Multiple Identities of Media Labourers and Experiences of Creative Autonomy: An Empirical Investigation from a TV Programme Producer's Perspective

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Abstract
This paper seeks to fill a gap between existing theories of cultural work and the lived experience of creative labourers. After identifying certain limitations in mainstream theories of cultural work that are implicitly based on the image of traditional artistic labour, the paper suggests that there is a need to consider the various desires of creative workers in current creative industries. Arguing that the multiple wishes of creative workers are based on their multiple identities, the paper examines the idea of multiple identities and its relationship with creative autonomy by analysing the case of Korean television Producer-Directors (PD) in the light-entertainment genre. Finally, a new definitional framework of creative autonomy that elucidates the paradoxical and complex nature of creative production process and creative labour is suggested.

Keywords: Creative Work, Creative Autonomy, Multiple Identities, Television Industry, Creative Production process

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Introduction

It is widely believed that creative and media organisations should loosely control employees during the creative production process by offering them a certain level of creative autonomy, but the these organisations should tightly monitor and manage the distribution and reproduction process of creative products (Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Recently, academic interest in cultural work and creative labour has increased, but the concept of creative autonomy remains largely dependent on the images of traditional artistic labour. In reality however, the creative industries are now typically a commercialised market environment and many believe it seems very unlikely that contemporary creative labourers will have true creative autonomy. Due to the tendency to use traditional approaches when considering the creative industry and its creative work, the ability for creative labourers to maintain a good level of creative freedom has largely been denied in previous literature. As a result, there has been little space within which to discuss the importance of autonomous creative labour in the constant development and innovation of the industry. This paper seeks to fill this gap by conducting empirical research with creative labourers in the Korean television industry.

I will begin by pointing out the limitations of mainstream theories of cultural work: due to the fact that these theories often deny the possibility of creative autonomy, this in turn leads to an inability to consider the value of creative autonomy within the creative production process. I will then suggest that there is a need to look beyond the artistic desire of creative workers and will argue that we need to acknowledge the multiple wishes of such workers based on their multiple identities. To understand the concept of identity, organisational identity, social identity, and multiple identities, I will then briefly summarise the relevant theories. In the last section, I will analyse the concept of multiple identities and creative autonomy with the case of Korean television Producer-Director (PD) in the light-entertainment genre. Finally, I will suggest a new definitional framework of creative autonomy based on my findings.

Structuralism and Denial of Creative Autonomy

To date, there has been a tendency in the discussion of the creative autonomy of cultural workers for studies to largely be based on the idea of structuralism. Indeed, most traditional views on cultural production understand creative labourers as a kind of 'artistic' worker. Naturally, within the context of highly commercialised cultural/creative industries, the possibility of having 'true' creative autonomy during the production process has been largely denied. Adorno and Hokeheimer's (1992) culture industry critique has laid the foundation for criticism of the standardisation of the cultural industry. It argues that the commercialisation of the cultural industry forces creative labourers to follow industrial demands, rather than pursuing their own creative endeavours. In this sense, writers then assume it is inevitable that creative workers must compromise their level of artistic autonomy due to commercial relations.

Neo-Foucaudian views on cultural production also established negative approaches to the concept of creative autonomy with the idea of 'governmentality'. In other words, Foucault believed that the identity of individuals naturally reflects the power relationships and social dynamics within society, as identity is constructed through primary discourse within the given society. Based on such approaches, many have

understood creative workers to be a vulnerable work force consisting of labourers who are self-motivated toward the creative process. Neo-Focaudians suggested that although creative companies are believed to allow a good degree of creative autonomy to workers within the creative industries, the firms in fact have the goals of growth in productivity and efficiency, and as a result, self-motivated labourers become exploited. In this vein, many scholars pointed out that such a tendency has been linked to job instability, long working hours, and relatively low wages (Banks, 2007; Ross, 2003; Stahl, 2005).

