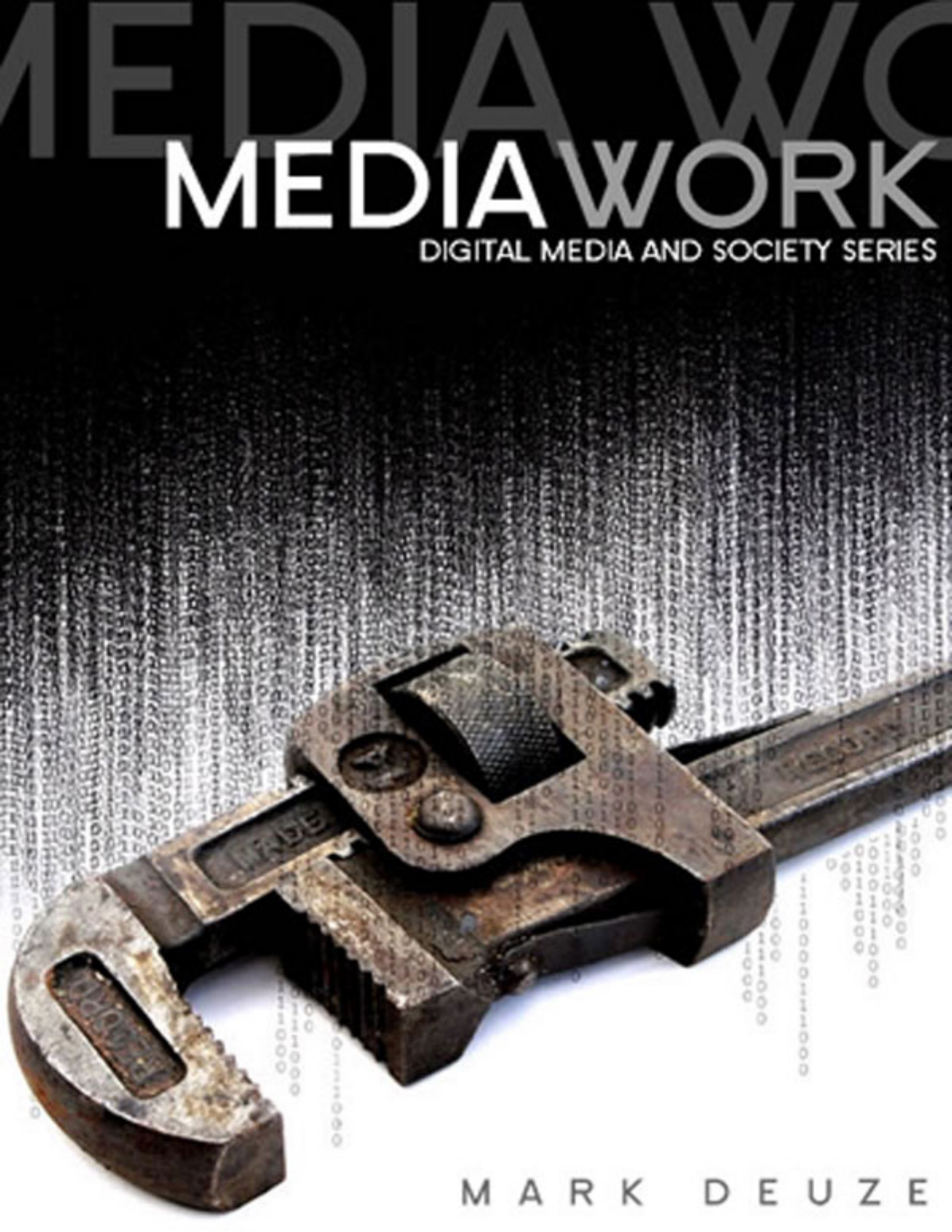
MEDIA WORK

DIGITAL MEDIA AND SOCIETY SERIES



MARK DEUZE

Media Work

Digital Media and Society Series

New technologies are fundamentally altering the ways in which we communicate. This series from Polity aims to provide a set of books that make available for a broad readership cutting edge research and thinking on digital media and their social contexts. Taken as a whole, the series will examine questions about the impact of network technology and digital media on society in all its facets, including economics, culture and politics.

