Invisible Workers

Working Conditions and Experiences of Short-Term Workers in The Australian Festival Industry

A thesis presented

by

Stephanie M. Speirs

552915

to

The Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts and Cultural Management

in the field of

Arts Management AMGT90027/AMGT90028

in the

The Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences

The University of Melbourne

Supervisor: Guy Morrow

May 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This research explores the experiences and working conditions of short-term workers in the Australian festival industry. Interviews reveal tensions between perceptions and experiences of these conditions, and between discourses of autonomy and connectivity. Examining occupational identities provides insight into these ambivalences, which are key to understanding workplace relations in the context of the festival industry.

INTRODUCTION

I. Research Problem

This project began as a response to the question – why is there no festival workers union? Given the precarious nature of festival work, perhaps it is not surprising that there is no dedicated union, association or peak body for these workers. However, a secondary question arose during the research – do festival workers need or want one? In searching for answers to these questions, the project focused in on understanding the perceptions and experiences of festival workers about their work, and the discourses that exist in festival work spaces around occupational identity, work conditions and collective organisation.

II. Aims and Significance

The Australian festival workforce is all but invisible in a number of ways. Festival studies is a growing field that demands greater academic inquiry (Getz 2010), and research about cultural workers is vital to the resilience and growth of cultural industries (Throsby & Zednik, 2010). However, artists are privileged in the focus of the discourse around creative labour, while other cultural workers who share similar experiences to artists are neglected by the literature (Banks, 2010b). Much has been written in recent years on cultural labour (particularly in film and television, see: Bridgstock, 2011; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008, 2011; Percival & Hesmondhalgh, 2015; Stahl, 2012; Ursell, 2000), but there is only one notable study focusing on festival workers, which was a short, qualitative report on the UK festival industry by Kate Oakley (2007). While there is research that provides valuable insight into the Australian festival landscape (Stevens, 2016), the view of the worker is notably absent.

Not only are festival workers not visible in academic research, they are also overlooked more broadly in governmental and other formal recognition[1]. From a labour market view, the lack of worker representation has direct impacts, in

[1] At the sector level, there is no peak body aside from the Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals, which is open only to "major state-based festivals" (Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals, 2013) and exists for the purpose of commissioning new work and administering funding.

that there is no specific Award that covers festival workers. While many festivals in Australia apply the Live Performance Award 2010, this Award is clearly designed for use in permanent live performance venues for such industries as dance, theatre, striptease, opera, and for large touring productions (Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman, 2018). Although it can be applied fairly well in a lot of cases, many of the roles found on a festival or festival site are not to be found in this Award. There are a range of awards that might be applied to festival workers in such roles, such as the Amusement, Events and Recreation Award 2010, the Travelling Shows Award 2010, the Hospitality Industry (General) Award 2010 or the Building and Construction General On-site Award 2010. However, short of picking and choosing from across all of these awards, there is no single Award that accurately captures all of the roles and duties of festival workers and realistically reflects the demands of this kind of work. Furthermore, the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) contains only one job title that references festivals or events - Conference and Event Organiser - the definition of which makes reference only to conferences, conventions and trade shows. Scattered throughout the listings (often under the “miscellaneous” or “not elsewhere classified” headers), variations of many festival jobs can be found, however once again, quite a few are missing (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

This research project aims to redress the paucity of research about cultural workers in the Australian festival industry. By building on the work of cultural labour theorists and applying those concepts and questions to workers in the festival industry, this research will contribute to a growing body of work that can be referred to in developing relevant, responsive and responsible cultural policy, in order to ultimately improve working conditions within the cultural industries.

III. Research Design and Methodology

As a festival worker myself, I had a unique level of access to networks of festival workers that might be inaccessible to other researchers. My position granted me access to frank personal accounts that may not have been so easily disclosed to an outsider. This opportunity for accessing deep qualitative data, combined with the lack of existing data on which to base a research question, led me to adopt a grounded methodological approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Willig, 2013).

Following on from influential cultural labour studies (Banks, 2010a; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Ryan, 1992; Ursell, 2000), this study aimed for a qualitative focus on the experiences of workers. Semi-structured interviews and a focus group were used (see Appendix B for sample questions), to open up conversations around work conditions and experiences, and tease out individual attitudes and key discourses around festival work. I drew initial

samples from colleagues and workers in my own networks, and then applied a snowball method to find further interview subjects (see Appendix A for participant list), with a final sample size of thirteen.

It is worth noting that the sample represented an accurate reflection of gender and sexuality, but was not particularly diverse in terms of ethnicity or cultural background. There was also a narrow age range of participants. Without any quantitative data to guide this process, the sample was as reflective as possible of the current festival workforce. Diversity, access and inclusion are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

IV. Scope and Limitations

Although there is a lack of large-scale quantitative data about this group of workers, this study doesn't aim to fill that gap. This research isn't trying to widely represent the experiences of all workers, however it is hoped that the data gained from this research can give insight into some of the experiences of festival workers, and open up the field for future inquiry.

V. Research Outline

Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2011) found that the identity of cultural workers is strongly linked with the work that they do. They experience precarity and isolation; and greatly value social capital, relationships and networks. The

authors conclude that the experiences of these workers are highly ambivalent; a finding that has been reflected in this study on festival workers. Extending the concept of ambivalence, this research focused on the tensions contained within particular ambivalences. Interviews revealed a propensity in workers to synthesise dissonant paradigms around festival work. These dissonances took two broad forms. One was in the contradictions between the *discourse* versus the *experience* of festival work; a phenomenon that has also been observed in short-term contract theatre workers (Lindgren, Packendorff, & Sergi, 2014). The other was in a core underlying tension between the desire for autonomy and a need for connectivity.

Chapter One presents the discussions that arose around definitions of festival work and festival workers. Two equal but opposing discourses emerged that prized autonomy and connectivity respectively. Chapter Two takes up Hesmondhalgh and Baker's investigation into 'good' versus 'bad' work (2011, pp. 25–51). The tensions uncovered in this chapter presented as opposing paradigms that saw positive interpretations given to situations that had actually been experienced negatively. Chapter Three engages with the original question about lack of unionisation in the festival sector. The 'good perceptions' versus 'bad experiences' of workplace conditions are contextualised by laying out the discourses that interview subjects used to justify these dissonances. The final discussion explores how these tensions

may come to bear on future changes within the festival industry, and the implications they have for collective organisation of festival workers.

1 What is a Festival Worker?

As festival workers are not currently recognised or defined in the ANZSCO, it is necessary to develop a definition of festival work and festival workers. For the purposes of this research, festivals have been defined as “themed public celebrations” (Getz, 2005, p. 21). However, interviews revealed a nuanced understanding of festival work and festival workers, that in many ways defied traditional definitions of work. Although interviewees confidently proclaimed themselves to be festival workers, most struggled to come up with criteria that they felt adequately encapsulated this term. Ultimately, festival workers preferred to define themselves far less by the specifics of *what they do*, than by the shared characteristics of *who they are*.

1.1 What is ‘Festival Work’?

‘What does it mean? It means working on festivals.’ (Sam)

There is a nebulous and unregulated nature to the festival industry that extends to not only the festivals themselves, but also the work, in terms of duties, demands, job titles and general conditions. Among the definitions given by interviewees there were key points of dissension

around the parameters of the festival industry itself, as well as the particulars of workplaces and jobs that could be defined as festival work.

It is helpful to consider the features of festival work in the context of similar or related work. The divide between festivals and 'corporate events' was readily discussed by interviewees, and although all agreed firmly that there was a distinct difference between the two sectors, participants struggled to articulate this difference in concrete terms. One participant who had worked in both contexts explained that in corporate events "it's a different language, it's a different pace. […] They're both results-driven jobs, but they're different jobs" (James). One worker stated simply that 'a lot of the people who work corporate are really dull' (Reece), while another interviewee categorised corporate work differently to festival work because:

> *The end product is all-important to me. […] I don't want to do conferences. I don't want to make Telstra look good. […] You don't get the atmosphere of the arts in corporate - and that's amongst the workers and amongst the audience and the performers. It's a completely different thing. (Sam)*

There was consensus on the divide between corporate events and festivals, but the importance of artistic value emerged as a point of disagreement in discussions of festival content - specifically with regard to non-arts versus arts festivals. One worker did not care about the artform of the festival, rather he was “passionate about process” (James). Many interviewees disagreed with this sentiment, one worker stating that she chose whether to accept a contract or not on the basis of how connected she felt to the artform and to the mission of each individual festival. She had no interest in working for non-arts festivals, and defined festival work as only applicable to specifically arts festivals. For many, this commitment to arts festivals related to how they came to work in festivals originally.

