

# Opposed devotions? Creation and care in the cultural precariat

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Received: 28/04/2021

Accepted: 19/12/2021

## ABSTRACT

In this article we will address the specific logic of cultural precariousness, focusing on gender factors that place working women in positions of structural weakness—a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. In our analysis, we focused on the relationship between creative labour and care work as differentiated social spaces. We understand 'care work' as the management of people's well-being, essential for the sustainability of life and the reproduction of the workforce. On the other hand, 'creative labour' is the most visible dimension of artistic activity and implies the production of works that achieve a social value and are recognised as artistic. The latter includes, especially as a result of the recent precariousness processes at play, an important component of 'free labour,' individual background work aimed at providing adequate conditions for creation and which nowadays focuses on the construction and maintenance of social networks and e-reputation. In short, while creative labour constitutes the visible and socially recognised part of artistic practice, free labour and care work form the hidden part. Although these aspects do not receive social recognition, they largely determine individual achievements, beyond the romantic conceptions of the 'genius artist' strictly focused on the creative sphere. In our article we reflect on the relationship between both these types of work, construction of their constitutive logics—which are generally incompatible with each other—and identify their main contradictions.

**Keywords:** creative labour, care work, free labour, gender, precarity

## SUMMARY

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**Suggested citation:** Pecourt, J., and Obiol, S. (2022). Opposed devotions? Creation and care in the cultural precariat. *Debats. Journal on Culture, Power and Society*, 7, 207-221. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats-136-2.6>

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last 10 years, the percentage weight of women in cultural employment has grown by just over four points, from 38.4% in 2011 to 42.9% in 2020. Even so, the presence of women is still significantly lower than that of men in this sector. This situation is comparable to that presented by the overall employment data, with women representing 45.5% of the labour force<sup>1</sup>. These figures measure the growing but still secondary presence of women in Spanish cultural employment compared to that of men and take on greater significance when complemented by the increasingly numerous analyses conducted on the situation of women in different sectors comprising complex creative work. In addition

to this lower presence, they also show the sexual segregation of work, both vertically and horizontally.

Both in Spain and in other Western countries, women have lower salaries, more dropouts, and are frequently subjected to de-legitimisation of their creative capacity by assigning them functions related to organisational and communication tasks with less social prestige (Pratt, 2002; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2015; Cubells, 2010; Conor et al., 2015; Jones and Pringle, 2015; Harvey and Shepherd, 2017; Bennett, 2018; Bridges, 2018; Pérez-Ibáñez and López, 2019; Anllo vento, 2020; Cuenca Suárez, 2020; MIM, 2020; Ramón-Borja et al., 2020). This situation cannot be separated from the general precariousness experienced by the sector, just like employment in general, in recent decades. Precariousness has become an undeniable and daily reality that affects all the conditions in which paid work is carried out globally (Bourdieu, 1999; Standing, 2013) and this situation has been broadened and

1 Cultural employment data referring to the second quarter. Source: CULTURABase, Ministry of Culture and Sports, retrieved 12/03/2021: <http://estadisticas.mecd.gob.es/CulturaDynPx/culturabase/index.htm?type=pcaxis&path=t1/p1e/a2018/&file=pcaxis>.

deepened as a consequence of the political and business management of the Great Recession. Furthermore, the effect of the measures taken to contain the spread of COVID-19, which have eroded the basic foundations of the world of culture, remain to be seen, especially in sectors in which a direct relationship with the public is essential.

In recent decades, paid work has completely colonised our lives and new technologies have sharpened the demand, in terms of capital, for the constant attention of workers: they must always be connected and in constant transformation, adapting to the 'needs' of the market. Here, we verified how this trend, which was pointed out years ago by Sennett (2000, 2006), is becoming more acute with the succession of economic crises. Thus, ever more groups of people now inhabit an insecure and unstable labour reality. In this context, creative work presents specific contours and consequences that complicate the purpose of describing (and above all, measuring) its precariousness. This is especially true when many of the characteristics that have come to define precarious jobs (instability, uncertainty, long hours, and lack of protection) form an indisputable part of what it means to engage in creative work, to be an 'artist,' in our collective imagination. This clearly has undeniable implications of a structural nature. Despite identifying creative work as the greatest exponent of freedom and diversity, according to Gill (2014), reality shows that it is based on unequal relationships by gender, social class, and ethnicity/race.

