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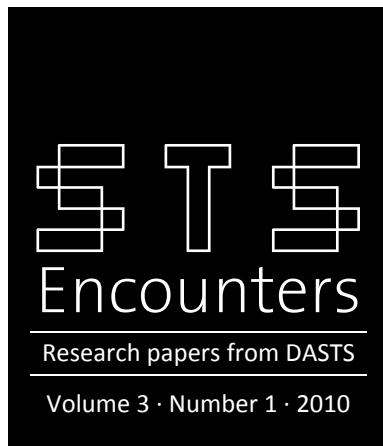
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## **Creative work beyond self-creation**

Filmmakers and films in the making

Sara Malou Strandvad

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# Creative work beyond self-creation

## Filmmakers and films in the making

Sara Malou Strandvad

### Introduction

In the growing body of literature on creative industries, creative work is most often portrayed in terms of self-creation. This portrayal has been accompanied by an on-going debate about whether self-creation in creative work should be characterized as good or bad. Hence, creative work has been described as self-realization (e.g. Caves 2000, Howkins 2001, Florida 2002) or as a more problematic phenomenon resembling self-exploitation (e.g. McRobbie 1998, Banks 2007). While these stances in the debate disagree in their evaluations, they share the premise that creative work consists in self-creation.

However, this paper puts forward the suggestion that there is more to creative work than the creation of oneself. Illustrated with examples from two studies of Danish filmmakers; an interview study with fifteen up-coming Danish film directors and a case study of the development of five film projects, the paper discusses the limitations of seeing creative work solely as self-creation, and suggests an alternative route of turning the discussion about creative work in a sociomaterial direction.<sup>1</sup> Arguing that the evolving product should not be considered a side effect of creative work but rather its rationale, the paper suggests incorporating materiality in the analysis accord-

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<sup>1</sup> The two studies were conducted by the author in 2004 and 2006-2007 respectively. All quotes from the studies have been translated from Danish by the author. All persons and projects have been anonymized on request of the informants.

ingly. Hence, the paper proposes to understand creative work as a matter of working with materials.

To carry through this argument, the paper is divided in three sections. The first section introduces the dualistic paradigm of self-creation, which characterizes accounts of creative work. This dualistic tradition has historic roots in the writings of Marx and is nowadays represented in accounts that subscribe to Foucauldian frameworks. The first section is rounded off with a critique of the dualistic paradigm; arguing that it produces a reductionist portrayal of creative work as it overlooks that which is being produced.

Secondly, a section looks at the agency of creative products. This section starts from accounts that thematize the attractiveness of creative products; the concepts of the flâneur and the voyeur that point to the pleasure which derive from film products, and Benjamin's concept of aura that gives an explanation of how pleasure of art is brought about. Using these descriptions of the effects of the product as stepping stones, this section subsequently turns to the proponents of the sociomaterial perspective; Antoine Hennion, Bruno Latour and Alfred Gell, who propose, contrary to Benjamin's claim that mechanical reproduction destroy the uniqueness of art; that it is techniques which create the magic of art.

In the third section of the paper, the sociomaterial perspective is illustrated with two empirical examples. Based on Hennion's concept of mediation, the section analyzes development of film projects as a process of concretizing and thereby creating ideas. In this analysis, creative work is portrayed as a collective process that centers on materializing objects. Thus, the section suggests seeing creative work and objects as co-produced; mutually constitutive.

The paper concludes that the sociomaterial perspective exceeds the paradigm of self-creation. By bringing the evolving product into focus, the sociomaterial perspective looks at how transformations take place. In this optic, self-creation is an additional outcome of the working process, not its core. Thus, the paper suggests that the sociomaterial perspective furthers the focus on creative work by call-

ing attention to how materials and techniques are assembled in creative work practices.

## The dualistic paradigm of self-creation

“Interviewer: Is there something I have overlooked, which you think is important I take in?”

