Entrepreneurial Labor among Cultural Producers:

'Cool' Jobs in 'Hot' Industries

Gina Neff, Department of Communication, University of California, San Diego,

Elizabeth Wissinger, Research Fellow, Center for the Study of Women and Society, Graduate Center, City University of New York

and

Sharon Zukin, Department of Sociology, Brooklyn College and Graduate Center, City University of New York

Forthcoming in
Social Semotics
Special Issue on Cultural Labor edited by Toby Miller

Please direct all correspondence to

Gina Neff
gneff@ucsd.edu
Department of Communication
University of California, San Diego
9500 Gilman Drive, MC 0503
La Jolla, CA 92093-0503

ABSTRACT

This article compares the work of fashion models and 'new media workers' (those who work in the relatively new medium of the Internet as dot-com workers) in order to highlight the processes of *entrepreneurial labor* in culture industries. Based on interviews and participant-observation in New York City, we trace how entrepreneurial labor becomes intertwined with work identities in cultural industries both on and off the job. While workers are drawn to the autonomy, creativity and excitement that jobs in these media industries can provide, they have also come to accept as normal the high risks associated with this work. Diffused through media images, this normalization of risk serves as a model for how workers in other industries should behave under flexible employment conditions. Using interview data from within the fashion media and the dot-com world, we discuss eight forces that give rise to the phenomenon of entrepreneurial labor: 1) the cultural quality of cool, 2) creativity, 3) autonomy, 4) self-investment, 5) compulsory networking, 6) portfolio evaluations, 7) international competition, and 8) foreshortened careers. We also provide a model of what constitutes the hierarchy of 'good work' in cultural industries, and we conclude with implications of what entrepreneurial labor means for theories of work.

Media industries, in part influenced by the unpredictable audience reception of their products, have long dealt with the problem of how to stimulate creativity in the face of organizational and industrial uncertainty (Hirsch 1972, Caves 2002, Biebly and Biebly 1994, Peterson and Anand 2004). One way that media industries negotiate the dual pressures of innovation and uncertainty is through changing workplace norms. Indeed, one of the first and most important scholarly studies of flexibility in the workplace traces shifts in employment relations in the film industry from the relatively stable days of the studio system to the present flexible organization of jobs and contractors (Christopherson and Storper 1989).

Since the 1970s, there has also been a more general trend in the post-industrial economy toward greater employment insecurity. 'Nonstandard employment,' or work outside of a full-time, permanent arrangement, is on the rise across all economic sectors in the United States (Kalleberg et al 2000) as well as in other regions. Practices ranging from firing then rehiring employees as independent contractors (Treaster 2001) to retaining 'permatemps' within fast-growing industries (Smith 2001) and demanding that employees 'keep up' with new skills on their own time (Kotamraju 2002), press workers to accept more risk and greater responsibility. Understandably, adapting to these demands has altered individuals' attachment to work and their sense of self (Beck 1992; Beck 2000; Sennett 1999; Smith 2001).

This article looks at two distinct groups of workers in the contemporary media industries—fashion models and 'new media workers' or those who work in the relatively new medium of the Internet—to trace the processes behind what we call *entrepreneurial labor*. More, perhaps, than in other sectors, entrepreneurial labor in culture industries becomes intertwined with work identities. While workers are drawn to the autonomy, creativity and excitement that jobs in these industries can provide, they also accept as normal the high risks associated with this work. Because cultural work is prominently featured in popular discourse, especially in visual images, and associated with trendsetters, beautiful people, hipness and cool, this problematic normalization of risk serves as a model for how workers in other industries should also behave under flexible employment conditions. That is, although we agree that labor markets in cultural industries are 'a field of turbulent but structured social activity in which large numbers of individual workers constantly confront the need for strategic planning of their careers' (Scott 2004:129), we focus on the workers' willingness to balance risky jobs against attributes of cool. Without strong stabilizing norms and regulations of workplace behavior and rewards, media workers develop entrepreneurial labor in the dual hope that they will be better able to navigate uncertainty and maintain their association with a 'hot' industry—even though that industry is marked by a 'winner-take-all' inequity in both income and status (Frank and Cook 1996).

Below, we outline the existing literature on the relationship between so-called new economy and the increasing pressures of flexibility that workers in cultural industries face. Next, we describe the two cultural industries that we studied, fashion modeling and the new media. Then, using interview data from 100 workers in the two fields, we discuss the following eight forces that give rise to entrepreneurial labor: 1) the cultural attributes of cool, 2) creativity, 3)

autonomy and flat career hierarchies, 4) self investments 5) compulsory networking, 6) portfolio evaluations, 7) international competition, and 8) foreshortened careers. We then provide a model of a hierarchy of 'good work' in cultural industries that draws on our research on the role of entrepreneurial labor in these two industries. We conclude with the implications of what entrepreneurial labor means both for theories of work in cultural industries, but also for the work conditions more generally.

Entrepreneurial Labor in the New Economy

The origins of the new economy may be traced to computer technology, global competition, and corporate strategies to reduce costs and increase productivity, the new economy's cutting edge—and yet its true *social* innovation is the production of a new labor force that is more 'entrepreneurial' than previous generations of workers. This entrepreneurial work force is risk-taking rather than risk-averse, and willing to accept more flexibility in both jobs and careers than workers have been. Contrasting with the key role played by workers in gritty manufacturing jobs in prior industrial eras, these entrepreneurial workers are mainly based in high-end service industries including media, entertainment, fashion, and, broadly speaking, culture—the supposedly glamorous spheres of the 'symbolic economy' (Lash and Urry 1994; Zukin 1995).

Entrepreneurial labor is not completely new in the culture industries. Since the 1970s, collaborative projects in the film industry have increased the importance of individual, rather than craft-based skills. Recognition of these skills comes in the form of 'a piece of the action,' or property rights in the product being developed, in addition to wages (Christopherson 1996). Moreover, creative work in culture industries is increasingly constrained by financial considerations and by market-proven evaluations to stem the uncertainty of investment in the production of products for public taste: Hits lead to spin-offs, and failures lead to the destruction of individuals' careers, resulting in 'institutional logics' that often privilege the avoidance of uncertainty over the lure of innovation (Becker 1982; Bielby and Bielby 1999, 1994). The alternative institutional logic of entrepreneurial labor shifts the risk of market failure to the workers, themselves. They accept these risks, on the one hand, because they have experienced, or grown up in, the 'enterprise culture' that has been fostered by business and government since the 1980s (Keat and Abercrombie 1991). On the other hand, they are lured by the possibility of sharing in the profits of risk—as dramatically demonstrated prior to 2000 by employees of Internet start-ups.

At first glance, the new entrepreneurial workers are indistinguishable from many men and women employed in 'nonstandard jobs' (Kunda et al 2002; Barley and Kunda 2004; Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000; Smith 2001). They may or may not be 'permanent,' may or may not be directly employed by, or at, a firm, may or may not work in a rigid organizational hierarchy, or rise through a traditional career ladder. They usually lack employer-provided health benefits and pensions. However, like many independent contractors and consultants, these workers often have higher skills, earn more money, and enjoy higher prestige than most of the work force. But high wages and status are not assured. Because the new entrepreneurial workers' financial compensation does not depend on such traditional criteria as seniority or expertise, but rather on

the success of their clients or on the level of investment from outside, as in the highly publicized initial public offerings or IPOs of new media firms, it can vary enormously. The common characteristic of new entrepreneurial workers, regardless of their specific activities and rewards, is that they share a more explicit, individualized, profit-oriented risk—a risk that aligns them both economically and culturally with firm founders and employers in a 'winner-take-all' society (Frank and Cook 1996). Although not all workers have access to the financial profits, high-profile clients, or edgy image of culture industries, the prevalence of these attributes in popular discourse publicizes and promotes the normalization of workers' bearing risk.

An unappreciated dimension of the impact of one relatively small sector of the overall economy is that work in culture industries has cultural value: the industry is 'hot,' and the jobs are 'cool.' For obvious reasons, most analyses of nonstandard work ignore or downplay the cultural factors that make uncertainty desirable, as well as the subjective factors that encourage workers to internalize risk. Yet these two aspects of work in contemporary culture industries are manifest among the fashion models and new media workers whom we studied.[1]

Two Risky Businesses

To examine the mechanisms of entrepreneurial work, we look at conditions in two urban culture industries that symbolized the 'hot' new economy of the 1990s: new media (Internet content providers) and fashion modeling. While new media workers and fashion models at first appear wildly dissimilar in terms of skills and gender, a comparison provides crucial insight into material conditions of flexible work and cultural compensations for shouldering risk. Both industries are highly visible in the media and have been widely touted for their role in both urban economic redevelopment and job creation . They share the social characteristics of predominantly young workers in relatively unstructured workplaces, an absence of management norms, a high level of cultural capital required for entry into the labor market, and requiring the affective commitment of their workers. Leaving aside the facile (and, as we will see below, incorrect) distinction of beauty versus brains, work in both industries is shaped by similar forces of entrepreneurialism that have intensified since 2000, i.e. during the most recent economic downturn.