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Media Work

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Contents

Preface

Manpower is a temporary employment agency founded in the United States in 1948, and currently operates over 4,400 offices in seventy-two countries and territories. The company offers permanent, temporary, and contract recruitment, employee assessment and selection, as well as training, outplacement, outsourcing, and consulting services to hundreds of thousands of enterprises.[1] *Manpower's* corporate slogan – "creating opportunities for all people to participate in the workforce" – sounds like an empowering rallying cry for all who want to be employed, who want to be able to participate in the global economy. At the same time, the enormous success of agencies such as *Manpower* signal a world of work that provides anything but security, stability, or guarantees for participation. This world of work thrives on contingency: whatever happens today has few or no predictable consequences for what will most likely happen tomorrow. One's future – as a contracted employee and thus as a successful consumer – is structurally dependent on something not yet certain. Work is conditional, but the conditions for work are beyond your control. You can excel in what you do today, but if investors pull out tomorrow – you are without a job. You can have a brilliant moment during a meeting on Friday, but if on Saturday the stock of your company collapses, you will find yourself checking *Monster.com* – a jobhunting site with affiliates in twenty-one countries – on Monday.

What people are doing online is a good indicator of how everyday life for a working professional (or those seeking to become one) in today's new capitalist economy has changed. It is not just work that has become contingent – contingency stretches across all walks of life and impacts all

social institutions. A growing number of singles – quickly becoming the dominant species in contemporary society – seek, and sometimes find, love online. A popular online matchmaking service, *Match.com*, launched in 1995, currently has more than fifteen million members in more than 240 territories on six continents, and operates more than thirty online dating sites in seventeen local languages.[2] Finding love online gets mediated by simple mathematical formulas linking one's self-reported and constantly tweaked or updated characteristics and preferences to those of millions of others, thereby making the selection process of a mate contingent as well. Other popular sites online combine matchmaking, employment-seeking and other social networking-based services, effectively enacting the convergence of all walks of life. An illustrative example of such hybrid and interconnected online services is *MySpace.com*, a social networking website offering its approximately seventy million registered users blogs, profiles, groups, photos, music, videos, and an internal e-mail system. *MySpace* was acquired by Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorporation in July 2005. By March 2006 the social network was growing by an average of 250,000 new members daily.[3]

Manpower, *Monster*, *Match*, and *MySpace* are not examples of a life increasingly lived online – but rather must be seen as case studies of how contemporary life gets expressed through (new) media. Such a life is deeply connected to other people's lives all over the world, yet socially isolated at the same time as life's context has become contingent. Social bonds get expressed through all kinds of networked media at home, at work, and at play. The personal computer, the cell phone and the (portable) game console signify a world saturated by media where age-old ideas of what it means to be part of a community, to have a job or to pursue happiness have become unstable and uncertain. Media are not just pervasive and ubiquitous – we

also develop intense relationships with our media. Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass (1996) have shown how people treat and respond to media artifacts (computers, televisions, cell phones, and so on) in just the same way as they treat and respond to other people in everyday social interaction. The rules which people apply to everyday social interaction apply equally well to their interactions with media. These interactions are increasingly shaping and influencing almost every kind of social arrangement: how and where we work, we communicate and socialize, we play. In doing so, we apply to mediated experiences the same rules and conventions as to face-to-face or otherwise "real" experiences.

The seamless and generally taken for granted nature of media in everyday life to some extent explains how our use of media often disappears: when asked, people tend to grossly underestimate how much time they spend with media. Contemporary media usage studies in wired countries such as Japan, the United States, The Netherlands, or Finland tend to reveal that people spend twice as much time with media than they think they do – up to twelve hours a day. Media have become such an integrated part of our lives that most of the time we are not even aware we are using media. American researchers describe this kind of almost constant immersion with media technologies and content from multiple sources simultaneously available through shared or shifting attention as concurrent media exposure, rather than popular industry-terms such as media multitasking or simultaneous media usage, emphasizing how important it is to avoid implying that our engagement with media is necessarily deliberate or attentive (Papper *et al*. 2004). It has become automatic.

All of this ultimately means that an understanding of what people do in their everyday lives must take note of the crucial role media play therein. Media do not just influence us in terms of how we spend most of our time, how we

organize and give meaning to our social networks, or what we may think about world events; media have also become a crucial part of today's global economy. The industry of media – from the revenues it generates, the ways it manages its workflows to the particular kinds of people employed as culture creators – can be seen as a role model or benchmark of how the globalizing economy is organizing itself. Some of the key elements of what it is like to work in the media today are symptomatic of how people all over the world are increasingly experiencing their work-lives. Understanding media is much more than being able to wield a remote control, to navigate the features of a personal computer successfully, or to get reliable results using an online search engine. It is also more than being able to read between the lines of a newspaper article, or to decode the subtle seductions of a television commercial or soap opera cliffhanger. Understanding media must include a critical awareness of the particular characteristics of making media. This not just to inform and assist those vying for a successful career as a reporter, advertising creative, television producer, or game developer. This to empower anyone entering the current and near future global cultural economy, where media as ubiquitous and pervasive devices, as tools for social organization and as accelerators of everyday experiences provide the dominant frame of reference for what Zygmunt Bauman (2005b) effectively describes as contemporary "liquid life."

