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# Creative Work Beyond Precarity

Learning to Work Together

TIM BUTCHER



# Creative Work Beyond Precarity

This book offers an original critical evaluation of how freelance careers can be established and sustained in the increasingly uncertain global creative economy.

Developing from the author's theoretical and empirical research at the nexus of precarious work and entrepreneurial learning, it provides an in-depth understanding of why and how creatives can learn to become entrepreneurial and how this relates to creative entrepreneurship. This book traces how arts work became creative labour and explores the contemporary organisation of artistic and creative practices to understand practical alternatives to the individualised careers we currently feel responsible for maintaining. Inspired particularly by the work of Raymond Williams, creative work is reconceptualised as practice-based collaborative learning encounters through which we might put shared feelings of precarity to work towards the production and practice of alternative possibilities.

Accessible and concise, breaking down complex concepts through practical examples and linking the creative process to entrepreneurial learning, this book will be of interest to students, educators and researchers studying and working in the creative economy.

**Tim Butcher** is Associate Professor of Organisation Studies at the University of Tasmania, Australia.

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**Tim Butcher**

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# 1 Creative work

## An introduction

### Creative freedom

Culture is ordinary. An interest in learning or the arts is simple, pleasant and natural. A desire to know what is best, and to do what is good, is the whole positive nature of man [sic].

(Williams, 1958/1989, p. 7)

Culture is ordinary, but is it as straightforward as Raymond Williams suggested in 1958? Contemporary cultural production and consumption come in many forms in the creative economy. In various ways, it has made art more accessible, cultural consumption more inclusive and created new forms of work for many. The idea of a creative economy is replete with all-consuming hope and promise. Defined economically, as it is, the creative economy invites us to ‘do what is good’ for ourselves (and the economy) through the pursuit of creative careers or artistic practices that are intrinsically meaningful to us. When so many other forms of work seem to feel increasingly devoid of meaning, the simple idea of an individual pursuit of creative freedom as a career choice is seductive. The power of creative economy discourse lies in how that simple idea is communicated.

Creative freedom could be viewed as idealistic and bourgeois, not ordinary. In some ways it is. The creative economy promises both liberation from the apparent mundanities of more traditional forms of employment, and freedom to (re)define ourselves through our work. Viewed sociologically, the language and practices of creativity have become entangled in notions of working independently and entrepreneurially for our individualised selves. Yet the supposed freedoms of creative work bring with them risks, responsibilities, uncertainties, insecurities and instabilities that in traditional salaried, unionised work the employer typically manages. Innumerable books, TED Talks, social media content, and other popular media invite us to embrace risk and live with uncertainty, but there is no getting away from the plain and simple fact that creative work is invariably precarious work. The creative