It is important that both fashion and new media industries cluster in urban centers where economies of symbolic capital and a 'creative class' thrive (Florida 2002; Lash and Urry 1994; Zukin 1995). These industries help shape, or even 'brand,' the image of the cities they are in, potentially creating positive externalities of growth . Despite the bursting of the dot-com speculative bubble, the combination of creative work, job autonomy, and social spaces connected with the media images of these industries still provides workers and cities alike with the sense

---

[1] Historically, fashion modeling began in the 1880s when the Parisian couturier Worth showed styles on live models in his salon. Fashion shows on runways began around 1910 (Lipovetsky 1993, Leach 1993, Quick 1999). For more information about work in fashion modeling, see Wissinger (2004).

that these are 'cool jobs.' Just as urban centers such as Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York City rushed to brand their respective technology districts with names such as Digital Coast, Multimedia Gulch and Silicon Alley, so too have cities from Milan to Miami attempted to lay claim to fashion's cachet to enhance an image of creativity-driven growth. The urban production site is also important because both industries, like other cultural industries, rely on close networks and 'arm's length ties' both within and outside of their sectoral boundaries for news about trends, diversity of inspirations, and distributed production and financial relationships (Grabher 2001, 2002; Molotch 1996; Pratt 2002; Uzzi 1996).

From their beginnings, both industries showed the rampant entrepreneurial individualism that is now emerging throughout the economy. Fashion models are almost without exception independent contractors working through an agency structure. New media workers—be they 'creatives', 'techies', or closer aligned with the 'suits'—are employed as freelancers, temporary workers and independent contractors as well as full- and part-time employees. Regardless of the flexibility of employment structures, certain attractions of creative work encourage workers to enter the field even if they have to bear a risk. Moreover, the level of entrepreneurial investment required to enter each field creates a structural disincentive to exit these industries, even in a difficult economic situation.

Both new media and modeling are organized by project-based work, carried out in varying locations by varying groups of participants. Project-based work results in credentials defined by 'portfolios' that conflate job skills and clients' prestige. While project-based work has previously been limited to specific milieux (such as advertising, film production, and operating rooms), the development of the new media industry has made project-based work more visible in the press, and, we think, elevated it as a general model (Batt et. al 1999; Boltanski and Chiapello 1999; Girard and Stark 2002; Grabher 2002; Heydebrand 1999; cf. Meyerson et al 1996). Both new media and fashion modeling also owe their most recent growth to the expansion of marketing and telecommunications. In contrast to traditional, print-based media, which have grown continuously since the 1880s, the new media industry emerged with the Internet in the early 1990s. The explosion in lifestyle and fashion magazines during the 1940s helped to make fashion modeling a career in its own right.

The new media industry 'combines elements of computing technology, telecommunications, and content to create products and services which can be used interactively by consumers and business users' (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2000). New media firms design and develop content for the Internet, engage in electronic or 'e-'commerce, build 'online communities,' and provide services and strategic planning to other companies. There are three main types of work in new media, related to content (writing and designing), technology (programming), and management.

At the new media industry's height, more than 2.5 million people worked in the 'Internet economy' nationally (Center for Research in Electronic Commerce 2000). Their workplaces included small, start-up companies; the home offices of independent contractors who operate as small business owners; large, corporate firms that are either privately owned or publicly traded; and the new media divisions of publishing, advertising, and entertainment companies. Before the

crash in technology stock prices in the spring of 2000, the strength of the finance, advertising and publishing industries in New York City, and local real estate initiatives, led to the clustering and networking of new media content firms in downtown Manhattan (Indergaard 2004, Neff 2004, Pratt 2002, Ross 2003).

In 1995, according to an industry survey, the 1,350 new media firms in New York City employed 27,300 people. By 1999, 3,831 firms had approximately 140,000 employees (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2000).[2] Surveys on employment figures during the downturn are harder to come by. Challenger, Gray & Christmas, an outplacement source firm, estimated that from the beginning of the dot-com downturn to March 2002, over 150,000 jobs were cut nationally. In our own sample, twenty-two of fifty dot-comers interviewed were either laid off or worked for a firm that failed in the early 2000s.[3]

At the highest income levels, online producers in New York during the expansion of the industry may have earned more than $100,000 a year; entry-level production coordinators working as temporary workers earned as little as $15 per hour. Such hourly wages contrast dramatically with the legendary fortunes made during the 1990s by 'dot-com millionaires,' i.e., the founders or equity partners of new media, Internet and other technology firms.

The modeling industry is about 100 years older than the Internet industry, and its employment structure has matured into basically two main types of jobs: modeling, itself, and managing models' careers. Technically, the job of modeling consists of showing clothes on a runway or posing for photographs. Models may work for 'a retail store, a manufacturer, an advertising agency, a photographer, [or] a publishing company' (New York State Labor and Worker's Compensation Law 1992). Modeling agencies, which are all privately owned, select, train, 'book' (i.e., get jobs for), and represent models in negotiations with clients in return for a 20 percent commission on models' fees. These agencies vary in size: the number of models an agency represents may range from five to several hundred. A firm of 45 full-time agents and administrative employees is considered large by industry standards; many agencies consist of only 6-12 employees. Models and their agents are divided into 'boards,' according to the agency's best guess of the markets to which the models might sell. While the 'high board' is comprised of high-fashion, top-level, or editorial models whose photographs appear in fashion magazines such as Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, the development or 'new faces' board is made up of young hopefuls.

During the past five decades, the number of modeling agencies has grown steadily. The Manhattan business 'Yellow Pages' listed 30 modeling agencies in 1950, 41 in 1965, 60 in 1979, 95 in 1985, 117 in 1998, 124 in 2000, and 132 in 2002. Some of these agencies are now multinational. Elite, an agency that represents a number of supermodels, was founded in New

---

[2] These include freelance and part-time employees counted on full-time equivalent (FTE) basis.

[3] For more detailed description of the methodology of how subjects were chosen, see Neff 2004.

York in 1977 and now has 25 offices around the world (Elite Model Management homepage, 2002). The number of models has grown as well, even though it is difficult to measure. In 1994, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) counted 3,155 'demonstrators, promoters, and models' working in the city; in 2000, there were reportedly 3,700 models, and they estimate the number will rise to 4,000 by 2005. Although this two percent increase is small compared to new media's, it compares favorably with other occupations whose numbers in the city are shrinking. [4]

Like some new media workers, models are hired by the project, the day, or the hour. A supermodel may earn $7,000 an hour for runway modeling—but there are no guarantees of continued work at this level, except for special, 'exclusive' contracts representing specific clients. Below the superstar level, successful models' rates run as high as $10,000 a day. A model with a year's experience, doing editorial work for high-status magazines, may earn $3,500 to $5,000 a day. Yet, a beginning model working for the same high-status magazine may earn as little as $125 a day.

The Cultural Attributes of Cool

The most important perception of fashion modeling and new media work—both inside and outside the industries—is that these fields are 'cool.' Increasingly the cultural attributes of cool are used in the service of increasing profits in post-industrial capitalism (Frank 1997; Lloyd 2004), forming what has been called 'an artistic mode of production' (Zukin 1982). From modeling competitions to a twenty-four-hour fashion channel, the glamorous lives of models are ubiquitous on television. Similarly, advertisements for consumer goods from computers to cars depict Internet work as fun, fast-paced and exciting. Before the dot-com bubble burst, a proposed reality-based television show promised to present the glamorous life of workers at an online magazine in New York City 'as they cover and uncover stories behind the power brokers of fashion, finance, art, music and multimedia' (http://www.bunim-murray.com). Although the media may exaggerate, respondents concur with at least some of the hype. A graphic designer, who, along with friends, founded her own company, says new media work is 'hip to do, you get paid well, and in a lot of the offices you don't have to work that hard.' An artist in new media says, 'It's a lifestyle choice with cool people, who think like we do, from similar backgrounds.' Although this 'industrialization of bohemia' has been noted as serving a critical function for

---

[4] Many models are also dancers, actors, or, in the lower echelons of the profession, restaurant workers. Further, the number of models working may fluctuate widely each year. Finally, since fashion models are constantly shuttling between 'shoots' and showing in cities around the world, no one know exactly how many models are working in New York City at any given time. In the past, some employment agencies provided fashion models as well as 'office personnel' (advertisement in Manhattan 'Yellow Pages,' 1970). Prior to 1991, the BLS included models in the category 'sales personnel.' When the BLS began to count models as a separate category in 1991, the number counted was a suspiciously low 650.

innovation within capitalism in general (Ross 2003), the institutionalization of bohemia supports the positive self-image of workers in the new media and modeling industries. Models, stereotypically, are celebrated for their beautiful bodies. But the world of fashion is also celebrated for its hip lifestyle. 'I just really enjoyed the day job,' a male modeling agent said. 'It's not drudgery, you're surrounded by beautiful people, and half my job was taking out models and clients four nights a week.' Some people in modeling are more ambivalent. The owner of a male modeling agency says, 'It's all based on hype—[people] think because they're in the fashion business that they're somewhat special,' but then adds, 'They are [special] in a way because the culture makes them that way.'

Models, especially supermodels, are frequent fodder for gossip columns and celebrity sightings in daily newspapers (at least in New York and other fashion capitals) and fashion and lifestyle magazines. They can make the reputation of restaurants and nightclubs. If they are seen at a club, it can 'quickly' become 'one of New York's hottest hangouts,' as New York Magazine reports of the Atrium, a club that caters to 'models and those who enjoy being seen with them' (Brown 1999). New media events such as 'launch parties' for new websites were also written about in both major daily newspapers and online trade magazines. During the dot-com boom, Internet notables at play were featured in the style pages of New York's daily papers, covered by their own industry gossip columnists in the trade press and featured in, ironically enough, photographic 'spreads' for fashion magazines and clothing advertisements. As the management consultant Tom Peters describes his model of the new worker, whom he calls 'Icon Woman,' 'She is turned on by her work! The work matters! The work is cool! . . . She is the CEO of her life!' (Peters 2000).