In this article we wanted to focus on the proven gender inequality present in the creative sector and reflect upon a question that has been asked on other occasions but that we believe should be raised again given the generalised nature and deepening of job insecurity now seen in western society. We questioned the relationship between creative work and care work, and whether these tasks can be understood as distinct social spaces.

This text is divided into three parts, followed by conclusions. In the first place, we point out the

social conditions that define the existence of a cultural precariat. Second, we delve into the specific considerations of this cultural precariat, with the historical construction of the status of being an artist. Third, we address the logic of care work and the construction of the ideal of femininity upon these two social spaces. Finally, reflection on the relationship, in a situation of precariousness, between artistic logic and that of care enabled us to identify points of collision between the two logics.

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### THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF THE CULTURAL PRECARIAT

Various studies published in recent years (Tasset et al., 2013; O'Brien et al. 2016; Barbican, 2018) have shown the existence of a specific labour market in the field of creative professions, which is conditioned by precariousness processes. The idea of the precariousness of the creative sectors, and their differentiated character with respect to other professional fields, is not new; it is part of a debate with a long history (Abbing 2002). However, the specific characteristics of these forms of precariousness have recently transformed and have gained greater visibility. This first occurred with the financial crisis of 2008, which dismantled the most utopian vision of the 'creative classes', and later, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Although these events may give the impression of being one-off crises in the creative professions, they are in fact the result of intensification of deeper structural processes (Comunian and England, 2020). Moreover, these inequalities are articulated on different axes, with one of the most relevant being gender. Indeed, precariousness is inscribed in the conditions of artistic work, but especially so in the conditions of female artistic work.

From a general perspective, and covering the different creative sectors, Caves (2002) identified two fundamental principles that determine the differentiated structure of these spaces. On the one hand, is the principle of 'no one knows,' that is, of the permanent uncertainty regarding the demand for and success of creative work. The ways in which these artistic risks

are faced determines the working conditions and internal dynamics established in cultural fields. On the other hand, is the principle of ‘art for art’s sake,’ which indicates the orientation of creative workers towards originality, experimentation, and the search for innovative solutions, etc. This principle has shaped the various cultural fields since the process of their autonomation was implemented throughout the 20th century.

Unlike other professions, the passion and pleasure that these jobs provide impose a very peculiar tension between autonomy and exploitation, which Helsmondhalgh (2011) called “a complicated version of freedom.” Historically, these principles have given rise to bohemian communities that lived with a certain amount of isolation from the rest of society. These communities were characterised by differentiated value systems and codes of conduct, which rebelled against the normality of dominant society. Furthermore, this rebellion was often associated with the rejection of economic benefits, understood as part of a bourgeois lifestyle (Heinich, 2005).

However, in many cases, this ‘chosen’ poverty becomes an ‘imposed’ poverty. The motivations of applicants to enter the artistic fields are not usually economic, rather, they are associated with other interests of an aesthetic, social, or self-knowledge type (Menger, 2006). Applicants to enter the artistic or literary field, generally with a high amount of cultural capital, and with ambitious life and professional projects, encounter two major obstacles. On the one hand, they find that this economic resignation is not sustainable over time. Although the logic of artistic fields is based on the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital, economic capital is still important, not only to survive, but even to promote one’s own professional career. This generates significant inequality between those who can and cannot resist the absence of economic income for prolonged periods (Bain and McLean, 2020). On the other hand, many applicants do not find the level of recognition they expect within artistic communities. If artistic ethics assumes, to a certain extent, material poverty because it is part of the artist’s mythology, it

accepts the lack of recognition with greater difficulty, at least among groups of equals; recognition and visibility is an essential objective of creative professionals (Bourdieu, 1995). The absence of recognition, either in the majority circles or in the most specialised groups, can generate individual tensions and a certain shared awareness of the exclusion and rejection of existing cultural institutions and hierarchies.