Meanwhile, Bourdieu framed the concept of creative autonomy and the nature of the cultural industry somewhat differently. For Bourdieu, creative workers well recognise the fact that they are not fully autonomous but by maintaining the superficial image of autonomous artistic labour they understand that this in turn brings financial rewards (Bourdieu & Nice, 1980). From this perspective, a good level of creative autonomy (whether or not it is superficial) is believed to be beneficial to both the industry and cultural workers themselves, as it produces a 'belief' in art, which conceals the bare face of commercialism.

To date, these three approaches to cultural work have been primary foundation upon which the possibility of true creative freedom within the cultural industry has been denied. From such structural perspectives, it is believed that workers are implicitly guided to work more effectively and productively as their identities are constructed by reflecting the given social orders and values (Du Gay, 2007; Prichard, 2002). Furthermore, it seems that such negative views are very closely related to the traditional images of artistic workers.

Beyond Artistic Desires

Although the concepts of creativity and commerce are not necessarily polarised, in many cases, cultural work-related studies still primarily centre on the traditional views of artistic work in which cultural workers are understood to be people who produce 'art for art's sake'. Even after "the myth of genius" has been shunned (Bilton, 2010; Sawyer, 2006; Weisberg, 1986), many still believe that the creative autonomy of creative labourers is needed for individuals to express their own innate artistic creativity.

However, when it comes to the cultural production process of contemporary creative workers, the underlying thought that creative autonomy is needed almost exclusively for the aesthetic independence of creative workers does not seem appropriate. Above all, such an interpretation is unable to reflect the complex nature of the creative production process in current creative industries. Contemporary creative labourers are not a group of people who are quietly waiting for their own muse to appear; rather, creative workers produce cultural products by aiming to bring about 'communication of experience' with others through the product (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). To such creative workers, having active communication and sufficient interactions with multiple stakeholders is surely crucial. For instance, receiving feedback or praise from co-workers and audiences becomes an important motivator for creative labourers. At the same time, creative workers desire to have a good life with a good level of work-life balance and a living wage.

That is not to say that creative labourers today do not wish to have artistic independence during the creative production process; rather, after recognising the given structural conditions, creative labourers actively search for a way to maintain their artistic independence as a creative self by actualising their own self-expression through their work. Within the current commercial cultural industry, their goal may be to become successful both creatively and commercially. In this sense, the traditional concept of the aesthetic or artistic drive of creative workers is somewhat inadequate. Instead, we need to redefine the concept of creative autonomy in a way that allows consideration of the multiple wishes expressed by creative labourers through their work based on their multiple identities. In turn, this allows us to explore the continuing creative development of the industry under a highly commercialised market environment. I also believe that such an approach might enable us to find an answer that could lead to the growth of not only the industry and organisations but also individuals. It is on this basis that the present research is founded.

Understanding Multiple Identities of Creative Labourers and Their Multiple Wishes

Overcoming Dichotomies of Identity

Recently, many have understood the concept of identity at work within a postmodern frame, which considers the fragmentation and dislocation of the identity of individual workers. In general, it has been believed that a largely fragmented contemporary society will lead individuals to have a weak and corroded identity in their working process, which in turn causes employees to have a lack of stability and a meaningless working experience (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1999).

Several new frames of identity, which consider the inter-relationships between individuals and social structures, have been constructed to overcome this dichotomy of essentialism-structuralism. As widely quoted, Pierre Bourdieu (1990) framed the inter-relationship between individuals and social structures with the concept of 'habitus'. For Bourdieu, individuals inevitably reproduce the social and cultural norms of the privileged class through inclinations that create habitus (Mowbray, 2014). It is true that Bourdieu admitted the possibility of autonomy in individual choice, but he was pessimistic about the likelihood that autonomous individuals could overturn the dominant social order. Bourdieu believed that it is hard to deny a given structure as individuals will inevitably willingly advocate the habitus having experienced the benefits of following social values and norms.