Up-coming film director: No, I don't think so. What should that be? [13 seconds of silence] Yes, there is, there was just something I was thinking, yes. No, but yes, but I think, I think that, somehow I think that once you are in it, then I think there is so much necessity in doing it, in doing it and getting permission to do it. Once you have gotten that ambition or that thought one time, well, then I think that it is terribly difficult to let go of. I can see like, I think that it is actually what I think is the most difficult about it. [...] The hunger for realizing yourself in it, right. [...] I think that is one of the slightly more ugly things in it, or more dangerous things, right. Because it may involve that if one does not succeed then one becomes bitter, right.

Interviewer: Yes.

Up-coming film director: And angry with one's life, if one does not succeed. That is kind of the other side to it. But then it is also fantastic when it does succeed, right.”

(Quote from interview study, director a).

From this quote it appears that self-creation is indeed an important aspect of creative work. The young film director claims that creative

work is addictive as it entails a need for self-realization which may even become an obsession. The addiction to the work is upheld by the prospect of success, but the hope for success may lead to failure and disappointment. Nevertheless, in the end of the quote, the young film director maintains that the possibility for experiencing wonderful success in the work subsists. By drawing this conclusion, the young film director confirms the assumption that the work implies an attractiveness which surpasses critical reflection and forms a self-sustaining rationale.

To understand the obsession for realizing oneself in creative work, the paradigm of self-creation may be a relevant optic since it portrays creative work as an activity that preoccupies and forms the individual. As another young director describes creative work: “*It costs an unreasonably lot, it costs your life, right*” (Quote from interview study, director b). Creative work is not just an activity; it becomes a dominating personal need. Accordingly, it seems relevant to conceptualize this work as the creation of oneself.

The paradigm of perceiving creative work in terms of self-creation has deep theoretical roots and is characterized by the dualism of positive contra negative self-creation; self-fulfillment versus self-delusion. Since Marx introduced the fundamental difference between wage labor in capitalist society and the human species-being as *homo faber*, two differing approaches to interpreting creative work have been competing. On the one hand, creative work in neo-liberal Western societies can be seen as a version of capitalism that alienates humans from their needs and nature. On the other hand, creative work can be seen as a refuge from the capitalist wage labor system that provides access to a shared human nature, because it is a productive activity which is not conducted for an economic purpose (Engels & Marx 1976/1851).

Whereas some inheritors of Marx have emphasized the dystopian view, others have stressed the optimistic outlook on creative work. The dystopian view is represented by the Frankfurt school writers Adorno and Horkheimer who perceive cultural production under

capitalism as an industry that deceives its consumers of exactly that which it promises them; emancipation from the trivial everyday life as wage laborer (1947/2002). Although Adorno and Horkheimer do not isolate the issue of work in the culture industry, their analysis implies that creative work can be seen as an alienated form of labor which enhances the capitalist mode of production and simultaneously destroys the sphere of art. Yet, Adorno and Horkheimer hold out the prospect of another form of creative work; artistic creation, which reveals and opposes the alienating character of the capitalist mode of production. Furthermore, the optimistic interpretation of creative work can be found in the writings of the situationist movement that portray creative work as an emancipative and subversive activity (Debord 1967/2004, Vaneigem 1967/2001, Plant 1992). The situationists describe creative practices as subversive in contrast to the capitalist production of cultural products. By rejecting wage labor and bringing artistic creation into everyday life, the situationists propose to turn creativity towards the goal of initiating a revolt against capitalist society.

Although Adorno and Horkheimer highlight the dystopian view on the culture industry whereas the situationists propose an optimistic outlook on creativity, both perspectives are based on, and reproduce, the same dualism. In that way, the internal opposition between an emancipative and an alienating form of creative work is continued by these inheritors of Marx.

In the tradition from Marx to the Frankfurt school and the situationist movement, the character of creative work is identified by the mode of production. Paid creative work under capitalism is considered to be entirely different from creative work as a voluntary activity that is carried out without an economic purpose. Thereby, the formation of the subject; the alienating or emancipative effects of creative work, is portrayed in relation to economic structures.