In recounting their paths to festival work, many interviewees revealed that they had started out studying or working in the arts. Combined with the ad hoc nature of short-term contract work, this meant that many festival workers I spoke to often worked non-festival, arts-related jobs throughout the year. This was sometimes to supplement their festival income, but also often a conscious choice informed by a sustained interest in the arts, transferable skills from festival work, and frequently by a desire to stay in one city and avoid the interstate or international circuit. One worker struggled with whether their increased work in non-

festival arts work meant they could no longer call themselves a festival worker:

> *I used to identify more as a festival worker. I don't think I do now. Just based on the ratio of actual festivals I work now. (Coby)*

They then went on to list the seven festivals across four cities in Australia and New Zealand that they had worked at in the first six months of that year:

> *So, that's your first six months of the year. And that was me "not doing festivals". Sweet Jesus. Fucking hell, I still do festivals, let the records show. (Coby)*

This was a clear example of how the “ideal” festival worker was a notional concept often very separate from reality. For some, the transitory nature of working the festival circuit was a key element of festival work.

> *I think the travel aspect, the short-term aspects, the fact that you're only in one place for four weeks and then you go off to the next festival. I think that's what I consider festival work [...] I think it's the temporariness (Coby)*

Although this view was expressed by more than one interviewee, the reality did not hold up, as there turned out to be a number of festival workers who worked the full year on festival contracts in one city. This is another example of the discrepancy between the “festival worker” ideal and the reality.

Festival work is not confined to merely one type of festival or event, and although it is certainly different from corporate event work, this difference is more ideological than practical. Some festival workers move around and some don’t; some work in only festivals and some work other jobs too. It is not possible to come up with a sufficient definition by examining the work alone, which leads to an exploration of the workers themselves.

1.2 Who are ‘Festival People’?

The title of festival worker was often adopted for pragmatic reasons. When one interview subject was asked why he did not refer to himself as a technician, or a production manager, which were the jobs he most often worked, he replied, ‘I try and stay away from any specific title, because I feel like that pigeon holes you in what we do.’ (Ethan) Using a title that references *where they work* but not *what they do*, allows festival workers

to stay working on the circuit in whatever department or role that they can find.

Yet despite how common it was for festival workers to drift between departments, not everyone who worked in a festival was considered a festival worker. Interviewees drew varying degrees of distinction between those who worked “on-the-ground” roles and those who worked year-round, office-based roles.

> *A lot of marketing people in festivals are more "marketing people" than "festival people"[...] "finance people" as well. (Sam)*

Interestingly, while departmental distinctions were mostly consistent, there also emerged the idea that a ‘festival person’ could take a job in one of those departments and they would still be a ‘festival person’. This came down to particular characteristics and interests of the workers themselves that identified them as ‘festival people’. There was a remarkable consistency in these definitions, with the general consensus that “you can work in a festival and not be a festival person” (James). These qualities not only made festival people good at their job, but perhaps were the reasons they were drawn to the job in the first place.

Is it just something that only suits a certain group of people? (Madeleine)

There was a sense that the demands of festival work could only be met by people who had the particular traits of a festival person, and these qualities fell broadly into three categories:

1.2.1 Who They Are:

Festival workers are defined by their personal characteristics.

I think it's personality-driven. [...] I think it's an attitude. (James)

The same personal characteristics came up repeatedly, and included independence, opportunism, commitment to continuous improvement, a love of problem-solving and a strong work ethic that verged on workaholism:

> *It's that workaholic thing in you, and wanting to do the best, and wanting to be busy. And I think it's a problem-solver's job, and some people really love solving problems. (James)*

Many participants defined festival workers according to how much they loved the work. Although workers did not necessarily need to love the artform of the festival, as one worker put it, "there's no room for apathy, or there's no room for a lack of enthusiasm in festivals" (Abigail). There was a high value placed on workers who were optimistic, stoic and who love to have fun while they work hard. Workers who did not display these qualities were described as "whingers", and this attitude was not kindly tolerated:

> *When I do have people complaining [...] and some really petty complaints, that I just go, "Well, you don't have to be here. And you're actually making it harder for everybody else, by you being here and complaining." I don't want to be unsympathetic to it, but we don't have enough time for that. We just don't. (James)*

1.2.2 What They Want:

Festival workers are defined by their intrinsic motivations, or the "psychic pay" that they seek from their work.

By creating personal meaning from career and life choices, some festival workers gained a sense of fulfilment and higher purpose from their work. This attitude is not unique to festival workers, in fact Susanne Ekman documented a similar phenomenon in high-commitment workers in the cultural industries, where she observed the attitude that 'individuals are responsible for orchestrating their lives in the most optimal way, always relying on personal choice rather than convention. Everything should be carefully deliberated as an existential stance showing one's commitment to the realization of personal values and potential.' (Ekman, 2014, p. 143). Under this paradigm, choosing to be a festival worker is ultimately an expression of individual choice and personal identity. For others, festival work served to boost their ego by giving them a sense of great importance during the festival.

> *I think that there's an inflated sense of self-purpose that happens when you work in a festival, which is like a drug. Because […] whatever your issue is at that time is the most important thing in the world, at that place, at that*

time. And so your decision is the most important thing. So, for me, as an egomaniac, that is a really amazing feeling. (James)

Many interviewees found fulfilment from how vital they perceived their work to be in the facilitation of artistic endeavour. One worker's motivation came from 'helping people to realise their artistic and creative ambitions, and produce work that they believe can better our society.' (Reece). Other festival workers were deeply motivated by the importance of festivals to a community:

Irrelevant of what the actual artform of the festival is, it actually brings people together in a celebratory way. [...]From an artist's point of view I think that they're amazingly important, and bring artists of [...] different walks together. Like, some really successful people and some up-and-coming people could be in venues next door to each other and share a dressing room and suddenly they're friends. And then they support each other through their networks [...] I love that I'm part of that community (James)

Many workers referred to the “sense of achievement and that sense of joy” (James) that they gained from working hard in festivals. They greatly appreciated the freedom to act with autonomy and the lack of micro-management, as well as the satisfaction of overcoming challenges.

1.2.3 How They Identify:

Festival Workers are defined by their shared personal and collective identities.

I feel like we all kind of self-identify as “carnies”. (Alice)

Another concept that emerged across the interviews was the idea that a festival worker is simply someone who *identifies* as a festival worker. Some contested this idea, alluding to a kind of higher definition that transcended the will of the individual - ‘I think there are a lot of people out there that would call themselves festival workers that aren’t’ (James). Another worker believed the collective acceptance of a new worker by other festival workers was the marker of the title’s legitimacy; ‘I felt like people knew that I did the work, they knew that I was good at it, and they wanted me to come on board.’ (Alice). Whether or not

festival workers could or should self-designate, the label of festival worker is far more than just a job title, and connotes two separate but connected identities.

The first is an individual occupational identity. This identity encompasses the ideal desires and qualities described in 1.2.1 and 1.2.2, and for workers who embrace this identity this means a belief that they themselves embody those ideals. There was a 'specialness' referenced often by interviewees when referring to this occupational identity. In assuming the mantle of 'festival worker', they were able to transcend the mundanity of ordinary jobs, which were looked down upon as less fulfilling, less interesting and less worthy. One worker said he "thought it was disgusting, looking for an office job, or going and working in retail, [...] or getting a bar job" (James). For some, the thought of working in a more traditional (and less special) nine-to-five job was threatening to their very enjoyment of life. When contemplating his future work options, one worker reflected, '...when I get a job at council, that's when my life is over.' (Sam)

Another aspect of this individual identity is the term 'carnie', which was an affectionate (and affected) label applied particularly to festival workers who worked the notoriously long and hard festivals. It refers to the itinerant lifestyles of workers in a travelling carnival or circus, and so

generally was used by those who are working or who have worked the circuit, rather than those who stay in one city.

