

Johana Kotišová (Masaryk University, Brno)

Devastating Dreamjobs

Ambivalence, Emotions, and Creative Labor in a Post-socialist Audiovisual Industry

Introduction

Although creative workers form the core of the creative industry labor processes (and thus of post-industrial economy), they, their work, and their working conditions have been largely absent from academic research and significantly under-theorized in academic accounts of creative industries for a long time.¹⁾ While the more recent turn to creative labor in social science and humanities²⁾ did justice to its importance, this also gave rise to new theoretical issues and conflicts. Most generally, it stirred up a discussion about the most appropriate theoretical framework for studying creative labor.³⁾ At first, the critical scholars who had begun to pay attention to creative labor processes looked at them through the lens of neo-Marxism, understanding creative labor as a brute form of oppression but neglecting the micro-level strategies of domination, the diverse subjective and inter-subjectively shared experiences and meanings that emerge as a response to being positioned as “cultural/creative labor”. Later, cultural studies approaches attempted to compensate for the neglect of the individual identity in the creative workplace,⁴⁾ acknowledged that creative work generates new subjectivities,⁵⁾ and saw the contemporary creative worker as

-
- 1) Mark Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); David Hesmondhalgh, ‘Alternative Media, Alternative Texts? Rethinking Democratization in the Cultural Industries’, in James Curran (ed), *Media Organizations in Society* (London: Arnold, 2000), pp. 107–125.
 - 2) David Hesmondhalgh, ‘Normativity and Social Justice in the Analysis of Creative Labor’, *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2010), pp. 67–84.
 - 3) For overview and critique, see David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 2011); Hesmondhalgh, ‘Normativity and Social Justice’; Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton, *Contemporary Identities of Creativity and Creative Work* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).
 - 4) Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*.
 - 5) Rebecca Finkel et al., ‘Diversifying the Creative: Creative Work, Creative Industries, Creative Identities’, *Organization*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2017), pp. 281–288.

a human being subjected to a regime of self-discipline and governmentality.⁶⁾ Finally, some researchers, among others David Hesmondhalgh,⁷⁾ have criticized both perspectives, arguing that they wrongly perceive any positive features of creative labor as techniques for control and seductive compensatory mechanisms that make negative features of work bearable for workers and lead only to self-exploitation. In reality, this author believes, apart from “bad” work, there are some components of “good” work in creative industry, mainly autonomy and self-realization, that the workers can find genuinely satisfying.⁸⁾

In this paper, based on a piece of research on non-Western creative workers and their working conditions, I suggest we could take a step further and define creative labor as “jobs, centred on the activity of symbol-making, ... a compressed version of ‘creative work in the cultural industries,’”⁹⁾ via its inherent ambivalence and its context-sensitivity rather than by the categories of good and bad work. Given that, as Richard Maxwell reminds us, “the work of culture has never taken place outside the areas of life determined by particular economic systems and power relations,”¹⁰⁾ and further de-Westernization of studies of creative labor might shed new light on/broaden the relevance of the debate. Since this paper not only increases the number of non-Western empirical cases, but also aims to challenge and add to the existing theoretical approaches, it takes what Ana Alacovska and Rosalind Gill call “ex-centric” perspective: “the perspective outside of the Anglo-American orbit, that will challenge mainstream theory-building.”¹¹⁾ In line with the authors’ ambition, this paper provides a non-Western contextual perspective on some characteristics of creative labor that have been taken as general truths (and perceived highly normatively), such as informality and precarity, and thus challenges their positive/negative value (see below).

This paper looks specifically into creative labor in one of the Central and East European (CEE) post-communist creative (audiovisual) industries. These industries are marked by the coincidence and resonance of media globalization processes with dramatic political, economic and social transformations.¹²⁾ While the transformation processes and their results vary across post-socialist countries — CEE countries with socialist state pasts formerly belonged to the Soviet bloc¹³⁾ — all of them are “as EU members formally integrated with ‘The West’, yet still marked by their authoritarian past.”¹⁴⁾ This gives rise to

6) E.g. Angela McRobbie, *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?* (London: Routledge, 1998).

7) Hesmondhalgh, ‘Normativity and Social Justice’.

8) E.g. Taylor and Littleton, *Contemporary Identities*.

9) Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, p. 9. While I am aware of Hannah Arendt’s distinction between “work” and “labor” (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press)), and of the fact that the latter term would be perhaps more appropriate (it would stress the cyclical character of jobs in cultural industries and acknowledge their power to define human beings), I use both the terms interchangeably in this paper to refer also to the activities the creative personnel does within their jobs.

10) Richard Maxwell (ed), *Culture Works* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 3.

11) Ana Alacovska and Rosalind Gill, ‘De-Westernizing Creative Labor Studies: The Informality of Creative Work from an Ex-Centric Perspective’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2019), pp. 195–212, p. 196.

12) Anikó Imre and Ginette Verstraete, ‘Media Globalization and Post-Socialist Identities’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2009), pp. 131–135.

13) Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

14) Vaclav Stetka and Henrik Ørnebring, ‘Investigative Journalism in Central and Eastern Europe: Autonomy,

“post-socialist hybridity”:¹⁵⁾ the mixing of “old” socialist realities and “new” Western modes of production. While Katarzyna Marciniak uses this concept to describe cultural products, it also epitomizes the whole transition and liminality of post-socialist creative industries. On one hand, the anthropologist Katherine Verdery observes, the post-1989 transformation lead to parcelization of sovereignty and, in turn, to continuity of power relations and strengthening of the state (against which the revolutions had been pointed). As Verdery noted, demands for state intervention “were especially vociferous in the domain of culture”.¹⁶⁾ Therefore, paradoxically enough, the specifics of now formally democratic CEE creative industries display important continuities with the socialist period.¹⁷⁾ On the other hand, post-socialism includes certain idealization of the West, as numerous stories of post-socialism “have the knights of Western know-how rushing to rescue the distressed of Eastern Europe”.¹⁸⁾ This hybridity reflects itself in many particular paradoxes and problems. Despite unprecedented concentration within the creative sector,¹⁹⁾ the financial position of many CEE media houses and producers remains relatively weak and media occupations are fragmented, often along political lines. Moreover, because of its instability and continuing consolidation after 1989, the CEE media sector has experienced a particularly devastating impact of the 2008–09 financial crisis²⁰⁾ which led to the outflow of foreign media owners and further strengthened media oligarchization.²¹⁾ There is rampant instrumentalization of media — media moguls are often active in business or politics and get involved in media businesses for the sake of the former. While not all these trends are exclusively linked with post-socialist countries — for example, the 2008–09 financial crisis together with digitalization affected creative industries globally as oligarchization also appeared in other media systems, and the CEE media system remained linked to other media systems through transnational media ownership — this analysis below shows that the post-1989 development is believed to intensify some of the broader trends. The Czech media system that this paper focuses on is by some of its actors seen as “distorted and deviated”, fatally marked by “wild privatization” after 1989, and the neoliberal turn (manifesting itself, among other things, in the opinion that public service media are superfluous).²²⁾

Business Models, and Democratic Roles’, *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2013), pp. 413–435, p. 414.