The basis of my argument in *Media Work* is the notion that the current lives of people all over the world and most particularly in Western capitalist democracies cannot be understood without an understanding of media – albeit not so much through the content of media, but through the way all elements of work are organized in media as an industry. Following the work of Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) and others, I consider the management of creativity, the culturalization of work, and the processes of giving meaning

to one's professional identity in the creative industries (of which media are part) crucial indicators for life as lived in contemporary liquid modernity. This is a time where most people experience their lives as a perpetual whitewater, living in a state of constant flux and uncertainty. In order to get at the heart of the human condition in the context of a life lived through, or rather: *in* the media, I primarily lean on the social theory of Zygmunt Bauman.[4] Bauman was born (1925) in Poland and, since 1971, has resided in Leeds, England. Although he has been a prolific author for most of his career, his works since the late 1990s on the human condition in contemporary late, second or what he calls "liquid" modernity strike at the essence of what it means to live in the world today. During the process of writing *Media Work* professor Bauman was kind enough to see me at his home (on 29 May 2006), which interview significantly helped me on my way. Throughout the book I reference his work as a means to ground my analyses about media and society in the increasingly fluid and unstable character of everyday lived experience – both as a reminder of the fleeting nature of my assumptions and the complex and multiple meanings my concepts and arguments have for the people involved: media workers.

In this book I explain and contextualize the changing nature of media work: what it is like to work in the media today, and how the particular organization of work shapes the professional identity of those employed in the creative industries. I assume how these people manage and give meaning to their life through their work has something to say for all of us, as the current global economy in what most call our information age increasingly turns towards (the production of) culture to reorganize the status quo. Although media work gets carried out in a bewildering variety of contexts, my analysis focuses primarily on those markets, companies, and professionals directly involved in the creative process of making what is called "mainstream

news” in journalism, “tentpole movies” in the film industry, and “triple A titles” in computer and video game development. Based on a review of the scholarly and trade literatures, practitioner and journalistic weblogs and e-zines, and in-depth interviews with media workers in five countries (Finland, The Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States), I deconstruct what media work means in the four key media professions: advertising (including marketing communications and public relations), journalism, film and television production, and computer and video game development. The interviews were conducted by the students in my classes, and in the classes of my colleagues and friends in these countries: Risto Kunelius (Finland), Addie de Moor (The Netherlands), Verica Rupar (New Zealand), and Herman Wasserman (South Africa).

The aim of the book is not only to prepare media students to become competent media practitioners, but to also enable students to become competent citizens in a media-saturated “hyper-reality,” where meaningful distinctions between public and private life, work time and non-work time, local and global, or lived and mediated reality are fading. Studying and understanding the issues framing the way people inside of the media industry give meaning to their “work-styles” provides a window to a world that is quickly becoming culturalized: an economy in which culture has grown into a vehicle of and for economic interests. The structure of the book moves from a broad macro-level overview of the social, cultural, economical and technological developments currently disrupting and shaping much of everyday life in (over-)developed nations around the world to a detailed micro-level analysis of the work-styles of individuals in the games, film, television, advertising, and game industries.

My work on this book has benefited greatly from the input, feedback, encouragement, criticism, and storytelling of many friends and colleagues currently employed as media

workers or engaged in the academic investigation of media production. I am extremely grateful for their comments and deeply indebted to their work. It has been an absolute privilege to research and write this book and thus be able to connect with some many amazing and brilliant people. First of all my thanks to Zygmunt Bauman, whose work – even though he doubts that I can make such an assertion before I am an old man – fundamentally influenced and shaped my view of the world and my potential role in it. Another major source of intellectual stimulation and mentorship is Henry Jenkins, whom I cannot thank enough for his encouragement in engaging with the material in this book. A third colleague I would like to single out is Henk Blanken, who is a constant source of insight and enthusiasm. This book has benefited greatly from our concurrent work on *PopUp* (2007), which book was an absolute joy to co-author with him. Beyond interviews, numerous media professionals made the kind effort to read through critically and discuss my chapters on their respective fields of work: Brian Steward, Joan Johnson, Paul Caine, Hans van Gils, Heather Scott, Tonya Maxwell, Christian Allen, Jason Della Rocca, and Steven Krahnke. On the academic side, I am indebted to the insights and comments from Harmeet Sawhney, David Waterman, Lee Sheldon, Addie de Moor, Jaap de Jong, Verica Rupar, Herman Wasserman, Koos Zwaan, Chase Bowen Martin, Jennifer Johns, Aphra Kerr, Susan Christopherson, John Hartley, Toby Miller, Carlos Volkmer Castillo, Risto Kunelius, and David Domingo. I also would like to thank the people at Polity for their enthusiasm and hard work on this project and the Digital Media and Society series, particularly Andrea Drugan and Susan Beer. Finally my thanks to Betsi and Martha for their patience with my endless rants about all the ways in which our scholarly discipline faithfully ignores, unfairly criticizes, or simply misrepresents the lived reality of media work.

