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Fragmented (Working) Lives

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ABSTRACT

The paper considers Richard Sennett's (1998) claims about the ways in which the traits of contemporary capitalism have impacted on personal and professional lives of people. It examines some of the main themes such as reduction of working lives, pressure on personal lives, emphasis on youth, devaluation of experience, demise of authority and teamwork, in the light of data from the film and TV industry. The data resonates with much of Sennett's concern that when 'pieces of work' and 'lumps of labour' become the norm, people's sense of who they are is corroded and (fragmented) work becomes a destabilising factor in one's life. Considering the wider significance of such trends, questions are raised as to how symptomatic this type of employment is and whether it is indicative of the future of work in the Western societies.

Institutions and work are changing. The new capitalism is characterised above all by short-termism, flexibility and insecurity. They seep into everyday experience of work and shape professional lives and careers. In this paper we focus on one aspect of this change: the fragmentation of working lives. Our discussion resonates with the concerns expressed by Richard Sennett about the possible negative impact the above changes have on the individual. We also reflect on the speculations about the likely wider impact of the new working realities.

Sennett (1998) raises concerns about the ways in which some of the main traits of the new capitalism corrode the social basis of human integrity. In the new circumstances personal character comes under severe pressure (Sennett, 1998). The new capitalism puts special emphasis on youth. Young people, traditionally low-wage labour, are more flexible, which often means less judgemental about work and working conditions (Sennett, 1998:93-94). Past experience does not matter as much as it used to; it does not invoke respect and is not a signifier of greater competence, skills and hence value. Hierarchies are diluted. As a consequence, working life has been compressed. The new work arrangements also put special emphasis on teamwork. Sennett argues that teamwork is the core of the contemporary work ethic.

> "It celebrates sensitivity to others; it requires such 'soft skills' as being a good listener and being cooperative; most of all teamwork emphasizes team adaptability to circumstances. Teamwork is the work ethic which suits a flexible political economy." (Sennett, 1998:99).

The combination of the above traits allocates a special place and meaning of risk. Risk-taking is an inevitable consequence of uncertainty. In contemporary capitalism it has a rather positive connotation: it is the means to grasp opportunity. People jump from one job to another not necessarily knowing what to expect, just in the hope it is going to be better. The only specific information they may have when taking these decisions is perhaps earnings. However, as Sennett argues on the basis of statistical data from the US, moving from job to job is not necessarily related to higher earnings. At the same time, the way the world of work is developing makes risk-taking inevitable.

Being successful or simply surviving in such social conditions requires a very specific type of

individuals, argues Sennett in his more recent work (2006). They have to be able to manage short-term relationships in the context of frequent changes of tasks, jobs and places. They have to be able to update their skills and abilities and be socialised in the new culture which values potential ability and not past performance. And finally, they have to be prepared 'to let go of the past' (pp.3-4).

Such a shift in the way contemporary capitalist societies are organised, the challenges they present to the individual and the way in which they shape people's lives breaks the consistent narrative of one's path, puts pressures on the way people make sense of their lives and leads to a 'corrosion of character' (Sennett, 1998). As a result, the way in which the individual thinks of him/herself in the society is challenged as is the very core of the sense-making and self-respect. Moreover, these new social rules and practices put potentially destructive constraints on the modern man. Sennett claims, "...institutions, skills, and consumption patterns have indeed changed. My argument is that these changes have not set people free." (2006:13).

Sennett's discussion of the traits of the contemporary capitalism and the ways in which they are introduced into people's lives and work is based mainly on the realities of contemporary US (Sennett, 2006:8). Our discussion takes some of his reflections into a different context: film and TV industry in the UK. This is an industry where the work has traditionally been organised around separate projects: film or TV productions. Teams are being composed for the particular programme or film and disintegrated after the completion of the project. People work together for a limited time periods, besides, often not being involved with productions from start to end but having their 'inputs' at the different stages depending on their role in the team. In this sense 'pieces of work' have always been the norm. Since 1990s there have been significant changes in the UK television and film industry. They were more pronounced in the TV sector where the de-regulation and the reforms altered fundamentally the employment and the labour market.

Prior to the 1980s the television sector in the UK had the status and characteristics of a public service (Davis and Scase, 2000; Langham, 1996; Tracey, 1998). This was reflected not only in the content of programmes and the way in which the industry was regulated, but also in the long-term stability of employment within it. The TV scene

changed considerably with the establishment of Channel Four in 1982. What was new was the way in which Channel Four produced programmes. Almost all the productions it broadcasted were outsourced i.e. commissioned to outside players. These were usually independent production companies which made and then sold programmes to the broadcasters. It was the establishment of Channel Four and its model of commissioning that stimulated a considerable growth in the number of such independent production companies (Dex et al., 2000; Langham, 1996; Sparks, 1994; Tunstall, 1993). The growth of the independent sector meant essentially growth in the outsourced production which replaced the in-house programme-making. This in turn led to considerable reductions in the staff positions and to a corresponding growth in the number of freelance workers (Davis and Scase, 2000; Dex et al., 2000; Saundry, 2001; Thynne, 2000; Tunstall, 1993). The old vertically integrated production structures of the BBC and ITV with strict hierarchies were replaced by a network of small companies (Barnatt and Starkey, 1994; Davis and Scase, 2000; Saundry, 1998; Starkey et al., 2000; Tunstall, 1993).