Contrary to the structural macro approach which is prioritized in the Marxist tradition, recent explanations of creative work have applied the writings of the late Foucault that concentrate specifically

on the formation of the subject (e.g. McRobbie 1998, Staiger 2003). In opposition to the Marxist diagnosis that wage labor under capitalism is inhuman because it eliminates the possibility for realization of the inner self, Foucault's approach is an exploration of how the subject is invented which emphasizes that becoming a subject is not necessarily liberating. Thus, the self-creating aspect of creative work is highlighted in accounts that use a Foucauldian framework, but without automatically adding positive value to this.

Like previous accounts of creative work, the Foucauldian approaches split in two on the topic of whether self-creation in creative work should be seen as good or bad. On the one hand, Foucault's concept of governmentality has been used to make critical analyses of creative work by McRobbie (1998). Based on Foucault's notion that government in neoliberal democracies is a particular form of power that produces subjects by affiliating itself with and propagating the interests of those who are governed (Foucault 1978/1991), McRobbie explains the motivation of young British fashion designers as self-government; a biopolitical and highly efficient mode of power where people govern themselves. In that optic, the young designers' aspirations lead them to tolerate the insecurity which freelance design jobs imply. Thus, in accordance with other governmentality studies of work life under neo-liberalism, McRobbie's analysis is skeptical of work that is seen to involve self-realization as it is considered to be founded on a subjectivation that is inescapable (Donzelot 1991, Rose 1996, 1999).

On the other hand, the American film theorist Janet Staiger applies Foucault's concept of self-aesthetics to portray creative work as a pleasure-based act of forming one's life (2003). Self-aesthetics; making one's life a work of art, is an idea which Foucault introduces in the second and third volume of *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (1984/1992) and *The Care of the Self* (1984/1990). In contrast to earlier work that primarily demonstrates how discourses and power techniques interpellate the individual and come to operate through the subject, as the concept of self-government exempli-

fies, the concept of self-techniques emphasizes how the subject forms itself. Following this line of thinking, Staiger suggests seeing authoring as *an art of existence*; a technique of the self that consists in creating and recreating oneself as an acting subject. The appealing feature of this approach is, according to Staiger, that it opens the possibility for the subject of taking a number of different subject positions when working creatively; thereby overcoming the ensnaring subjectivation that makes the individual reproduce domination.

Going back to the quote in the beginning of this discussion, it should now be clear that creative work can be seen as a self-formative affair caught between self-exploitation and emancipation. According to the young film director, creative work is addictive and dangerous as it generates a hunger for self-realization in the work; yet these dangers do not outweigh the luring promise of a fantastic state of being if one succeeds. This quote nicely illustrates the dilemma of the dichotomous approaches to creative work as self-creation: Seen from a governmentality perspective, the young film director's description substantiates the claim that aspirations become a principle of self-government which leads to potentially harmful consequences. However, from the perspective of self-aesthetics, the quote shows that the goal of making one's life an aesthetic object is possible, even if there are obstacles on the way. Both descriptions portray creative work as the creation of oneself; yet, they make contradictory evaluations of this diagnosis.

Possibly, the paradigm of self-creation is carried on because it provides a critical edge to otherwise descriptive accounts of creative work. However, the polarized perspectives constitute an unproductive way of framing the subject. First of all, the schism between a positive and a negative approach turns the issue of creative work into a normative matter. Secondly, the ingrained dichotomy of the debate pushes creative work to be catalogued along the lines of one extreme or the other. The alternative of a positive or a negative account positions these perspectives as mutually exclusive, which makes the discussion repetitive.

Finally, and most importantly for the argument in this paper, both the positive and the negative perspective emphasizes the self-formative dimension of creative work, thus neglecting the other outcome of the work; the creative product. Instead of drawing attention to that which the work is about, both the negative and the positive interpretations portray creative work as a matter primarily of working on oneself. In doing so, the work is reduced to self-creation and the objects that the work concerns are mostly excluded from the analysis.