> *I used to take a lot of pride in saying that I'm a festival worker or saying I'm a carnie (Abigail)*

The term also invokes a privileged, first-world nostalgia for an idealised version of old-time carnival workers, who in this fantasy perhaps may have been touring around depression-era, 'dust bowl' America, or pre-war Germany - labouring long and hard for little pay, and living and working outside of the law.

> *I fell in love with the 1920s and 1930s era charm of working at a carnival and building Spiegels. (Coby)*

The glorification and idealisation of hardship is very much tied into the 'carnie' identity, and when used in conversation these references are often implied. So although it was frequently used, this label has its own set of connotations that mean it cannot be used interchangeably with 'festival worker'.

> *Ultimately, the people who are doing really well in the industry aren't dirty carnies. (Coby)*

The term was also sometimes adopted by artists who were touring their shows on the same festival circuit, and so had a similar itinerant lifestyle. Artists and festival workers frequently socialised and developed friendships over the course of festival seasons. This close relationship to artists and to the art within festivals forms another part of the individual festival worker identity. Many interviewees described themselves as cultural intermediaries (Wright, 2005), in the sense that no matter the job they did on a festival, they felt their contribution was vital to the greater 'festival experience' of audiences and artists.

> *I don't feel like what I do (when I do what I actually want to do) is that far away from being an artist [...] An artist doesn't just draw a picture, [...] they have to do all these other things, and I feel like I do everything that is <u>that</u>, apart from drawing the picture, as my profession. (Abigail)*

The second occupational identity is a social identity. A central concept that featured prominently in interviews was the 'festival family'. This was a powerful "social imaginary" (Anderson, 1983) that was afforded great respect by interviewees. Membership of this exclusive community

allowed workers to identify as one of a “very isolated group of people” (Coby).

This was a social category inextricably linked to work, and which in many ways defined the employee’s sense of self. For many, being accepted into the festival family was a prerequisite to being able to individually identify as a festival worker. Because of this, the relationships with others in the festival family were highly valued. Haslam, Powell & Turner argue that status and recognition within the social group become “important means of self-validation and self-regulation.” (Haslam, Powell, & Turner, 2016, p. 330), and this was certainly observed in festival workers.

> *The best parts are that sense of community, and that sense of team, and the friendships that come out of that. (James)*

Interviewees described a sense of camaraderie, community and support between colleagues that transcended ordinary workmate relationships. For some it was the primary motivating factor for working in festivals:

I one hundred and ten percent wouldn't do the work that I do if it wasn't for the people that I work with, I'm pretty positive about that. (Alice)

The festival family was generally referred to in positive terms, and the love and support of the festival family was often described as the best part of being a festival worker.

1.3 Discussion

This research focuses on people who work short-term or non-ongoing contracts, predominantly in arts, cultural and community events and festivals - and for the most part, interviewees echoed this definition. The work is precarious, and may be paid on a casual hourly, salaried instalment or negotiated fee basis. The majority of this work is not for large corporations for the purposes of advertising or corporate interests, and is often for arts and cultural festivals (though less frequently music festivals). These workers are most frequently employed in operational, venue, production and technical roles, with fewer festival workers found in programming or marketing teams.

Definitions given by interviewees were highly personal, and for the most part could be viewed as an expression of each individual's own values,

and *sense of personal value*. The ability to define one's own occupational identity was evidently an important expression of autonomy for a group of people who highly value the freedom, independence and control they have over their careers, identities and lives. Although this self-declared autonomy was somewhat at odds with the equally dominant discourse of the 'festival family', the personal *and* social identities of festival workers were revealed to be equally important in shaping decisions and perceptions.

Explorations of festival work and workers uncovered two key tensions. Tension between the desire for autonomy and the need for connectivity could be seen in the dual occupational identities. While one discourse described autonomy as essential to the enjoyment of the working experience, in reality this extreme independence showed itself to only be fulfilling when it was adequately balanced with connectivity. The opposing discourse of the 'festival family' social imaginary reflected this reality. The dissonance between accepted discourses and lived experiences was also evident in the idealistic and optimistic characterisations of festival work and workers, that were frequently contradicted by examples that did not match these perceptions. The tension between discourse and experience is explored further in the next chapter.

2 Work/Life/Party

David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker have put forward a comprehensive normative framework for understanding 'good work' (2011, pp. 25–51), however the perceptions of experiences recounted by festival workers were often at odds with Hesmondhalgh and Baker's definitions of what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' work. Many aspects of the job were spoken of positively by workers, however further discussion frequently revealed negative sides of these experiences that had at first been discounted or downplayed. This chapter attempts to understand how festival workers make sense of their working experiences, and explores how the salience of occupational identities influences the way in which workers interpret these experiences.

2.1 I Am My Job - Work and Identities

The individual identity of festival workers often sat at odds with the lived experiences described by interviewees, in which they were frequently at the mercy of factors outside their control. In order to maintain their view of themselves as independent, autonomous and opportunistic, workers commonly described "exploitative" conditions such that, by choosing to be festival workers when there were other options available, they were clearly in control of the situation, and therefore not being exploited:

> *You always have the choice, and especially in festivals, you have the choice of walking away. You can go. You can go. It's a week's work, or it's a month's work. (James)*

These workers reinterpreted the challenging conditions they endured as proof of the "specialness" of festival workers:

> *Elitism is the wrong word, but it bonds us together in this thing, like, "Well, you probably couldn't work sixty hours a week and get paid for thirty, but I can. And my friends can." (Alice)*

The importance of adhering to the social occupational identity is also amplified by a number of aspects of festival work. Short contracts make good relationships essential in order to keep booking work (Banks, Lovatt, O'Connor, & Raffo, 2000, p. 459). For those working on the circuit, who are away from family and friends, working long hours and often knowing no one else in a city, there may be no other option than spending social time outside of work with their colleagues. In some cases, accommodation requirements mean that workers may end up living together as well.

Because your work environment is so intense, they really are your friends and your family and your enemies as well, all in one. (James)

These factors make it vitally important for workers to find ways to get along. The desire to belong is amplified by these converging needs, and makes the social occupational identity increasingly significant. Due to the enhanced salience of these identities, they strongly affect the choices, actions and lifestyles of festival workers, as well as their perceptions and experiences of working conditions (Haslam et al., 2016).

2.2 It's All Good

The enhanced salience of the occupational identities above drives workers to form positive interpretations of their working conditions, so as to reinforce their positive images of themselves and their choices as a festival worker. This positive reframing was not necessarily subconscious, and one worker even acknowledged the worrisome nature of this cognitive process, saying "you can convince yourself that it's good, but it isn't necessarily good. That's a bit depressing" (James).

2.2.1 Exploitation versus Sacrifice

The narrative of agency that neutralised the exploitative nature of certain conditions could also be seen when workers reframed exploitation as “sacrifice”. Hesmondhalgh and Baker argue that this inclination to sacrifice may be attributed to “the myth of the starving artist” (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p. 227). However, for some workers it became a discourse that enabled them to frame powerlessness as noble. One worker experienced collective sacrifice as strengthening her sense of being part of the festival family:

> *What makes it where you feel like part of a club is - you’re all sacrificing something. You've all said, ‘I wanna do this so much, that I don’t care that I’m working a sixty-hour week.’ [...] That bonds you together; this idea of, ‘We’re all sacrificing something.’ (Alice)*

2.2.2 Work-Life Balance

Finding work-life balance was a challenge for most interviewees, and many made reference to the overwhelming and demanding nature of the work.

> *‘the hardest thing is the all-consuming part of it’ (Sam)*

Older workers with families had made choices that specifically enabled them to find greater work-life balance, but even so they still identified it as a challenging aspect of the job. Some workers managed to find balance on a scale of months, or even over the course of the year. Although on the one hand, interviewees loved the way they could become absorbed in their work during festival periods, they were unable to disguise the double-edged sword of this occupational immersion.

> *My life is 100% integrated into my work [...] At the end of a festival, there's about a week's amount of time where I have to literally reintegrate into non-festival life [...] I'm coming down off all this adrenaline for the last six weeks, I don't remember how to not do anything. (Alice)*

Although most workers expressed a desire for greater work-life balance, few showed a willingness to take action to make this change a reality in their own lives.