In contrast to the generally 'uncool' image of computer hackers, nerds, and geeks, both old and new media portray new media workers as the epitome of hip and cool. 'The stereotyped symbol of New York City's Internet industry,' an article in the New York Times (Johnson 1997) begins, 'is an ultracool, twenty-something cyberhead with a tattoo and a skateboard, plotting the overthrow of Microsoft from a fifth-floor walk-up on East 10th Street.' Articles in the newspaper's 'Sunday Styles' section describe new media workers, offices, and launch parties as trendsetters for new styles. Like Tom Peters, advertisements for both recruiting new media workers and selling standard consumer goods suggest new media workers have fun and control their lives. A computer-chip manufacturer's print advertisements show four twenty-something men and women standing in a highly designed loft-office, in front of computers, a huge stereo system, and stacks of compact disks; the accompanying text says they have had 'enough of paying dues' and are 'ready to be their own bosses.' A television commercial for the Volkswagen Jetta shows a young computer game designer who says, 'You know, when you write code for 15 hours a day, ya gotta get out,' as he drives off with his friends on an idyllic ocean highway. [5]

---

[5] AMD@work advertisment, spring 1997 and Jetta television advertisement, summer 1999.

Creativity

Another attractive aspect of new media work and fashion modeling is that, like the advertising industry to which they are both closely related, they encourage artistic creativity and self-expression—albeit in a commercial way. A 'content strategist,' or editor, at a large, corporate online magazine observes, '[New media] is really cool and very creative and it is still the freest medium around.' What is perceived as 'creative,' we think, mainly reflects the great influence of visual images in consumer society (Featherstone 1991; Levin 1993). And a web designer's products—the 'front-end' or viewable parts of websites—are just as visually oriented as a fashion model's photographs. Even work on the 'back-end' code, i.e., programming that is not visible to users of a website, can be judged according to aesthetic norms of programmers: Code, too, can be 'beautiful' or 'elegant.'

Likewise, models are creative because they create their own 'look,' a performance that can be changed to project an appropriate image for specific clients, designs, and situations. An experienced model notes that she has fun 'be[ing] so-and-so today.' Still, models are often given strong cues about how they should emote. Boards shown to runway models before one fashion show said, 'Be sexy,' 'Be hot,' 'Be glamorous,' and even elaborated: 'It's a jungle out there! Be manly, butchy, hot. Keep your aim straight and shoot hard! Kill them with your eyes!'[6]

Workers in both fields also feel they are creative because they can visualize how their own part of the production process fits into both production and consumption of the final product. This, in turn, leads to a subjective feeling that they 'own' the product and control their labor. In practice, however, there is always a tension between the goals of 'creatives'—who want to do 'cutting-edge work' to add to their personal portfolios that are evaluated in numerous instances by other creatives—and clients' desire for more standard, market-tested work (cf. Jackall and Hirota 2000). As the strategic planner of a large online design and advertising firm says, 'The creative team keeps bugging me to get them 'cool' work, but, hey, we have to make money and work with clients. . . . I don't care if the work is boring—just do it!'

Visions of creativity influence the architectural designs and social organization of new media workspaces. Bright colors, open floor plans, and self-conscious design mark these spaces as different from corporate settings. Newspaper articles about new media firms frequently note such amenities as basketball hoops on doors and pool tables in conference rooms, beer in the fridge, and weekly massages. The three co-founders of one start-up firm, along with a girlfriend and a cat, moved into a Lower East Side loft. 'We treat the company like another roommate,' they report in one interview, with each of the four people and the firm paying a share of the rent. 'Our clients find it very "romantic" that we have this cool loft downtown.' In a clever visual pun, an item on a trendy scooter called the 'Razor' in the 'Sunday Styles' section of the New York

---

[6] Published in the book Fashion Cues (Visionaire Design, 2000) which brings photographs of the instructional boards models are shown before they go down the catwalk. One of our favorites instructs models to project the image of 'sexy rich bitchy in a ski resort. . . not skiing!!' Quoted in Metropolis, June 2000, p. 46.

Times describes employees of Razorfish, 'a digital media firm, . . . [who] use Razors to race around their 28,000 square-foot office [in SoHo]' (Asfour, 2000).[7]

In a corporate new media firm on Wall Street, the producers' offices contrast with those of the business and advertising staff. 'They think I'm a freak when I shut my door and blast my music and bounce around,' a new media producer says. In this firm, most of the artists and designers work in a large, open area lit by individual lamps instead of by overhead fluorescent lights. When we visited, workers were playing catch; one of the designers was constantly interrupted by shouted requests for information from a designer across the room. Posters, art, and pop culture objects were tacked up on the walls.

Similarly, whether models work in photo studios, on runways, or on location, they are in a 'fun' environment. Everyone spends most of the workday hanging out, telling jokes, smoking cigarettes and admiring one another in 'chic' locales on the beach and in bars, clubs, and lofts. An editorial model says it is a 'fun job' in which she travels the world in style. Perhaps the key image comes from a behind-the-scenes look at a fashion show in Fredrick Wiseman's 1980 documentary Model. In one scene, models laugh and joke around backstage while a male dresser dances in the women's clothes to disco music. On a photo shoot, even the lowliest workers (the 'extras') have access to the catered food and location vans equipped with stereo systems and conversation pits.

Autonomy and Flat Career Hierarchies

Along with their cool, creative images, workers in both new media and fashion modeling are characterized by a strong sense of autonomy that is closely related to employment flexibility. Again, we emphasize a subjective aspect of the work, derived from our respondents' own evaluations. 'There's no other business that I could go into and have the kind of hours I have and make the money I make,' says a veteran fit model who only works part-time. A young commercial model enjoys the work because 'you get to have your own schedule [without] someone breathing down your back.' An agency owner says, 'It's a really free existence. It's really quite amazing.' Similarly, new media employees say that the freedom to create their own schedules distinguishes their industry from more 'corporate' settings. At one firm, employees mentioned they enjoy not having to come into the office early in the morning; many said they never arrive before 11 a.m. However, the president of the company sponsors games of Quake, a network computer game, at midnight—leading a strategic planner to suggest this is a strategy 'to see who's still around.' Our respondents also like that their work requires them to devise 'solutions to unique problems' and 'create something new.' One programmer, who studied

---

[7] At an extreme, the new offices of Doubleclick in Manhattan are 'like a resort… .There is … a huge terrace with a stunning view over Manhattan, an informal bistro, a couple of lounges, a well-appointed pantry, an exercise room with showers, a yoga room, a game room with a pool table, a rooftop basketball court, and an indoor park with real trees—most of it fully wired for connection to the Internet' (Vienne 2000).

Romance languages in college, said she 'loves programming. It's like getting paid to solve puzzles all day long' Because these industries lack standard career ladders, they have flatter job hierarchies than in most organizations, with fewer steps between entry-level and top-ranking jobs. Although only a few people in each field reach the top levels, the flatness of the hierarchies shapes workers' perceptions that their professions are more open or democratic than others.

The apocryphal entry for modeling, of course, is to be 'discovered.' A friend's father told us how his 'gorgeous' teenage daughter was discovered on the street by an agent from one of the most exclusive agencies in Manhattan, an agency that does not even recruit by 'open calls.' This experience duplicates the story of the supermodel Kate Moss, who was not only discovered, but offered a contract on the spot by an agent who saw her in the airport on the way home from a family vacation. Her first modeling jobs were a series of shoots for teen magazines and, within months, Moss was on the cover of Vogue and Harper's Bazaar (Halperin 1999). None of the models we interviewed had such an experience, but most entered the field by chance. A young model agent says, 'How do people get their jobs? Well, at [this agency] you would never see an ad.' An agency owner describes his own entry into the profession, 'One day you're not in the business and the next day you are and they give you these very important, powerful positions. . . . So, one day I was unemployed, the next day I was interviewing people to be models.'

Likewise, among new media firms, the computer industry's garage-to-riches myth fuels the hope of instant success despite evidence to the contrary. A graphic designer who founded his own web-based company says, 'There's no real resume or experience that you need, because nobody has that.' Certainly new media is a new industry and has, as yet, few formal entry requirements. And, as in all portfolio-based professions, new media workers emphasize the ability to just do the work rather than accumulate formal credentials or job experience, while seemingly relishing in the challenge of continually acquiring new skills. [8] As the CEO of an e-commerce firm said at the peak of the dot-com boom, 'I just want to find someone who is really smart. I'll teach them what they need to know about the field.'

Self Investment

Although the standard costs of nonstandard work seem to be offset, in these fields, by the 'coolness' of the jobs, entrepreneurial work exacts its own costs. In both new media and fashion modeling, there is a cultural norm that workers bear responsibility for their own work conditions. The sources of this norm are ambiguous. Modeling agencies function as both models' representatives (in negotiations with clients and photographers) and their employers (in the manner of temporary employment agencies). As a booker says, models 'have always been independent contractors.' New media workers, on the other hand, can be independent

---

[8] This point was confirmed by a web-based survey commissioned by The Industry Standard, a trade-publication for the Internet industry, which found that 'challenging work' an even more important factor in job satisfaction than salary. Job security was not found to be a significant factor in this admittedly unscientific survey. Annalee Newitz, 'Thank God It's Monday' **The Industry Standard** 11 Sept 2000.

contractors, temporary employees (that is hired through an agency), permanent part-time employees or full time employees. Despite this difference, models and new media workers alike often pay for their own health insurance. The founder of a Web content firm, specializing in games and cartoons, told a reporter, 'A lot of the people who actually grind the stuff out are, like, the invisible staff. My freelancers. I can't afford their health plan. I'm not interested in paying for their health plan for their little boy. . . . I pay them a nice, decent hourly wage, and they can work at home in their underwear' (The New Yorker, April 24-May 1, 2000, p. 160). Surveys of the industry indicated that nearly fifty percent of those working in new media, even during the height of the dot-com boom were part-time, temporary or contract workers and that nearly 60% of them paid for their own health insurance benefits or lacked any coverage at all (Batt et al, 2001; PricewaterhouseCoopers 2000). In contrast to the image of dot-com millionaires, the median wage in the New York internet industry was under $50,000 (PricewaterhouseCooopers 2000).