CHAPTER ONE

Liquid Life, Work, and Media

In contemporary society, argues Zygmunt Bauman, work is the normal state of all humans; not working is abnormal.[1] Life has come to mean: work. People spend more time in institutions of higher education hoping to have a better chance in the highly competitive global economy. Work dominates our thinking about life. Choosing not to work is not an option, and the unemployed tend to be seen as people who either need our help (to be schooled or retrained for necessary jobs as defined by current market demand), or deserve our loathing (as those who do not pay taxes, and exploit the welfare system of the state). People's efforts and energy go into developing a blend of work and lifestyle: a workstyle, where life becomes a way of working and a way of being at work.[2] Ulrich Beck (2000) points at the fundamentally ambivalent prospects of current "workstyles" as marked by uncertainty, paradox, and risk. The risk of finding and keeping a job has become a strictly individual risk, as most governments and employers in the world today are retreating from collectively negotiated labor and welfare regulations, instead focusing on keeping a core of experienced employees and outsourcing, off-shoring, or sub-contracting work. Indeed, tem porary employment agencies today are among the largest employers in the world. Contemporary workstyles are best understood in a contemporary context where, as Gillian Ursell (2000: 805) writes, the size of permanent staffs quickly diminishes, casualization of the labor force increases, entry to the labor market is more difficult and less well rewarded or supported,

average earnings have dropped, and working terms and conditions continue to deteriorate.

People in all sectors of the economy have to come to terms with the challenges and opportunities of contingent employment, precarious labor, and an overall sense of real or perceived job insecurity. Work has become contingent, as the success in keeping a job increasingly depends on developments beyond the control of employee or employer: the fluctuations of the global economy, the unpredictability of the wants and needs of consumers, the rapid shifts in new technologies for the workplace, and in-vogue management styles aiming for short-term innovation and change rather than long-term investment or the cultivation of routine. Labor has become precarious, as it seems to be disappearing fast: it is off-shored to different parts of the world as businesses go global, it gets augmented or automated by sophisticated technologies, and it is temporary as production processes fragment across multiple places and professionals. This does not mean people cannot find solid jobs anymore, nor that everyone must accept that getting fired is an inevitable part of what being employed is all about. It does mean that most if not all people feel their job is continuously on the line (even when such a fear is produced by a manufactured insecurity generated by increasingly market-driven policies and proclamations of prominent politicians). As Joan Greenbaum (2004) argues, since the 1990s the link between jobs and secure employment has been permanently cut.

Fueling people's fear for their career are trends in economic policies around the world, as the governments and employers of the twenty-first century tend to favor a further deregulation or outright cancellation of welfare, benefits, and other types of support for workers. This effectively shifts the provision of these services to external parties, such as commercial companies. Individual employees have become personally responsible for

negotiating, securing, and maintaining their own individual support structures. In doing so, individuals cannot turn anywhere else for help – unless they are willing to pay for this help out of their own pocket, and take matters into their own hands. Fueling this trend are policies in for example the United States and Great Britain that transfer welfare into "workfare," where those who cannot find jobs and seek state support are placed in unpaid positions with public agencies. Such practices essentially create free labor for the state in return for benefits, and contribute to a gradual phasing out of full-time jobs by public agencies, hiring workfare participants instead. In countries like Denmark and The Netherlands a notion of "flexicurity" has become a political staple since the late 1990s in an attempt to strike a balance between workforce flexibility and social security. The policy combines unemployment benefits with imposed reeducation programs and guided job searches.[3] Contemporary labor laws enable companies to use temporary employment contracts more (and much easier) than they could in the past without being necessarily required to hire permanent workers. Similarly, politicians in developed nations tend to advocate delays in the pensionable age of workers as a solution to the rapid aging of the world population, coupled with what Chris Wilson (2001) considers a global demographic convergence of declining mortality and fertility rates in rich as well as developing countries. Not only do these developments emphasize the centrality of work to a contemporary understanding of life, it also reminds us of how, following Beck, the risks involved with survival in today's society are redistributed away from the state and the economy towards the individual. The relationship between employers and the employed has become based on individualized, short-term, and contingent contracts rather than on companies assuming some kind of formal responsibility for the permanent employment and career development of the

worker. This system has increased competition between individual workers for jobs, instead of between companies for laborers, which process keeps average wages down, and increases an overall sense of insecurity among especially younger workers and junior employees.