Meanwhile, other more optimistic views have also emerged, which claim that market opportunities allow individuals to have more autonomous self-expression, and the capacity of an individual to enhance a given situation will be linked to more assertive career planning and the self-growth of individual workers (Giddens, 1991). Giddens believed that autonomous and knowledgeable individuals could bring about the change and development of social structures. For Giddens, individuals are able to behave based on their own intentions and autonomy and are thus able to effect change, even though they may not be able to anticipate and manage all unknown eventualities (Ha, 2006). He did not believe that individuals could have complete autonomy, but he also resisted the idea that a given social structure automatically determines an individual's identity. From this perspective, individuals have the capacity to

subjectively construct their 'essential' identity, and in the process, they are believed to have a certain degree of autonomy to behave based on their own preferences and intentions.

Social Identity, Organisational Identity, and Multiple Identities

It seems many have agreed with the view that the identity of a person is inherently fluid (Lacan, 1987 cited in Du Gay, 1996; van Zoonen, 1998; Cornelissen, Haslam, and Balmer, 2007). Different from essentialism, in reality, the identity of an individual is not automatically constructed but formulated within various structural and individual dynamics. Thus, it can be seen that a person's identity can be changed by a given external environment, but such change is not a complete alteration of identity. Rather, it is likely to be much closer to the blending of various identities within oneself.

The idea of multiplicity can be traced back to Plato's Republic and Phaedrus. Plato observed that individuals tend to have a certain inner conflict because sometimes they desire different things at the same time. The struggles between multiple identities were also observed by Freud, and he suggested that psychological health could be achieved by achieving balance between different identities (Engler, 2013). While Plato and Freud were primarily concerned about inner psychological conflicts, Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory and subsequent studies have focused more on the interrelations between the external environment and an individual's identification process. According to social identity theory, people come to formulate multiple identities by reflecting their association with a specific group (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Haslam & Ellemers, 2006). After establishing a new social identity within a group, individuals begin to reflect intergroup behaviour and establish a sense of self-esteem when their in-group performance is superior to that of their out-group performance. Social identity theory argues that such changes in individual behaviour should not be interpreted as 'dehumanisation' or 'deindividuation', but as 'depersonalisation' (Hogg, 1996). The experience of social identity is not a loss of 'essential' identity but is a change of context within the multiple levels of one's identity.

The concept of organisational identity in Business and Management studies is also very similar to the above idea of group behaviour and multiple identities. Such views have been applied to explore how employees can be encouraged to have an organisational identity, which is often a core driving force of organisational development (Haslam & Ellemers, 2006). It is believed that once individual employees come to have an organisational identity, their desires for self-development will be linked to the development of the organisation.
However, we need to consider the fact that great differences remain between individual employees under the same organisational environment. Van Zoonen's (1998) view on organisational identity shows individual differences during the identification process and reflects the importance of subjectivity within the socialisation process. Van Zoonen's idea of organisational identity is a negotiating process between structures and subjectivity (see Figure 1). While an organisational identity reflects structural imperatives, it also reflects individual tastes and subjective factors. From this perspective, an organisational identity cannot simply be built under restrictive organisational power. Van Zoonen's flexible organisational identity model

allows us to identify the high level of subjectivity in the identification process within an organisation.
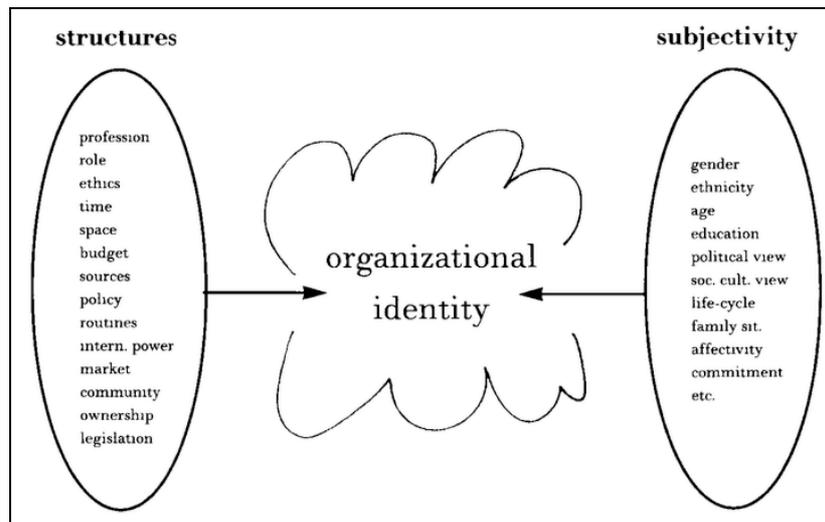