### The secession of artistic stars

A basic structural condition of cultural fields, which supports the persistence of the cultural precariat, is the distinction between two clearly differentiated and hierarchical groups, which Caves (2002) called List A and List B: a minority that acquires visibility and social recognition—the ‘stars’ of E. Morin (1972)—and an invisible majority, with little social recognition, which Bourdieu (1995) called the ‘intellectual proletariat.’ Often, minor differences in talent mean huge differences in symbolic recognition and access to economic resources (Gladwell, 2000). Indeed, differentiated recognition and resources have considerable implications for the life trajectories of artists. The elite concentrates much of its recognition and public attention in a dynamic similar to ‘winner takes all’ (Quemin, 2013). However, those at the base have great difficulty in gaining visibility and recognition (and therefore, economic resources).

These artists, who remain at subsistence levels (Tasset, 2013), will make very significant efforts and large sacrifices to try to access those privileged positions, which are only reached by a minority. In addition, this process of polarisation between a recognised minority and an unrecognised majority has intensified with the digital revolution and new forms of visibility. These are excluded groups, a precariat in the sense assigned by Standing (2013), but they have some distinctive characteristics, and unlike other groups, extremely high levels of cultural resources.

In the workplace, creative work is presented as a boundaryless career (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). This means that creative workers move between dif-

ferent employers and work on different projects; they also need to obtain the validation of different social networks, both professional and public. Different studies of the cultural world have shown that this world is complicated for creative workers, who share common traits such as: the tendency to hold several jobs at the same time, generalised self-employment and freelance work, discontinuous jobs and very few forms of protection, uncertainty of their professional trajectories, unequal distribution of benefits, youth of the workers in the sector, and constant increase of these types of workers in Western societies. The working conditions of the creative professions fit perfectly with the ‘culture of capitalism’ described by Richard Sennett (2006), in which permanent fragmentation and constant change are promoted.

Creative professionals must become a company, learn to manage their relationship with the public, and acquire new skills and abilities to adapt to new market demands.<sup>2</sup> This hyper-capitalist culture of flexibility and permanent production is manifested in the professional trajectories themselves: the transition from a series of more or less predictable achievements, based on long-term contracts, to a constant chain of specific pieces, which Charles Handy (1989) called a “job trajectory portfolio.” In the portfolio lifestyle, workers do not commit to any individual or organisation, they make specific agreements related to specific projects. This chain of projects also occurs in a vital context where work, life, and leisure converge towards the same type of existential experience (Deuze, 2007). In its most celebratory vision, this process gives rise to the appearance of a dynamic and entrepreneurial ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002), and in its most critical conception, to a cultural precariat (Standing, 2013) which remains at the limits of basic subsistence.

2 Intensification of the difficulties of the creative professions, expansion of endless hours, irregular remuneration, multiplication of tasks, and difficulties in maintaining basic levels of subsistence, have been investigated by various authors from qualitative perspectives, focusing on how they affect individual well-being (see, for example, Loudon, 2013 and Deresiewicz, 2021).

According to Miège (1989), creative work is underpaid due to the excess of applicants wanting to work in artistic fields, which produces a vast pool of non-professional cultural workers and the constant mobility of creative professionals from one field to another. This excess of applicants is an explanatory element of the difficult working conditions in the cultural or creative industries, even when the offer of cultural work increases. As Zafra (2017) pointed out, the attraction of many young people to creative work can lead to forms of ‘self-exploitation’—masked as the ‘enthusiasm’ they show for their work. In this paradigm, workers push themselves to the limit to build themselves a reputation that will give them enough autonomy to implement high-quality cultural productions (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011, McRobbie, 2002; Neff, 2012).

Other researchers such as Banks (2007), insist that creative workers seek, above all, intrinsic benefits and not fame, fortune, or quick money. The moral systems of trust, honesty, obligation, and justice have not been entirely lost in the cultural world, and in addition, many artists continue to aspire to have a social influence by materialising their aesthetic goals. Somehow, cultural production is still associated with the struggle for human emancipation. Many initiatives are associated with goals that emphasise the need not to be driven by career success, but to consider other aspects such as making contributions to the community, providing love and affection to family and friends, and showing solidarity with others, even strangers (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). These objectives, and especially those that affect women, such as goals that interfere with motherhood, collide head-on with the dynamics of cultural fields (Dent, 2020) and tend to alienate creative workers in precarious conditions.

