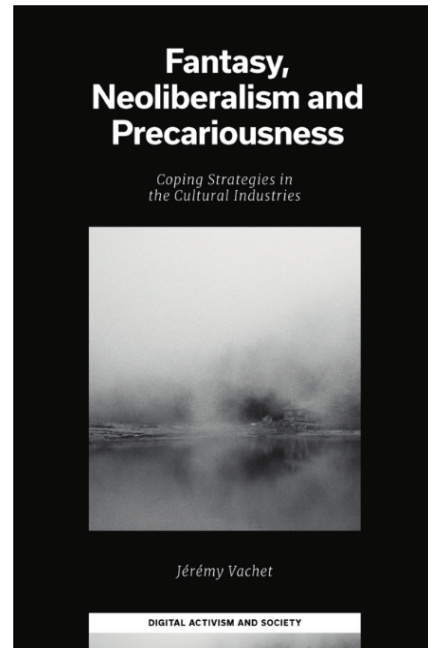


Jérémy Vachet, **Fantasy, Neoliberalism and Precariousness: Coping Strategies in the Cultural Industries**, Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2022, 140 pp., \$12.74 (hardcover), \$12.10 (eBook).

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In *Fantasy, Neoliberalism and Precariousness: Coping Strategies in the Cultural Industries*, Jérémy Vachet discusses neoliberalism, a term that gradually gained attention after the *Colloque Walter Lippmann* held in Paris in 1938 and a series of economic reforms delivered by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan throughout the 1970s, when it was connected to the Chicago School of economics (p. 5). The rather socioeconomic concept is also malleable and differs from “classical liberalism” by advocating state institutions’ key role in shaping individuals (Gilbert, 2013; Ong, 2006). Today, the ongoing trend of neoliberalism, coupled with capitalism in late modernity, imposes even more impacts upon people’s creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation. These three things are closely related to subjectivity. Consequently, the vicissitude of capitalist societies has an inevitable influence on people working in cultural and creative industries (CCIs).



Currently, due to the prevalent neoliberalism in nearly all spheres of living and working life, cultural workers are suffering from the “double bind” effects where individuals are trapped in a dilemma “in which an individual receives contradictory messages from another person” (VandenBos, 2015, pp. 333). The scenario reveals the deeply rooted side-effect of neoliberalism: individualization at the expense of psychological suffering; subjectivization at the time of precariousness.

To discover answers to (1) the psychosocial impact of precariousness on participants working in the independent music industries; and (2) coping strategies used to bear the struggle between an organized self-realization and flexibilities in the neoliberal context (p. 93), the author, a professional musician, takes four parts of general introduction of key concepts; ruminating the theoretic frameworks on individualization and self-realization; coping strategies collected from interviews with musicians; and the conclusion on limitations and implications.

Although brief, the four parts of the book were organized by the logic of theoretic introduction, real-life observation, theory application with multidisciplinary perspectives involving sociology, cultural studies, psychology, and philosophy, etc. Besides, the subtitles of each chapter are also finely structured to serve the

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general idea of each chapter well, representing the line of thought of the author on the pathologies of freedom and cultural workers' defense mechanisms against the loss of self-identity.

The author begins with the enumeration of various thoughts on the key notions of the study: neoliberalism, precariousness, inequalities of class and gender in cultural industries, thoughts on well-being, and the psychosocial field. It is easy to understand from the arrangement of subtitles that the author attempts to lead readers through the general picture of what it is like in CCIs, and to reveal the fact of how social factors like gender and class affect the industry that has rather implicit entry barriers (p. 17) before further providing a psychosocial way of thinking to address the internal conflicts of the cultural workers.

The key term precariousness can represent today's social order, which has fewer limits and restrictions. As the world is becoming more liberal politically and economically, people's lack of security also emerged, especially in the post-Fordist era. The cultural business, as a relatively typical scenario that embodies the precarious phenomena today, finds unpredictability in workers' compensation, access to the artist network, resources, and recognition from their colleagues, sponsors, or customers. The reason for such flexibility lies in the dependency of the industry on social elements such as class, educational background, gender, and social networks.