Thus, the framework of self-creation may be useful to gain an understanding of certain self-formative features of creative work. However, it does not address all dimensions. Although creative work entails formative elements it exceeds the paradigm of self-creation, primarily because it is a practice of working with materials to create a product. Hence, it may be fruitful to turn attention to those aspects of creative work that surpass what is discovered by the framework of self-creation.

To lay the foundation of an alternative approach to creative work, the following section looks into the conceptualization of agency of creative products. Two perspectives will be used as stepping stones that build up the relevance of thematizing materiality in creative work before introducing the sociomaterial perspective. First, the concepts of the flâneur and the voyeur are turned to indicate that a certain pleasure infuses not only film spectatorship but also the making of films. Secondly, Benjamin's concept of aura, which draws attention to what technologies do to creative products, is discussed. In opposition to Benjamin's view on the destructiveness of mechanical reproduction, the sociomaterial perspective highlights productive effects of technologies. Hence, attractiveness of creative work is accounted for by proposing that it is the work with materials and technologies which produces the magical aspect of artworks.

## The attractiveness of the work

“Up-coming film director: So when I stood there in the rain and the storm and our lamps were tumbling down and we were standing outside, and a tiny little car we had to make it in where the actors were sitting inside with heat lamps and all sort of things; there I stood and then I thought ‘holy shit man, I am happy right now! Of course this is what I have to do’. I mean it was so obvious, [I was] thinking ‘this is it. This is really the most exciting thing I have ever experienced.’ [Laughs]

Interviewer: Great.

Up-coming film director: Completely soaking wet. It was simply so strange. And I think that it had a lot to do with that collaboration, that focus and concentration which arise while striving to arrive at something very specific. It is extremely interesting, I think. And I think it is really interesting observing everyone being totally, totally, totally like ‘drhh’ [: the sound of concentration] focused in one direction, right. Which ends with being, and you don’t really know what it ends with and it is also, you are standing, floating ‘woohoo’ [: the sound of excitement], you throw yourself into it, kind of into deep water and are standing for a while and can hardly feel your feet. And really, that is also extremely exciting, you know, right. Kind of ‘brhh’ [: the sound of worry] what is happening with this? It’s great. It has some kind of very, very special energy to it. It really does.”

(Quote from interview study, director c).

In the quote here, a young film director describes the first time of directing, which involves an account of the passion in the work. Approaches that focus on self-creation facilitate an understanding of what motivates creative work; why people are attracted to creative industries and why they want to go on with their occupations in these industries. Yet, as the quote here indicates, creative work is not only appealing because it provides a ground for acting upon oneself; in the case of filmmaking it is also a social experience. Moreover, the attractiveness of the work is about something else than its sociality, namely the making of the product; the evolving product, which, according to the young director in the quote, has a certain force to it.

Seen from the perspective of self-creation, the quote above can be read as a statement about the daring experience of nearly losing oneself in the work. As the young director explains, the excitement about the work consists in momentarily losing control; going with the flow of the process, not knowing exactly where it ends. Experiencing oneself in that situation can be understood as a specific type of self-creation; exceeding what one could have imagined by the challenging of oneself.

However, the pleasure of experiencing oneself in challenging and transformative situations occurs in sociomaterial work processes. Going back to the quote, this point can be illustrated when the young film director describes the experience of temporarily losing control and the pleasure it entails. The young film director attaches this emotional experience to the sociality of the collaboration in addition to the setting; the location for the shooting of the film and the technical equipment. By depicting these elements in the surrounding milieu as conditions for experiencing pleasure in the work, the young film director points out that the emotional experience is tied to a social and material foundation.

Clarifying this point, the young film director states that the quality of the work; the intense concentration and thrilling pleasure, arises “*while striving to arrive at something very specific*”; that is, during the

pursuit of the aim of making the film. Thus, the work consists in making a particular product and it is in that activity of bringing the product into being the work gets its distinct character. Based on this account, the young film director concludes that the work contains a particular energy; an exceptional force of excitement.