Figure 1: Organisational Identity in Journalism (van Zoonen, 1998, p. 137)

This process by which an organisational identity is established can be also applied to other types of social identities, such as professional identity. By continuously negotiating and balancing between newly emerged social identities, individuals aim to have a better quality of life.

Experiences of Multiple Identities by Korean Television PDs

The primary subjects of the current study are television PDs (Producer-Director) of the light-entertainment genre in South Korea. Due to the cooperative nature of the broadcasting system, PDs establish their career more or less by working as an employee in an organisation (either full-time, part-time or freelance). Regardless of a specific organizational type (terrestrial broadcaster, cable television company, or independent production company), it is fair to say that most PDs in the same genre experience analogous career stages to become a Main PD (see Figure 2). From the Main PD stage, they are believed to have specialised skills and knowledge, and are able to produce their own programme with a relatively high level of autonomy from idea incubation through to post-production.

Figure 2: Typical Process of being a Main PD

Based on my in-depth interviews with Main PDs, I will observe how a PD comes to formulate his or her multiplicity throughout the career development process. After entering into the labour market, the multiple selves of a PD are not automatically formulated; rather, their multiplicity is constructed through the career development process itself as PDs experience dynamic socialisation processes both within and

outside of their organisations. As a result, PDs typically have multiple desires based on their multiple identities. My aim here is not to generalise a concept of PD identity, but to create an analytical framework of multiplicity, which has the capacity to consider both the specificity of creative labour and the paradoxical nature of creative autonomy. From May 2012 to July 2013, 23 interviews were conducted with 16 Main PDs working in the light-entertainment genre in South Korea. To reflect the diverse nature of the Korean television industry, interviewees from all four types of employment were recruited: terrestrial broadcasters, cable broadcasting companies, independent production companies, and freelancer PDs. All interviewees have debuted as a Main PD with their own programmes and the average length of career was 14.4 years.

Individual Idealism about the PD Job (Before Entering the Role)

The majority of my interviewees shared that they had an interest in the PD position from a very early age. Some interviewees became interested in broadcasting through their experiences as an ordinary viewer, but a few PDs were able to observe the television production process directly via others in their family and social circle. For instance, the father of Interviewee SP (Main PD at a cable broadcasting company, 24 years) worked as a senior make-up artist, allowing Interviewee SP access to one of the most privileged terrestrial broadcasters from his childhood.

Also, there were many interviewees whose interest in a broadcasting job had arisen through the practical experience of producing an amateur programme in further education, including not only universities and colleges but also private institutions (so called 'Broadcasting Academies'). Interviewee OJ (Freelancer Main PD, 15 years) graduated from a media college where he had opportunity to experience the attractiveness of the audience reaction towards a programme.

> It was an amazing experience to express my thoughts and social endeavour through video content. I made a documentary film about a disabled professor in my school. The professor was unpopular and students hated him. But surprisingly, after the screening of my film, I heard that many student audiences burst into tears. You know what, then everything has changed. The professor became such a star. It was literally a thrilling experience. And I realised that I wanted PD to become my life-long job.
>
> Interviewee OJ

The majority of interviewees stated that they had a certain idealism about the PD role before entering the labour market. In particular, many identified the fact that it is possible to have a huge impact on both audiences and the world as one of the most valued elements of the PD role. Interviewee JP (Main PD at a cable television company, 13 years) expressed his subjective idealism in describing the ultimate goal of a PD.