In order to work in either field, an initial capital outlay is often required. Aspiring new entrants to the workforce spend 'free' time learning new skills for no pay in new media (Batt et al; Kotamaraju 2002) and time getting ready their bodies ready for work in fashion modeling (Entwistle and Wissinger 2005, Wissinger 2004). In new media, workers pay for training certificates or programming classes, and models take acting, dance, and movement classes to improve their ability to gain work. Both sets of workers invest in expensive self-promotional materials. Models must pay for their own photographs in the beginning and must buy 'comp. cards' that function as a model's resume, business card, and leave-behind portfolio. [9] New media workers build personal websites to advertise their skills; throughout the dot-com boom, they invested in entrepreneurial projects on their own time that served to demonstrate their business and technical acumen.[10] These investments, like all investments, are made with no guarantee of a return. In entrepreneurial labor, however, workers may have to completely forgo pay for a chance to make top earnings in their field—whether through a new media worker's IPO or a high-board fashion model's lucrative cosmetics contract. After workers are established in the field, they weigh the volatility of jobs and constant changes in assignments against flexible hours and relatively high incomes. A model in her mid-twenties claims, 'You can put in 40 hours per week for free, just going to 'go-sees' [where prospective models are viewed by clients].' Further, when models travel 'the circuit,' from New York to Paris or Milan, 'it is all 'on spec,' in a sense. Think of going and sitting in another country, paying two rents and not getting a job! When I

---

[9] Sometimes, modeling agencies lend new models money for these expenses. If a model's career doesn't take off, he or she may owe the agency money.

[10] One example from our sample of new media workers is a personal website that was created to advertise an 'old media' project that our respondent was involved with. After the website itself became a cult hit on the Internet, a media conglomerate bought the rights to it and hired our respondent. Her investment paid off in visibility for her talents as well as in money and stocks.

could just break even, I was pretty happy.'

Neither are these investments sure to yield the desired results. Although some would-be models spend up to $10,000 to enter model 'searches' or attend modeling 'school,' the booker in a boutique agency that specializes in models for editorial work calls these options 'scams….Maybe one out of a thousand of those girls is going to make it.' She says, 'We've got 5,000 girls coming to Washington to meet with New York model agents….Maybe, maybe, three of them will get an offer.'

But these investments and the structure of work keep workers in the field, even in hard times. In the midst of the recession, a model who hasn't worked in two months explains why she continues looking for a modeling job:

> It's always that feeling like, one more time, one more chance, one more casting! Because this could be it! Maybe I'll go to London, and it will change everything, and it'll really happen.

Similarly, a dot-commer who has been out of work for a year turns exclusively to freelancing because she can't find full-time employment in the industry. Rather than look for work in a different industry, she spent the year prior to her interview dealing with the uncertainty and lack of control that accompany freelancing during a recession:

> What you do when you're freelancing is that you just assume that everything is going to be okay. You concentrate on what you do have control over not on what you don't have control over. This year has been really depressing because there aren't a lot of jobs out there. On the other hand, I do know that when there are jobs that I'm qualified for, I do stand a very good chance of getting them. So, I try to keep that uppermost in my mind and not to listen to the people who are really, like frantic. I mean, I'm like, 'Well, I have a little boy who needs shoes, so I have to stay upright.'

Both these workers believe that they possess the skills and requirements to get positions 'when there are jobs.' But the structure of work in these two industries—as in all cultural industries—is built upon workers being motivated by the promise of one Big Job being right around the corner. During recessions, that motivation is transformed into the hope that any job is imminent. In lean times or fat, however, the structure of work in industries marked by entrepreneurial labor is based on workers' willingness to take the periodic risk of being out of work along with the continual risk of investing in their careers.

Constant pressure to invest in skills combined with a perception of the individualized nature of cultural work pushes workers toward continuous efforts of self-improvement. In both fashion modeling and new media work, talent and skills always need to be updated and upgraded. While new media workers have to develop technical skills to advance their careers, fashion models have to develop a 'look.' A fit model explains that new models go through a 'development' process in which they learn how to dress, walk, talk, and eat, and throughout their

careers fashion models pay for lessons in dance, gymnastics, yoga, and acting.

For their part, although new media workers still do not need advanced degrees in computer science, over half of our new media respondents got, or are getting, master's degrees, mostly in technical fields. All new media workers spend extra hours on the computer, both at work and at home, to improve their skills and, as one respondent puts it, to look at 'the competition' (see also Batt et al 2001, Christopherson 2002, Kotamraju 2002). They also devote time and effort to developing and maintaining their own websites, which serve as a powerful medium of self-promotion. Moreover, new media workers move from job to job in an effort to acquire skills. 'I'm not sufficient in hard-core technical [skills],' says a young woman who moved from copy editor to producer, and then to senior producer, within two years. '[I'm considering a job] with a marketing company which focuses on online commerce, which is exactly where everything is going and something I want to learn. I need to learn the technical stuff, or in two years I'm going to be obsolete.' This echoes Kotamraju (2002) who finds that the pressures of 'keeping up' through constantly redefined job skills means that employees favor workers 'having a college education and being young, both of which presumably allow the easy and constant upgrading of skills.'

The dot-com crash of March 2000 and the subsequent recession have made these pressures more intense. A model who was interviewed in the summer of 2001 observes that 'the economy is really bad right now, so modeling isn't good right now. It's really bad. Everybody's complaining, nobody's getting work. It's kind of depressing.' Yet she immediately puts forward an individual and entrepreneurial solution, claiming that she will take lower paying jobs to tide her over, while simultaneously calling on a media-driven myth regarding how she should behave:

> Model: You have to convince your agency so that they don't sell you for less. Like some girls won't get out of bed for less than … what was that saying?
> Interviewer: For less than $10,000 per day?
> Model: That would be nice. You have to get the agent to sell you at a price, I mean [under her breath she mumbled with sarcasm, 'sell you at a price!'] sell you at a rate that you want.

Similarly, workers in new media approached the recession as an event that they are responsible for predicting and managing. One programmer who was laid off and then found work with a more stable company offers a completely individualistic explanation for doing well relative to his peers in the industry:

> Some people's jobs are more expendable than others, and therefore they're at a higher risk. <u>It's really up to you to manage that risk, to take precautions, and build up savings, what is psychologically and financially [necessary] to handle that [risk]…</u> So, in a way, the wind is against everybody in the industry looking for a job right now, because of the market has taken a downturn, but I've managed well, I think.

The risk of less-than-continuous work is only one downside of entrepreneurial labor. 'Nonstandard' workspaces can feel unruly, chaotic, or menacing to those who work in them (Railla 2002). Open plan workspaces may foster communication, but the lack of clearly

delineated, enclosed space precludes privacy and may impede concentration. The general lack of formality may even prevent people from getting work done and can make less transparent the expectations about the quality of work. Moreover, the atmosphere established by pool tables, basketball hoops, parties, and pets in the office is greatly influenced by 'boys' games,' a male-dominated culture that can easily segue into offensive 'locker room' talk and even sexual harassment (Ligos 2000, France 2000).Blurred lines between work and play pressure workers to participate in 'non-corporate' culture even if they do not enjoy it, or if they have to put in extra time.

Compulsory Networking

A fluid boundary between work-time and playtime is shaped by compulsory 'schmoozing,' 'face-time,' or socializing within the industry after the workday. While some workers in corporate settings such as the advertising industry are under similar pressures, high-tech and professional workers in large corporations could establish boundaries between marketing and technical work—at least prior to the 1990s (cf. Kunda 1992; Epstein et. al. 1999). For both new media workers and fashion models, however, after-work socializing is compulsory in part because of the pressures to use social networks for obtaining new projects. Within new media, business networking events constituted one of the key places of production within the industry (Neff 2005).

'Twenty-five percent of the time, when we go out, we're doing socializing at specialized new media parties,' explains a Web producer in a small entrepreneurial firm. A reporter for an on-line business magazine describes his off-hours time at industry parties:

> I go, I schmooze. I view [these gatherings] as much work-related as enjoyment. Actually, they're not fun at all. You're drinking and what does the CEO want to talk about? . . . He wants to talk about his latest software upgrade that's 'going to change the face of chat!' Talk to me between 10 [a.m.] and 7 [p.m.] on weekdays!

Although the reporter affects disdain for such arrangements, most of the new media workers interviewed felt that attendance at industry-related after-hours events is crucial to maintain their continued employability in the field. 'I really hate it,' a partner in a new media firm says. 'It's not easy for me to schmooze at cocktail parties….But'—because she is responsible for networking and representing the firm at industry events—'it's important for the company, and it has to be done.' Another young entrepreneur says one should regard work in the industry as more lifestyle than labor: 'If you look at it like work, you'll burn out' (Bunn 1997).