15) Katarzyna Marciniak, ‘Post-Socialist Hybrids’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2009), pp. 173–190.

16) Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 214.

17) Sabina Mihelj and John Downey, ‘Introduction: Comparing Media Systems in Central and Eastern Europe: Politics, Economy, Culture’, in *Central and Eastern European Media in Comparative Perspective: Politics, Economy Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 1.

18) *Ibid.*, p. 204.

19) Imre and Verstraete, ‘Media Globalization’; Monika Metyková and Lenka Waschková Císařová, ‘Changing Journalistic Practices in Eastern Europe: The Cases of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia’, *Journalism*, vol. 10, no. 5 (2009), pp. 719–736.

20) Stetka and Örnebring, ‘Investigative Journalism’.

21) Lenka Waschková Císařová and Monika Metyková, ‘Better the Devil You Don’t Know: Post-Revolutionary Journalism and Media Ownership in the Czech Republic’, *Medijske Studije/Media Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2015), pp. 6–18.

22) Aukšė Balčytienė et al., ‘Oligarchization, De-Westernization and Vulnerability: Media Between Democracy and Authoritarianism in Central and Eastern Europe. A Roundtable Discussion’, *Journal of Media, Cognition*

Yet, there is very little academic work on the specificity of post-socialist media production processes, so that we still have little understanding of creative labor in the post-socialist context.²³⁾ The complacency surrounding creative and media work appears to exist also on the part of Czech policymakers, as exemplified by Czech Statistical Office's Job Classification²⁴⁾ in which creative professions are only roughly outlined.

This paper examines the work and professional identities of twenty-four workers in Czech audiovisual industry, television reporters, and feature film screenwriters, and in it, I address the following question: what kind of experiences do “primary creative jobs”²⁵⁾ in a post-socialist audiovisual industry offer their workers? In specific, I ask: what makes these workers' labor good or bad? How, and to which extent, are the good and bad aspects of creative labor narratively linked to the post-socialist context? How does this all inform their audiovisual professional identities? By illustrating how certain “good” aspects of creative labor such as autonomy and self-realization can be directly interrelated with the “bad” ones and that the valence of individual aspects depends on the context and on their role in the creative professionals' narrated professional identities, I propose that David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker's categories of good and bad work can be read rather as two sides of the same coin instead of as separated, decontextualized and either positive or negative features of work in the field. Therefore, I suggest that the trouble with the good aspects of the labor such as autonomy and self-realization is their deep ambivalence and their susceptibility to the context rather than their inherently seductive and manipulative nature. Furthermore, stressing the ambivalence can also bring about a new perspective on the conflict among the current theoretical approaches, and thus help to de-Westernize the debate.

First, I shall develop the theoretical approach employed in this paper. After explaining the method of data gathering and analysis, I shall discuss the ambivalent aspects of creative labor in the Czech audiovisual industry, and how these features were co-shaped by the post-socialist context. In the last part, I will summarize how the contextualized good and bad work informs the interviewees' professional identities.

and Communication, vol. 3, no. 1 (2015), pp. 119–141; Johana Kotišová, *Crisis Reporters, Emotions, and Technology: An Ethnography* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Henrik Örnebring, *Comparative European Journalism: The state of current research*. Working paper (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2009); Lisa Parks, ‘Signals and Oil: Satellite Footprints and Post-Communist Territories in Central Asia’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2009), pp. 137–156.

23) For some exceptions, see Petr Szczepanik et al., *Studie vývoje českého hraného kinematografického díla* (Praha: Státní fond kinematografie, 2015); Stetka and Örnebring, ‘Investigative Journalism’.

24) ‘CZ-ISCO (2017) Klasifikace zaměstnání’, Český statistický úřad; cf. ‘Ö-ISCO 08 (2014–2018)’, Österreichische Berufsklassifikation.

25) Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*.

Good and bad creative work: the paradox of self-realization and self-exploitation and the socialist heritage

Because of the symbolic, experiential and non-utilitarian nature and value of their products, creative industries are marked by higher uncertainty,²⁶⁾ inherent both to the creative process and to the putative reception of creative products, and by unpredictability of the demand, the production costs and the profit. To increase certainty and reduce unpredictability, creative industries employ a variety of mechanisms which have significant consequences for creative work. For example, the industry can be restrained in valuing intellectual work, which resonates with the fact that creative labor remains to have the seemingly-dazzling haze of leisure activity characterized by autonomy and fulfillment that make creative work “hardly like work at all.”²⁷⁾ This leisure myth²⁸⁾ stems also from its commonness: symbolic creativity, defined as “communication of experience through symbolic production”²⁹⁾ is something we all do, yet creative professionals perform this action in a particularly intense form and use learned skills in the process.

At the same time, however, there is a grain of truth in the myth. As Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton³⁰⁾ suggest, the promise of “not work” is what makes creative work attractive to creative workers, who avoid the conventional careers and workplaces which are associated with the daunting caricatures of modernist industry and its correspondingly unattractive lifestyles. Creative workers often love their work and are driven by the desire for self-realization. Indeed, the very expressive and non-routine nature of creative work, the self-actualization, self-fulfilment, freedom, flexibility, autonomy and independence that are often associated with it, can be regarded as positive features of creative (self)employment.³¹⁾

While the “not work” features of creative work can be attractive, creative workers often pay too high a price for these rewards in risks they bear on their shoulders. Their precarity (i.e. existential, financial, and/or social insecurity) is exacerbated by precisely the flexibility of a labor market that has deep roots in media and cultural production.³²⁾ Among the most typical ways and features of creative workers’ precarization are freelancing, short-term contracts, temp work, part-time jobs, self-employment and other types of intermittent, irregular and informal work, income instability, lack of a safety net, an erratic work schedule, dependency on individual acquaintances and social relations, working on unpaid positions such as internships, low pay, and so forth.³³⁾ As Isabelle Lorey points out,

26) Barbara Townley et al., ‘Managing in the Creative Industries: Managing the Motley Crew’, *Human Relations*, vol. 62, no. 7 (2009), pp. 939–962.

27) Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, p. 4.

28) Andrew Beck (ed), *Cultural Work: Understanding the Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 2003); Sean Nixon and Ben Crewe, ‘Pleasure at Work? Gender, Consumption and Work-based Identities in the Creative Industries’, *Consumption Markets and Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2004), pp. 129–147.

29) Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, p. 61.

30) Taylor and Littleton, *Contemporary Identities*.

31) John Hartley et al., *Key Concepts in Creative Industries* (London: SAGE, 2013).

32) Greig De Peuter, ‘Creative Economy and Labor Precarity: A Contested Convergence’, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2011), pp. 417–425.

33) De Peuter, ‘Creative Economy’; Finkel et al., ‘Diversifying the Creative’; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative*

these conditions “are all too often accepted as an unalterable fact; nothing else is even demanded. Conditions of inequality often go un-remarked”.³⁴⁾ Similarly, Barbara Townley, et al. conclude that “risk has been absorbed by individuals as the necessary corollary, and cost, of their occupation. Indeed, the passionate endorsement of high employment risk is a defining characteristic of the identity of creative workers”.³⁵⁾ The professional identity³⁶⁾ which has absorbed the risk further reflects itself in individual biographic strategies, such as family planning.³⁷⁾

Some features of the post-socialist context can further problematize these risks. In general, the overall instability, continuing transition, fragmentation and instrumentalization of (enterprises in) cultural and media sectors³⁸⁾ further increase the uncertainty as well as potentially strengthen all its side effects. In the Czech film industry, this reflects itself not only in the missing adequate valuation of intellectual work, but also in the inherited mode of organizing creative work: the importance of informal relationships, production “units”, and the mistrust of professional associations. As Petr Szczepanik³⁹⁾ suggests, using Fernand Braudel’s concept of the *longue durée*, there is a continuity in post-socialist filmmakers’ thinking and acting: “the collective mentalities of film workers develop at a significantly slower rate than the rapidly changing ‘history of events’ that affect cinema as it intersects over time with the political”.⁴⁰⁾ Therefore, the State-Socialist Mode of Production keeps affecting current CEE media industries. For example, the former mode of production, which was organized around and managed through “units” (small semi-autonomous groups of writers, directors, production managers, and sometimes other personnel), might reflect itself in the nowadays widespread preference of close and, above all, informal relationships between authors and producers: „Both authors and producers prefer making oral agreements to written ones. To use professional legal advisors (in particular, specialized attorneys) is seen as a ‘luxury’, which only established producers and well-off authors can afford.”⁴¹⁾ Moreover, many authors who were then unwilling to subjugate themselves to the ideological demands of the socialist state used to produce their works literally outside of their official, often unskilled work. Therefore, the force of habit may strengthen the idea that, for example, writing a script for free and in one’s leisure time is

Labour; Isabelle Lorey, ‘Virtuosos of Freedom: On the Implosion of Political Virtuosity and Productive Labor’, in Gerald Raunig et al. (eds), *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the ‘Creative Industries’* (London: MayFly, 2011), p. 79; Townley et al., ‘Managing in the Creative Industries’.

34) Lorey, ‘Virtuosos of Freedom’, p. 86.

35) Townley et al., ‘Managing in the Creative Industries’, p. 951.

36) Together with Taylor and Littleton, I use the term ‘identity’ rather than ‘subjectivity’ to avoid the implicit assumption of completeness present in research inspired by poststructuralism.

37) Lorey, ‘Virtuosos of Freedom’; cf. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (London: SAGE, 2001).

38) Imre and Verstraete, ‘Media Globalization’; Metyková and Waschková Císařová, ‘Changing Journalistic Practices’; Stetka and Örnebring, ‘Investigative Journalism’.

39) Petr Szczepanik, ‘The State-Socialist Mode of Production and the Political History of Production Culture’, in Petr Szczepanik and Patrick Vonderau (eds), *Behind the Screen: Inside European Production Cultures* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 113.

40) Ibid., p. 125.

41) Ivan David et al., *Smluvní vztahy mezi tvůrci a producenty v audiovizí* (Olomouc: Palackého Univerzita v Olomouci, 2019), p. 50.

the way it goes. Finally, the former regime discredited collective organizing, and as a result, the main Czech professional association for authors — the Association of Directors, Screenwriters and Script Editors (ARAS) is seen as relatively dysfunctional and insignificant — “it seems that the post-communist mistrust towards trade unions, professional organizations and any collectivism still prevails.”⁴²⁾ As Ivan David, et al.⁴³⁾ suggest, authors therefore need to rely mostly on their own negotiating skills. The mistrust towards professional associations is relevant also for television reporting: the Syndicate of Czech Journalists, until recently, showed little signs of life and proved to be weak in negotiations with Czech policymakers.⁴⁴⁾ By contrast, TV reporters’ work was never surrounded by the mist of a leisure activity; rather, the new generation of television foreign reporters that started almost from scratch after 1989 jumped straight in the myth of renegade, brave and cool professionals,⁴⁵⁾ idealizing Western journalism and perhaps blindly following American journalistic patterns. In short, the two realms of activity have experienced the transition in intense yet different ways.

The contradiction and paradox that are central to these “virtuosos”⁴⁶⁾ identities are dealt with in various ways. Neo-Marxist critics of creative labor diminish its rewarding aspects by emphasizing its oppressive character and by pointing to the manipulative exploitation of creative workers’ desire for experience, recognition and self-realization (while acknowledging the possibility of “resistance” and building collective solidarity). By contrast, some scholars grounded in cultural studies point out that we cannot grasp creative labor using the framework developed for understanding other workers’ precarious conditions⁴⁷⁾ — while creative labor embraces older forms of exploitation, it also generates new subjectivities.⁴⁸⁾ These researchers, largely inspired by poststructuralist concepts and assumptions,⁴⁹⁾ therefore speak about “self-exploitation” and “self-precarization.”⁵⁰⁾ As Rebecca Finkel, et al.⁵¹⁾ note, people working in creative industries often refuse such analyses and believe that they self-fund their creative practice “voluntarily”, which, however, can be understood as full subjugation to governmentality. Finally, a few researchers criticize both the approaches. Hesmondhalgh⁵²⁾ argues that such studies lack any conception of what might constitute good work, which then limits critique. According to Hesmondhalgh and Baker, whose stance is inspired by epistemology grounded in critical realism, creative work can be both good and bad based on: the level of autonomy the workers enjoy; the extent of sociality (vs. isolation); interest (vs. boredom); self-esteem and self-realization;

42) Szczepanik et al., *Studie vývoje*, p. 260.