2.3 Blurred Boundaries

That's what festival workers do, they work in a party...It's a lot of hard work, but it's still a party. (James)

Festival work lends itself to workplace cultures of partying and excess, with discourses that normalise unhealthy lifestyles and deny negative experiences. The merry-go-round of short-term contract workers between festivals and continents means that there is little consistency in which workers are the bosses and which are the subordinates from one festival to the next. As one worker put it, "You don't know who's going to be your boss in the next job in this industry" (James). This results in an extraordinarily flat hierarchical structure, wherein a team of workers have frequently managed one another (and even their manager) at some point in the past. One worker believed this led to an increased level of support and mutual respect between colleagues, and that it created a 'great dynamic of teamwork, and an environment where everybody learns from everybody' (James).

However, the constant shifting of power and relationships between festival workers can mean that "it becomes really blurry, the line of a colleague and a really good friend" (Coby). Participants referred to the industry as 'incestuous', and it was extremely commonplace for relationships between co-workers to extend beyond the boundaries of

ordinary work relationships into romance, friendship, mentoring, counselling, house-sharing and even financial support.

> *We all work with each other, live with each other, party with each other, date each other, in such an intense way, that sometimes it's almost impossible to extricate the employee from the employer, the manager from the staff. We're so in each other's pockets all the time that it's not possible sometimes to be like, 'Hey, you need to step it up', because there's all these other levels of friendship, or old romantic relationships. (Alice)*

These blurred boundaries sometimes led to conflicts of interest, where work situations were not dealt with appropriately due to extraneous relationships. But despite this, the small power-distance (Hofstede, 1983, p. 81) was generally praised by workers because it led to workplaces that were egalitarian and mutually respectful, where colleagues felt "comfortable enough to be able to call on anybody for support" (James).

2.3.1 The Things We Don't Talk About

'...it's really unhealthy, and really messed up but I love it, I love doing it…' (Alice)

The unhealthy and unstable lifestyles that proliferate in precarious work (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 33) were no less common among festival workers. Many interviewees asserted that alcoholism and drug-abuse was commonplace in the industry, as well as poor choices with regard to eating, sleeping, fitness, finances and mental wellbeing. While this behaviour seemed sometimes to be thought of as unavoidable (or even glorified), most workers expressed the desire to find a way to take better care of themselves. However, life as an itinerant worker poses unique challenges that make self-care difficult to maintain.

2.3.1.1 Surviving the circuit - life in a suitcase

The opportunity to travel to new places while earning money was seen as an extremely positive aspect of festival work. However, it is a lifestyle that takes its toll.

There is definitely a sense of the exciting anxiety of not knowing where you are going to be in a month, or not knowing what you're going to do with your life, or not knowing how much money you have or whether or not

you're gonna have a place to live or a place to stay. There's definitely something exciting about that, but there's also something pretty grim about it. Wears you down, a hundred percent. (Coby)

Moving constantly meant that workers who had been on the circuit for more than a year often felt disconnected from a sense of home.

It doesn't feel like I belong anywhere, and I really am struggling with that. (Rebecca)

While enjoying the freedom of having no ties, one worker described feeling “scattered and fragmented” (Madeleine). The demanding nature of festival periods combined with constant moving also makes it very difficult to establish and maintain relationships as a festival worker. Not only romantic relationships – workers spoke of the difficulties they had faced keeping up with obligations to family and friends while maintaining their festival careers.

It’s exhausting, it’s tiring, and it’s hard to maintain relationships outside of it. [...] A lot of stuff goes past that you miss. And people in festivals choose the work over big family events sometimes. Often. (James)

Hesmondhalgh and Baker identified isolation as a key experience for cultural workers (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, pp. 156–157), and this was no different for festival workers.

> *It is this false world and this false party the whole time [...] you can feel very, very lonely when you're surrounded by the party. (James)*

Added to this is the finance-related stress that is not unusual in precarious work (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 33). Festival work often amplifies these financial strains. For those working the circuit, travel and accommodation costs are generally not covered by employers. One worker told how he had been affected by financial distress:

> *Edinburgh I paid for everything [...] it's part of the reason why I'm declaring bankruptcy. (James)*

So, in addition to not paying well, festival work frequently costs a lot as well. The challenging aspects of working the festival circuit exacerbated feelings of loneliness; feelings which contrasted starkly with the hyper-socialisation and partying culture these workers were immersed in. Although interviews revealed these negative experiences to be almost

universal, workers claimed they were rarely talked about between colleagues. This denial of reality took its toll both materially and psychologically. Without having a framework within which to understand these feelings, festival workers tended to deny the existence of the feelings, rather than attempting to come to terms with the dissonance between their private negative experiences and the socially-acceptable positive interpretations.

> *I think there's levels of alcoholism. I think there's levels of mental health issues. I think there's levels of depression. I think there's high levels of anxiety, due to the lifestyle, due to the travelling, due to the shunning of your responsibility to be self-aware, and manage your time, and manage relationships, manage stuff like having a different person in your bed twice a week and getting drunk every night. Not living in your own place, not feeling like you can have nice things or stuff around you, or not having time for a relationship or a partner. Or feeling really sad but still going to work and having to work your arse off, or not feeling comfortable enough to say to your friends, "Hey, I'm actually having a really rough day." and not managing your time off. Yeah, I think mental health in the festival industry is definitely a big thing. (Coby)*

Although most participants agreed that mental health issues were prevalent in the industry and needed attention, the overwhelming tendency to accept and even embrace demanding conditions undermined this attitude. Many interviewees were strident in demanding that good mental health care should be prioritized for festival workers, however were just as protective of the 'special' elements of festival work that are likely contributory factors to mental ill health in the first place.

This is an example of another phenomenon observed by Susanne Ekman of cultural workers in high-performance jobs (2014). Ekman argued that by internalising the dissonance between the *imagined* and *actual* conditions of work, workers managed to transcend it, so that working experiences became "exploitative and liberating at the same time" (Ekman, 2014, p. 150) However, this mode of operating was not sustainable, and not only led to breakdown, but would also problematically normalise the mental distress of a breakdown by characterising that experience as a natural and necessary element of the work (Ekman, 2014, pp. 153–154).

2.4 Discussion

Many workers displayed a heightened identification with their occupational identities, which manifested in behaviours that positively reinforced these identities. This was often at great cost to workers' financial, mental and physical wellbeing. Workers experienced dissonances centred around feelings of loneliness and belonging, that can spring from the competing desires for autonomy and connection. Internalizing harmful dissonances, wherein the negative consequences of a behaviour are known but the behaviour is continued, is ultimately an unsustainable mode of existence, which some festival workers acknowledged.

3 Workplace Relations in The Festival Industry

Australian legislation has enshrined the rights of workers to collectively bargain, under the belief that it is the most “appropriate way to protect and to promote the interests of workers” (Creighton & Forsyth, 2012, p. 9). This belief is built on the assumption that employers hold a position of power that might enable them to oppress the human rights of their employees (Wheeler, 2000, pp. 535–536). Creighton and Forsyth state that there are three primary objectives of collective bargaining laws, which are “workplace democracy, redistribution of resources, [and] efficiency” (Creighton & Forsyth, 2012, pp. 9–10).

The features of the festival industry pose many obstacles to traditional collective bargaining practices. The endurance of so-called “bad” work can be attributed to the attitudes and preferences of festival workers, which are heavily influenced by their occupational identities. Interviews revealed that, when faced with precarious or unacceptable conditions, festival workers responded with tactics such as nepotism, individual negotiation and informal collective organisation. The overwhelming tone of discussion around working conditions was that of acceptance of things “as they are”, even if change might have been welcome or desired.

3.1 Conditions, Regulation, Resistance

Across many cultural industries, precarity is increasing and unions have eroded (Cloonan & Williamson, 2016, p. 12). Although new forms of organising have emerged, they are small and vying for worker allegiance, which makes them ineffective. In her 2010 study on collective organising amongst freelance writers, Nicole Cohen observes a declining belief in collective power that she attributes to feelings of isolation and reduced individual power (Cohen, 2010). Cohen argues that the individualistic notions associated with freelancing are at odds with qualities needed for collective organising to take place, and concludes that collective bargaining in freelance industries can only be achieved by breaking down individualism and competition (Cohen, 2010).