### Digitisation and the expansion of free labour

Recently, the structures of cultural fields, conditions of creative work, and internal hierarchies of the profession have been drastically altered by the digitisation process. These modifications have especially affected creative groups located in the middle and lower strata,

who have seen how it is increasingly difficult to maintain visibility and, therefore, creative recognition (Rius-Ulldemolins and Pecourt, 2022). Digitisation has further increased the distance between the visible creative minorities (who obtain attention and social recognition) and the invisible creative majorities, who remain eternally anonymous, do not obtain social recognition and, therefore, cannot live from their creative work. Thus, for example, while in the 1980s, 20% of the content generated 80% of the income, currently, 1% of the content generates 80% of the profits (Taplin, 2017). These invisible majorities, in addition to their creative work, are also obliged to expend a huge amount of effort on developing complementary social networks to build their visibility and reputation (Marwick, 2013).

In digital environments, before institutions and companies take notice of their creations, artists must first build a reputation, which often works by developing an online standing. This is because it involves working in the sphere of social networks and platforms, and thus, artists obtain more institutional recognition, which in turn, implies access to the established cultural circuits (museums, galleries, publishing houses, and record companies, etc.). This obligation to be on social networks can equate a new form of exploitation because the user must ‘give their data away’ to the platform. In this sense, Tiziana Terranova (2004) talked about ‘free work’ on the internet, which she considers a fundamental, although invisible, way of creating value in our current form of capitalism. Free work is simultaneously voluntary and obligatory, enjoyed and suffered, and includes tasks such as designing web pages, participating in mailing lists, Twitter accounts, Facebook, and Instagram, etc.

Creative professionals are required to participate in this free work to build their reputation. In this sense, Mark Andrejevic (2009), in his response to the celebratory culture of active audiences, claimed that creative work and exploitation coexist and influence each other in the context of the emerging online economy. Andrejevic criticises the ‘participation=democratisation’ equation and underlines the control regimes and

economic imperatives that condition participation in digital environments. He believes that these technologies gain their popularity by offering creative control in exchange for indirect work based on community building and forms of socialisation. These networks are controlled by the big tech platforms, which make huge profits from the unrecognised free work undertaken by creators. All this suggests a type of subjection similar to what women have historically suffered. Artists spend a lot of time on building relationships, on emotive work, which on the one hand is autonomous, but on the other, is subject to exploitation.

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#### CREATIVE WORK AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF CARE

In *The Fisherwoman’s Daughter*, a text from 1988, The writer Ursula K. Le Guin (1989) poses a dilemma that is repeatedly imposed upon women writers, and only women writers: “books or children.” Le Guin exposes, from a critical position, how the artistic (literary in this case) impulse has historically been constructed as a need to which to one must respond, leaving aside everyday tasks, which includes, of course, care. The artistic work occupies a central place and male writers must dedicate themselves absolutely, almost heroically, to it. Furthermore, women who want to be considered as writers must give up either motherhood or creation.

It is true that, as Gill (2014) pointed out, the secondary position that women still occupy with respect to creative work cannot be explained solely by their greater responsibility in terms of care work. This is because women without children (or other people they must care for) are also doing poorly. We believe, however, that focusing on the social construction of care work and creative work as distinct social spaces—with different people responsible for these tasks, but above all with similar demands put on these people—contributes significantly to a better understanding of this same secondary position of women in the field of creation (and, with it, the secondary position of men in care). Thus, we approach the notion of care based on two fundamental elements: (a) on the one

hand, the conception of care and the time it requires; (b) on the other hand, who does the caring and how the best care is exercised.