43) David et al., *Smluvní vztahy*.

44) Waschková Císařová and Metyková, ‘Better the Devil’.

45) Kotišová, *Crisis Reporters*; Mark Pedelty, *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995); Chris Peters, ‘Emotion Aside or Emotional Side? Crafting an ‘Experience of Involvement in the News’, *Journalism*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2011), pp. 297–316.

46) Lorey, ‘Virtuosos of Freedom’.

47) Hartley et al., *Key Concepts*, p. 64.

48) Finkel et al., ‘Diversifying the Creative’.

49) Hesmondhalgh, ‘Normativity and Social Justice’.

50) Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*; Lorey, ‘Virtuosos of Freedom’; McRobbie, *British Fashion Design*.

51) Finkel et al., ‘Diversifying the Creative’.

52) Hesmondhalgh, ‘Normativity and Social Justice’.

work-life balance and security that it grants the workers; and based on quality of the creative product.

Conceptualizing “good” and “bad” work:⁵³⁾

	Good work	Bad work
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good wages, working hours, high levels of safety • Autonomy • Interest, involvement • Sociality • Self-esteem • Self-realization • Work-life balance • Security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor wages, working hours and levels of safety • Powerlessness • Boredom • Isolation • Low self-esteem and shame • Frustrated development • Overwork • Risk
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent products • Products that contribute to the common good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-quality products • Products that fail to contribute to the well-being of others

As Hesmondhalgh⁵⁴⁾ argues, future research should emphasize and draw critically on concepts of autonomy and self-realization as possible components of good work. However, as Eva Illouz⁵⁵⁾ reminds us, self-realization and self-actualization also form a part of the popular psychological narratives of self-development and personal growth, directed to reveal and develop one’s potential to the fullest extent possible and equating self-realization with health. Thus, the concepts are bound up with deeply problematic forms of individualism and with therapeutic culture or culture of narcissism in general, so their “goodness” needs to be considered carefully.

Here, Taylor and Littleton’s⁵⁶⁾ critique of the governmentality-inspired conceptions of creative work can be very helpful. The authors believe that the inescapable “freedom” to invent the self and the continuous construction of an identity does not do justice to the conflict inherent to creative identities, and rather stress multiplicity and ambivalence of creative identities. Aspects of creative work, the authors believe, can be perceived and experienced as both genuinely satisfying and worrying, depending on how they are made sense of within individual professional narratives. This paper brings together Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s model and Taylor and Littleton notion of multiplicity to investigate the relevance of the concepts of self-realization, autonomy and other “good” and “bad” features of creative labor in a CEE audiovisual industry. In what follows, I show that, in the studied context, rather than looking through the lens of “good” and “bad” what helps to understand creative work is ambivalence, which further extends the notion of “post-socialist hybridity” to the realm of cultural production.

53) Adopted from Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, p. 39.

54) Hesmondhalgh, ‘Normativity and Social Justice’.

55) Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

56) Taylor and Littleton, *Contemporary Identities*.

Method

The present study draws from semi-structured interviews with two types of creative professionals: screenwriters (n=12) and TV reporters (n=12) both male and female, all white, in various stages of their careers. Both the professional groups are parts of what Hesmondhalgh and Baker⁵⁷⁾ call “primary creative personnel”, i.e. those creative workers whose input into the creative output is said to be more significant than that of other personnel within creative teams, such as craft and technical workers, managers, administrators, executives and unskilled laborers. On the other hand, TV reporters and screenwriters are exemplary of two distinct types of autonomy. While feature film and high-end television screenwriters represent potential bearers of aesthetic autonomy, public service television reporters can enjoy relatively high levels of professional autonomy. As the authors argue, “for analysis of creative labor, we need an understanding of [these] two different kinds of autonomy.”⁵⁸⁾ The purpose of studying screenwriters and television reporters is therefore *not* to compare the two professional groups but to address the research questions based on two types of professional experience associated with two different kinds of autonomy.

The screenwriters’ professional milieu — the independent production of Czech feature fiction films and high-end television — is extremely fragmented and volatile, organized on a project-by-project basis, consisting of small, under-capitalized and short-lived independent companies with only little and episodic ties to international televisions and distributors.⁵⁹⁾ Screenwriters’ work processes and the cooperation within the creative triangle⁶⁰⁾ — i.e. between the producer, the director and the screenwriter — largely depend on the budget of a concrete project.⁶¹⁾ Yet, even some of the most successful screenwriters find themselves close to unbearable existential insecurity.

The TV reporters that I interviewed for this study, on the contrary, all work in a relatively stable and large organization, the Czech public service medium *Czech Television* (CT). The organization runs six channels, including a 24/7 news channel, and an online news service. It was created in 1992 from its Czechoslovak antecedent and operates in all regions of the country. Being funded mainly by television fees (set by an Act of Parliament), it has nearly 7 billion CZK (roughly 272 million EUR) budget (2017) and remains formally independent of the state budget and the state. Despite the relatively stable position of CT, there are factors that make the reporters’ position difficult, such as some politicians’ verbal attacks on public service media.

57) Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*.

58) *Ibid.*, p. 66.

59) Petr Szczepanik, ‘Transnational Crews and Postsocialist Precarity: Globalizing Screen Media Labor in Prague’, in Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (eds), *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), p. 88; Petr Szczepanik, ‘Post-Socialist Producer: The Production Culture of a Small-Nation Media Industry’, *Critical Studies in Television*, epub ahead of print 26 April 2018. DOI: 10.1177/1749602018763546.

60) Peter Bloore, *The Screenplay Business: Managing Creativity and Script Development in the Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 2013).

61) Szczepanik et al., *Studie vývoje*.