Individualization in the Information Age

In the information age, the individual carries the brunt of the weight of finding, negotiating, and securing employment. However, it is a mistake to attribute this shift in social responsibility solely to global market forces and government deregulation under the influence of multinational corporations, as much of this trend is also fueled by the ongoing individualization of society. There are two key aspects to this kind of contemporary individualization. First, individualization refers to the fragility, transformation, and even disintegration of traditional social institutions – such as class, gender roles, family, and community. Second, it involves increasing demands being put on individuals by a rapidly globalizing society. One aspect is supercharged by the other, further amplified by the emergence of an increasingly critical and self-aware citizenry. These kind of individualized options regarding work are indeed not just forced upon employees by their managers or employers; the same practice works the other way around as professionals – especially in the knowledge and information industries – are demanding so-called “flexitime” working schedules or other perks particular to their personal demands. Flexitime allows an employee to select the hours he or she will work, within certain limits specified by the employer. Flexitime can be seen as benefiting dual career couples, workers who want to take care of elderly family members, or people working in industries that operate on a transnational scale, thus needing to be flexible regarding the hours they

participate working in teams of people in different parts of the world. Other examples of increasingly flexible working arrangements are telework and telecommuting, jobsharing arrangements, and a gradual introduction of on-site daycare. Such increased variability in working hours contributes to the blurring of the boundaries between work and private life. Although the degree to which companies have been able or willing to organize their management practices to fit flexitime demands differs widely, and it is clearly not a type of alternate work arrangement that is preferred by everyone equally, it is important to note here that this trend amplifies the ongoing individualization of work, as well as a rapid decline of any traditional understanding of the stable, lifelong “nine-to-five” career protected by the long-term investment of a company or public agency. In traditional definitions, the organization is seen as a collectivity working towards a common goal according to a formal and rather bureaucratic social structure. This notion of organization today seems a thing of the past. In a critical review of contemporary organization theory, Campbell Jones and Rolland Munro (2005) for example come to the conclusion that the contemporary responsibility for organization – as well as the accountability for its consequences – is increasingly being passed to the figure of the individual.

The global shift towards individual and institutional individualization pervades all aspects of everyday life – where “the way individual people define individually their individual problems and try to tackle them deploying individual skills and resources is the sole remaining ‘public issue’ and the sole object of ‘public interest’” (Bauman 2000, p. 72). The individual has become the center of all things, and the way workstyles have evolved in the course of the last century matches this development. One particularly unfortunate consequence this has is a widening gap between the rich and poor. The global economy has

swept up everyone in its wake, providing opportunities for production and consumption for people across the planet, while at the same time increasing the risks for those people in finding and securing employment or sustaining their families as their plight is increasingly dependent on the fluctuations of a worldwide marketplace. For most people life seems reasonably comfortable, moving from job to job and place to place in an attempt to secure and sustain a position somewhere in the middle class. Yet their workstyles have become a delicate balancing act between keeping up with the rest or slipping away into what Bauman sees as a global underclass of “flawed consumers.” Bauman refers to the growing numbers of people unable to respond to the seductive expectations of the global marketplace where their individual freedom gets solely defined in terms of consumer choice. It does not seem to take much today to disappear into the void of permanent precariousness, unpaid workfare, and thus flawed consumption; consider for example job destruction because of “de-industrialization” (for instance when factories are relocated from towns in Europe and North-America to cheaper sites in South-East Asia and South America), flexicurity laws that accelerate hiring and firing decisions, and ongoing technology-driven reskilling and deskilling practices that favor the few that can adapt while making others obsolete.