3.1.1 Round Industry, Square Industrial Relations?

One reason for the lack of a union in the festival industry, is that newer sectors within the creative industries are less likely to be unionised (de Peuter & Cohen, 2015, p. 305). This “newness” was mentioned by a number of interviewees, and refers not to the festivals themselves, but to the cohort of industry professionals who have emerged in recent years. One interview subject described how one festival that was over

thirty years old was “noticing a change and needing to keep up with the fact that there is now an industry standard that wasn’t there even five years ago” (Ethan). Because festival professionals have taken the place of a predominantly voluntary workforce, there has been a delay in organisations keeping up with the fact that standard contracts, fair pay and reasonable hours are now expected by workers, in line with conditions for workers in comparable industries.

As has been observed in freelance writers, the short-term nature of festival contracts deters workers from collectively organising, because they do not want to risk losing future work (Cohen, 2010, p. 123). It also means that workers are unlikely to be in a job for long enough to follow through on any kind of collective workplace action. Cohen observed that collective bargaining is thought of as impossible without a fixed workplace or workforce (2010), which applies to festival workers on the circuit, which can take them to dozens of cities in one year, leaving little time to engage in protracted bureaucratic processes.

The sector also offers little uniformity of jobs or of conditions between workplaces. Christopherson attributes this fluidity of role titles to a deliberate avoidance of regulation that “shifts accountability [...] to the individual who willingly participates” (2008, p. 88). While Christopherson’s interpretation assumes a malicious or negligent intent

on the part of the employer, it should also be remembered that many festival workers embrace this fluidity of job titles as a tactic to make themselves more employable. It also ignores the fact that in the cultural industries, uniqueness of product may sometimes demand unique management approaches - this results in job descriptions and titles that are tailored to the needs of each individual festival. This tailored approach makes it difficult to formulate useful regulatory frameworks with regard to conditions, hours and pay, and also makes it difficult to compare apples with apples when considering one job against another.

3.1.2 Good Work or Bad Work

I never feel like I'm working. (Alice)

The way in which conditions are perceived and described by workers naturally varies from industry to industry. However, the perception of conditions by festival workers often differed significantly from what workers in other industries might accept as reasonable, in so far as alignment between conditions and compensation goes. Interviewees consistently reported working very long hours; working many days in a row without a day off; no penalty pay or compensation for demanding hours or conditions; daily or weekly rates that are not reflective of hours

worked; high levels of responsibility for pay grade; no per diems or allowances even when workers are living away from home; and little to no support in the form of employee assistance programs or basic HR structures.

> *I've become accustomed to working a sixty-hour week — seventy if it's a bad week. […] I've also become accustomed to working seven days in a row. (Alice)*

However, despite the presence of these conditions, interviewees tended to describe their experiences of work positively.

> *I've never done anything that makes me tick like doing this kind of work does. It fulfils so many things in my personality in who I am as a person. It validates so many parts of me all at once, in a way that I never thought I could find work that felt this rewarding. Where I could be who I am. (Alice)*

3.1.3 Why do Festival Workers endure 'bad work'?

Chapter Two demonstrated how the dissonance between conditions and perceptions of festival work was frequently countered by

discourses that explained, justified or reframed ‘bad’ experiences as either ‘good’ in themselves, or necessary in order to make possible a separate ‘good’ experience.

3.1.3.1 Excusing, Accepting, Enjoying

It is easy to attribute this willingness to endure poor conditions to the psychic pay and intrinsic motivations identified in Chapter One. One worker was happy to earn less working in festivals because “of the value of this industry to society. And from what we get personally from doing the kind of work that we do.” (Reece). However, there were also other factors at play beside the conscious choice to sacrifice for a love of the arts.

In some cases, the justification was that others had it worse. Many workers referred to themselves as ‘lucky’ and were keenly aware of the exclusiveness and inaccessibility of the festival sector in Australia (see 3.2.1.2). While they enjoyed the specialness conferred on them by their positions, they also acknowledged how privileged they were to be in these roles. Enduring challenging conditions, for these workers, became an act of gratitude, or even penance, which served to mitigate feelings of guilt about their privilege.

This mode of comparative thinking also presented strongly in workers on the circuit, who measured their experiences in Australia against other countries:

> *I have such a comfortable life here, and have ever since I moved to Australia [...] we have the opportunity to take those roles which are maybe more fulfilling or more enjoyable, or the ones that really speak to our hearts rather than our bank accounts' (Reece)*

The 'dual frame of reference' (Waldinger & Lichter, 2003) that results from working in multiple countries creates a comparison that invites workers to be more tolerant towards conditions than they might otherwise be (Berntsen, 2016, p. 475).

More than one interview subject referred to the work as an 'addiction' and described the inflated sense of importance felt by a festival worker during the festival as being 'like a drug' (James). Many festival workers also described the challenge itself as enjoyable. Experiences of overcoming difficult conditions were described similarly to Csikszentmihalyi's "flow state" (1990). The addictiveness of this flow state was amplified by the 'group flow' that festival work made possible (Sawyer 2015).

3.1.3.2 Addicted to the Flow

Festival work meets all of the conditions necessary for group flow to be achieved and thus shows itself to be particularly conducive to operations and production staff achieving the addictive state of group flow. These conditions include shared goals (Sawyer, 2015, pp. 34–35), deep focus (Sawyer, 2015, pp. 36–38), constant communication and responsiveness via radio, the familiarity and equality of festival teams (Sawyer, 2015, pp. 39–41), and the high-stakes and fixed deadlines that create the potential for failure and the need to constantly move conversations forward towards outcomes (Sawyer, 2015, pp. 43–44). The last vital condition that is found in festival environments is group autonomy. This speaks to the tension at the heart of the festival worker experience:

> In group flow, unlike solo flow, control results in a paradox — because each participant must feel in control, while at the same time remaining flexible, listening closely, and always being willing to defer to the emergent flow of the group. (Sawyer, 2015, pp. 38–39)

In order to achieve group flow, a group must be able to achieve autonomy not just collectively but also individually, however members must still remain responsive and agreeable to the decisions and needs of the group. The constant balance between the discourse of autonomy and attachment to the social imaginary creates the perfect environment for group flow to flourish.

3.1.3.3 Festival Worker Individual Identity

The fiercely independent characteristics outlined in chapter one lend themselves to an avoidance of collective organising. Many workers were convinced that difficult conditions and the resulting dissonance are simply the price you must pay for work that is truly fulfilling. Ekman refers to these ideals as “optimization fantasies” (Ekman, 2014, pp. 153–154), and argues that even though these fantasies lead to “exhaustion, pain and anxiety, the tedious practice of humility and moderation seems to generate even greater reluctance” (Ekman, 2014, p. 154).

> *If we were all getting paid fairly, you know, 38 hours a week, you're just the same as every other person who’s doing a job, essentially. So, there's no secret thing that*

> *you're all doing, there's no thing that makes you like, "Ah, we're the people who can work sixty hours." (Alice)*

When asked whether someone could be a festival worker without the precarious aspects of festival work, one interviewee responded, "I mean you could be, but you wouldn't be a 'cool' festival worker." (Coby). This attitude captures perfectly McGuigan's concept of "cool" precariousness (McGuigan, 2016, pp. 40–45), in which coolness assumes great value for late-capitalist workers.

The positive alignment individuals feel with their occupational identity also fosters identification with the festivals themselves. Festivals that acknowledge the value of the employee create a relationship with that worker, which builds loyalty and empathy for the organisation.

> *Working in small production companies [...] with a small group of people, you've just got to come to terms with that. They're the days that you're going to do, that's how hard you're going to work. (Coby)*

This is consistent with Linn Van Dyne and Soon Ang's (1998) study, which showed that the positive attitudes of contingent workers

towards an organisation increased the amount of work they voluntarily took on above and beyond their position descriptions.

3.1.3.4 Festival Worker Social Identity

Haslam, Powell and Turner apply self-categorisation theory to argue that the "social identity salience" of a worker compels them to accept conditions and engage in behaviours that serve the best interests of the organisation or group with which they are identifying (Haslam et al., 2016, p. 326). This is one reason that the acceptance (and in some cases, glorification) of poor work conditions by colleagues and supervisors has such a powerful influence over newer workers. Another reason stems from the flat organisation structures and informal hiring practices; in an environment where workers are frequently in a position to hire, fire or recommend their colleagues for future jobs, it becomes even more important to display behaviours that align with group norms.