The two sets of semi-structured interviews, i.e. conversations between a creative worker and myself in the role of a researcher,⁶²⁾ were conducted⁶³⁾ in Czech (the excerpts from interview transcriptions used below have been translated into English by me) based on interview guides that included questions related to work and professional identities yet was largely adjusted to individual interviewees' experiences and narratives. As Hesmondhalgh and Baker⁶⁴⁾ suggest, reflexive narration is key for grasping how good and bad work are incorporated into a worker's identity,⁶⁵⁾ as it provides a sense of identity connectedness and unity. Because of the focus on reflexive identity construction in the creative workers narratives, the most appropriate method of analysis was discursive psychology.⁶⁶⁾ The method, a more programmatic than (for example) thematic analysis, goes beyond treating talk as simple description and focuses on details of the version of pre-existing, collectively-held meanings and values presented by the speaker. At the same time, unlike for example the most seminal types of discourse analysis, it focuses less on various expressions of power relations and more on psycho-social categories. In the case of CEE creative professionals, this means for example looking into how the interviewees made sense of the communist past's effects on their current positioning towards the West, i.e., adding codes describing the interviewees' emotionality, sentiments that are believed to be collective, sense-making of the diverse aspects of the jobs, identity construction, self-reflexivity, perceived limits to autonomy, perceived mental health risks and so on. Indeed, as Taylor and Littleton observe, this method of analysis also offers insights into emotions, which, as I illustrate in the next section, proved to be a fruitful concept that helped to understand the narrated ambiguity.

The personal data that the research deals with — personal opinions, attitudes, emotions — together with the small media market create an ethical challenge. Apart from using informed consent forms, I therefore very carefully anonymized all the excerpts used in the analysis below and use pseudonyms.

Analysis

The Risk of Self-realization and Interest

Both the professional groups genuinely love their work,⁶⁷⁾ since, not surprisingly, the best thing about writing screenplays is the opportunity for self-realization it provides. The screenwriters can “fall in love” with, “be carried away” and enthused by certain themes (Salim); they enjoy playing with genres, kinds of poetics and viewpoints, turning complex

62) Hilary Arksey and Peter Knight, *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples* (London: SAGE, 1999).

63) The screenwriters were interviewed by me, Petr Szczepanik, and Eva Pjajčiková, at that time working at Masaryk University.

64) Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*.

65) John T. Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Paul Du Gay, *Consumption and Identity at Work* (London: SAGE, 1996); Karl E. Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (London: SAGE, 1995).

66) See Taylor and Littleton, *Contemporary Identities*.

67) Cf. Ibid.

motifs, situations or characters into linear narratives. Similarly, for the reporters, the involvement and interest in international affairs, the possibility to “be there” and to directly and in real-time witness history, are perhaps the most rewarding features of the job. While most of the reporters openly talked about the thrill of seeing globally significant — often negative — events, others displayed their involvement by immersing themselves in (at times terrifying) stories from the field.⁶⁸⁾ The screenwriters’ self-realization and related creative autonomy, however, had two interrelated preconditions, money and good reputation/fame, i.e., economic and symbolical capital⁶⁹⁾:

“That’s what I bet on, I know I have to be successful, this is how I make myself free, so that I can film what I want.” (Salim)

By comparison, and compared to Hesmondhalgh and Baker’s⁷⁰⁾ assumption that journalists enjoy rather professional than aesthetic autonomy, the reporters considered themselves as autonomous both in the sense of being independent on politics and advertising,⁷¹⁾ and of having freedom of their aesthetic expression,⁷²⁾ which concurred with the jump into the independent self-mythologizing, particularly of American journalism. However, their autonomies were delimited by public service principles. Thus, in practice, their professional autonomy means showing all sides of conflicts, which “is the task of CT” (Thomas), while the aesthetic autonomy manifests itself in respecting the language and visual styles of individual reporters, as far as they fit into a certain moderation and brevity, i.e., if they are not cheesy, melodramatic or undignified (Ester, Mary). Their sense/taste is shaped by professional socialization: “everyone has internalized [the moderation and brevity]” (Mary), and the know-how to use [such] autonomy is perceived as a defining feature of public service reporters. In this respect, ‘autonomy’ as an individual-level concept is quite problematic.”⁷³⁾ Furthermore, the autonomies are not equally distributed:⁷⁴⁾ for instance, high-profile permanent correspondents enjoy much greater levels of autonomy.

The screenwriters’ dismal incomes — low fees⁷⁵⁾ and step deals,⁷⁶⁾ giving rise to a kind of uncertainty, risk and unsafety (“Because bills come every month and you don’t know whether you’ll get a job.” /Monique/) — are by no means specific to Czech filmmaking milieu.⁷⁷⁾ However, what *is* specific is, first, the relative incapability to pursue collective

68) See Kotišová, *Crisis Reporters*.

69) See Ian MacDonald, *Screenwriting Poetics and the Screen Idea* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

70) Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*.

71) Mark Deuze, ‘What is Journalism? Professional Identity and Ideology of Journalists Reconsidered’, *Journalism*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2005), pp. 442–464.

72) E.g. Peters, ‘Emotion Aside’.

73) Deuze, ‘What is Journalism?’, p. 456.

74) Jenny Wiik, ‘Internal Boundaries: The Stratification of the Journalistic Collective’, in Matt Carlson and Seth C. Lewis (eds), *Boundaries of Journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 118.

75) Leaving aside extreme cases, the typical monthly income (based on an average fee for 2 years of work) is believed to reach roughly 1.0 to 1.4 multiple of the Czech minimal wage (478 EUR/month).

76) See Szczepanik et al., *Studie vývoje; Szczepanik, ‘Post-Socialist Producer’*.

77) Bridget Conor, *Screenwriting: Creative Labor and Professional Practice* (London: Routledge, 2014).

bargaining strategies. Due to the historically specific experiences — “communists discrediting labor unions, the interventionist yet selective cultural politics of the state”⁷⁸⁾ — screenwriters criticize local policymakers rather than their producers and tend to focus on learning and mobility barriers rather than exploitative financial conditions. Secondly, the increased uncertainty within the media system reflects itself in the intensity of the financial risks that screenwriters face. The very first phase of work that lasts up to a year (Terence) is unpaid and can remain so in case the producer gets into “development hell”⁷⁹⁾ and stops the project, which “is a thing that can destroy one. Destroy, and it happens!” (Frederic). While, as Monique noted, the risk is “mutual”, faced by both screenwriters and producers,⁸⁰⁾ the development phase is the riskiest one (Ian, Frederic) and the writer bears the risk of the project alone for a relatively long time. The common fragmentation of writers’ activities (taking part in a variety of projects or becoming directors or producers, the latter is predicted to become a new trend) is therefore not only something that our interviewees set about to increase their incomes,⁸¹⁾ but an existential necessity enforced by the paradigm of the small, post-socialist film industry, within which not even the most successful feature film screenwriters (could) earn enough for living. As the award-winning Vincent noted, “If [screenwriting] was to be my livelihood, I would not be alive, in the first place, and I’d be in a state of permanent hysteria.” The screenwriters often further connected the financial instability within the profession with a generally low self-esteem. Learning to handle the feelings of standing in the darkness, being overshadowed by directors, getting rude feedback from Czech Film Fund “with as little emotion as possible, which takes time to learn” (Andrew), i.e., learning to maintain the right distance, seemed to be a specific type of screenwriters’ emotional labor.⁸²⁾ Enhancing the self-esteem through external trust could make the work significantly better and sustainable:

“a kind of support and trust coming from [your] environment, including the Fund (...) makes you to overcome the moments in which you are telling yourself, fuck, I have no, no, no idea.” (Monique)

Unlike the screenwriters, none of the television reporters complained about their wages — rather, they were unsatisfied with their working hours. Achieving a work-life balance was particularly impossible during the reporters’ legendarily grueling business trips, whether covering a crisis or for permanent correspondents. In all these situations and positions, reporters could work up to seventeen hours a day (based on TV schedules), several days in a row (Matt, Ester, Joseph, Thomas) without any respite and without free weekends:

“You don’t work five days a week. Neither you work eight hours a day.” (Joseph, a permanent correspondent)

78) Szczepanik, ‘Transnational Crews’, p. 100.

79) Bloore, *The Screenplay Business*.

80) Szczepanik, ‘Post-Socialist Producer’; Townley et al., ‘Managing in the Creative Industries’.

81) Cf. Conor, *Screenwriting*.

82) Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

“Your bosses don’t divide your personal and working time.” (Emma)

Emma further compared the post-socialist professional colonization of journalists’ personal time with a “Western” model, where, she believed, “the professional world is different”; media professionals are used to being valued and having their privacy respected and thus divide their personal and professional time. The Czech frenetic working habits were, in her view, outdated in the West: “I think that we still need to crash into the moment when people say enough and start to separate it, at least journalists.” To most of the reporters, however, the interconnection of their personal and professional time and identities⁸³⁾ came as an unreflected and unintended side-effect of social media use. The workload and the practical inseparability of personal and professional time significantly affected the journalists’ intimate and family lives. The impact of the overwork on family life is accompanied by mentally and emotionally difficult coping with the farrago of negativity, stress, and the “mad contrast of the parallel worlds” (Ester), not to mention physical endangerment — attacks, robberies or kidnaps — faced while reporting on international crises.⁸⁴⁾

Together Alone: Sociality, Powerlessness, and Isolation

Another “good” feature of screenwriting is sociality. Our interviewees stressed the *sine qua non* of good emotional interpersonal ties based on trust, mutual respect and esteem, understanding, shared points of view, and friendship throughout the process of developing a script. A few of them also blissfully reminisced about weeks or weekends they spent in pubs, at their cottages or abroad, having round-table discussions with their colleagues (co-authors, directors, script-editors, producers), together working on screen-plays, drinking, and talking. “Stories were being associated, our parents and parents’ parents and thousands of situations were being recalled,” said Andrew, and stressed the efficiency of such a process: “And then you send further the fun you had (...) to an imaginary audience”. Such a working regime shows that despite the strongly desired self-realization, most of the screenwriters do not adopt the Kantian myth of an artist as a lonely individualized genius⁸⁵⁾ and rather (eventually have to) accept and at times even enjoy the mode of work bridging the categories of “writing” and “filmmaking.”⁸⁶⁾

On the other hand, the sociality can border on powerlessness. While the powerlessness traditionally stems “only” from the antagonism between writers and producers and marginalization of the former,⁸⁷⁾ here the closeness among the creative professionals and the importance of friendly ties, historically strengthened by the habit to work in “units,”⁸⁸⁾ lead

83) Du Gay, *Consumption and Identity*.

84) Marte Høiby and Rune Ottosen, *Journalism Under Pressure: A Mapping of Editorial Policies for Journalists Covering Conflict* (Oslo: Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus, 2015).

85) Finkel et al., ‘Diversifying the Creative’; Martha Woodmansee, ‘The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the ‘Author’’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1984), pp. 425–448.

86) Bloore, *The Screenplay Business*; Conon, *Screenwriting*; MacDonald, *Screenwriting Poetics*.

87) Conon, *Screenwriting*.

88) Szczepanik, ‘The State-Socialist Mode’.

to the screenwriters' unwillingness to dirty their hands with formal acts such as negotiating better working conditions, and thus to their powerlessness in their relation to producers and directors. Writing up to fifteen versions of the script (Tobias, Andrew), having to accept unwanted interventions in the work or passing the license on to the producer (Ian)⁸⁹, i.e. literally losing the ownership of one's motifs and themes, were a norm. The powerlessness can be understood as the dark side of not only sociality, but also self-realization: "If it's a film that I invent and feel the need to see it on a screen, I know I won't be able to dictate the conditions." (Monique) Rather than understanding the self-realization and sociality as factors that turn exploitation into self-exploitation,⁹⁰ the interviewees experienced continuous tension and emotional oscillation between sociality and powerlessness, self-realization and marginalization, and collaboration and individualism.⁹¹

By contrast and somewhat counterintuitively, the television reporters' work was permeated by various forms of isolation: those who are abroad for a short or long time need to manage everything on their own and "don't have the backing" (Guy); they usually work only with a camera person, so that they perform many roles including that of a driver, an editor and a production manager. This convergence and loneliness, as Simon stressed, is distinct from "big televisions such as *BBC* and *CNN*, that you are there alone (...). That's what's so hard about it". In their isolation, the Czech reporters therefore stood out among other, typically Western media professionals on the spot: while *CT* was able to send its own reporters out, it was unable to keep them company.

Looking Back, Looking West: The post-socialist hybridity of media products

The quality of the interviewees' products is also perceived as ambivalent, and largely reflects the post-socialist hybridity,⁹² the mix of "old" socialist realities and new, western models of production, albeit in different ways. The screenwriters believe that from time to time, they (Czech screenwriters in general) produce scripts that they "hopefully need not be ashamed of" (Elijah), and give credits to Czech cultural-historical specifics, including forty years of communist dictatorship, resulting in appealing to "weird bitterness, seasoned with a kind of humor that no one understands" (Elijah). However, the totalitarian heritage — corruption, atheism, skepticism, and an all-encompassing post-revolutionary disillusionment — manifests itself also in deficiency in big, internationally attractive themes. According to Björn,

"At the moment, our whole society is in the phase of mending of what had gone bad, what had been going bad for forty years, so it might take forty years to fix it".