Currently the TV industry in the UK comprises a large number of small and a smaller number of large companies. The majority of the big companies are located in London. Many of the small independent companies work on a limited number of commissions and often in only one genre (Skillset, 2006). There is a legislative requirement for broadcasters to commission 25% of their production to independent companies. According to the BBC's Annual Report in 2005 - 2006 it commissioned 31% of its production to outside providers (BBC, 2006). The Skillset workforce survey shows that 62% of those working on such independent productions are freelance compared to 38% on permanent or long-term contracts.

The reforms in the industry in 1980s and 1990s resulted in profound changes in the labour market. The overall industry employment structure was altered and many of the TV professionals had to become freelance (see among others, Davis and Scase, 2000; Langham, 1996; Paterson, 2001; Tunstall, 1993). This new type of employment was aimed at increasing the flexibility and unleashing the creative potential of these creative workers or at least at corresponding better to the need for artistic space. It required new types of work organisation, progression demanded new ways of working and work structures were characterised by

greater uncertainty (Davis and Scase, 2000). Hence, a key feature of contemporary employment in TV is freelance work, whereby people are hired for specific short-term jobs in specific productions. For the freelancers jobs are, as Storey et al.'s research showed (2005), distinctive 'pieces of work' and 'termination' is an intrinsic property of their employment (pp.1039-1040). In this sense it can be defined as characteristic of the new, increasingly normative type of fragmented employment which as Sennett claims, corrodes character.

Working as a freelancer is marked by insecurity (Paterson, 2001; Storey et al., 2005; Tempest et al., 2004). The main pressure comes from the need to find employment. It is largely dependent on social mechanisms and often the additional efforts and strategies freelancers employ do not necessarily lead to success, to finding employment (Dex et al., 2000; Paterson, 2001). Paterson's study (2001) of freelancers' diaries revealed that the majority of television workers favoured employment stability and disliked the uncertainly which freelancing introduced in their lives. This also had a negative impact on their creativity. A number of researchers have commented that employment prospects in such labour markets depend on reputation (Baumann, 2002; Saundry, 2001; Ursell, 2000). Reputation, however, is dependent on very elusive factors. As Paterson (2001) explains,

"Television is an industry of opportunity as well as uncertainty, but it is constrained opportunity where how you network, whether you are attuned to fashionable ideas, and the success or failure of your programmes with audiences, determine the reputation of individuals." (p. 517)

The roots of this heavy reliance on reputation are in the nature of the creative endeavour. It was amplified by the shift from strong internal labour markets to external or occupational ones (Baumann, 2002; Langham, 1996; Ursell, 1998). As a result the labour market in UK TV at present relies mainly on informal social mechanisms (Baumann, 2002; Saundry et al., 2005). The informal practices are not entirely new to the TV, but the changes have increased significantly their role (Langham, 1996; Ursell, 2000). Saundry (2001) summaries: "The ability of workers to find freelance work was based on reputation, track record and their contacts within the industry" (p.28). Following an extensive study of freelancers Ursell (2000) comes to a similar conclusion:

"Television workers are hired (substantially if not completely) on the basis of their reputation."(p.818). TV industry is characterised by frequent change of employers and short-term employment duration. At the same time there are no established and functioning institutions or standards. The role of labour market institutions is performed by social mechanisms: they safeguard transactions against uncertainly. For example, reputation provides a record on past performance and is used to reduce uncertainty in future interactions (Baumann, 2002). Baumann interpreted the use of intermediaries as 'buffers' against risk reducing uncertainty for individuals and cost for companies.

The strong reliance on personal networks and almost entirely freelance labour does present challenges to those at entry and at exit points. At entry level, aspiring professionals are suffering from the social inequalities reflected in and replicated by the entry mechanisms. For example, people are selected on the basis of race, gender and above all, class (Holgate, 2006). Even if this is not done intentionally, the informality of the recruitment methods and the fact that people in TV like to work with people similar to themselves (Langham, 1996) motivate and allow for this replication of existing imbalances. At the entry level of the industry there are a large number of media graduates (Davis and Scase, 2000; Langham, 1996). This is partly due to the boom of media and related degrees in the last decade. The increased competition at this lower level of the TV labour force combined with the informality of recruitment and selection practices lead to the widespread expectation that young talent will work for free (Holgate, 2006; Tunstall, 1993; Tvwrap, 2005). Moreover, the experiences of this entry level or work placement work are often very poor (Holgate, 2006; Tvwrap, 2005).