A more concrete example is the music industry. The producers endure both internal and external conflicts. They have been pushed to be entrepreneurs who use music as texts for interpersonal communication and self-realization as a result of the overall neoliberal environment. The activity of creating and communicating builds a group of people as a community and at the same time triggers anxiety, pressure, depression, and identity loss, given the disparity of resources. Considering the collective nature of music production and problems facing individuals, the author chose the psychosocial framework represented by scholars such as Stephen Frosh, Lisa Baraitser, and Lynne Layton, since the branch of psychoanalysis mainly helps to understand how irrationality infuses the social sphere (Žižek, 2009). Notwithstanding, the innovative part of the book lies in the difference from the tradition of the psychoanalytically oriented case assessment to a rather sociologically oriented view of the psychosocial (p. 35), to incorporate more social factors like gender, class, and group.

As the study moves on, the author sharply captures cultural workers' challenges to individualization, as the term bohemianism is becoming increasingly hard to define in today's consumerist society due to the expanding middle class and people's different notions of "ways to pursue an ideal life." Cultural workers tend to invest in their work as a medium to prevent alienation and exploitation. So, the rather intangible artwork is psychologically tied up to the producer. In post-Fordism, creative work is easily interpreted as the activity of self-construction, which, therefore, carries an instrumental and psychiatric dimension. If too much pressure emerges as the result of the liberal art creation, there will obviously be repercussions, such as misrecognition, narcissism, and anxiety, or what the author refers to as "pathologies of individualization" (p. 44).

Following the already defined and redefined ideas and concepts on self-esteem, subjectivization, working activities, and capabilities to flourish, the author decided to take a step further to extend his multidisciplinary study from theoretical elucidation to firsthand qualitative data. He applied participant observation of over 250 musicians and semidirected interviews with 32 individuals (22 men and 10 women)

from across the world between 2008 and 2016 (p. 36) to understand how professional musicians with at least three-years' experience cope with, consciously or unconsciously, mental sufferings.

Since Leon Festinger's (1962) work demonstrated the alignment between the agent's previous action and their opinions, nearly all the musicians under great pressure would rationalize what they lived in the past to make sense of their sufferings, and this is the "cognitive dissonance" (p. 74) that they share. The musicians, on one hand, are in pursuit of their dreams for self-fulfillment, and are, on the other, often deprived of a financially stable opportunity to flourish in the era of precariousness. We could say that the instability of the CCIs exacerbates the tension of every cultural worker and makes the dissonance more prevalent and prominent for them, which gives way for the observation of their common coping strategies.

Seven strategies are often adopted among the participants of the research, but the ways of managing the pressure from their work can be boiled down to just one term: fantasy. There are, in conclusion, mainly three subcategories of fantasies specifically taken by musicians. They are referred to in this article as "Three Ds (Delusion, Denial, and Displacement)" (pp. 75-90). The delusion emerges when they feel marginalized by society or the artist community, and it often takes the form of "Don Quixote-like" (p. 81) behavior to transform the cruelty of daily life into a dream-like pretense to sustain their creation. Denial frequently presents when the artists feel they are underrepresented or ignored by the media. The defense mechanism could be both mild (self-assurance) for radical (cynical detachment and blasé attitudes). Displacement occasionally emerges when less well-known artists simplistically assess their surroundings to distract attention away from their lack of ability, resources, or networks and toward something that is clearly beyond one's control to give themselves an excuse to work even though their careers do not seem so promising. They might also compensate themselves by claiming "it's better to be bohemian than poor" (p. 85).

It is obvious that all the strategies employed are for the sake of artists' self-recognition. The phenomenon proves that (1) all cultural workers need more internal security than any other professions; (2) CCIs can never be divorced from society, and they may be the most sensitive barometers of the changes in public values towards our cultural, social, and political lives.

Generally, the book is structurally clear, providing both introductions and conclusions in every single chapter to help readers quickly and effectively grasp the "what," "why," and "how." Besides, the author attempted to integrate psychoanalysis into cultural group studies while reforming the traditional psyche-based approach with the help of long and bias-free field research, which serves as a fine example of psychoanalysis-based cultural and sociological studies. Last but not least, the book has pragmatic and practical implications for cultural workers other than musicians, who may also suffer from mental problems, as well as governmental institutions that have mostly overlooked the group. The book also calls upon more scholars to pay attention to topics in late modernity.

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