Likewise, a model says, bookers arrange dinner parties in clubs and restaurants to 'make connections for the models.' 'Half my job [is] taking out models and clients four nights a week,' says a male model agent. 'Another part of an agent's job is meeting clients [and] entertaining them,' says a young agent who works in a large, well-known agency. 'There's also tons of parties throughout the year that clients and models [are] at, and that's all part of networking.' Modeling agencies receive free coupons from new restaurants and gyms to encourage models to be seen there. 'Understanding the 'scene' is absolutely part of a model's job,' a male model agent told us. 'If you want to dazzle someone, you really have to know where to go.' In their

socializing, models are expected to produce a specific persona: to be beautiful, act pleasant (if not also compliant), and demonstrate 'energy.' In return, they make contact with prospective clients, date rock stars, and frequent 'in' places alongside famous people.

Networking means that playtime is no longer a release from work-time; it is a required supplement to work-time, and relies on constant self-promotion. 'The smart models are always marketing themselves,' a former male model who is now a model agent says. 'Even if it's not something I have told them to go to, if they're somewhere with a friend . . . where they might happen to see a client, they'll market themselves, and give the client a card or say, 'If you're interested, call me.'' A high fashion model finds the incessant demand to promote herself unnerving: 'You're always on display; you have to put on that show 24 hours a day. It's not as though you can get to the office, and then go home and relax. You're always watching what you eat. You're always worrying about how you're coming across, always worried about being seen at the right places at the right time. It's just never ending.' Yet there is often a fine line between selling yourself as an image and selling your self. '[Modeling] is technically a business, you're technically selling yourself,' a commercial model says, 'you have to take control of your own image.' A successful model who quit at the peak of her career says, 'You learn to objectify yourself. You are an object, you serve a function; you learn to use it to your advantage.'

This type of self-promotion can be fraught with ethical risks. A fashion photographer tells us that another, relatively well-known photographer has a reputation for choosing models 'who he can have fun with—who will want to party.' A fashion model says that a former agent instructed her to date prospective clients, and a male model admits that he likes 'to keep [potential male clients] guessing [about his sexual orientation].' But 'I was never the type to go out,' a model says. 'I was very leery and skeptical of the men ….There are so many ways that you feel compromised in the [modeling] business.'

Portfolio Evaluation

Evaluation of work in these two fields is subtle. Models carry their 'books,'—portfolios of their clippings or 'tear sheets' of their magazine appearances—to show to prospective clients. A model's book is 'strong' it if contains many editorial pages shot by well-known photographers and published in the best magazines. A model with a great deal of editorial experience quips: 'Tear sheets mean experience; test shots mean 'new girl.'' Recent editorial work shows a model is 'hot'; as they say in the film industry, a worker is only as good as their last project (Bielby and Bielby 1999).

A new media worker's 'portfolio' is often a personal website. While these have become less important in recent years, business cards often list the URL of a personal homepage, where a new media worker posts an online portfolio with 'screen grabs' or screen shots of websites developed. These 'portfolios' include samples of work done for clients as well as resumes. When we ask new media workers to talk about their careers, they often invite us to look at their websites. These portfolio sites may also include original short stories, photographs, or poetry, as well as links to other artistic projects.

In project-based work, in general, workers must show they can adapt to changing

technologies, symbols, and trends. Adaptability is required for getting new jobs and, thus, surviving in the industry. A dancer who became a model and then an actress exclaims, 'What other business do you know where you have to be so adaptable! Once you do this business, you can do anything. . . you are constantly meeting new people; you have to adapt to any situation.' At a new media networking night, the editor of an online magazine said he wants adaptable workers: 'Give me people who don't ask, 'What is my job going to be?'' In practice, project-based work requires workers to find their way between contradictory norms. 'Adaptability' couples the ability to work autonomously on current projects and deal confidently with the uncertainty of getting future work. Moreover, the need to show a track record of creativity contrasts with a constant pressure to exhibit 'freshness, 'a pressure that is particularly acute in 'permanently beta' organizations with fluid boundaries and continual change (Neff and Stark 2004).

Portfolio-based work can exacerbate the forces of entrepreneurial labor by placing a burden on the cultural worker to create highly visible products. However, as we see in both new media and fashion modeling, workers must balance within a portfolio jobs that carry creative cachet and lower-profile jobs that pay the bills. This tension also emerges between work that is produced to satisfy corporate clients and that which is produced to elicit recognition from peers who are perceived to be creative or 'edgy.'

International competition

Many different pathways connect the far-flung nodes of fashion modeling and the global production of computer code. In the fashion world, global cities (New York, London, Paris) and regional capitals (Milan, Miami) serve as proving grounds for novice models in the process of creating an image and establishing a reputation. In the never ending search for new workers who can bring a unique 'look' to the industry, models are either picked off the streets or found in open calls or recruiting events that take place all over the world

In the continual search for the next new face, scouts work locally, periodically going on special trips to hold open calls in other cities or other countries. Hoping to find the new Alec Wek or Iman, African supermodels who were discovered by scouts, agents reportedly have gone into the rural areas of Kenya, holding up a Coca Cola advertisement, asking village elders if they want their daughters to be the girl in the picture, able to bring back a lot of money to the village (Lacey 2003). One French model agent interviewed for this project went to Moldavia to find that 'certain something.' Another agent, based in New York, speaks of 'mining' the world for new girls:

> You've got constant hunger for new faces, and you've got to farther and farther to find them. They mine different areas of the world—Eastern Europe, South America. Now one of the biggest trends I see is multicultural models who are from mixed ethnic backgrounds. That's one of the few ways you can find a unique girl.

Money and time are the great facilitators in this process, making it possible to import models to the United States despite political barriers and even trade bans:

> If you find a great girl anywhere in the world, you can get them out. I've had models come from Cuba, you just pay enough money, enough times to the government to get the model out. Of course, it's trickier, if they're from Cuba, they can't, they have to seek asylum, and they can't go back to Cuba, and they can't leave the US for a while. But if someone is worth enough trouble, you can make it happen.

While importing models may supply new faces at relatively low cost, the media images of these 'exotic' men and women continue to promote the glamour of the industry. A recent cover of Vanity Fair (April 2005) features three lissome blonde women in skimpy bikinis with the headline: Get ready for a new wave of supermodels from Eastern Europe.

Yet the global reach of the modeling industry is not due simply to the widespread networks of scouting, or the international character of the scouting contests, or its networks of offices worldwide. The industry is also global in the sense that work teams are assembled from a global pool of workers on a routine basis. According to Diane, a high level agent at one of the top international modeling agencies,

> This is a business without boundaries. When you work in this business, you are international; you are forcibly international… It has always been happening, but now it's even more so, because the markets have opened, there are more models from other places, you'll have a Croatian model shooting with an Italian client in France, the photographer is from LA, and the stylist is from New York. So you'll have time being put on the girl by seven different people.

Within new media, international pressures are felt, but perhaps less directly. While the drive for a new face, or innovation, may dominate the international division of labor in fashion modeling, cost pressures and global migration are forces within the new media industry. The Washington Alliance of Technical Workers or 'Washtech,' a workers' organization based in Seattle but organizing nationally has begun a project to alert workers within new media about immigration policies that encourage technical workers to migrate to the United States. They also track the 'offshoring' of technical jobs, claiming that over 350, 000 U.S. jobs have been 'offshored' from January 2000 to March 2005.[11] The occupational communities of media work may cluster in highly geographically centralized locations due to the tight social networks of technical workers (Neff 2005; O'Riain 2002), but those communities are shaped initially by proximity to clients and investors, and then by outsourcing and migration.

Global outsourcing and the continual search for new workers in the far regions of the globe represent two sides of 'the new international division of cultural labor' (Miller et al 2001). Cultural industries' global quest for uniqueness, innovation, and cheap labor exacerbates pressures on workers to be flexible and accept employment that is not secure. In order to

---

[11] Available online at http://www.techsunite.org/offshore/. Accessed March 21, 2005.

compete within an increasingly worldwide labor market, workers internalize the need to make cultural products that are innovative, unique, and less expensive.

Foreshortened Careers

Like fashion itself, the modeling industry moves in shorter cycles than ever before. Although women models have always been called 'girls,' they are now being recruited at younger ages than ever before, and the career cycle is speeding up. 'Years ago,' an experienced agent says, 'you just had the same 10 top girls that did well. . . all right, maybe five. Today, every six months there is a new breed of girls.' 'It's an image thing,' another agent says. 'It's going to change all the time; it's got to change all the time.' From the models' viewpoint, there are no objective reasons for either success or failure. 'They love you one minute, hate you the next,' a model with 20 years' experience says. 'You're constantly tortured. There's no rhyme or reason. If someone stops using you and you don't know why, it can be really…' and her voice trails off. A 25-year-old model who is ready to retire says, 'You can go for a month without any work….Suddenly, everything just stops. . . . It's a personality-based, subjective industry.'

Employment in new media is also volatile, as evidenced by the crash of 2000 and subsequent mass layoffs and company closings. Even in better times, start-up firms regularly go out of business or are bought and absorbed by large corporations. 'In this industry, because it's changing so fast, you're lucky if you're in the same job for a year,' says a producer for a corporate, on-line retailer. Indeed, only 20% of our sample of new media workers were with the same firm eighteen months after we interviewed them, and several recent surveys claim that the national unemployment rate in new media exceeds 35% (Wilson and Blain 2002). 'I feel like the industry will be one of those industries where a few will rise to more senior positions, and there'll be a constant flow and turnover of young people,' says a 25-year-old researcher for a corporate-owned, on-line magazine. 'I think most people won't be doing [new media work] 10 years from now, or even five years from now,' says the 27-year-old founder of a Web design firm. Since the crash, many of our respondents report being out of work and unable to use either their networks or their skills to find alternative employment. 'We thought our companies might go bust,' says a woman who had eight years of dot-com experience. 'We never thought the entire industry would disappear.'