Problems have been established also at the 'opposite end' of freelancers' working lives. Platman's (2004) research on media freelancers in their 50s or older found that those in the later stages of their careers were more vulnerable to pay rates being constantly reduced, particularly in the context of young 'cheaply' available labour. They were also finding difficulties staying in the active networks which are crucial for finding jobs, and they were facing challenges as their skills went out of date. So for those more senior freelancers this type of labour market did bring greater insecurity and made them much more vulnerable to competition. In line with this, research by Dex et al. (2000) studying the effect

of the reforms on different age cohorts reported that TV workers in their 40s were the group most affected by the changes in the TV industry in the 1990s.

Like TV, film industry is also a 'loosely organized structure of work activities' with its project-based contracting of freelancers (Faulkner and Anderson, 1987:907). The work is organised around 'semi-permanent work groups'' (Blair 2003) under a 'project-based enterprise' (De Fillippi and Arthur 1998) in a 'network organisation' (Jones 1996). Jones et al. (1997) discuss the various definitions and characteristics used to denote this type of organising work and suggest the term 'network governance', which involves

> "a select, persistent, and structured set of autonomous firms (as well as nonprofit agencies) engaged in creating products or services based on implicit and open-ended contracts to adapt to environmental contingencies and to coordinate and safeguard exchanges. These conditions are socially - not legally - binding." (p.914)

The main difference to TV is the length of the projects. In film they are traditionally larger scale productions, equipment is heavier and there are more established unwritten rules within the different departments/teams. Film has thus been less susceptible to the processes of de-regulation and a non-restricted labour market entry. The latter has been pronounced following the weakening of the trade unions and the subsequent removal of the requirement for a possession of a union card for practicing most of the jobs.

THE PRESENT STUDY
The research from which we draw empirical data is set against this background. It involved 85 semi-biographical semi-structured, face-to-face or telephone interviews with freelancers and key informants in the industry; 3 months participant observation in a small independent company; participant observation of the filming of a short semi-professional film and attendance of film and TV industry events.

The data provided direct access to the ways in which some of the features of the new capitalism discussed by Sennett have been introduced in the industry and the ways in which establishing them as an employment norm impacted on the careers and personal lives of our respondents. Although traditions of project-based work in film and TV

differ with the film industry having a longer history of more autonomous production work (also linked to the average length of the projects), both present a complex picture of change and continuity. The people we talked to often had the feeling their lives have been revolving around 'patchy' and erratic employment with frequent changes and weak or at least highly unpredictable connections between the different 'pieces'. However, there seems to be acceptance of fragmentation within this industry, especially by the younger ones. Those who have been working in it long enough, from before the changes, do make the distinction between the fragmentation of working lives and careers, and the fragmentation of work as an intrinsic trait of this type of labour. And they do voice serious concerns about the new face of fragmentation.

Below some of the main themes introduced by Sennett will be illustrated followed by a discussion of the implications for the individuals working in film and TV. We also reflect on the likelihood of a wider impact of those and question the assumption that these new forms will become the model for the vast majority of employment arrangements. We contend that although industries such as film and TV provide ample evidence of the tendencies and effects of the new capitalism, it is still arguable that these will become the norm in the wider society.

THE INDUSTRY

"It's not highly organised body that's governed by really strong organisations; it's not. The unions have lost their power. So it's just a bunch of word of mouth freelancers. It's incredible, really." (Claudia, production manager)

Following the deregulation of the film and TV industry in 1990s the work in the sector became much more fragmented. This had bigger impact in the TV industry where for decades employment under the umbrella of the BBC or ITV was long-term and stable, with production work being project-based but within those structures. As a result, the general feeling of our respondents was that of instability. As Claudia, a production manager with more than ten years of experience as a freelancer told us, "This is not an industry you can trust." For the individual freelancer this meant that there was no guarantee of work being available, there was no security of training, or growing, or even, to start with, of entry. The most characteristic about the responses we had from the industry was their diversity. People loved, it, or

resented it, or both at the same time. And it also depended on their employment situation at the time of the interview. In a couple of cases subsequent contacts revealed that people had 'moved on', i.e. out of the film or TV making. One researcher summarised, "Staying in or getting out of the industry is as random as getting in and being in." (Ciru). The explanation we were given was domination of the new commercial principles which seeped through all the aspects of film and TV making.

"The industry has grown enormously and it's possibly a more cut-throat now, much more commercial than it used to be... I think it moves away from a creative industry to a much more commercially-driven experience. And that in itself doesn't limit the opportunities, it just makes it harder for people to get themselves in as individuals as opposed to just cogs in the wheel, if you like." (Joanna, production manager)

The elevating of the marked principles prioritising cost efficiency has resulted in an increased fragmentation of working lives.