The worldwide shift towards individualized societies has particular consequences for the way people relate to each other. According to Robert Putnam (2004), since the last few decades of the twentieth century people around the world have started to withdraw from participating in social institutions such as political parties, religious institutions, as well as from subscription-based news media, large-scale voluntary associations and organized group sports. This does not mean people do not vote, worship, read a newspaper, or engage in league bowling anymore. It does suggest that if we do, we tend to do it whenever we feel like

it – rather than because of our membership of a certain collective. This makes our behavior towards such institutions irregular, sporadic, unpredictable, and ultimately dependent on our personal wants and needs. The individual can thus be seen as the sole reference point for any and all decisions to be made regarding one's life – and living this life now relies on our ability to work. This disconnection between people as individuals and institutions in society as a collective certainly seems to make our world much smaller. Most people live their lives in this context reflexively, directly responding to whatever is happening at home, work, or play without taking (or getting) the time to think and reflect upon their predicament. This has introduced a distinct element of restlessness in our everyday life. People tend to make sense of their lifeworld by reacting to the issues they face on the basis of the know-how of the day, "by what people can do and how they usually go about doing it" (Bauman 2000, p. 56). As Richard Rorty (1999) suggests, whatever the ruling consensus at any given moment in time – it is generally not the best or the only way to go about doing things. The instantaneity in the way people interact and communicate with the world seems to reduce it to their most intimate, direct, and real-time personal environment. Yet the same trend also works the other way around. The world as people experience it not only is getting smaller – it also seems to be getting bigger all the time. The experience of life in the "global village" feels like constantly trying to catch up with what Anthony Giddens (2002) considers a "runaway" world, a world constantly on the edge of swerving out of control. In such a world all the traditional institutions that provided the social cement of modern life – most notably the family, the church, the factory or company, mass media, and the state – are nothing but bargaining chips in our individual negotiations with the forces of change that sweep contemporary life. People cannot simply rely on parents, priests, professionals,

or presidents for truth anymore – they have to go out and construct their own narrative, to come up with “biographical solutions of systemic contradictions” (Beck 1992, p. 137). In his more recent work, Beck envisions a new type of cosmopolitan democracy, where people as individuals all over the world will have a more or less equal say in world affairs (such as environmental problems, transnational corporate policies, and worldwide migration patterns), as these affect everyone (2006).

As the contingencies of life, work, and play converge on the shoulders of the individual and traditional social institutions lose their automatic authority, people are at the same time swept up in a world of cosmopolitan politics and a global capitalist economy. As the power of the nation-state to control or protect its individual citizens withers, a new translocal rather than international playground has emerged. Here all kinds of forces and social movements compete for attention, recognition, and cultural acceptance: multinational corporations, cross-border coalitions of social interest groups, globally oriented media, and a growing number of international agencies. These forces increasingly influence interstate decisions and set the agenda of world politics (Archibugi *et al*. 1998). This does not necessarily mean that people as individuals are completely powerless in the face of global market forces – as the worldwide interconnectedness of markets, industries, economies, and social systems also open up numerous possibilities for the entrepreneurial individual. The point is, however, that the ability, skill, and resources necessary to navigate these global waters are beyond the means, capacities (or even wishes) of many, if not most people. We are supposed to increasingly rely on ourselves – which suggested self-reliance has become an endemic property of late twentieth-century policymaking, corporate practice, and public discourse, and it seems to warn people to be reluctant to

trust the institutions they used to turn to for comfort or protection.

Reporting on studies in 43 countries, Ronald Inglehart (1997) observed a global shift of people in their roles as citizens away from nation-based politics and institutional elites, towards a distinctly skeptical, globally interconnected yet deeply personal type of self-determined civic engagement. Instead of voting at regular intervals in national elections we temporarily join any of the close to 30,000 international nongovernmental organizations (INGO) active in the world today. Rather than subscribing to a so-called “quality” national newspaper or tuning in to the daily evening newscast, we search for news and information online about topics that are only of personal interest to us. We do not form or join unions anymore, we simply move to a different area, city, or country when we become dissatisfied with our working conditions (or when we face permanent unemployment where we live). Although all of these activities may seem beholden to a relatively small group of resourceful financial and cultural entrepreneurs, one cannot forget that blue-collar workers now have become a declining minority in most modern countries, whereas a creative class of professionals in knowledge and information industries increasingly dominate the cultural economies of the contemporary information age. As the rift between the individual and the nation-state widens, Pippa Norris (1998) observes the emergence of a new type of deeply critical global citizen, who is excited about the ideals of democracy but is losing confidence in its national practice. “We are undoubtedly living in an antihierarchical age,” concludes Beck (2000, p. 150).