Fashion models report that competition from younger models has intensified in recent years. According to a fashion editor, 'the reservoir of fresh talent is enormous.' A booker at a large, high-fashion agency claims the age range for female fashion models is now '14-15 to the early 20s, maybe to the mid 20s. After that point, their fashion career is over.' Once they're over 25, models can move on to 'what's called 'classic work,' with an age range of 25 to 70.' These models comprise a different board in the modeling agency. A booker at another agency paints a more drastic picture: the average fashion model's career is only 'a good four years.'

None of the models we interviewed who had done high fashion at some point in their careers were still in high fashion when we spoke with them again. Three left the industry entirely, two became commercial models and one became a fit model.[12] Within eighteen months of the interviews, four of the six high fashion models were already planning to leave modeling entirely. Economic downturns only serve to make things worse. A group of teenage models interviewed in 2002 seemed to expect even shorter career spans: 'When I first started, I said I'm going to try it for a year, and it has almost been a year, so, now I'm going to do it for another year. Whenever it starts that I don't make money, then I'll do something else.' The longest period any one of them expected to work in modeling was two years.

'The modeling industry is a factory,' says a 25-year-old who is ready to retire. 'It pumps these girls in and spits them out. Once you become too old, you're out.' Likewise, the online magazine writer says, 'I overheard our head producer saying, 'Get someone who's young, someone who's hungry. There's a sense [that] high levels of turnover keeping a very young, fresh labor force is a way these companies achieve flexibility. They're basically screwing you.'

What is 'Good Work?'

The interviews show that, in new media and fashion modeling, the best jobs are at the top of a loosely-defined structure; access to these jobs does not depend solely on hard work and skills. Instead, getting 'good work'[13] reflects luck or innate qualities (as in a fashion model's 'look') and marketing (as in a new media founder's ability to tell a 'story' that convinces potential investors). Further, 'good work' in both fields may carry high status but relatively low pay.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Modeling work is structured in a typical status pyramid, with a small number of highly-paid, highly-visible jobs on top and larger numbers of lower-paid jobs on the bottom (see fig. 1). At the top of the pyramid are jobs held by the supermodels—these jobs are, indeed, the very source of their fame. They include representing a 'name' fashion designer (e.g. Calvin Klein) or multinational cosmetics firm (e.g. Lancôme) in an exclusive contract for advertisements and runway work. Contracts may be negotiated every year, as firms seek fresher faces and bodies. The other type of work at the top of the modeling pyramid is 'editorial' work, i.e., posing for the photographs that illustrate articles in the top-level fashion magazines such as Vogue and Harper's Bazaar.

On the next level down, models work in runway shows for lesser-known designers, and pose, on the one hand, for the catalogs of such high-end retailers as Neiman Marcus and Saks, and, on the other, for the print campaigns of lower-status designer labels, cosmetics, and perfumes. They may also do editorial work for magazines not devoted to high fashion such as Glamour or Self, which have a lower status among models and those who hire them. The next

---

[12] We have no follow-up information for one of these models.

[13] Because most of the work in these fields is done on the basis of projects rather than jobs, we use 'good work' instead of 'good jobs'.

level of work includes posing for the photos in 'look books,' i.e., the in-store, seasonal catalogs of fashion designers, and providing 'looks,' i.e. acting as a 'muse' by trying on clothing while the designer is refining the styles.

Models rarely move up to work at the top of the pyramid from work on lower levels. The lowest-status work, however, may pay well on a daily basis. These jobs include posing for the catalogs of chain stores and downscale shops working for a designer or manufacturer as a 'fit' model, posing for print and television advertisements as a 'parts' model (e.g., hands, feet), and modeling clothes to a store's customers in a 'trunk show' or an 'informal.' The worst jobs—in terms of status and lack of career mobility, although not in terms of wages—include modeling in a manufacturer's or designer's showroom, demonstrating products at an automobile (or other) show, and modeling coiffures in a 'hair show.' Because there is no possibility of moving up to the higher-status jobs from this low end, models often refuse the well-paying jobs. 'You might have $150 [a day] offered to you to do Elle and you have to pass up a $15,000 [-a-day] toothpaste commercial in order to do it, but you do,' the 25-year-old model who is ready to retire says. If she does not, a model risks 'spiraling downward into the whole catalog trap.'

In the new media industry, status is not necessarily conferred by job title or pay. A worker's status is closely related to the status of the product and the client and the cachet of the firm. Working at a web design firm such as Razorfish is 'cooler' and has higher status than working at the online division of an advertising agency, even though the positions at the latter are more stable than the former. But the best work in new media in terms of status is both creative and entrepreneurial—'creative' because it develops new products, technologies, and business strategies, and 'entrepreneurial' because it is closely connected with marketing the product (see fig. 2).

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Creating or working on independently produced new media projects can be equivalent in status to modeling for Vogue. As in fashion modeling, only a small number of people work at this level in highly visible and professionally recognized outlets. While these workers may not get high wages—or any wages at all—before the crash they stood to gain the most from being acquired by a larger firm or from a successful IPO. Not just founders and entrepreneurs, but workers at any level developed new products and enjoy the higher status conferred to their portfolios by creative products.

Lower levels of work in new media include 'creative, non-entrepreneurial' work, such as designing websites for 'creative,' non-corporate clients, like museums. Working on client projects with a fair degree of autonomy, and 'pitching work,' or marketing the firm or oneself, are also associated with medium status and lower pay. Such work brings high visibility in the press, such as an article in the trade press. 'We know we don't make much money on [a museum] job,' says the founder of a firm, 'but it's good publicity [emphasis added]. We use the other clients to help pay for this.'

The 'other clients' provide less creative, non-entrepreneurial work, such as designing and maintaining routine websites for corporations. This work carries a lower status, but higher, more stable pay. Designing a website for laundry detergent or a database for a financial services

company may pay a high salary, but has low status in the industry. Unlike in fashion modeling, workers frequently move among these levels.

Conclusions

For many workers in these two fields, the internalization of risk may be justified by the expectation of high rewards—the million-dollar-a-year Revlon contract or the million-dollar share of an IPO. But the number of workers who actually get such rewards is small. There is a huge gap between a supermodel's millions and the hourly rate of other models, and between the few employers and stock owners who are able to 'cash out' of new media ventures and employees of firms that go bankrupt.

Both fashion models and new media workers confront structural barriers in their careers. Both confront serious age barriers, for fashion models and new media workers are notoriously young and are well aware of being replaceable by younger, fresher workers. The grueling work schedule inhibits family life, excluding older workers, although this may reflect the short history of the new media industry. Several factors, however, may encourage recruitment of more mature workers into new media. With a new emphasis on sound business plans, the integration of new and old media firms, and different criteria of capital investors, more experienced managers are being sought. The age structure in fashion modeling may also be changing. Several top models have continued high fashion modeling even after motherhood, and the 'graying of America' is extending the careers of other models.

The lack of ethnic and gender diversity in our sample reflects the lack of constraints on institutionalized discrimination in these fields. Fashion modeling still offers few opportunities to 'ethnic' models, and new media founders and workers are mainly male and white. Further, new media workers and fashion models confront barriers of 'edge' or 'attitude.' No matter how hard a person tries to develop or acquire it, this is a rare commodity. There are barriers, moreover, between the 'best' jobs and the routine jobs in each industry. While it is easy, given minimally good 'looks' or skills, to enter the routine jobs, there is no way to move up from these jobs to the best work. By the same token, men and women in both industries—as in culture industries in general—are constantly being judged not by their track record, but by their most recent work. If 'you're only as good as your last project,' and younger, talented people are continually pressing at the gates, these careers in culture industries exact a psychic cost.

The desirable qualities of work in new media and fashion modeling have less to do with material rewards than with qualities of cultural work: the work is 'cool,' 'creative,' and 'autonomous.' While these qualities do not refer to the usual characterizations of occupational prestige, they do suggest three historic shifts in relations between subjective perceptions of work and objective employment conditions. First, to a stunning degree, workers in these fields share the general perception of their professions that is communicated by mass media. Second, the attraction of young workers to these industries prolongs and expands the post-1960s 'pull' of liberal arts graduates toward 'cool' kinds of work in culture industries: publishing, advertising, television broadcasting, and, now, new media and fashion. Moreover, the extent of 'desired flexibility' in these industries implies that flexibility is valued, at least under some conditions, in itself—as part of a 'postmodern work ethic' (Cannon 1995) with both an individualized and a

collective acceptance of risk. This individualism seems to point to a general shift, not merely a reflection of work in rapidly changing industries or libertarian values of 'cyber-culture.'