"They might say, 'Come and work for us four weeks, then go off and do another job so, you know, you pay your rent and then come back to us when we've got more money to put you back on our budget." (Sandra, production manager)

Doing 'chunks of labour' is the norm in film and TV. It is so both for the creative and the production professionals. As we mentioned previously, it has always been so as regards the organisation of work. Nowadays, however, there is a growing tendency not only of raising insecurity but also of shortening the lengths of contracts. A producer-director told us about her shortest programme which was four days: a day of travel, a day of shooting, a day of edit preparation and a day of edit. The pieces of work become smaller and smaller and as a rule unpredictable. Employing individuals is decided often on an ad hoc basis. Here is a typical account of this new employment 'pattern':

"I came in at an eight day contract and they were in the middle of a massive production and realised after eight days that they still needed more help, so they extended me for a couple of weeks. So I finished the first production... Then they

asked me to stay on for another two weeks and do another production which was, sort of, going off the back of the first one. Then, I did another production: I did edit-produced a programme for them, which was another three weeks. And literally, they're, like, three weeks contracts: 'OK, can you stay for another three weeks?", "Yes, that's great!". Then, at that point, they said 'We'd really like to keep you. How would you fancy some development? And we'll give you a six months contract." So I was like "Wow! My God! That's amazing! That'll be fantastic!" And here I am. But, yes, six months: it's been a long time since I'd had a six months contract." (Anna, producer-director)

In some sense, the above story can be interpreted as one where producing good work is rewarded by further contracts. And it is indeed so. Anna was not only pleased but also surprised by the situation which shows probably atypical continuity of work. Importantly, all of the contract extensions were very short and given on an ad hoc basis, and it is this nature of contracts that shapes freelancers' employment.

Not only the 'pieces of work' are smaller, but professional life is much more unpredictable. Future moves depend only partly on previous attainments. Careers happen in a much more random way. People in the industry often refer to it as 'being at the right place at the right time'. Many of the explanations of the moves of people between one job role to another was 'pure luck'. With Ciru it was the fact that while she was 'running' on an entertainment programme, the production team realised they have not hired anyone to take care of the cheer team, so they offered her the job: for the same money, but with a researcher's credit and more responsibilities. For Sandra, the move from production co-ordinator to production manager happened on one Monday morning when the production manager on the project was hospitalised and she was offered to take over. For Susan it was when the production manager on her programme got an offer to go on a shoot to an exotic location which she took, left the job, and Susan replaced her.

People can be perfectly prepared to do such new roles, or they can be unprepared but do them well, or they can be unprepared and fail at them. This 'sink or swim' logic of work progression can be very costly both to the talent pool and to the individual. There are no universal regularities and

very little predictability. The most predictable trait is the wide variety of situations in the play of risk and opportunity. Because fragmentation brings both risks and opportunities. It blurs a lot of the previously existing rules and promotes serendipity and charm to career managers. Respondents continuously emphasised that a part of their "luck" is that someone takes a chance on them: to give them the opportunity to learn, to grow, or simply to be in employment. Taking chances is inevitable in the film and TV environment. This is a constant theme in the way people think about their work. It is a feature of the contemporary work and life which is particularly pronounced in the film and TV.

People take chances also across the boundaries of working life in search of 'having a life'. Such was the case of a producer-director who was one of the rare examples of a mother working in the industry. However, the cost of her return after she had a baby was not only the complete change of job role: she returned on the production management rather than on the creative side, but also a difficult period of claiming benefits and going through a 'hard patch'. The way back in for this production manager, Joanna, was the chance which a woman producer she had worked with took on her.

The changes between being in and out of work can be problematic because it is very much outside the powers of the individuals to define or even influence them. And because they happen over short periods of time. People have to be ready to oscillate between jobs and lack of jobs throughout their working lives. Our freelance respondents had a clear image of it: 'feast or famine' is how the fragmented lives can be labelled at a more basic level of personal survival. And, again, it was marked by unpredictability and by quick change of opportunity and dead-ends:

"There was no more work at the BBC. Not that I could find, anyway. And I thought "...OK.... Big, bad, scary world outside the BBC" [laughs nervously]. And on the first day I was unemployed, I had a phone call from a company called [...]. They rang me up and said 'We've seen your CV on *productionbase* [on-line crew search resource]. Can you go to Spain tomorrow?". So, it was one of those things, sometimes life works in a very mysterious way. So I went and had an interview. The next day I went to Spain for three weeks. Did a shoot for them in Spain. Came back

and was unemployed for about a month, you know, sending my CV out to everyone, looking on *productionbase, mandy.com* the whole time. Spent the summer, kind of, doing short jobs: four weeks here, four weeks there, but no work… two months." (Anna, producer-director)

Another consistent feature was the fact that respondents were actively looking for opportunities and were making use of all these opportunities. Waiting for their 'lucky break', individuals seemed to be sharply attuned to the idea that every chance should be used. Only one respondent, a cameraman in his mid-40s said that he was careful as to the extent to which he 'stretched'[1] his work. In film the opportunistic behaviour seems a lot more restrained than in TV. Mainly due to strong traditions of gradual upwards progression, bigger emphasis on quality of the output, and more demanding technology which dictate the boundaries in which chances can occur in the first place. In this respect it is very dissimilar to the majority of TV productions, where the turnover is much higher, the quality criteria much lower, and the teams much smaller.

A benefit of the frequent change of jobs was the potential opportunity to negotiate higher rates when moving from job to job. The more frequent the job changes, the more opportunities people have to do so. However, within the limitations of the tighter and tighter budgets. So in actual fact, as respondents bitterly acknowledged, fees have not gone up.