Among the things that are believed to need fixing is film funding. Its post-revolutionary setting, causing lack of money and related lack of continuity in the development phase allegedly results in "lots of rubbish emerging here" (Elijah), because "the continuous postponing is not really good for the materials" (Tobias). More precisely, the time/money con-

89) See Woodmansee, 'The Genius and the Copyright'.

90) Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*.

91) Cf. Conor, *Screenwriting*; MacDonald, *Screenwriting Poetics*.

92) Marciniak, 'Post-Socialist Hybrids'.

ditions are perceived as very harmful.⁹³⁾ The Czech film industry is further marked by narrow-mindedness (including lack of courage and passion) and provincialism (including the screenwriters' language barriers), and allegedly also by opaque processes of film funding (as some believe that the Czech Film Fund's grants are rigged).

Contrarily, the reporters from *CT* believed they were doing a relatively excellent job, however, in their case, post-socialism appeared instead as an idealization of Western know-how.⁹⁴⁾ They were avowedly inspired by and attempted to keep up with renowned global television networks such as *BBC*, *CNN*, *France24* etc., and sometimes were even successful (within the regional context):

"The bosses [of *CT*] are really proud of foreign news, because the people do like really great job here, (...) [they] are competent, it's not only that they parrot something, usually they really are versed, care for the context;" (Simon)

The reporters felt they did not have any alternative and had to "look much more to the West" (Joseph) while creating a new post-1989 journalistic tradition. Any indigenous journalistic traditions were seen as either non-existent, had stagnated in the wild 1990's, or had gone in the wrong direction (e.g. creating complacency to international news). The new tradition, at least in the current organizational milieu of *CT*, was to consist in fast reactions (Cestmir) and both international and regional on-the-spot reporting, enabled by a relatively sizable budget. The reporters took it as their vocation to set the wrong direction right, and to help Czech audiences understand the global affairs.

Discussion and Conclusion

The paper, based on 24 interviews with Czech creative audiovisual professionals, sought to extend the understanding of creative labor behind the former Iron Curtain, and to suggest that the concept which helps to reconcile the various approaches to creative work is ambivalence of its "good" and "bad" aspects, or multiplicity.⁹⁵⁾

The analysis shows that the boundaries between the good and the bad features of the creative works in Czech audiovisual industry are far from clear and each of the good aspects has its dark side, which form inherently ambivalent professional identities. It seems that conceptualizing the work processes as either good or bad does not do justice to their complexity. As Bridget Conor⁹⁶⁾ points out, the seductive/destructive duality of creative work often acts as a privileging mechanism; the very narratives about deeply and inherently more pleasurable and painful work reconstruct the romantic professional myth.⁹⁷⁾ While the screenwriters truly enjoy self-realization and the social aspects of the work, on their way to achieving them, they experience powerlessness and bear the risk related to

93) See also Szczepanik et al., *Studie vývoje*.

94) Verdery, *What Was Socialism*.

95) Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*; Taylor and Littleton, *Contemporary Identities*.

96) Conor, *Screenwriting*.

97) E.g. Pedelty, *War Stories*.

feature film development and production on their shoulders⁹⁸⁾ which can be, and at times is, “devastating” (Terence). Although the television reporters usually live much further from the dole, they embody a similarly paradoxical complex of good and bad processes. On one hand, they enjoy high levels of involvement and interest in their job, the possibility to directly and in real-time witness history; on the other hand, the eye-witnessing and the on-the-spot experiences can lead to physical and mental health risks. As their involvement is a source of the reporters’ professional authority,⁹⁹⁾ they have little choice.

Both the kinds of professionals have limited autonomy. The screenwriters’ desire for higher creative autonomy and satisfactory remunerations lead them to search for ways how to take part in later stages of film production and distribution; the convergence within the filmmakers’ professions is therefore a trend that has emerged partly from the post-socialist undercapitalization of the industry. The reporters (say that)¹⁰⁰⁾ while “covering” the events, they typically have both creative and professional autonomy, which, together with the know-how to use it, are defining features of their organizational (i.e., public service) identities,¹⁰¹⁾ shaped by their professional socialization.

Counterintuitively, the reporters often mentioned they disliked the isolation that some of their tasks brought about, while the screenwriters stressed the social nature of writing screenplays.¹⁰²⁾ The latter, however, could easily turn over to powerlessness, because the importance of friendly ties inside the creative triangle lead to the screenwriters’ unwillingness to contaminate them with formal acts such as negotiating better working conditions.¹⁰³⁾ This double-bind then resulted in a continuous tension between sociality and powerlessness, self-realization and marginalization that defined the screenwriters’ professional identity. Both the professional groups also spoke about tough emotional labor¹⁰⁴⁾ that included keeping the right distance from their work, suppressing and mitigating disagreeable emotions such as stress, revulsion, sadness (the reporters) and humiliation and grievance (the screenwriters).

Screenwriters’ and television reporters’ kinds of precarization vary significantly. Greig De Peuter¹⁰⁵⁾ distinguishes three types of precarity typical of creative industries: cyber-tariat, autonomous worker and precog. Here, the two latter are particularly relevant. The autonomous type, encompassing self-employed artists, stresses the ways of precarity that stem from flexibility and self-employment. Czech screenwriters indeed seem to pay for the flexibility and self-employment: that they perceived their incomes as irregular, unpredictable and inadequate (i.e. the scheduling of payments did not correspond to the actual working time and workload). As a result, it was impossible for most of the authors to make a living solely by creative work, which can be attributed to business models and methods

98) De Peuter, ‘Creative Economy’; Finkel et al., ‘Diversifying the Creative’; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*; Lorey, ‘Virtuosos of Freedom’; Townley et al., ‘Managing in the Creative Industries’.

99) Kari Adén-Papadopoulos and Mervi Pantti, ‘Re-Imagining Crisis Reporting: Professional Ideology of Journalists and Citizen Eyewitness Images’, *Journalism*, vol. 14, no. 7 (2013), pp. 960–977.

100) Wiik, ‘Internal Boundaries’.