### Care work and time

Care, the need to care and to be cared for, is an inseparable part of our daily lives because it ensures human continuity. However, despite this daily centrality and the increasing academic interest in care, there is no consensus on either its definition or its measurement. This is partly because of the magnitude and complexity of the tasks it involves (Folbre, 2011) and its marginality among academic interests in the social sciences (Carrasco et al., 2011). Following Durán (2018, p. 126) we can consider care as “the daily management of one’s own and others’ well-being; containing activities of direct transformation of the environment, but also surveillance activities that mainly require availability and are incompatible with other simultaneous activities.” This definition includes work, resources, and relationships (Daly, 2021) and must also include the dual dimensions of material (corporal) and immaterial (relative to affections) care (Pérez Orozco, 2006). These are mainly conducted in the private sphere and at home, although some tasks are transferred to the market and become paid work. Nonetheless, what they have in common is that women usually complete them.

The number of tasks we could classify as care work is immense and cataloguing them would require a huge number of hours<sup>3</sup>. In addition, they are not equally distributed by sex<sup>4</sup>, social class, origin, or the form of family coexistence. Moreover, we must also consider the lack of public investment in Spain—which is strongly familial (Saraceno, 1995; Naldini, 2003)—in

terms of family (and care) policies. This situation was aggravated by the Great Recession of 2008 and the austerity policies implemented that led to a greater incidence of care in the private sphere. In turn, this caused women to return to the private domain, further weakening their position in the labour market (Gálvez, 2013; Gálvez and Rodríguez, 2016). Indeed, we are still yet to see the consequences of the ongoing crisis generated by COVID-19, although there are signs of a worsening of the position of women in the labour market, precisely because of the accumulation of care needs.

In short, the assumption of the majority of care work and its overlap with increasingly precarious paid work has led women to use their time intensively in order to make both jobs compatible—the ‘double working day’ (Balbo, 1979) or ‘endless working day’ (Durán, 1988)—which worsens their health, eats up their personal time, and makes it difficult for them to build a professional career under the same conditions as men. In addition, this situation has no prospect of change, at least not immediately, given that the state, market, and men do not seem to move at the same pace as women, creating increasingly deepening care gaps and unequal relationships (Ahlberg et al., 2008; Crompton et al., 2005; Crompton, 2006; Lewis, 2001; Scott, 2006; Obiol, 2014).

### Care work: who cares and how they care

In addition to the activities and relationships arising from attending to people’s well-being needs, care also includes regulatory frameworks to define who is responsible for these tasks and the spaces in which they are conducted (Daly and Lewis, 2000, p. 285). In this sense, we have witnessed the construction of these frameworks for centuries; they not only decide who provides care but also how people should be cared for. The foundations of some of these frameworks include the notion of motherhood, leading to the emergence of an ideal of femininity (and masculinity) which has presented in different forms throughout history (Badinter, 1991).

3 According to calculations by Durán (2018, p. 121), the annual time devoted to care, understood in an extended way, represents a total of 28,143,097 full-time jobs in the service sector.

4 While women devote a daily average of 4 hours and 36 minutes to the home and family, men spend a mean 2 hours and 37 minutes on these tasks (Time Use Survey, 2009–2010, INE).

Almost parallel to the cultural construction of bohemia as a representation of artistic work and as an inherently masculine space, care—especially that of children—was constructed as a feminine space. This long and complex process is closely related to the development of the capitalist economy and involved separation of private and public spaces and the exclusive attribution of their responsibility to women and men, respectively. This process began in the 18th century on the basis of Enlightenment values according to which women possessed intrinsic aptitudes that made them more suitable for the care and education of children, a private responsibility that was, nevertheless, presented through the effects that it could have in the public sphere as the result of its civilizing function (Bolufer, 1995, 2012). Thus, the nursing mother was the symbol of the new maternity (Bolufer, 2010): devoted exclusively and self-sacrificingly to the care of children.

This discourse became hegemonic in Western society during the 19th and 20th centuries along with the advance of the industrialisation process. It formed the basis of the capitalist economy, playing an especially important role in the design of the welfare state based on the model of men as the breadwinners and women as the main caregivers in families (Lewis, 1992). In short, as Nash (2010) had already pointed out at the beginning of the 20th century, the cultural representation of sexual differences was fundamental in the construction and consolidation of a collective imagination with respective archetypes of femininity and masculinity, in which women occupied a subordinate and dependent place compared to men.