Fragmentation provides more possibilities for quick moves upwards, which is not necessarily positive. Dorothy, a producer-director, had a baby and coming back to the industry realised that a lot of her contacts were dealing with the nitty-gritty of production anymore. The people had moved higher up and could not help her in finding jobs. This shows how it is easy for people in this context to be personally and professionally detached within a relatively short period of times.

Some of our respondents said they were freelance by choice. These were mostly people who have had the choice and chance of being staff at some point in their lives. Freelancing comes with both negatives and benefits. In this sense it is not problematic in itself. It becomes a source of

contradiction when intertwined into the structures and pressures wider than a specific production or company, which may nevertheless be manifested in the work of the particular production or company. Such can be, for example, the legislative and institutional environment and the competitive basis for film and TV which puts enormous pressure on budgets, which then allows for those pressures to get to the individual through the de-regulated context in which variables become too much and people and structures are too detached to provide anchors of professional and often personal lives.

> "I think it's getting so comical in terms of budgets and… the unrealistic things that channels demand from production companies. So they just want a runner who shoots, and edits, at home, on a final cut, and will write the script, and will deliver the final papers…" (Susan, production manager)

AUTHORITY AND TEAMS

A prerequisite for smooth running of production teams is the clear understanding of the roles and power their members have. Bechky (2006) argues that job positions play a significant role for organising the project-based work where people frequently change jobs. The work in production teams however has a strong notion of hierarchy. Organising by role models and seniority are not mutually exclusive. A good illustration of this are film camera teams. They consist usually of a camera trainee, a clapper loader, a focus puller, a camera operator and a director of photography. These are perhaps the teams where the notion of seniority is most preserved, as stepping up the ladder is preceded by certain years of experience and close monitoring from the person on the immediately higher job role. However, nowadays this is mostly so in film and bigger productions such as TV drama ones.

In the high speed and high turnover lower budget productions (such as many nowadays are) roles within the teams are still defined. However, the frequent moves people have to make from job to job and the strong competition they face in a context of financial pressures has started to erode the traditional notion of authority as a signifier of prerogative and power. Mainly because of insecurity and employment opportunities

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[1] 'Stretchwork' is a term used by O'Mahony and Bechky (2006) to denote the process by which contract workers in the film industry gain more varied work which enables them to develop competencies across organisational boundaries and to make subsequent career steps based on the skills acquired.

dependent on reputation. As Claudia, an experienced production manager told us, in these days of small budgets people cannot afford to have big egos. This is, we contend, a possible outcome of the demise of the notion of authority. It is also linked to Sennett's point about the focus of the teamwork: the necessity to be nice and understanding. And it looks so indeed. A young researcher exclaimed enthusiastically how many nice people there were in the industry.

There is a prerequisite if not pressure for people to conform to not being 'difficult' which in many cases means not standing up for themselves; or not being 'bossy'. There is a tacit understanding that people have to be complacent to some extent, that being nice is a part of being professional.

> "I know someone who's worked as an editor who's very picky... And she told me she hasn't worked for a couple of years and I do know why. I'm not going to say anything, but I do know why she hasn't worked for a couple of years." (Dorothy, producer director)

A lighting cameraman told us about a sound recordist who was often being 'difficult' by being particularly uncompromising on getting the perfect sound. This put him off some work; our respondent said he would take him on only on the jobs where the quality is really important. Examples like this reveal how doing high quality work can be at odds with the expectation to comply with time, budget or social pressures.

Reputations also evolve around personalities and behaviour. A few researchers mentioned how it was not uncommon for a producer or a director to ask the whole team about a candidate he or she has just interviewed if someone has worked with them, and what are they like to work with.

> "And, you know, if you work on a production where people don't like you... you know, everybody knows everybody in TV. And if you then go to another company on another programme, they're bound to say, you know, this person is coming to work on...[programme], and there's ... someone who worked on [the programme] or is friends with someone who worked on [the programme], goes "Oh, no, she was a bitch!", and you know, even if someone like a runner says you are a bitch it will go against you in you

wanting the job. But if you have someone going "Oh yes, she's is pretty lovely" that's gonna benefit you". (Susan, production manger)

It is possible that this is more so in the lower positions. Also, it is more often mentioned by respondents working on the production side. However, not exclusively. A producer-director commented on the ways in which professionals in other job roles build reputation:

> "...particularly the cameramen and stuff, because they're obviously shooting the whole time, and it's even more fragmented because they're working on a totally freelance basis. It may literally be a day here, and a day there, and a day there. Cameramen, you know, you know who you like working with, because you want to work with a cameraman who's always polite with people you're filming with. Always smile, don't complain if you have to work through lunch, don't complain if you don't have a chance to sit down and stuff, you know. So, a lot of it is based on not complaining, I think. Which is not necessarily a good thing..." (Anna, producer-director)

We were told that difficult people stand out. And that professional people are nice and pleasant. Technical capacity, even for jobs where it presumably should have priority, was assumed. It has turned into a basic requirement rather than a key asset. Interviewees repeatedly said they were selecting colleagues on the basis of being nice, pleasant, sociable and communicative.