101) Deuze, ‘What is Journalism?’; Du Gay, *Consumption and Identity*.

102) See Bloore, *The Screenplay Business*.

103) David et al., *Smluvní vztahy*.

104) Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*.

105) De Peuter, ‘Creative Economy’.

of funding within the small, peripheral, post-socialist Czech audiovisual industry.¹⁰⁶⁾ The precog, typically a media or education professional, emphasizes the passionate commitment to work, willingness to work for nothing, or perpetual re-skilling. The tv reporters bear some of precogs' traits; their precarity is constituted largely by the risks related to their emotional and physical involvement in work.

While some of these ambivalences are by no means specific to the post-socialist context, the historical heritage of the industry formed a part of the audiovisual professionals' narratives and played a role in how they made sense of their professional identities. The screenwriters' narratives included both a sense of rupture and continuity. Taken together, they told a story about how the wild post-1989 transformation of film funding lead to unsustainable funding models, dragging the authors to existential insecurity, and proposed, for example, that Czech Film Fund should control how producers redistribute obtained grants. This confirms Verdery's finding that post-socialist societies called for strengthening of the state in the domain of culture.¹⁰⁷⁾ However, none of the screenwriters mentioned basic income for creative workers that "would help to bridge the pay gap between gigs, to insulate against immiseration, to ease the pressure to take a dubious job at any price,"¹⁰⁸⁾ as advocated by some scholars. At the same time, the continuity of the modes of production, more specifically the habit to work in "units,"¹⁰⁹⁾ perhaps strengthened the importance of informal ties that resulted in imbalanced contractual relationships and authors' powerlessness. The post-socialist context is also still believed to significantly affect the end products of screenwriters' work, both in positive (such as their specific sense of humor and somewhat bitter poetics) and negative ways (the absence of big current themes, provincialism, narrow-mindedness and the Czech authors' language barriers; the lack of enthusiasm and courage, which results in mediocre movies but no excellent ones). On the other hand, Czech journalism suffered instead from the rupture. Because of the discontinuity in the conception of journalistic professionalism, mostly young people after 1989 jumped into the Western dominant professional ideology valuing objectivity, detachment, and promptness,¹¹⁰⁾ simultaneously trying to stir up the public's interest in international affairs, without considering contextual constraints and individual professionals' needs. According to some, even the public service television thus overdid the transformation to the liberal journalistic model, leading to the colonization of personal identities by professional ones,¹¹¹⁾ without having enough resources to prevent reporters from isolation and overwork (stemming largely from the insufficient size of parachute reporters' teams). This was clearly a consequence of the continuing and widespread idealization of Western know-how¹¹²⁾ for news making and managing people. The idealization of Western modes of production was apparent in both the groups, just as the toothless collective organization, stemming from the historically discredited professional bodies and collective initiatives.

106) David et al., *Smluvní vztahy*.

107) Verdery, *What Was Socialism*.

108) De Peuter, 'Creative Economy', p. 422.

109) Szczepanik, 'The State-Socialist Mode'.

110) Deuze, 'What is Journalism?'.

111) Du Gay, *Consumption and Identity*.

112) Verdery, *What Was Socialism*.

The relevance of ambivalence and multiplicity that is apparently believed to characterize the post-socialist creative industry should, I believe, be further investigated by ethnographic research in individual media organizations. It is the organizations rather than individuals — notably the public service media with their long and often troubled histories — whose functioning is inevitably pervaded by collective memory. At the same time, further studies could follow the fruitful emotional track, as emotion proves to be an important dynamic in both the practice of symbolic production and the very cultural industries.

The work was supported by the European Regional Development Fund-Project “Creativity and Adaptability as Conditions of the Success of Europe in an Interrelated World” (No. CZ.02.1.01/0.0/0.0/16_019/0000734).

The work was supported by The Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, project “Research on the Impact of Current Legislation and the European Commission’s Strategy for Digital Single Market on Czech Audiovisual Industry (No. TL01000306).

Johana Kotišová currently works as Assistant Professor at the Department of Media Studies and Journalism at Masaryk University. She holds double PhD degree in Sociology from the University of Liège, Belgium and Masaryk University, Czechia. Her first book *Crisis Reporters, Emotions, and Technology: An Ethnography* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) explores crisis reporters’ emotional labour and professional ideology. She conducts applied research of various types of media professionals and is particularly interested in their emotional labour and in power relations that circulate within the field of media production.

SUMMARY

Devastating Dreamjobs*Ambivalence, Emotions, and Creative Labor in a Post-socialist Audiovisual Industry*

Johana Kotišová

Recent studies of creative labor have stirred up a discussion about the most appropriate theoretical framework for studying it: is creative labor a brute form of oppression? Or does it rather generate new and multiple subjectivities? Does creative labor subject the workers to a regime of self-discipline and governmentality? Or does it have purely positive features that cannot be reduced to compensatory mechanisms? Discussion of the accuracy of the different approaches still needs to be better grounded in empirical research. In particular, what is missing in the emergent work on creative labor is insight into non-Western creative workers' identities and working conditions.

This paper addresses both the good and bad aspects of creative labor in a post-socialist audiovisual industry. Based on twenty-four in-depth interviews with Czech television reporters and screenwriters, I aim to address the following questions: What kind of experiences do creative jobs in a post-socialist audiovisual industry offer their workers? What makes these workers' labor good and bad? How and to what extent are the good and bad aspects of creative labor narratively linked to the post-socialist context?

The findings suggest that while screenwriters' and TV reporters' forms of precarity vary, their work is still marked both by a post-1989 sense of rupture in funding and professional ideologies and through continuity in modes of production. In the audiovisual professionals' narratives, the post-socialist context appears as an idealization of the West and of liberalism, yet also features discontent about the state's deficiencies, great uncertainty, the fragmentization and instrumentalization of media industries, a specific sense of humour, and also, provincialism. Importantly, I argue that both the types of audiovisual professionals perform extensive emotional labor which resides in the carefully measured immersion in (as well as detachment from) their work. By illustrating that and how the audiovisual workers' professional identities are inherently ambivalent and by bringing in the concept of emotions, this paper seeks to further de-Westernize the research of creative labor and broaden the debate on the good and bad work in creative industries.

keywords: crisis reporters, screenwriters, film, journalism, emotional labour, good and bad work

klíčová slova: krizoví reportéři, scenáristi, film, žurnalistika, emocionální práce, dobrá a špatná práce