Glorification of endurance is deeply enculturated in the industry. A strong work ethic, love of the job and the ability to cheerfully endure the worst of challenges are exalted in the discourse and admired by junior workers.

The weird thing that happened when I started telling people […] that I wanted to move up, with every single conversation [they said to me], "You have to be aware that you're [going to be] there a lot longer than you think you'll need to be". (Alice)

Difficult conditions are seen as a rite of passage and so become normalised and maintained by workers as they move into management roles.

3.2 Autonomous Workers and Collective Organisation

As well as choosing to endure 'bad' working conditions for these reasons, festival workers also maintained their agency in a number of other ways. De Peuter and Cohen propose an expanded view of autonomy that includes "workers' efforts to collectively exert control over the terms under which their labour power is engaged, to question the dominant organization of cultural production, to seek ways to sustain independent work [...] and to produce alternative systems of meaning about work." (2015, p. 306) All of these efforts were observed and ranged from entirely individual activities through to coordinated network responses and social behaviours, once again showing the duality of autonomy and connectivity at play in the lives of festival workers.

3.2.1 Keeping It in The Family

Informal recruitment within the festival industry is an example of a primary strategy employed by workers to increase their agency in the face of precarity. The importance of "personal, industry-based networks" for career development in the cultural industries is widely accepted (Christopherson, 2008, p. 89). Relations of trust are utilized in environments where employment insecurity is commonplace (Banks et al., 2000, p. 461), and building networks is a strategy to decrease risk, cost and uncertainty (Christopherson, 2008, p. 89). Through informal recruitment processes, festival workers seek to mitigate the risks posed by conditions of the festival industry. These risks include short timeframes, high stakes and demanding conditions.

> *I think that the dynamic of a team in a festival is much more important because you all work so closely together, and you work in heightened situations, with little sleep, not eating regularly or at the right times, often doing physical labour, you're on your feet the whole time. So, the dynamic has to be really good. (James)*

Lack of jobs combined with lots of new, young and aspiring festival workers and event management graduates was also a risk to be protected against, although this anxiety is not unique to festival work (Dex & Willis, 2003, p. 124; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011, p. 7; Ursell, 2000, pp. 814–815). Informal recruitment also provides benefits to workers and organisations. For workers, protecting the exclusivity of the festival worker identity increases the specialness they can lay claim to. For organisations, capitalising on existing team dynamics means that workers can jump straight into a new job with less time spent on orientation, so contracts can be shorter (and cheaper). It reduces the risks of instability posed by workers navigating new relationships as well as new jobs.

> *Because you're jumping from job to job so much, it's so, not only personally refreshing and personally better to walk into a job and you know people, so you're not having to relearn how to work with somebody and do that, but it's better for an organisation and for a festival, because you're getting pretty much a pre-existing team [...] they're not having to go through that dating process (James)*

The personal demands of the circuit are also alleviated by keeping jobs in the 'family'. As a hiring manager it can be comforting to know that the

person you're hiring will be able to support you not just professionally but also personally.

3.2.1.1 The Fallout of Nepotism

The power of the 'festival 'family' as a social imaginary contributed to unintended negative side-effects of nepotism. Over-reliance could lead to workers feeling suffocated by their dependence on the social imaginary.

> *They're trapped because they're so used to the lifestyle now. It's scary to go out and have to look for other jobs where you have to apply, and rejection is scary, and living a stable life is scary. (Coby)*

Extreme insularity can lead to festival workers who don't know how to get any other kind of work, whose only friends are on the festival circuit, who haven't got a job through interview or with a CV in years and who don't have any networks or support outside of the industry. On the flip side, those wanting to stay in the industry felt under pressure of constant surveillance.

> *What scares me is, I feel like if I make one wrong turn in one job, every single person who I've ever worked with will know that. And then you're done, you don't get work. (Alice)*

Word of mistakes or poor performance travelled quickly, and the chance of the network turning against an individual who made a mistake or 'did somebody wrong' was terrifying. The informal nature of recruitment meant that retribution could be enacted by individuals in ways that directly affected the livelihoods and careers of their peers. Some interviewees also felt that this led to an "ultra-competitive environment, and [...] a lot of self-interest and egotistical behaviour" (Reece). The systems of nepotism could also easily be disrupted by changes in management, with drastic effects on workers who were relying on future contracts.

> *I know people that have got totally canned when the management team up above changes from who they thought was going to be managing the festival. (Coby)*

There were instances of hiring based on habit or personal loyalty, and of workers not getting jobs they were qualified for because they had been shut out or rejected socially. One downside of nepotism that was

less frequently mentioned was the suppression of diversity that it encouraged.

> *I think we're all a hundred percent more privileged than we realize sometimes [...] we're all upper middle-class, white, twenty to thirty-five years old. Pretty privileged. Grew up with good education, good background, having access to the arts, having money or financial stability to access the arts or access education. (Coby)*

The limited social circles of festival workers means that hiring tends to happen from within the festival family, so breaking into that pool of eligible workers becomes almost impossibly difficult for people who are too far removed socially from current festival workers. Networking practices end up homogenizing the workforce, and reinforcing existing systems of inequality, “so that someone from an ethnic minority, an underrepresented gender, or a certain class background who puts effort into establishing networks might only thereby be led back to those ghettoized jobs already prescribed for him or her.” (Pang, 2015, p. 52).

3.2.1.2 Required Privilege of the Aspiring Festival Worker

I don't think festival work is really accessible to a lot of people (Coby)

The limitations of nepotism are not the only factors that suppress diversity and result in exclusion. Attribution of qualities that define a festival worker contributes to the mythology of a destined career that only certain people are cut out for. This thinking reveals itself to be problematic when considering the people who might be less able to access their “calling” as a festival worker.

The festival worker identity demands a high level of autonomy from individuals, in pursuing work and building a career. Many interviewees began their careers by volunteering, or by accepting contracts that paid them tokenistic amounts. The ability to work for free or for very little was a foot in the door that led to more and better paid work opportunities.

If I didn't have parents who were able to support me [...] it probably would be a lot less sustainable than it is. (Alice)

Workers also pointed to flexibility and mobility as key factors in their ability to build a career. Even those who had been working in the industry for many years believed that their willingness to move around

made it easier for them to find year-round work. This level of autonomy makes it difficult for people with commitments that require them to stay in one city or earn at least a minimum wage. This includes parents, carers and people who do not have financial safety nets. Additionally, these demands can eventually exclude people who are currently festival workers, but who are unwilling to make life choices that would allow them to maintain high levels of autonomy, such as putting off getting a mortgage or starting a family.

On the other side of the coin, the social identity of festival workers imposes its own demands. The relentless need to network excludes people who aren't able to go out drinking or socialising after shifts. The extremes of autonomy and of connectivity that the festival worker identities demand may be luxuries that not all aspiring workers can afford or access.

3.2.2 Drawing the Line

There are instances where workers drew the line on unacceptable workplace conditions, and much of the time this came down to acknowledgement, respect, and values. Workers did not like working for festivals that were seen to prioritise money over people or culture. Poor conditions might be accepted if employees were made to feel

special, irreplaceable and thanked for their work, whereas workers became resentful of similar conditions if they felt uncared for, and unacknowledged for their contribution.

As short-term contractors, festival workers hold unique forms of power that they wield as best they are able. Chris Smith refers to this as “mobility power”, and it includes “the time involved in network-building, the resources used to plan and explore job moves and the use of mobility threats to create strategic rewards” (Smith, 2006, p. 391).

3.2.2.1 Individual bargaining

Discourses of autonomy and control, and the self-reliant festival worker identity all feed into a neoliberal concept of individual responsibility (McGuigan, 2014). A commonly expressed belief was that festival people should “have what it takes” to fight their own battles.

> *I think [not having a union] encourages an individual strength in bargaining and representing yourself for what you’re worth. (Reece)*

Another commonly expressed view was that if conditions were not right, the correct course of action was to walk away and not accept the contract. This was often phrased in terms of knowing your worth, however ignores instances where workers may be forced to accept contract they aren't happy with, simply because they need the work. The idea of fighting a battle to improve things for others was seen as too risky an action for any individual worker to take.