To explain the energy in the work; the passion which is tied to the evolving product, one possible approach is to transport an analytical framework from the topic of film spectatorship to the issue of filmmaking. Film spectatorship has a long tradition of being conceptualized as a pleasure-based activity where the pleasure derives from the specifics of cinema. Even the most critical account of the film spectator's gaze; the film theorist Laura Mulvey's theory of how the male gaze is prescribed by the camera (1973/2001), maintains the premise that the visual cinematic experience is founded in pleasure. Two key examples of this approach to film spectatorship are the concepts of the flâneur and the voyeur. In addition to characterizing the film spectator as a detached observer who takes pleasure in viewing how others are conducting their social lives, the concepts of the flâneur and the voyeur have been connected to descriptions of the space of cinema as an alternative to everyday life. Both Foucault's concept of heterotopia that characterizes a space of alternate ordering and Bakhtin's concept of carnival which depicts a momentary suspension of the ruling social norms have been put to use to typify the function of cinema (Bruno 1993, Denzin 1995). Thus, the figure of the flâneur or voyeur places the spectator in a context where trivial everyday life is dissolved and substituted with playful and joyful experiences. Thereby, the theories of cinematic spectatorship highlight the pleasure which receivers obtain and locate this sensation in the space of the extraordinary which cinema is said to provide.

If this optic is transferred to the production of films, filmmakers may be seen as subscribing to the same type of pleasure as receivers, and the place of production may be seen as a transgressive space of heterotopic social ordering. In this way, the filmmaker can be cha-

racterized as a flâneur or voyeur whose gaze not only generates a visual world but also takes pleasure in doing so. Furthermore, following this line of thinking, the production of films can be characterized as a spectacle. Drawing these similarities between consumption and production of cultural products makes it possible to identify creative work as pleasurable; an activity that gives access to the same experiences as those of consuming cultural products (du Gay 1996).

Hence, the concepts of the flâneur and the voyeur draw attention to a crucial aspect of filmmaking; the pleasure that is generated not from self-realization but from the material substance of the evolving product. However, these concepts are inadequate to describe the productive activities of filmmaking as they exclusively characterize visual practices of a distant and rather passive observer. As well as the finished film makes visual pleasure obtainable for spectators, the product under development may provide the ground for the passion in the work of filmmakers. That is, the materiality of the film creates access to experiences of pleasure. Thus, the passionate work has to concern something; without materiality the intensity and necessity of the work cannot be upheld.

To understand how the product generates experiences, Benjamin's concept of aura offers a scheme of interpretation, which is a classical way of accounting for the role of technology in creative production (1963/2001, Gumbrecht & Merrinan 2003). According to Benjamin, the performance of an artwork is an authentic act that has its basis in ancient rituals, which gives rise to an aura of the artwork. In Benjamin's optic, the cause of aura implies that mechanical reproduction eliminates the presence of the original and thereby the aura of artworks. Filmmaking, in contrast to theatre, is a key example that Benjamin uses to illustrate how the aura of the product is destroyed. As there is no original performance of a film, since the finished film is the result of editing, film production is inherently aimed at reproduction, and thereby its potential aura is destroyed.



Benjamin's concept of aura provides a springboard for explaining the active status of the evolving film product since it draws attention to the role of technologies. The sociomaterial perspective shares with Benjamin the basic premise that conduction of creative work implies a distinct, attractive and formative element that is founded in the work under construction. However, the sociomaterial perspective completely disagrees with Benjamin's analysis on the central question of the status of techniques that enable reproduction.

In contrast to Benjamin's concept of aura that is a category that he reserves to non-reproductive forms of art, the force of creative work may be said to derive exactly from the assembling of materials and techniques in the work process. Such a sociomaterial alternative to Benjamin's argument is formulated by the French sociologists Antoine Hennion and Bruno Latour (1996/2003), and is also found in the writings of the British cultural anthropologist Alfred Gell (e.g. 1999).