> I know this sounds silly, but my everlasting goal is to make a programme that has a good impact on global audiences. It would be enough even for just a few seconds; if everybody in the world could see my programme…it is my final goal.   Interviewee JP

In the later career stage, this kind of idealism is very likely to be linked to pressures on viewership ratings. Also, since PDs have such an idealistic notion of delivering

their own creative ideas through a programme, they have a tendency to seek individual satisfaction in their work. With these ideals, PD candidates willingly invest considerable amounts of both time and money in preparing to become a PD. However, at the same time, they also have a different sense of idealism concerning the prospect of a stable job with a good wage that is able to bring them a good quality of life. Indeed, many have contended that the attractiveness of creative work lures people into the cultural/creative industries (Ursell, 2006). However, from my interviews, I found that most PDs had a very practical approach to pursuing a career that is able to fulfil all their ideals.

Emergence of an Organisational Identity (AD to Ordinary PD stage)

Any occupation requires great perseverance to become an autonomous professional. It is fair to say that almost all PDs in the same genre experience a similar process of long-term on-the-job training as an AD (Assistant Director) after entering a broadcasting organisation. Regardless of organisational types, PDs in their early career stages start to learn the skills and knowledge of a PD through an apprenticeship-like training system (so-called Doje) during the AD period. Typically, in Doje training, a new recruit is assigned to an immediate superior (usually a senior PD) and the superior takes responsibility for the training. At this stage, since many ADs are in a strictly controlled working environment, new recruits learn not only the basic skills of programme making but also reflect the implicit knowledge and culture of the given organisation.

The majority of my interviewees agreed that they were disillusioned when they realised they would not be able to create a great television programme immediately. Many of them stated that they were very disappointed with their marginal roles during the initial career stages. In most cases, an AD's life is expected to be very busy and challenging due to huge workloads and poor working conditions. However, many interviewees emphasised that their disappointment at the early career stage was not about the heavy workload but their inability to make something 'real'. Indeed, for many respondents, their first moment of receiving feedback about their first opportunity to edit something 'real', which is typically a 30 second trailer for a programme, was a vivid memory. Interviewee JL (Main PD at a cable television company, 14 years) explained her experience of such a moment:

> At first, I was swamped with a workload that was too heavy. But one day, they offered me a chance to make a short trailer. After editing it, their feedback was much greater than my expectation. That thrilling moment, like ecstasy…it was my main driving force. I can't forget the moment.
>
> Interviewee JL

Interviewees also explained that they were truly happy when their first video was shown on air (even though it was very short). Interviewee EK shared her experience as:

> The most memorable moment…it may be the very first moment that I saw the trailer I made was actually on TV. It was truly amazing. Although it was a really short trailer, it was just a wonderful feeling that audiences would have watched the trailer that I filmed and edited on my own!
>
> Interviewee EK

Through such experiences, PDs start to have a tendency to describe a video clip they edited as 'mine', which means they begin to identify themselves with their work. During the editing process, PDs naturally express their own styles and preferences: however, this does not mean that PDs want to show their own 'essential' identity through editing; rather, they desire to have confirmation from colleagues and seniors that their style of making a video is acceptable at a professional level.

Having received such feedback, PDs become very sensitive to reactions to, and feedback on, their work. With the desire to receive positive feedback, PDs start to learn the shared aesthetic criteria of producing a programme within a given organisation. After identifying the 'right' way to edit a video clip, they begin to internalise certain organisational standards. However, from my interviews, I found that such phenomena should not be understood as the disappearance of individual idealism; rather, the tendency to conform could be identified as a temporary postponement of individual tastes and preferences in order to achieve an opportunity to do a 'real' thing at a later date (producing their own programme).

By using the model of organisational identity created by van Zoonen (1998, p. 137), the emerging organisational identity of a PD can be illustrated as in Figure 3. PDs come to have a certain perception of 'us' as they are trained through the Doje system and thus internalise the rules of the system. Despite some early disillusionment, their initial idealistic notions of the PD job do not completely disappear and this is maintained within the individual. As seen in Figure 3, the fluid nature of their organisational identity is always subject to negotiations between structures and subjectivity; consequently, their organisational identity shifts in accordance with both environmental factors and personal matters.