> "... a lot of it is down to personality. Because most people can do the job, most people can be a clapper loader, most people can be a focus puller if you're working, if you're already working in the industry, and most people can be a camera operator, if they're doing the job. But it's really down to personality. You really got to get on with them because you are working with them for a 10-11-12 hour days 6 days a week, 5 days a week or whatever for months on end. So they've got to be people you want to be around. Because you are spending more time with them than you are at home. Almost they become your family; for a short period of time." (Martin, Director of Photography)

Although crews are still organised around clear job roles, the established culture of being pleasant and nice (mainly under the risk of losing employment prospects if failing to do so) as well as the caution not to damage their reputation by being 'awkward' or 'difficult' erodes the imperative power which authority comes with. It illustrates Sennett's concern about teams establishing a work ethic of being co-operative and understanding. And is a case where people are not empowered by the new employment principles.

This is not to say that team work is not important. It has always been essential in film and TV at least for two reasons. The first one is the very nature of the job. Because of the way films and productions work, people need to spell out clearly their requirements and ideas, to be able to 'click' together, to work without extensive explanations. This is achieved partly through looking how the others do it, partly through natural ability, partly through trial and error. In this sense, it has always been important that the individuals work well within a team.

The second and perhaps more recent reason for the increased importance of the personality is the fact that people often spend long time working in a team. Again, in some sense it has always been the case, especially on longer productions where teams have spend a lot of time on location. What is new is the intensified hours and harder work which introduces intensity of close work regardless of the type of production and makes it a permanent characteristic of work in the industry.

"IT'S A YOUNG PERSON'S GAME"
In harmony with Sennett's claims, this is a universal wisdom in the TV and film industry. Being young, energetic, helpful and enthusiastic is the very image of the workforce, especially in TV. There are hardly any women in their 40s or 50s and any men in their 50s and 60s, perhaps with the exception of the few very senior jobs. The industry rejuvenates very quickly; maybe a bit too quickly for an industry.

One explanation the respondents gave us was that you have to be young (or young at heart) to make the programmes the audience likes. And with the shift to commercial as opposed to public service broadcasting the opinions of the audience are crucial. There is a clear awareness of this. Reflecting about it Claudia, a production manager said she really disliked reality shows, so probably she has grown old. She felt there was a part of

her which does not agree with things already. The tastes of the audience cannot, however, be guiding the industry in its preference for young energy. Although many commissioning editors are young, and they are the ones deciding on the programme content and style, there is a significant segment of audience which does not fit with the 'young and trendy' image of the viewer.

There are other reasons for the natural selection of the young which are embedded in the labour process. For example, the long hours and the intensity of work were amongst the explanations our respondents gave for this 'young person's game'. Invariably working in film and very much so in TV requires high energy, physical stamina and endurance. Another related reason for the young face of the industry is that people are leaving "simply because their health cannot take it" (Joanna). The competitive and difficult environment demanding long hours of work leads to quick burnout. A 31 years old producer-director said she loved her work, but did not know if she could continue practicing in 10 years time. A lot of people liked not having to fit within a nine-to-five work routine and shared their excitement about the variety and the big personal rewards of the work, but most found it stressful to shift between times of no work at all to a 15-hours working day. The balance between the two was a hard one to achieve.

> "Television is just one of those things that you just don't want to do forever... You need a get-out and if you don't have a get out you get really, really... disillusioned". (Linda, producer-director)

A reason for this young profile of the workforce is that budgets are low and the fees cannot match the expectations of the experienced professionals, so younger and less experienced people are being hired. This is clearly an opportunity for the latter and provokes resentment in those who have seen a different face of the industry. In this sense fragmentation can be especially problematic when budgets are low. Although welcomed by the young as bringing opportunity for more work (often more varied and interesting work or work at higher positions) this combination of small budgets, financial pressures, availability of keen to work and cheaply available young workforce essentially deteriorates both the quality of work and of working life.

At the same time, the younger segment of the workforce does not feel as bitter about the situation. The young spoke generally enthusiastically about their work. They liked the opportunities to travel, to meet different people, to work on a variety of projects. For them insecurity brings excitement, lack of family and personal commitments creates opportunity for full dedication (required by the work anyway), and physical stamina provides the possibility of a career, or at least an attempt at it.

LIVES? WORKING LIVES? FRAGMENTS OF WORKING LIVES...

There is something those working in film and TV agree upon; both the more and less experienced ones; and both those on the creative and production side. They all agree with a production manager who told us that the industry was full of people who have given more time to their work than to the rest of their life. And that the industry is full of people with problems in their personal lives.

The two aspects most commented upon were families and friends. Families, as an editor with a long career in TV commented, "are very bad idea to have in the television business. Many people have none. Or four." Freelancers were prepared for these pressures from the very start of their career. Young women said that if they wanted to have babies they could not combine it with their current work. Here are the thoughts of a young researcher in her mid 20s:

> "I think I'd be able to go and settle down and have a family and do that sort of things somewhere where is far less competitive. Because the thing is it's really competitive here... If you're like 'Oh, no, I can't do that because I've got to be home by this time because I've got a family, you know...', whatever, they're like, "Oh, well, we don't need you. We need someone who can commit to and do it solidly..." (Ciru, researcher)

Respondents found it extremely difficult to balance their personal and professional lives. If they had partners, their understanding was crucial in finding a compromise.