We suggest that such a shift does not bode well for either social justice or upward social mobility. Despite their aura of hipness, new media workers and fashion models are really the Stakhanovites—or norm-making 'shock workers'—of the new economy. In addition to the products of culture themselves being valuable political and economic resources within a globalized world (Yudice 2003), the labor relations within cultural production provides global capital with a model for destabilizing work and denigrating workers' quality of life. The cultural workers in fashion modeling and new media work long hours, networking even while they are schmoozing and boozing, constantly try to improve their skills, and live with a high degree of insecurity about their income and employment. These workers now directly bear entrepreneurial risks previously mediated by the firm, such as business cycle fluctuations and market failures. Popularized in media images of cool jobs and internalized in subjective perceptions, this work creates a model of labor discipline for other industries to follow. Moreover, given the ethnic and gender characteristics that have been associated with entrepreneurial culture, the effect of these changes will exacerbate persistent social inequalities.

Culturally desirable jobs bring, paradoxically, lowered expectations of economic stability. Indeed, younger workers are well on the way to believing that taking entrepreneurial risks is necessary to building careers. This is the legacy of 1980s-era enterprise culture and corporate restructuring. In contrast to crisis-driven models of that reorganization, however, entrepreneurial labor now appears in relatively privileged parts of the work force. These norms have been internalized by workers through cultural images of risks and rewards. 'Hot' industries and 'cool' jobs not only normalize, they glamorize risk, and the entrepreneurial investment required of individuals seeking these jobs leads to a structural disincentive to exit during difficult economic times. The image of glamorized risk provides support for continued attacks on unionized work and for ever more market-driven, portfolio-based evaluations of workers' value.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Paul Attewell, Daniel Beunza, Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, Herb Gans, Toby Miller, David Stark and the reviewers for *Social Semiotics* for their helpful comments on drafts of this article.

References

Asfour N 2000 'Wheels that Fly and Fold', **New York Times**, April 9.

Barley S and G Kunda 2004 **Gurus, Hired Guns and Warm Bodies: Itinerant Experts in a Knowledge Economy** Princeton NJ Princeton University Press.

Kunda G, S R Barley, and J Evans 2002 'Why Do Contractors Contract? The Experience of Highly Skilled Technical Professionals in a Contingent Labor Market', **Industrial and Labor Relations Review** 55 234-261.

Batt R, S Christopherson, N Rightor, and D Van Jaarsveld 2001 **Net-Working, Work Patterns and Workforce Policies for the New Media Industry** Washington, DC Economic Policy Institute.

Beck U 1992 **Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity** London Sage.

_____2000 **Brave New World of Work** Oxford Polity/Blackwell.

Becker H S 1982 **Art Worlds**. Berkeley University of California Press.

Bielby WT and D D Bielby 1999 'Organizational Mediation of Project-Based Labor Markets: Talent Agencies and the Careers of Screenwriters', **American Sociological Review** 64 64-85.

____. 1994 'All Hits Are Flukes: Institutionalized Decision Making and the Rhetoric of Network Prime-Time Program Development', **American Journal of Sociology** 99 1287-1313.

Blair J. 2002 'Fashion Week Speaks of Recovery', **New York Times** 24 September.

Boltanski L and E Chiapello 1999 **Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme** Paris Gallimard.

Bram J and M De Mott 1998 'New York City's New-Media Boom: Real or Virtual?', **Second District Highlights** New York Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Available online at http://www.ny.frb.org/rmaghome/curr_iss/sec_dis/issue5.html

Brown E 1999 'Tough Life', **New York Magazine** 11 October p 20.

Bunn A 1997 'A Web Start-Up: More Lifestyle Than Labor', **Wired News On-Line** Available online at http://www.wired.com/news/news/business/story/4014.html, downloaded 29/04/98.

Cannon D 1995 'The Post-modern Work Ethic', **Demos Quarterly** 5: 31-2.

Caves R 2002 **Creative Industries: Contracts between Art and Commerce** Cambridge MA Harvard University Press.

Center for Research in Electronic Commerce 2000 'Internet Economy Indicators', Austin, TX: University of Texas. Available online at http://www.internetindicators.com.

Christopherson S 2002 'Project Work in Context: Regulatory change and the new geography of media', **Environment and Planning A** 34 2003-2015.

_____1996 'Flexibility and Adaptation in Industrial Relations: The Exceptional Case of the U.S. Media Entertainment Industries', pp 86-112 in L.S. Gray and R.L. Seeber, eds. **Under the Stars: Essays on Labor Relations in the Arts and Entertainment**. Ithaca NY:ILR Press.

Christopherson S and M Storper 1989 'The Effects of Flexible Specialization on Industrial Politics and the Labor Market: The Motion Picture Industry', **Industrial and Labor Relations Review** 42 331-347.

Entwistle J and E Wissinger 2005 'Keeping Up Appearances: Aesthetic Labour and Identity in the Modeling Industry' unpub. ms, University of Essex.

Epstein, C F, C Seron, B Oglensky and R Saute 1999 **The Part-Time Pardox: Time Norms, Professional Lives, Family and Gender** New York and London Routledge.

Faulkner, R R and A B Anderson 1987 'Short-Term Projects and Emergent Careers: Evidence from Hollywood', **American Journal of Sociology** 92 879-909.

Featherstone M 1991 **Consumer Culture and Postmodernism** London Sage.

Florida R 2002 **The Rise of the Creative Class** New York Perseus.

France D 2000 'Sexual harassment.com?**' Glamour** May p 274.

Frank R and PJ Cook 1996 **The Winner-Take-All Society : Why The Few At The Top Get So Much More Than The Rest Of Us** New York: Penguin Books.

Frank T 1997 **The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism** Chicago University of Chicago Press.

Girard M and D Stark 2002 'Distributing Intelligence and Organizing Diversity in New Media Projects', **Environment and Planning A**, 34 1927-1949.

Grabher G 2002 'Fragile Sector, Robust Practice: Project Ecologies in New Media', **Environment and Planning A** 34 1911–1932.

_____ 2002 'The Project Ecology of Advertising: Tasks, Talents and Teams', **Regional Studies** 36 245–262.

_____2001 'Spaces of Creativity—Heterarchies in the British Advertising Industry', **Environment and Planning A** 33 351-374.

Halperin I 1999 **Shut Up and Smile: Supermodels: the Dark Side** Ottawa FutureDisc Publications Group

Heydebrand W 1999 'Multimedia Networks, Globalization and Strategies of Innovation: The Case of Silicon Alley', in H-J Braczyk, G Fuchs, H-G Wolf, eds. **Multimedia & Regional Economic Restructuring** London Routledge.

Hirsch P M 1972 'Processing Fads and Fashions: An Organizational-set Analysis of Cultural Industry Systems', *American Journal of Sociology* 77 639-659.

Indergaard M 2004 **Silicon Alley: The rise and fall of a new media district** New York Routledge.

Jackall R and J M Hirota 2000 **Image Makers: Advertising, Public Relations, and the Ethos of Advocacy** Chicago University of Chicago Press.

Jencks C, LPerman, and L Rainwater 1988 'What is a Good Job: A New Measure of Labor-Market Success', **American Journal of Sociology** 93:1322-57.

Johnson K 1997 'The Place for the Aspiring Dot Org', **New York Times** 30 September.

Kalleberg A L, B F Reskin, and K Hudson 2000 'Bad Jobs in America: Standard And Nonstandard Employment Relations And Job Quality in United States', **American Sociological Review** 65 256-78.

Keat R and N Abercrombie 1991 **Enterprise Culture** London Routledge.

Kotamraju N P 2002 'Keeping Up: Web Design Skill and the Reinvented Worker', **Information Communication and Society** 5 1-26.

Kunda G 1992 **Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation** Philadelphia Temple University Press.

Lash S and J Urry 1994 **Economies of Signs and Space** London Sage.

Leach W 1993 **Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture** New York Pantheon.

Levin D M ed 1993 **Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision** Berkeley CA University of California

Press.

Ligos M 2000 'Harassment Suits Hit the Dot-Coms', **New York Times** 12 April.

Lipovetsky G 1993 **The Empire of Fashion** Princeton NJ Princeton University Press.

Lloyd R D 2004 'The Neighborhood in Cultural Production: Material and Symbolic Resources in the New Bohemia' **City and Community** 3 343-371.

Meyerson D, KE Weick and RM Kramer 1996 'Swift Trust and Temporary Groups' in R. M. Kramer and T. R. Tyler eds **Trust in Organizations** Thousand Oaks CA Sage.

Michaels E, B Axelrod and H Handfield-Jones 2001 **The War for Talent** Cambridge MA Harvard Business School Press.

Miller T, N Govil, J McMurria and R Maxwell 2001 **Global Hollywood** London BFI

Molotch H 1996 'L.A. as Design Product: How Art Works in a Regional Economy', pp. 225-75 in AJ Scott and EW Soja eds **The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century** University of California Press.

Neff G 2005 'The Changing Place of Cultural Production: Locating Social Networks in a Digital Media Industry', **The Annals of the American Academy for Political and Social Science** 597 134-152.

Neff G 2004 **Organizing Uncertainty: Individual, Organizational and Institutional Risk in New York's Internet Industry, 1995-2003** unpub dissertation Columbia University.

Neff G and D Stark 2004 'Permanently Beta: Responsive Organization in the Internet Era', in P Howard and S Jones eds **Society Online: The Internet in Context** Thousand Oaks CA Sage.

O'Riain S 2002 'High-Tech Communities: Better Work or Just More Work?' **Contexts** Fall/Winter 36-41.

Peters T 2000 'What we will do for work', **Time** 22 May.

Peterson R and N Anand 2004 'The Production of Culture Perspective' **Annual Review of Sociology** 30 311–34.

Pratt A. 1997 'The Cultural Industries Production System: A Case Study of Employment Change in

Britain, 1984-91', **Environment and Planning A** 29 1953-74.