Linking the trends of concurrent individualization and globalization with the convergent trends in life, work, and play, a pattern emerges where the conditions of work at the beginning of the twenty-first century are in a constant state of flux. One moment you seem to be doing well, working

hard, enjoying relative freedom and creative autonomy in your work – the next moment your company restructures because of a pending merger with a former competitor owned by a group of foreign investors who see new opportunities in different markets as consumer demand for your product seems to have suddenly shifted. Contemporary corporations find answers to these developments by bringing about all kinds of job destruction practices in the context of what Richard Sennett (1998) calls “workforce flexibility,” thus rearranging the economy on a working assumption of permanent change. For employees, both young and old, this means that they have to come to terms with structural job insecurity, and a career that seems like an endless accumulation of experiences, ideas, skills, and knowhow shaped by the hasty demands of the here and now. In the daily context on the job this suggests that one has to deal with the permanent threat of imminent job loss, which threat may also include the loss of valued job features (such as building a stable community of colleagues), a deterioration of working conditions, or an end to future career opportunities. This kind of anxiety does not stop here, though, as one also has to consider threats to the possibility of future employment for people seeking jobs in a company, industry, region or nation that is experiencing economic difficulty, which can be stressful for both employed people who cannot predict if, or when, they may be laid off, and for unemployed people who cannot foresee if, or when, they will regain employment (Mantler *et al*. 2005). There is no single person, party or group of people responsible for this trend. The operations and management practices of transnational corporations, a growing popularity of *laissez-faire* economics and cosmopolitan politics, rapid innovations in new information and communication technologies, and living in an individualized yet globalizing society: it all contributes to a constant uprooting and

repotting of the ways in which workstyles are structured and experienced.

Informational Hypercapitalism

The key to surviving what Sennett (2006) calls the “culture of the new capitalism” is the ability to let go of one’s past and develop the confidence to accept fragmentation and permanent change. The worker of today must become an enterprise of her own: perfectly adept at managing herself, unlearning old skills while reflexively adapting to new demands, preferring individual independence and autonomy over the relative stability of a lifelong workstyle based on the collective bargaining power of a specific group, sector, or union of workers. Let us not make the mistake of assuming these survival requirements are particular to those at the bottom of the economic hierarchy; these self-directing competences equally apply to the people in charge: top-level managers, chief executive officers, and directors of big companies or small enterprises all must continuously strike a balance between the opportunities of the new capitalism and the anxieties and uncertainties that come with it.

As it affects all human beings, the economy of the information age is based on what Phil Graham (2005) calls hypercapitalism, where economically productive activities that in many ways are connected to and shaped by a global marketplace consume the entire waking life of people – both at the top and at the bottom of the corporate ladder. This hypercapitalist culture of flexible yet never-ending productivity manifests itself most directly in the notable change of one’s career, from a series of more or less predictable achievements within the context of a lifelong contract, to a constant reshuffling of career bits and pieces in the “portfolio worklife,” as heralded by Charles Handy in

1989. In the portfolio lifestyle, careers are a sequence of stepping stones through life, where workers as individuals and organizations as collectives do not commit to each other for much more than the short-term goal, the project at hand, the talent needed now. Handy was right in predicting this workstyle to emerge as the preferred organizing feature of work in the new capitalism, for example among those in the knowledge and information industries such as the media. Media workers in their twenties and thirties are more likely to already have had at least three or four different employers, whereas their senior counterparts built their careers largely within one and the same organization. Indeed, people building their careers in the media – in professions as varied as advertising, journalism, public relations, marketing communications, television and movie production, and computer or video game development – are typical examples of this trend. Media professionals in all of these industries are perfect examples of how work, life, and play have converged in the experiences of today's preferred or forced flexible workstyles – which explains the focus on their lives and professional identities in this book.

Most of the jobs in today's information age have moved away from agriculture, manufacturing, and service professions towards so-called knowledge and information work. This trend, largely fueled by the twin developments of market globalization and technological innovations, favors those engaged in what Manuel Castells (2000) conceives as "informational labor": a category of well-educated, resourceful, and innovative workers, who are welcoming the rapid pace of change in contemporary life. People in this category belong to what Richard Florida (2002) has coined as a creative class consisting of scientists and researchers, artists, engineers, designers, architects, educators, writers, entertainers, and professional culture creators in the media. Florida suggests that this group of people makes up almost one-third of the workforce in countries such as the United

States and increasingly determines the economic and cultural features of “new urban corridors” rather than cities or countries. Although the professions in the creative class are quite different, all of them are enabled, amplified, and interconnected by information and communication technologies – most notably personal computers and internet.

The ubiquitous nature of technology in everyday life has become a force of social change that is not to be underestimated. As the vast majority of people access the internet from home, computers can be seen as the primary vehicles for the ongoing convergence of work time and leisure time, which means that people use internet time for personal pleasure at the office, for work tasks at home – and vice versa. The humming PC at home allows one to play a game – *Solitaire* is the most commonly played computer game of all time – while its desktop folders remind the user that there is always work to be done. Florida’s creative class can be seen as a vanguard of a distinctly individualized class, whose workstyle is highly dependent on information and communication technologies, and who can be considered to be the embodiment of all the trends and developments as outlined above: living an immediate life where work and play are one and the same, which life is completely contingent with the fickle and unpredictable nature of the contemporary global economy for which risks no one but themselves is expected to take personal responsibility.