> *You've got to be prepared to battle it out or martyr yourself on behalf of everyone, which could end up breaking down a lot of the networks and stuff like that, which you may not want to do. But ultimately, if they're not willing to pay you what you want to be paid, or what you think you should be paid, you just don't do the job, you don't take the gig. (Coby)*

The personality characteristics identified in chapter one reinforce the notion that a 'real' festival worker is a certain type of person who is capable of demanding their rights and looking out for themselves. Alongside the discourse of individual resistance, a parallel collective resistance was also observed to be taking place.

3.2.2.2 Mates Look Out For Each Other

The discourse of connectivity was visible in informal modes of collective resistance. In one worker's experience, established festival workers in positions with hiring power had always gone in to fight for the conditions of those beneath them. Another common form of resistance was the open and frequent sharing of pay and contract details. Unlike other industries where the sharing of pay rates might be unusual, festival workers were often privy to what their colleagues were being paid for different jobs. This was a conscious act that aimed to prevent employers from being able to take advantage of changing workforces by degrading conditions or lowering pay rates from year to year.

> *I'm happy to tell most people I work with, and definitely all my friends, what I earn from job to job. And if you knew what I earned (and people that ask, realise), it's not a sense of bragging at all. (Ethan)*

Interestingly, a shared behaviour was observed in all interviews that is a clear reworking strategy. Without exception, interviews included informal "check-ins" about current industry and job-related news. Every interview subject asked me about where I was working currently and

what jobs I had lined up for the rest of the year and filled me in on their news reciprocally. They also all updated me on the information they had about who had recently been given contracts or jobs, who was interested in which jobs, and which jobs were open or going to be open soon.

> *I've always liked to know who's in work and who's out of work, and what people are doing, so that if there's an opportunity - not only to get the best people to work for me, but also to help other people get jobs. (James)*

It was clear that these conversations were not merely small talk, but neither were they conscious "networking" manoeuvres. Their tone was casual and friendly, they flowed naturally in and out of other conversations, and my experience of them was that they happened almost subconsciously. All of these forms of reworking are further facilitated by an Australian-based Facebook group, named *Festival and Event Staff Network*. This group was referenced frequently by interviewees, and the reworking strategies described above can all be observed taking place in this online forum. Two workers referred to an instance whereby a festival with a bad reputation was exposed on this platform, and workers were able to share their experiences and warn their peers against working for that company the following year.

3.2.2.3 Problematising 'Reworking'

These efforts are "reworking" strategies (Berntsen, 2016, p. 473) that evolved in response to existing conditions and structures. Reworking tactics take advantage of an unfair situation without fundamentally disrupting or dismantling oppressive power structures. The building of networks can be viewed as a reworking strategy that works *within* a problematic system rather than against it, and thus fundamentally functions to uphold those oppressive structures. The development of new networks does not guarantee changes to conditions, and often reinforces existing centres of power (Pang, 2015, p. 52). Although reworking strategies (such as informal recruitment) are used by festival workers to counteract poor labour conditions, it is evident that these reworking tactics often have unintended negative effects on the industry and on workers themselves (see 3.2.1.1 and 3.2.1.2).

3.2.3 What Do Festival Workers Want?

Some workers supported the idea of a union for festival workers but had doubts that it would happen, or didn't understand how could it work.

Who's gonna pay for it? And who's gonna run it? (Ethan)

Many pointed out that the industry itself is relatively new, so positive improvement is inevitable. By extension, this implied that they themselves didn't need to do anything to catalyse this change. A number of workers professed no interest in unions at all. Sometimes this stemmed from a belief that unions themselves were not useful, for others it was merely a result of their contentment with the conditions they had experienced. One worker believed that the informal systems already in place were sufficient, saying, "I feel like it's an industry where there's enough chatter, that they don't need a union" (Abigail). Some workers rejected the idea of any regulation, because it threatened the specialness of festival work:

> *I think that's part of the charm. [...] I don't want a festival union, I think it'd be a stupid idea, [...] it's SO DIFFERENT everywhere, that it doesn't work if there's a union. I don't really know much about unions, but we're not workers who work certain hours and have certain degrees and certain job things. They're just all unique, and that's what makes them so beautiful! And to homogenise would make it shit, and wouldn't make it interesting and make it fun. (Abigail)*

Other workers believed that a union would be bad for the industry:

I'm glad we don't [have a union]. I think unions and standardised pay breed laziness and expectation. (Ethan)

While interviewees desired varying levels of change within the industry, they generally resisted the idea of a union. They were reluctant for anything significant about the industry to be fundamentally changed. Notably, most interviewees saw any changes (whether positive or negative) as coming from outside of themselves.

3.3 Discussion

In an industry that prizes optimism, stoicism and love of the job, with workers that acknowledge their privilege and are grateful for their exclusive positions, it is unsurprising that dissatisfaction with workplace conditions is not frequently acted upon.

I feel like, on one hand I need the money, need to pay rent, need to eat. On the other hand, I think if you are lucky enough to work in a community that you believe in, with people that you respect, maybe that's worth more? Maybe it's worth doing extra hours. Maybe it's actually legitimately more than the money, and I would rather have people

respect me for what I do than have an extra fifty bucks. Because, I don't know, in the end I think the things that I respect and want in my life are a strong sense of community and friends, and working towards a common goal. And I definitely still want to not feel exploited and be able to eat, but if I wanted more money we could have gone into different lifestyles probably. (Madeleine)

Despite their resistance to formal regulation, festival workers have shown themselves capable of acting collectively and individually to change conditions when necessary. However, although current reworking strategies are sometimes effective at protecting and promoting the interests of workers, they are not sufficiently adequate, and often result in unintended negative consequences. Individual bargaining is fundamentally undemocratic, and in many cases where risk is too high, bargaining doesn't take place and thus resources are not redistributed appropriately. None of the current strategies serve to catalyse industry-wide change or benefit the workforce beyond a single individual or small group of workers. Additionally, the vast range of negative emotions that festival workers described in relation to their work indicates that the festival family does not provide adequate support for festival workers, despite the positive discourse around it.

The ongoing resistance of festival workers to regulation keeps doors closed for those who might wish to get in, and although it enables the party to continue, this is at great cost to workers and to the industry. Worker wellbeing is compromised, as is the sustainability of long-term careers, which are essential for building industry capacity.

CONCLUSION

The two key ambivalences that emerged from this research were the tension between autonomy and connectivity, and the dissonance between *discourses* versus *experiences* of festival work. These ambivalences appeared through many levels of the data, and they are the keys to understanding the problem of collective organisation and change management in the festival industry.

These contradictory paradigms were synthesized by workers, so that they held two seemingly opposing concepts to be true simultaneously. On one hand, this shows that it is possible to maintain autonomy and individualism while acting and identifying collectively, contrary to Cohen's thesis (Cohen, 2010, p. 134). This demonstrates a state in which "the notion of autonomy is understood with its dialectical other, connectivity" (Pang, 2015, p. 49).

On the other hand, internalising the dissonances between discourse and experience led to emotional and material distress for festival workers. While workers desired changes to negative conditions, attachment to the payoffs of their occupational identities induced a denial of these desires, and a reluctance to take responsibility for catalysing such change. If workers want to maintain the 'specialness' of festival work, then a different kind of value needs to be found in the festival worker identity. Otherwise, it is only a matter of time before that identity becomes irrelevant. As one worker put it:

Your mental health and your bank account and your career doesn't have to suffer in order for you to do really fun cool things in the arts. (Coby)

Policy creation and increasing regulation will pose their own challenges to workers, festival organisations and regulatory bodies. Although workers have often been complicit in their own exploitation, while finding ways to wield their own agency, ultimately festival employers hold the balance of power. This power will only shift further in their direction as new graduates continue to bloat the workforce. Current practices have been functioning under a state of fairly balanced employer-employee power, which is likely to unbalance away from festival workers as the gig economy grows in the coming years (Hesmondhalgh, 2008, p. 563). The resistance that many workers displayed to enacting change in their own spheres of influence seems to indicate that for many workers, the industry will change around them and they will merely ride the wave of change wherever it takes them. Perhaps interviewees were correct in surmising that this young industry will inevitably be reformed and regulated. However, it is worth considering how short-term workers could be involved in that reshaping process, and if they are not, how much of their autonomy, community and identity they will manage to retain.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (3rd ed.). Verso. Retrieved from http://www.tandfebooks.com/action/showBook?doi=10.4324/9780203358672_Imagined_communities

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations, First Edition, Revision 1. Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au/ANZSCO

Australian Government Fair Work Ombudsman. Live Performance Award 2010 (2018). Australia.