This model was largely based on medical and scientific discourse that, backed by the apparent neutrality of its position, defended the ideals of the bourgeois family with motherhood as the only way for women to fulfil themselves, as their natural destiny and only legitimate aspiration (Bolufer, 2013). It is still possible to find examples of this discourse even in the 21st century. Women are still expected to respond selflessly and in a self-sacrificing way to the care needs of their families, especially their children. In addition,

underpinning gender inequality in the supposedly different nature of men and women defused this critique and thus, strengthened the inequality itself (Nash, 2010). Although there was resistance and negotiations, marked above all by the social class of women (Bolufer, 1995, 2010; Aguado, 1998), there is no doubt that these values still occupy a relevant place in the social imaginary regarding maternity and care provision.

Furthermore, we must point out the specificities of the Spanish case in which, despite its late and weak industrialisation process (Babiano, 1993), establishment of the model of exclusivity of spaces and functions by sex/gender is still evident. Moreover, based on its most traditional values, family was considered the safeguard of the essence of Spanish society that Francoism had sought to build as a counterpoint to the alleged immorality of the Second Republic. The latter had taken shape in the absence of a maternal figure at home because women were working outside their households and, therefore, were neglecting their main function: educating future Spaniards in the ideology of the regime. In contrast, this model encouraged the myth of the ‘perfect married woman’ or ‘angel of the home’ whereby women’s destiny was motherhood and bringing up children (Nash, 1996; Iglesias de Ussel and Meil, 2001).

The social transformations that took place from the 1970s onwards, at different speeds depending on the country and social group, included important changes in the role of women in the public sphere and, necessarily, also in the private sphere. The generalisation and deepening of the individualisation process, especially in the case of women (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2003), and their greater presence (and permanence) in paid work and in public spaces, went hand in hand with changes in couple and family relationships. However, care, with motherhood and child-rearing as its most important aspects, continues to be seen as a fundamental responsibility of women. Thus, the normative framework that had been built on maternity took on new contours but presented the same content: to propose that the individual

fulfilment of mothers be in satisfying the needs of others, in this case, their children.

In relation to this, Hays (1998) coined the concept of ‘intensive motherhood’ as a set of ideas and beliefs, an ideology, which revolves around the general assumption that a ‘good mother’ should put the well-being of her children before her own or other types of interests. These beliefs posit that mothers should dedicate their bodies and souls to the task of caring, investing large amounts of time, effort, and money into this task. It says that mothers have to be emotionally and physically available for their children, always, whether or not they have a paid job or plan to have a career. An idea that, as usual, was conceived from a very clear structural position not only of gender, but also of class, ethnicity, and family format. Despite the difficulties, this influences how all women exercise motherhood, even though it differs in its costs. The most vulnerable women feel the most painful effects on their living conditions and those of their children (Gillies, 2005; Elliot et al., 2015; Obiol et al., 2016).

Having a child continues to be a fundamental turning point that often entails a traditionalisation, although not of discourses but rather, of the practices of care and sharing of this care between men and women (González and Jurado, 2015). Thus, we would no longer be dealing with a model of separation and exclusivity of spheres according to sex, but rather with the dual presence of women in the public and private spheres, while men continue with their sole presence in the public sphere (Carrasco and Recio, 2014). But, despite recent changes, the collective imagination upon which this division of work and spaces is still based supposes, in the case of a large part of the women in our society, the preference of the well-being of others over one’s own. In view of this, we get the heart of creative work, especially work in precarious conditions, in which these care needs are an element that must be considered. This is because of their contradiction with both the times and dynamics of their multiple trades and with the construction of an extremely specific subjectivity and its implications in terms of time and dedication.

## CARE WORK AND CREATIVE WORK, IN PRECARIOUSNESS

The social construction of what it means (and claims) to dedicate oneself to creative work and what it means (and claims) to care are based on similar, if not identical, parameters: selfless, almost devotional dedication. This differentiation in devotional obligation is related to the historical location of men in the sphere of production and creative work, and of women in the domain of reproduction, and therefore their inscription to the domestic space. While, throughout the 20th century, artistic revolutions were often posed as subversions against the economic system and moral order, they still maintained the unequal relationships between the sexes and the differentiated distribution of social obligations and rewards remained unaltered.