____2000 'New Media, the New Economy and New Spaces', **GeoForum** 31 425-436.

PricewaterhouseCoopers 2000. '3rd New York New Media Industry Survey: Opportunities and Challenges of New York's Emerging Cyber-Industry'.

Quick, H 1999 **Catwalking: A History of the Fashion Model** London Book Sales, Incorporated.

Railla J 2002 'The Real Dot-Com Bomb: A Bohemian Defense of Management', **Radical Society** 29 49-53.

Ross A 2003 **No Collar** New York Basic.

Scott A J 2004 **On Hollywood : the place, the industry** Princeton NJ Princeton University Press.

Scott A J 2000 **The Cultural Economy of Cities** London Sage.

Sennett R 1999 **The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism** New York Norton.

Smith V 2001 **Crossing the Great Divide: Worker Risk and Opportunity in the New Economy** Ithaca NY Cornell University Press.

Uzzi B 1996 'The Sources and Consequences of Embeddness For the Economic Performance of Organizations: The Network Effect', **American Sociological Review** 61 674-698.

Vienne V 2000 'Sugar and Noise', **Metropolis** July pp 96-9, 132-3.

Wilson G and M Blain 2001 'Organizing in the New Economy: The Amazon.com Campaign', **Working USA** 5 32-58.

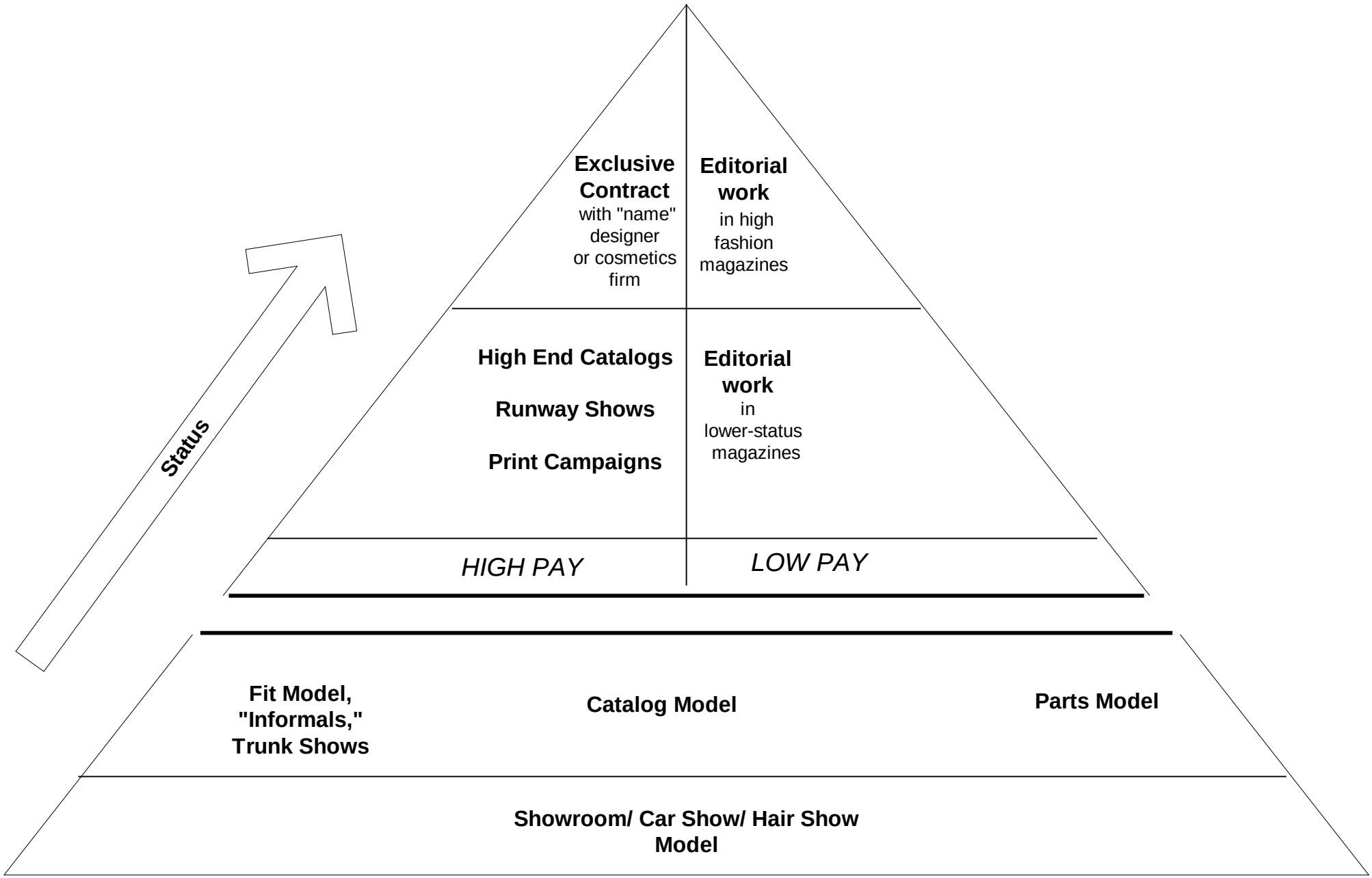
Wissinger E 2004 **The Value of Attention: Affective Labor in the Fashion Modeling Industry** unpub dissertation The Graduate Center City University of New York.

Yudice G 2003 **The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era** Durham NC Duke University Press.

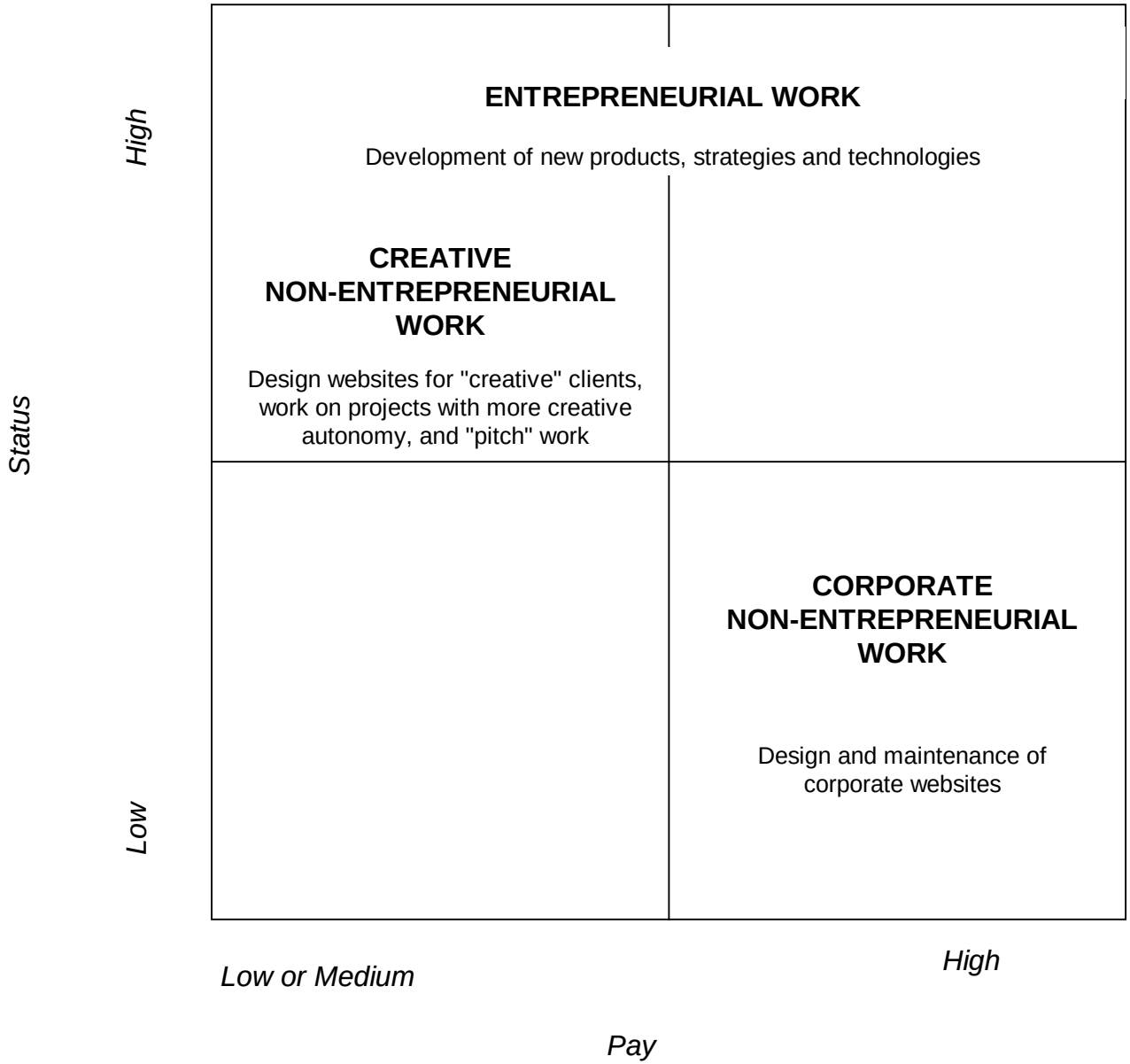
Zukin S 1982 **Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change** Baltimore Johns Hopkins University Press.

_____1995 **The Cultures of Cities** Cambridge Blackwell.

Figure 1



"Good" Work Hierarchy in Fashion Modeling

Figure 2

"Good" Work Hierarchy in New Media