Structures
- Organisational Norms/Rules
- Shared Aesthetic standards
- Feedback from, and reactions of, superiors and managers

Organisational Identity
(Employed Creative Labourer)

Subjectivity (Individual Identity)
- Idealism
- Individual preferences / tastes
- Goal of becoming Main PD

Figure 3: The construction process of the Organisational Identity of a PD

Emergence of a Professional Identity (Main PD stage)

In the Korean PD labour market, the debut as a Main PD is known as 'Ip-bong' (입봉). The length of time it takes to become a Main PD varies (from three to ten years) according to different genres and organisations. Interviewee HJ shared that it takes much longer for PDs in a bigger company to debut as a Main PD due to congestion of personnel.

Once debuted as a Main PD, individuals come to have relatively high levels of professional authority with full responsibility for a programme production. Although most PDs are working as employees within an organisation, as trusted professionals Main PDs are typically expected to be freed from direct supervision, which means that they are believed to have sufficient knowledge and skills to make a programme.

As a Main PD, PDs begin to perceive their colleagues as competitors and the gaps between individual PDs become larger. Thus, PDs must build a positive reputation within their field for excellence and uniqueness by creating a successful programme. Interviewee SL (Main PD at a cable television company, 8 years) explained his first experience as a Main PD:

> After moving to a new organisation, I needed to demonstrate my ability to make a programme efficiently and well. There are certain moments that we need to build trust within the organisation. At times like that, we do not try uncertain or unique ideas or experimental things. We should demonstrate the reliability of our performance first.
>
> Interviewee SL

It could be argued that such an experience reflects the subordinated nature of contemporary creative labourers who find themselves forced to conform to a given structure; however, many of my interviewees viewed it as another rite of passage through which they could achieve the desired level of creative autonomy as a professional PD. To attain creative freedom once a certain degree of trust had been constructed between themselves and the organisation (and the industry as a whole), it seems that they were willing to set aside their own preferences. Such behaviour also occurred in the later stage of their career, when PDs sought to build such trust again by enhancing their reputation through achievement of high viewership ratings and so on, which in turn allowed them to expand the opportunities for higher levels of creative autonomy. Interviewee BM (Main PD at a cable television company, 10 years) called this kind of mindset 'dualistic':

> It's a dualistic attitude. If I make a programme that leads to a higher viewership rating, I can produce what I want for at least one programme. I'd like to keep this kind of balance throughout the rest of my career. This is an attempt to raise the possibility of making a programme that I like.
>
> Interviewee BM

In addition, the majority of interviewees had a dream proposal for programme production, which they hoped to make if external conditions became propitious. For PDs, having a great level of creative autonomy was perceived as one of the greatest rewards. To achieve this, many interviewees said that there were times when they

should make a programme for an organisation that did not fit with their own style. Although the organisational identity becomes most salient at such moments, it should not be assumed that individual and professional identities have been subsumed. Many interviewees stressed that it was important to maintain their idealism even in such environment as such idealism is the driving force for maintaining and developing their creative capacity.

In this sense, the three simultaneous identities of a Main PD can be identified: a creative producer who continually seeks individual enjoyment through the creative process; an employed labourer who attempts to successfully negotiate between their idealism and reality; and a professional who tries to defend his/her discretionary rights and to raise the level of creative freedom over the production process by maintaining high ratings. Again, the interrelationships between these different identities are subject to change according to structural and personal factors. From this perspective, a PD's multiple identities are also inherently fluid. PDs learn to balance various factors across their multiple selves to achieve a good level of creative autonomy (see Figure 4).
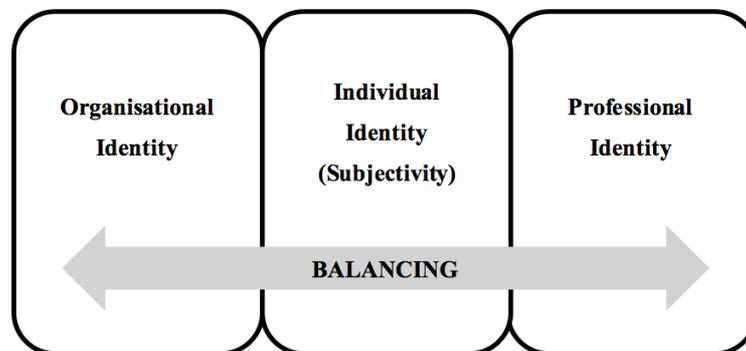