Hennion and Latour criticize Benjamin's concept of aura for being ambivalent. On the one hand aura is a nostalgic portrayal of a lost paradise that existed in former times, on the other hand aura describes an artefact with cult value; a symbol of a religious beyond. This double meaning makes the concept of aura highly dubious, according to Hennion and Latour. Moreover, they claim that artworks are not destroyed but created by techniques that entail mechanical reproduction. One example is music: "*first come infinite repetition, standards, schemes, variations, then come the works*" (2003, p. 94). A second example is the studio. According to Benjamin, the film studio ruins the immediate presence of the actor on the stage. However, according to Hennion and Latour, the camera and the editing are only two instances on a long chain of mediations. Their argument is that a stage performance involves as much technique as studio acting, because both types of creative work involve a series of technical operations. Thus, Hennion and Latour reverse Benjamin's argument when they propose that technique is at the core of all works of art.

In accordance with Hennion and Latour, Gell proposes to consider art as a component of technology; that is, the outcome of a technical process. Yet, Gell moreover suggests that the technical process is what gives art objects their power (1999). According to Gell, the technical process casts a spell over us so that we see the world in an enchanted form. This process of enchantment is portrayed by Gell as a concrete activity of making use of materials and skills that are sometimes performed with virtuosity. Hence, Gell's approach can be seen as an optic that turns Benjamin's notion of aura upside-down, as technology creates the magic of art objects.

Returning to the quote that opened this discussion, the critique of Benjamin provides a basis for understanding the "*very special energy*" which the young film director declares that filmmaking entails. Whereas the concept of aura is an unclear term and a contradictory term to use to describe the power of film; the sociomaterial approach provides a perspective that considers the force of the work of filmmaking to be deriving from the use of techniques and materials. Thus, when the young filmmaker explains, in the beginning of the quote, that the film is made in a tiny car with heat lamps around it that are tumbling down as it is raining and storming, these physical features are central to the account of how the work has a certain energy to it. Not only is the physical setting creating a demanding job which is fulfilling to accomplish, the technique of filmmaking is also transforming a real situation into fiction which is an exciting process of enchantment.

Another young film director explains about the attraction to the work:

"Also that thing about when you are on a film set, right. It can be magical, magical, right. I mean, that you are on the set and it is evening and the light is fucking beautiful; around the place there is completely quiet and eve-

ryone is deeply concentrated, right. And then you have to make this one little thing work, right.”

(Quote from interview study, director a).

In accordance with the previous director, this film director describes the attractiveness of filmmaking in relation to the material conditions under which the product is made and the collective attention to the creation of the product. Yet, the particular quality of the work is not equal to the ambience of the place where the film is being made; the atmosphere of a beautiful sunset and shared concentration. Rather, the distinct feature arises when the filmmakers work under these conditions.

Whereas the previous director spoke of a “*very special energy*” in the work, this young film director characterizes the work as “*magical*”. Thus, this director emphasizes that the distinct feature of the work is magic, which can be understood by reference to Gell’s concept of enchantment. According to Gell, the techniques and skills which are used to make an artwork bring about a transformation that enchants the product. Thus, the magic of the work is not a mystical occurrence, as the concept of aura indicates; it is a feature that is constructed by means of technical equipment and competences. The young film directors’ accounts resemble Gell’s view as they explain that it is the work itself that is magical. In their accounts, the attractiveness of the work stems from the activity of constructing specific products; the exceptional and exciting experiences occur as this is happening.

The next section substantiates the claim that creative work may be seen as a sociomaterial practice. To do so, examples from the case of development in filmmaking are employed.

## The techniques of mediation

”Director: I want to place it in a single-family house area.

Producer: Mmm [: the sound of understanding], the window blinds.

Director: [Continues the description of the location], it gives a great pressure on the person who wants to change gender.

Producer: Do you think it is more interesting with a woman that wants to become a man?

Director: Yes. [...] Who could write it except the most obvious ones? [They discuss various screenwriters] I come to think of *The Hours*, that mood, perhaps.

Producer: Yes, it could be close to that universe.

Director: What do you think about that?

Producer: It’s close to what we have been talking about before. I think it’s great. But it’s a big job; it’s a big job how to convince us that she is a man.”