Media and Everyday Life

The changing nature of work and life at the beginning of the twenty-first century must be explicitly set against the fast-paced innovations in new information and communication technologies that in turn develop as a reflection of new

demands of consumption and production. Media have come to be part of every aspect of people's daily lives, facilitated by the worldwide proliferation of the internet and similar services that connect subscribers to a global, always-on, digital information and communication network. The whole of the world and our lived experience in it can indeed be seen as framed by, mitigated through, and made immediate by pervasive and ubiquitous media. This world is what Roger Silverstone (2007) considers a "mediapolis": a mediated public space where media underpin and overarch the experiences of everyday life.

The cell phone can be seen as a case in point for the experience of life, work, and play in the mediapolis: a wireless device, instantanously connected to a regional or even global network, individually customizable through downloadable ringtones and menu interfaces, usable as digital camera, Web browser, instant messenger, e-mail client, television set, gaming platform, music player, and radio tuner – signifying the complex convergence between the telephone, the computer, and telecommunications in a single artefact. Market statistics suggest that the total number of global cell phone sales reached 800 million units by 2006. In most of Europe, wealthier parts of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Australia, Canada, and the United States, mobile phones are now widely used, with the majority of the adult, teenage, and even child population owning one.[4] The intensive global use of the cell phone puts us, paraphrasing William Mitchell (2003), in a state of continuous electronic engagement. Studies show how people develop deep personal connections with their media, which in the case of cell phones leads to mixed feelings: people seem to enjoy the ability to communicate when and how they want to on the go, while at the same time acknowledging the intrusion mobile and wireless communications have made into their private lives – including their wallets – and in public spaces.The

relationship we develop with a device like the cell phone exemplifies and extends the ways we interact with the world and the social environment we have come to live in: inevitably individualized, completely isolated yet instantaneously connected to everyone else.

Today we live in what can be called an “age of universal comparison”: by simply switching on the television, surfing the Web or scanning the pages of magazines in a supermarket we are exposed to a bewildering array of different lifestyles, choices, options and challenges. If we can afford it, we can compare ourselves with anyone, anywhere, anytime. In case of the internet one can consider the more than one billion users in 2006, with two billion users expected by 2011 (out of a projected world population of seven billion around that time).[5] Among the top ten countries in internet usage are the United States, China, India, Germany, Brazil, and Russia, where internet penetration reaches about two-thirds of the population.[6] At the same time, researchers in all these and other countries are still reporting increases in the global reach of television. For media conglomerates, the next phase in all of this is the introduction and proliferation of digital television technologies, signaling the (intended) convergence of internet and television into the home, public spaces, as well as the office. This development completes the blurring of the few remaining boundaries between life, work, and play – possibly leading to a kind of “e-topia” that Mitchell envisioned in his earlier (1999) work, forecasting a futuristic living environment where digital communication technologies blend leisure, labor, and family time, and where daily life in cities operates in a 24/7/365 cycle of completely decentralized production. Although we may not be there yet (nor would we want to be, for the prediction begs the question who will be left behind), the underlying assumption is evident in the way we immerse ourselves in globally interconnected yet profoundly personalized media,

and in the ways we at times seem to prefer to give meaning to this immersion.

The Network Society

The global explosion of networked information and choice flourishes through the increasingly networked character of economy and society. At the end of the twentieth century, Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) suggest, the world entered a phase of disorganized capitalism, indicating a shift from the manufacturing of endless reproductions of material objects – a Ford factory spitting out the same cars every day – to the flexible customization of products and commodified experiences through the use of signs and symbols – designer jeans, limited edition DVDs, personalized travel packages, television-on-demand. Lash and Urry argue that in this relatively new phase formerly fixed and stable economic properties such as capital, labor, products, information, and services are now flowing across time and space, which process is exemplified by worldwide migration patterns and outsourcing practices, global marketing, branding, public relations and advertising campaigns, and especially the increasing dominance of the industries primarily involved in the production and distribution of all those signs and symbols: the media. As different sectors of the economy get caught up in this phase of disorganized capitalism, the production process gets integrated in a global network of businesses, corporations, and markets. This for example means that companies increasingly seek alliances across national borders and across the traditional boundaries of the firm, that services are marketed across time and space, and that the way an organization operates has become reflexively interdependent with all kinds of related sectors of an economy that is at once local and global. The production of goods and services – whether it is