Figure 4: The Three Identities of a PD

Concluding Remarks

Proposing a New Analytical Framework of Creative Autonomy

Based on the idea of the multiple identities of creative workers, an ideal-typical model of creative autonomy can be suggested. As seen above with the case of television PDs in South Korea, the multiple identities of creative labourers are not formulated automatically but constructed throughout the career development process. Given the degree of variety in the creative industries, it may not be easy to generalise the path of a creative career, but Jones' (1996) articulation of the four stages of a project-based career appears to provide a model of the typical career path of creative work. Jones identified the career stages as: *beginning, crafting, navigating,* and *maintaining*. After entering into the job market (beginning), creative workers acquire necessary skills and knowledge through long-term on-the-job training (crafting). By the navigating stage, creative labourers continue the development of specialised skills to establish a positive reputation within their field. At the maintaining stage, creative labourers should not only act as a trusted professional but also maintain a good balance between

their professional, organisational, and personal lives. With the case of a PD's career trajectory, each career development stage and its relationship to each type of autonomy can be mapped as in Figure 5.
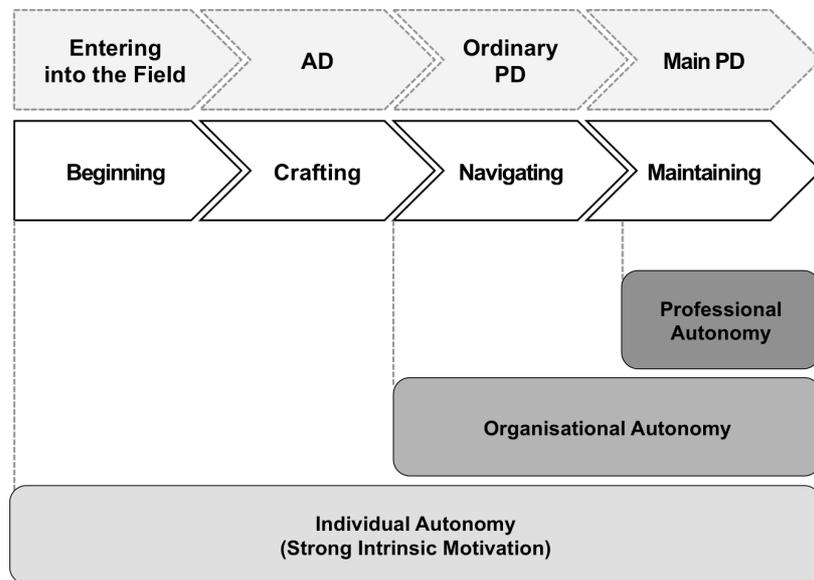

Figure 5: A New Analytical Framework of Creative Autonomy

Through this new concept of creative autonomy, we may be able to understand continuous innovation and creative development within today's highly commercialised creative industries. Although many have argued that individual creative workers subsume the value of their work to the given industrial structure, the core value of the creative industry still relies on individual creativity and intrinsically motivated creative labourers. If we are able to expand our view beyond the fixed image of creative work as artistic labour, and to recognise the various desires that creative labourers have in their work, we will be able to understand the industry and the nature of the creative production process through a more realistic and practical lens. As such, I believe we may then be able to identify the possibility of co-development of individuals, organisations, and the whole industry.

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