Both the bohemian ideal and the maternity ideal are presented as vital commitments that do not allow any distractions because this would mean a reduction in the results obtained: either one takes poor care of oneself—with both individual and collective consequences (Elliot et al. al, 2015)—or they are not a good artist. Hence, we return once again to the dilemma posed by Le Guin: “books or children;” in other words, creative work or care work. However, it is a dilemma that, at least for now, only seems to concern women. The cultural norm that frames motherhood in Western society requires, as we have pointed out, women to relegate their own desires and needs before those of their children from a place of self-sacrifice, even ignoring their individual identity. This can be seen in the absolute conviction with which Marina Abramović affirms that having children would have been a disaster for her work<sup>5</sup>. Or as Soledad Sevilla puts it: her colleagues took her as an amateur artist because she was a mother and had to share time that ‘should have been dedicated

5 Marina Abramović says having children would have been “a disaster for my work”, Nicole Puglise, The Guardian, retrieved 26/07/2016: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jul/26/marina-abramovic-abortions-children-disaster-work>.

completely to art' with motherhood.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the transition from the social space of reproduction (domestic life) to the social space of production (creative expression) becomes a socially suspicious or even illegitimate movement.

The ways in which creative work takes place do not help in finding a balance between paid work and care work. In other words, the alternation of periods without work with others of intense workloads, without schedules—referred to as bulimic periods Pratt (2002)—or irregular and short-term work patterns, marked by especially short units of time in weeks or days (Gill, 2014). These professional schedules require, among other things, long waits, rehearsals with a lot of people, performances at night, 12-hour days for audiovisual recordings, and study hours, etc.<sup>7</sup> In short, the dynamics of creative work in general are difficult to match up with the timetable required for care, which can be especially rigid and absorbing in certain circumstances, for example with small children, or in the case of caring for people with serious illnesses or disabilities. The plastic artist Myrel Chernick puts it clearly in a collective text on creation and motherhood (Bee et al., 2020, p. 272–273):

“Always the same. There is never time for anything: time to be with my children, for art, to earn a living, to see the shows that interest me, to be part of an artistic community. And often I feel isolated and exhausted. [...] Although I continue to dedicate myself to artistic work (at a slow pace, of course) and exhibiting it, I have little time left to establish contacts, attend openings, call and see people, organise visits to workshops, all the things required to continue being visitable and considered for an exhibition”.

6 Soledad Sevilla: “They saw me as an ‘amateur’ because I was a mother”, EL PAÍS Weekly: Interviews, EL PAÍS, retrieved from: <https://elpais.com/eps/2021-04-17/soledad-sevilla-otros-artistas-me-veian-como-una-amateur-porque-era-una-madre-rodeada-de-ninos.html>

7 *Eq'iliquà*, 51\_11/20, Matrius, retrieved from: [https://issuu.com/aapv-equiliqua/docs/eq\\_51\\_-\\_per\\_web](https://issuu.com/aapv-equiliqua/docs/eq_51_-_per_web)

Moreover, the precariousness of the sector also contributes to this contradiction. Considering workers in a one-dimensional way, focusing solely on employment relationships, makes it difficult to leave room for care: both in terms of the care provided and the time spent providing care. It must be remembered that, despite the myth of the solitary creative genius, creative work is social work. As Collins (1998) showed in the case of philosophical communities, creative networks play a fundamental role in valuing the work of creators. In modern times, artistic and bohemian communities, with their institutions and the participants involved, have played an essential role in the promotion and validation of artistic trajectories—and subsequent professionalisation. The effort required to build and maintain these social networks (traditionally achieved by living a bohemian lifestyle) further reduces time for family obligations and parenting. Nowadays, the centrality of digital platforms in building social networks and individual reputations has further amplified the amount of free work that must be done by artists to boost their careers (Marwick, 2013). This accumulation of free work, associated with the construction and maintenance of social networks, collides head-on with that of providing free care work.