> "...there's never really a balance, I think. It, sort of, sways one minute having a bit of time off and having a nice, more relaxed time and then madly panicked with work. And it's very difficult to know what's

gonna happen when. It's probably my biggest gripe of being in this industry is not being able to control my own free time. It's very difficult for me to book things well in advance because I really don't know whether I'll be working or not. It is extremely difficult. I'm sure my wife could give you a much better answer than that. Much more energetic, I'm sure."
(Arthur, a lighting cameraman)

The second theme was the one of friends and colleagues. Working long hours can result in building friendships at work. It depended largely on the individual if they did so. People were alerted to the dangers of being all consumed in a job and the necessity for having social life outside it.

> "They're [productions] so busy and you end up so consumed in all of them, you, kind of, almost lose touch of what's actually normal, and what's real... You're, kind of, completely in this bubble, this show and it's all you live and breathe for 3-4 months of your life. It tends to consume you completely and it's nice to have people who are completely away from all of it, have nothing to do with television. And that's a great way to keep you sane and keep you grounded." (Ciru, researcher)

Sandra, an experienced production manger resented the thought the people one encounters at work as a freelancer can be called friends.

> "You may work with a person once and maybe not work with them for another three years. You may not even have time to see them for a beer for another 18 months, but you had a great time when you worked with them... Some people spend 5-6 nights a week... meeting up with people whom they've met at work. And all these people ... are their mates, but they're not your mates: you met them through work. And we're freelancers, we meet dozens and dozens of people every year, so they're not your mates. Your mates are the people you've grown up with, your mates are the people who live down your street. So I always make that distinction. I've always made it and I don't make any apologies for it. I've worked with some lovely, lovely people; but I've worked with them. And it's a bonus if we stay mates

after this." (Sandra, production manager)

Having a balanced social life in the periods between contracts was also not unproblematic:

> "When you have the time, because you're out of work, you don't have the money." (Sandra, production manager)

Beck (1992) discusses the above contradictions. He considers mobility an inherent characteristics of the contemporary labour market experience. With the processes of individualisation in the wider society, labour market entrants are expected to take charge of their own lives. This detaches them from the traditional patterns and support networks as they experience mobility. So, Beck (1992:94) argues, "There is a hidden contradiction between the mobility demands of the labor market and the social bonds."

The combination of shortening of working life and individualisation restricts both the length and scope of the 'fragments' of the working life. In a sense, the very term 'working life' seems inappropriate. It is more prompt to define the working experience of the majority of film and TV workers as a fragment of their working lives. Only the more established ones have a 'career'. A vast majority leave the industry too early to make such claims. It is very common that people in their 30s (for women) and 40s (for men) change their occupation. They go into completely different fields, such as, for example, doing massage, driving taxies, teaching, fitting kitchens. In this sense the industry functions more like a temporary 'interest club'. The difference is that the cut off point is not always predictable or driven by choice.

DISCUSSION

Our research found that many of the traits of the 'new capitalism' according to Sennett (1998; Sennett, 2006) are introduced in the lives of the freelancers in film and TV. With the extinction of staff jobs and the introduction of market principles, there have been changes in the professional paths of those working in these industries. As freelancing became the norm, securing employment became a dominant theme. At the same time, working on freelance basis allowed freedom of choice as to where, when, with whom and for whom to work. But it also increased the insecurity of not having any work to choose from. For those in film the competitive pressures just reinforced the fragility of some of the existing structures and rules. The de-

regulation put an end of the 'closed shop' situation which opened the door to new talent. This is the positive side of the developments. The concurrent strong market ethos and logic however, transformed this into a situation where both quality and wages became a stage too negotiable and the fragmentation of the community challenged the criteria of skills and technical standards. And while the tolerance for fragmentation of the work paths (i.e. project-based work) was never much resented, the fragmentation of the community with its internal standards and work patterns provoked concerns and resentment.

For those in TV the changes brought about much more abrupt change. The higher turnover of TV programmes and the way the work was restructured changed its face much more significantly. The traits of the new capitalism were much more pronounced in this environment. Described by many as 'young person's game', where 'you're only as good as your last job' the TV industry is indeed a good illustration of many recent changes in the world of work, especially fragmentation, compression of working life, and emphasis on pleasant personality traits as a prerequisite for employment.

What is important to consider is how these affected the (working) lives of the freelancers. From the accounts of our respondents it became clear that they faced increased pressure on their personal lives. This was so especially for the women we interviewed. Even the younger ones who had been in the industry only a few years were well aware that they cannot stay in it for the duration of their careers. The work histories were already shortened and even discontinued at the very beginning of those women's careers. The few who had succeeded to have children suffered difficulties being re-integrated into the work, both because of the increased demands of their personal lives and because of the informality of the industry mechanisms and lost connections with working colleagues.