Banks, M. (2010a). Autonomy Guaranteed? Cultural Work and the "Art–Commerce Relation." *Journal for Cultural Research*, *3*(14), 251–269.

Banks, M. (2010b). Craft labour and creative industries. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, *16*(3), 305–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630903055885

Banks, M., Lovatt, A., O'Connor, J., & Raffo, C. (2000). Risk and trust in the cultural industries. *Geoforum*, *31*(4), 453–464. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7185(00)00008-7

Berntsen, L. (2016). Reworking labour practices: on the agency of

unorganized mobile migrant construction workers. *Work, Employment & Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017015617687

Bridgstock, R. (2011). Making It Creatively: Building Sustainable Careers in the Arts and Creative Industries. *Australian Career Practitioner Magazine*, *2*(22), 11–13.

Christopherson, S. (2008). Beyond the Self-expressive Creative Worker: An Industry Perspective on Entertainment Media. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *25*(7–8), 73–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408097797

Cloonan, M., & Williamson, J. (2016). *Players' work time*. Manchester University Press.

Cohen, N. S. (2010). Negotiating Writers' Rights: Freelance Cultural Labour and the Challenge of Organizing. *Just Labour: A Canadian Journal of Work and Society*, *17 and 18*, 119–138.

Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals. (2013). The Major Festivals Initiative (MFI) and The National Cultural Policy (NCP): Shared Goals , Shared Future MFI : Why it Works and How. Retrieved from http://creativeaustralia.arts.gov.au/assets/confederation-of-australian-international-arts-festivals.pdf

Creighton, B., & Forsyth, A. (2012). Rediscovering Collective Bargaining. In B. Creighton & A. Forsyth (Eds.), *Rediscovering Collective Bargaining:*

Australia's Fair Work Act in International Perspective (pp. 1–20). New York: Taylor & Francis.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow*. New York: Harper and Row.

de Peuter, G., & Cohen, N. S. (2015). Emerging Labour Politics in Creative Industries. In K. Oakley & J. O'Connor (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Cultural Industries* (pp. 305–318). Routledge.

Dex, S., & Willis, J. (2003). Mothers returning to television production work in a changing environment. In *Cultural Work: Understanding the Cultural Industries*.

Ekman, S. (2014). Is the high-involvement worker precarious or opportunistic ? Hierarchical ambiguities in late capitalism. *Organization*, *21*(2), 141–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508412473672

Getz, D. (2005). *Event Management and Event Tourism* (2nd ed.). New York: Cognizant.

Gill, R., & Pratt, A. (2008). In the Social Factory?: Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *25*(7–8), 26–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408097794

Haslam, S. A., Powell, C., & Turner, J. C. (2016). Social Identity , Self-categorization , and Work Motivation : Rethinking the Contribution of the Group to Positive and Sustainable Organisational Outcomes,

(November). https://doi.org/10.1111/1464-0597.00018

Hesmondhalgh, D. (2008). Cultural and creative industries. In *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Analysis*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848608443.n26

Hesmondhalgh, D., & Baker, S. (2008). Creative Work and Emotional Labour in the Television Industry. *Theory Culture & Society*, *25*(7–8), 97–118. https://doi.org/Doi 10.1177/0263276408097798

Hesmondhalgh, D., & Baker, S. (2011). *Creative Labour: Media work in three cultural industries*. Routledge.

Hofstede, G. (1983). The Cultural Relativity of Organizational Practices and Theories. *Journal of International Business Studies*, (Fall), 75–89.

Lindgren, M., Packendorff, J., & Sergi, V. (2014). Thrilled by the discourse , suffering through the experience: Emotions in project-based work.

McGuigan, J. (2014). The Neoliberal Self. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, *6*(1), 223–240. https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146223

McGuigan, J. (2016). *Neoliberal Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137466464

Oakley, K. (2007). *Better than working for a living? Skills and labour in the*

festivals economy. London: Report for Celebrating Enterprise/Equal Works program of the European Social Fund.

Pang, L. (2015). Art and Cultural Industries: Autonomy and Community. In K. Oakley & J. O'Connor (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Cultural Industries* (pp. 45–55). Routledge.

Percival, N., & Hesmondhalgh, D. (2015). Unpaid work in the UK television and film industries: Resistance and changing attitudes. *European Journal of Communication*, *29*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323113516726

Ryan, B. (1992). *Making Capital from Culture: The Corporate Form of Capitalist Cultural Production*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Sawyer, K. K. (2015). Group Flow and Group Genius. *The NAMTA Journal*, *40*(3), 29.

Smith, C. (2006). The double indeterminacy of labour power: labour effort and labour mobility. *Work, Employment and Society 20(2):*, *2*(20), 389–402.

Stahl, M. (2012). *Unfree Masters: Popular Music and the Politics of Work*. Durham, NC: London: Duke University Press.

Stevens, K. (2016). *Australian Film Festivals: Audience, Place, and Exhibition Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan US.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology. In N. K.

Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 273–285). London: Sage. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00988593

Throsby, D., & Zednik, A. (2010). *Do You Really Expect to Get Paid? An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*. https://doi.org/978-1-920784-56-0

Ursell, G. (2000). Television production: issues of exploitation, commodification and subjectivity in UK television labour markets. *Media Culture & Society*, *22*, 805–825.

Van Dyne, L., & Ang, S. (1998). Organizational Citizenship Behavior of Contingent Workers in Singapore. *The Academy of Management Journal*, *41*(6), 692–703.

Waldinger, R., & Lichter, M. I. (2003). *How the Other Half Works:Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*.

Wheeler, H. N. (2000). Collective Bargaining is a Fundamental Human Right. *Industrial Relations*, (39), 535.

Willig, C. (2013). Grounded Theory Methodology. In *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology* (3rd ed., pp. 69–82). London: City University.

Wright, D. (2005). Mediating production and consumption: cultural capital and 'cultural workers,' *56*(1). https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2005.00049.x

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SUBJECT LIST

ALIAS	YEARS IN INDUSTRY	ORIGIN
James	>10	Australia
Sam	>10	Australia
Charlotte	>10	Australia
Ethan	5-10	Australia
Reece	5-10	UK
Alice	<5	Australia
Coby	5-10	Australia
Natasha	<5	Australia
Rebecca	>10	Australia
Abigail	<5	Australia
Madeleine	5-10	Australia
Alicia	<5	Australia

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Do you or have you ever identified as a festival worker? Why/why not? What does "festival worker" mean to you?

Why do you work in festivals?

How does working in festivals fit in with or affect other parts of your life?

What is your relationship to festivals besides as a worker?

What/who are festival workers, and is festival work a unique sector? Why/why not?

Have you ever moved to work in a festival? Why? Tell me about that experience.

What is the festival circuit, have you worked it, why do you/others work it, what are the good/bad things?

Has working in festivals affected your relationships to places, or the way you think about place - where you're from vs. where you live vs. where you are right now; nationality/immigration.

How do you feel about the precariousness of contract work? Would you prefer ongoing work if you could get it? Why/why not?

What are the key relationships in your life, and are they affected by your work in festivals? How so?

How do relationships and networks play a part in your experience as a festival worker?

Tell me about the working conditions you've experienced as a festival worker. Hours, pay, recruitment, expectations, culture. Are they different/the same as non-festival jobs? How do you feel about those conditions? Why do you think it is how it is? Is there anything you would change? Why/why not?

What are the best and worst parts of working in festivals? What are the parts no one talks about or knows about? What are the parts everyone in the industry talks about but no one outside knows about? What are some common misconceptions?

Did you know, there is no peak body, workers union, employment award, or official occupational classification for people working in festivals - what are your thoughts on these things?