In the case of women, this duality in terms of the objects of their attention, demand for exclusivity imposed by creative work (and its associated lifestyle), and the inescapable responsibilities of care (which are mostly assigned to women), has important consequences. Firstly, in the secondary position that women often occupy in creative work. Despite the fact that women are present in relevant places in the creative sphere and that they are socially represented as a non-traditional and highly individualised sector, the truth is that, according to Banks and Milestone (2011), this appearance masks traditional forms of relevant gender discrimination and inequality. We continue to find an association between masculinity and creativity that serves to marginalise women from the most prestigious positions in the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015). On

the other hand, the success of women in certain professional sectors, and specifically, in certain cultural spheres, often implies a certain symbolic devaluation of the work they perform (Bourdieu, 2000). Although the presence of women is greater in the artistic and humanistic fields (compared to technological ones), on the whole, they continue to occupy low and intermediate positions in those sectors. Job insecurity and non-professional obligations often prevent them from participating in power struggles or from accessing specific forms of promotion within cultural fields.

One of the consequences of this subordinate position of women in creative spaces is found in their abandonment, be it of motherhood<sup>8</sup> (and care) or of creative work. In this last option, the ‘devalued’ position of women in creative work environments cannot be ignored, because if they are undervalued at work and this contrasts with the high value placed on their labour in private-domestic spaces, it facilitates their flight to more comforting places (Percival, 2020; Dent, 2020). When considering this abandonment, we must also take the weight of social class into account. The variables of gender and social class outline the positions occupied in the creative work/care work (motherhood) dichotomy—albeit masked with the appearance of being a personal choice. Therefore, there is little guarantee these factors will become an element of collective and political critique. This is especially true if we consider the cultural sector as the ultimate exponent of freedom, self-realisation, and individuality, in which it is a privilege to be able to work (Gill, 2014; Conor et al., 2015).

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## CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we presented an initial conceptual approach to the complex articulation between creative work and care work and how this reality

affects women located in the intermediate and low positions of the cultural field. Care is traditionally an invisible form of work assumed by women which involves remarkably diverse tasks and whose undertaking implies neglecting other occupations, especially those in professional fields. However, these tasks are essential to make the remaining jobs (especially those that are professionally recognised) possible. The difficulty of making the two social spaces compatible occurs in all labour sectors, but acquires unique dimensions in creative fields, precisely because of the vocational nature attributed to this reconciliation. The historical construction of creative work demands total, almost devotional, dedication and takes place in a social environment (commonly associated with the idea of a bohemian lifestyle) alien to the logic and needs of providing care. This structural reality makes it difficult for many women to access creative work, especially professionally recognised creative work. Thus, there is a collision between opposing devotions and obligations that seems to have no solution.

As Caves (2002) pointed out, the labour structure of creative fields is characterised by an extreme hierarchy between a minority that accumulates most of the visibility and recognition, and a majority that encounters great difficulty even to subsist. This is the distinction between List A and List B of the cultural field. The competition between the agents involved to access List A, and therefore achieve creative recognition, is extraordinarily strong, and so small differences in talent can have cardinal implications. In addition, the fight for recognition implies performing a whole series of free and invisible jobs, intricately linked to the generation of social networks and construction of individual reputations, which are hidden behind artistic or literary achievements.

In recent decades, the digitisation of the cultural field has further increased the demands for the free labour that hides the creative process. In this context, the obligations of care pose an almost insurmountable difficulty for those (women) who

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<sup>8</sup> Data from the Spanish music industry indicates that there is a low maternity rate of 26% compared to the 29% paternity rate of their male counterparts (MIM, 2020).

aspire to be part of the elite of the cultural field, not only in terms of time but also in terms of the esteem in which they are held as artists. It could be said that the social construction of the artist is fully inscribed into the process of the individualisation of modernity, with the consequent rupture of the networks of collective solidarity essential for dealing with care work. Within the neoliberal logic

of individualisation, some women manage to reach the cultural summit, but these individual examples do not eliminate the deep inequalities that are present. These disparities tend to penalise, to a greater extent, women who assume non-professional obligations associated with caring for others and the maintenance of community structures, which are essential for the functioning of social life.

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