(Observation notes, project a).

The notes here stem from a development meeting between a film director and a film producer who have decided to make a project together. The meeting takes place nine months after they have initiated a process, when still no storyline has been written down. As the observation notes illustrate, the development meeting unfolds as a dialogue where the director presents ideas and the producer reacts. The producer’s response makes the director go on exploring ideas.

In that way the dialogue between the director and the producer creates a storyline of the film in its initial form.

In the above case, the idea for the film is about a woman who changes gender. As the producer concludes, the task is to make that idea into a credible story. Hence, the work of developing the idea consists in testing how to show a gender bender. To construct a plot, the filmmakers draw on all imaginable means. In the quote, for example, window blinds, screenwriters and the movie *The Hours* are put to use. By attaching the theme of gender transformation to objects and human collaborators, the idea becomes concrete. Thus, the development work alters the idea from having a broad and vague scope to becoming defined and delimited.

When picturing the location in a single-family house area, window blinds become props to illustrate reserved manners. While window blinds back up the idea about transforming gender, they also twist that idea in a particular direction. Similarly, the discussion about finding a screenwriter represents an attempt to progress the idea, yet the screenwriter is also expected to alter the story. Finally, *The Hours* is applied as a reference for the project, which influences the impression of the idea. Thus, the story is created by putting these means into action. Rather than transplanting a vision into the world, the idea for the film is composed as it is worked upon (see also Strandvad 2009).

To understand the mixture of means that create a process of transformation which constructs the evolving product, it is useful to draw on the concept of mediation. In the sociomaterial perspective, as it is presented by Hennion, creative work consists in mediations (1989, 1995, 1997). Mediators can be any object and activity, which is necessary for the execution of creative work. According to Hennion, mediators create artworks. In that way, the sociomaterial perspective opposes the view that mediators can be seen as neutral transfer mechanisms that channel predefined visions. Rather, Hennion suggests that mediators are active producers (see also Yaneva 2003).

As the above example illustrated, imagined props, potential collaborators and existing artworks become mediators during the dialogue of developing the idea for the film. Hence, development is not solely a discursive activity, but also a material affair. To clarify this point, an additional quote will serve as an example. Whereas the previous project was in its early stage, another project group is close to starting filming after a year of development. To have their project green lighted, the group attends a meeting with a film consultant and the film consultant's producer at the Danish Film Institute. At this meeting, practicalities of the film are accentuated:

Film consultant's producer: What about furniture, is there already some [on the location]?

Producer: Yes, but it's trashed, it looks like the place was left in the middle of a war. [...]

Film consultant: Remember you can do a lot with books from the recycling station. [...]

Film consultant's producer: Get a concept with the photographer about the costumes. [Jokes and laughter about the clothes of the people in the film]

Film consultant: And people are wearing the same clothes through the whole film.

Director: Yes.

Film consultant: It's only [the name of a character] who should [change and] have a yellow color of deceitfulness on."

(Observation notes, project b).

By calling attention to furniture, books and costumes, the film consultant and the film consultant's producer underline the importance of materials which make the look of the film. Practicalities such as using recycled books and furniture that already exists on the location construct the film visually. Moreover, materials used in designing the film also influence the content. When, for instance, a dubious character wears a color that symbolizes duplicity, the costume constitutes the storyline. In that way, material objects employed as visual features can be described as mediators that alter the story.

Since it highlights materialization, the concept of mediation draws attention to how products are heterogeneously constructed (Hennion 1995, Yaneva 2003). Yet, moreover, the work itself also comes to be seen as a construct, delimited by the evolving product. Rather than proposing a causal relation between creative work and cultural products, where objects are effects of social interaction, the sociomaterial perspective suggests seeing objects and their use as mutually constitutive (see also Latour 2005). Creative work not only consists in constructing objects; these also become active participants in the collaboration of their making. By providing that which the work is about, the evolving product becomes involved in the collaboration and prescribes certain kinds of action. Thus, creative work and cultural products are co-produced; simultaneously and reciprocally constructed (Hennion 2001, 2007).