The new arrangements naturally selected those younger, possessing stamina, energy and enthusiasm. In order to work in this industry, one must love what they are doing because only this love will justify the huge sacrifices people have to make. Moreover, this 'young persons' game' is possible only in individual circumstances which do not involve long-term commitment: either personal or financial. In this sense it cannot fulfil a career of a lifetime working path - it can only be

an element of it, and one at an early stage. The very nature of the job, with its physical and emotional demands plus the insecure nature of employment limit the range of people who can perform it well. It usually limits it to the younger ones: partly because they can devote the time and personal resources to it, but partly also because by the very nature of their youth they are more likely to enjoy the quick changes, variability and high intensity aspects of work. Film and TV are not unique in this respect. Other industries, such as IT for example, also target predominantly the young and energetic segment of work. However, film and TV is an industry where one is very unlikely to have a decent wage in the beginning of their employment history.

This emphasis on youth does, as Sennett claims, reduce considerably the length of working life. To be more precise, it reduces the length of working life in this particular industry. What we found was that many people knew that they could not expect to stay in TV for a whole career. There was an early acceptance of the fact this was just a phase in one's working life. And indeed, many of the respondents did consider what else they could do, or knew of colleagues who have left and had started to work in a completely different sector. In this respect film and TV may not be an industry to provide a full length work life; it relies on the rest of the economy to cater for those in the second half of their careers. Even if they may be the ones who have more skills and experience.

We mentioned Sennett's concern that working in the conditions of new capitalism does not set people free. In the industries we studied this is related to the strong intrinsic motivation, the 'passion for the work' as our respondents referred to it. Those who stay in the industry are the ones prepared to make big sacrifices in the name of work. Analysing itx from a labour process theory perspective authors such as Ursell (2000) explain this with the processes of self-commodification:

> "For the workers, television production is simultaneously a source of potential rewards, both material and existential, and a source of definite exploitation... There is still the business of excitement, the pleasure which motivates so many to volunteer for exploitation at the hands of the others, or to self-exploit. The pleasure goes beyond a concept of job satisfaction... Television work is not invariably just a job: it can be a labour of love... In television production, you can pursue your sensual

pleasures and, if you are lucky, people applaud you. If you are lucky, they might even pay you." (Ursell, 2000:819-821)

The fragmented work experience brings both risks and opportunities. Every new job is a risk-taking experience. The attempts to attenuate it have made the social aspect of employment much more important, but because of the short-term time scales (particularly in TV productions) the grouping and re-grouping of teams is much faster and the picture is much more kaleidoscopic, fragmented and dynamic. Hence, avoiding risks requires much more information and much wider networks. Opportunities accompany risks. And people in the industry have the predisposition of making use of them. The uneven progress in employment, however, can facilitate further fragmentation of the networks.

In this context people are striving for compensation or balance. Deprived of much of their private lives, they have established a culture of nice personalities. To be nice and pleasant is one of the most useful recommendations in TV. Our respondents kept emphasising that personalities matter so much because of the time spent together and the all-consuming nature of the projects. And this was so not only on location where the teams are often isolated. This was so when they referred to colleagues on the production side, the people in the office. In this sense personality has relevance not only to the creative aspect of the work, to the 'chemistry' within the team. It is a search for personal life in the intense every day work. And a criterion for getting jobs and selecting team members.

There was no consistency in the timing of the career progression stages. Respondents often explained their upwards career moves as 'being lucky' or 'being at the right place at the right time'. The individual sense of competence is highly dependent on and restricted by the experience of the individual. Because the 'pieces of work' are constituent of people's development paths, the danger is that they also turn out to be the horizon of one's professional knowledge.

Discussing choice and freedom in both personal and professional lives, film and TV industry in the UK provides sufficient examples to confirm Sennett's concern that fragmentation does not set people free. Albert and Bradley (1997) argue that future employment will be driven by the agency of experts and professionals who can choose their work and contracts, and thus not only be in

control of their professional (and also personal) lives, but also drive and influence the new organisational structures. Yet, we found little evidence that this was the case in film and TV. Resonant with Sennett's view, our findings suggested that restricted budgets and strenuous work do not provide much choice of contracts, work, or at a more basic level, choice of type of employment. There are very few staff jobs, the community is disconnected and the financial pressures are increasingly defining employment decisions.

At a more macro level, what we find in film and TV corresponds directly to Sennett's concerns about integration of the features of the new capitalism in people's working lives. We find the majority of the negative aspects of fragmentation visible in the sector. However, how representative is this of the way the economy as a whole functions, is a somehow separate issue. Although in this industry there is a clear trend for fragmentation and it has reached a particular form there, we cannot argue that it is the whole society that operates or will operate in accordance with those principles. So, if we speculate about future developments, such will probably be the reality in a certain range of occupations. Taking this a step further we may contend that it is an exception providing a good illustration of the negative results of combining free market ethos with fragmented industry environment. And considering the attractiveness of the industry, this is perhaps a particularly 'unfortunate' or at least not very successful choice.

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