## Concluding remarks

In this paper, the argument has been made that the dichotomous paradigm of good versus bad self-creation is a prevailing but reductionist way of approaching the issue of creative work. The paradigm of self-creation is inadequate as it reinforces the alternative of categorizing creative work as either emancipation or exploitation, which comes to overshadow empirical studies of the subject matter. More-

over, both sides in the dichotomy reduce creative work to subjective development; work on one's self. This means that the object of creative work; the evolving product, is excluded from the analysis.

As an alternative, the paper has proposed the sociomaterial perspective. Contrary to the focus on the individual, which the paradigm of self-creation maintains, the sociomaterial perspective ascribes relevance and explanatory power to the interwoven material and social components of creative work.

To account for the potentials in the sociomaterial perspective, the paper has given two examples of what this approach offers. First, the paper has looked at the attractiveness of creative work. Bringing theories of film spectatorship in as a tool for arguing that a certain pleasure arises from experiencing the product not only during the consumption but also during the making of films, the paper raises the question of how this effect of the work can be conceptualized. Whereas the classical explanation from Benjamin states that the aura of the cultural product is destroyed by mechanical reproduction, proponents of the sociomaterial perspective; Bruno Latour, Antoine Hennion and Alfred Gell, argue the opposite; namely, that technologies bring about the magic in creative work. Hence, the sociomaterial approach explains pleasure of creative work by drawing attention to technology of enchantment; the magic which the work practices create.

Next, the paper has illustrated how the evolving product is formed by mediators. Based on Hennion's proposal that creative work is about making mediations, the paper has exemplified this in development of films projects. In these examples, mediators such as props and costumes clarify and constitute the evolving product. Thus, mediation concretizes the evolving product and by doing so the product is transformed and brought into existence. Furthermore, the paper has suggested that the evolving product thereby becomes involved in the collective process of its making. Hence, creative work and cultural products are portrayed as co-produced; mutually constitutive.

As the two examples of the sociomaterial approach illustrate, it is a perspective that is not restricted to deal only with the subjective aspect of creative work. Rather, the sociomaterial perspective has a broad scope that exceeds the paradigm of self-creation as it looks into the social and material components of production of culture. From this perspective, the production of the individual is considered a complementary outcome of the process of creative work. This means that the paradigm of self-creation can be seen as identifying one possible outcome of the process, but not the process of creative work as such. Calling attention to the pleasure or trouble of experiencing oneself in challenging and transformative situations does not explain how such situations are established; not does it account for what else they generate.

The sociomaterial view on the status of the individual in creative work can be elaborated by making a comparison to the status of the product. In the sociomaterial perspective, the product becomes an actor based on the assemblage of techniques, skills, people and materials that produce it. As the product derives agency from its constructedness, the active status of the product does not imply an ontology of 'the product itself'; a sovereign work of art. Simultaneously, the sociomaterial perspective de-individualizes the process of creative work. In opposition to portraying creative work as an individual's vision, which is materialized with the assistance of support personnel, techniques and materials, the sociomaterial perspective demonstrates how the product is formed by the mediations which it undergoes. Thus, by suspending the notion of a pure original of the work, the sociomaterial perspective also deconstructs the idea of an originating creative individual. This deconstruction does not lead to a rejection of human agency; however, it widens the analytical focus from being centered on individual agents to incorporate the series of mediations which creative work entails.

Idea development represents the phase in filmmaking that involves the smallest amount of materials, equipment and people. Hence, if the sociomaterial perspective is useful to gain an under-

standing of this stage, it may be relevant for understanding other parts and types of creative work as well. Even creativization of ordinary jobs, which the discourse on the creative class and the experience economy stimulates, can be approached with this framework, and perhaps seen as nothing more than discursive activities emphasizing self-exploration. Hence, by calling attention to that which the work consists in, the sociomaterial perspective may fuel a critical alternative to the monotonous discussion about self-development in creative work.

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