Chapter 12

‘Exhaustion’ as a Driver of Change in the Creative Economy

Ealasaid Munro

12.1 Introduction

Since the late 1990s, British policymakers have identified the creative industries as a key driver of the national economy (O'Brien 2014). According to the Centre for Economics and Business Research the creative industries contributed £8.5 billion to the economy in 2016 (CEBR 2017, p. 4),¹ and creative-economic strategies have been mooted as solutions to stalled growth, un- and under-employment, moribund town and city centres and a whole range of other economic and social crises. Whilst the idea that creativity represents a ‘fix’ for these diverse crises has been widely critiqued, Schlesinger et al. (2015) have argued that the trajectory of creative-economic policy remains largely unaltered.

The fact that the creative-economic policy ‘juggernaut’ rumbles on in this way is a source of frustration for those of us who have questioned the foundations upon which the creative economy is built, unpicking its inconsistencies and exploring its existing forms. There is now a growing body of critical work that seeks to ‘rethink’ the foundations and trajectory of the creative economy. As Oakley et al. (2018, p. 311) observe, ‘the rationale for the creative economy [...] has reached its limits. Faced with critical environmental concerns, and increasing demands for justice in

¹In the last 10 years there have been significant improvements in ICTs, leading to growth in digital creative production, distribution, and consumption. The established creative industries and newer ‘digital industries’ are often grouped together as a separate economic sector—the ‘creative economy’.

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E. Munro (✉)
Office of Communications (Ofcom), Glasgow, UK

the ways we produce, consume and experience culture, it is vital that we now explore possible critical paths for its future.’

This chapter contributes to work that explores creatives workers’ resistance to key tenets of creative-economic policy discourse, and their desire to produce alternative economic imaginaries through their work (see also Luckman 2018; McLean 2017; Munro 2016). Using Gilles Deleuze, I show how ‘exhaustion’ might be a driving force for change among creative workers. It draws on ethnographic material from two short research projects, including interviews with 23, predominantly rurally-based, creatives and participant observation in a range of settings.² While ‘exhaustion’ is my key theme, the analysis also contributes to wider debates about whether ideas on the creative economy based on urban experience can work in rural settings (Bell and Jayne 2010, p. 210; Harvey et al. 2012; Luckman 2012).³

The lives of the creative workers in my study are also shaped by two specific policy contexts. First, they work within a rural creative economy that has a patch-work quality (Bell and Jayne 2010; Roberts and Townsend 2016), a result of both poorly-developed infrastructure and attempts to combine ‘urban’ creative-economic policy frameworks with ‘rural’ policy interventions focused on the heritage sector and forms of creative practice such as craft. Creative workers must often develop the creative economy ‘from below’ to patch the gaps in the institutional infrastructure (Munro 2016). Second, although these workers are located in a Scottish policy context where devolution has offered a great degree of national control over cultural and creative industries development strategies and a separate national funding apparatus, the Scottish Government’s creative industries development strategy is still broadly in line with Westminster (Schlesinger et al. 2015). However, rural Scotland has a complex institutional infrastructure in which sector-specific funding and support agencies overlap with geographically-bounded ones, a complexity that acts as a barrier for creatives seeking funding and support (Munro 2016; Schlesinger et al. 2015).

12.2 Discourses of Growth in the Creative Economy

One recent strand of scholarship explores the role of the creative economy in an era of stalled economic growth. As Banks (2018, p. 366) notes, ‘official statistics show that in the decade since the financial crash the creative industries have recovered to become one of the UK’s most dynamic industrial sectors, consistently reporting

²The chapter draws on material gathered as part of two research projects concerned with the support landscape for creative practitioners in Scotland. The first, ‘Supporting Creative Business’, was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The second, ‘Towards a model of support for the rural creative industries’, was funded by the University of Glasgow.

³See also the wealth of research on how creativity contributes to rural development in Australia (Argent et al. 2013; Gibson 2010; Gibson and Connell 2015; Waitt and Gibson 2013).

growth in excess of the national average.' Despite the gloomy outlook for the UK economy more generally—particularly in the context of Brexit—the creative economy is lauded as a success story.

Government narratives about the creative economy emphasize its importance to economic growth at a range of scales. Funding bodies and business support agencies also aim to bring about growth—in key creative sectors, and in creative businesses and individuals (Munro 2017; Schlesinger et al. 2015). The policy landscape is predicated on the idea that, through funding and support, creatives can develop their entrepreneurial skills and build a business from their talent. For Luckman (2018, p. 314), an entrepreneurial subjectivity is characteristic of the experience of working within the creative economy: 'the increasing absence of secure employment options in the neoliberal workplace demands greater individual responsibility for generating work of workers themselves.' In the absence of professional development frameworks, entrepreneurs internalize a commitment to professional and personal growth.

Banks (2018), Luckman (2018) and Oakley et al. (2018) have questioned whether the creative economy can be seen as a growth area when the economy more generally is understood to be stagnating. The crude nature of metrics designed to measure growth (such as GVA and GDP) are unsuitable for measuring the creative industries and their contributions to local, regional and national economies, and adherence to purely economic conceptions of growth fails to account for the more-than-capitalist values that animate much creative production (McRobbie 2016). Furthermore, 'boosterist' discourses of growth mask the poor working conditions, extreme precarity, and tendency towards burnout inherent in the creative labour market (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2013). Most importantly, in the context of impending climate catastrophe, growth—as it is generally understood by economists—is unsustainable, and policymakers and participants in the creative economy may be complicit in 'lighting the path of return to a world where dreams of unfettered economic expansion might once again be dreamt' (Banks 2018, p. 367).

The creative industries are often seen as a 'clean' route to growth. However, creative production is not environmentally benign: 'the growth of digital technology that it promotes is highly dependent on energy use and the association with lifestyle goods, via fashion, craft, design and advertising links it in many ways to conspicuous (over)consumption' (Oakley et al. 2018, p. 15). Failure to tease out the tensions between elements of the so-called 'triple bottom line' of the economic, social and environmental impacts of creative activities has led to a blind spot relating to creativity and the environment, and serious consideration of the environmental impact of the creative economy has yet to percolate into the policy mainstream.⁴ Relatively

⁴Indeed, in Creative Scotland's (2016, p. 9) Creative Industries Strategy the 'triple bottom line' is identified as 'economic, social and cultural value' with no mention made of the environment. Creative Scotland, like all government bodies in Scotland, has a statutory requirement under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to contribute to delivery of the Act's emissions reduction targets. Creative Scotland's Environment Policy (2013) is primarily concerned with the organization's own operation, although Creative Scotland has in recent years implemented a number of

little scholarship explores the contribution of the creative economy to climate change (something that this volume seeks to address), although there is a growing body of work that explores how creative labourers are rethinking their practice in light of an increased awareness of environmental issues (Anderson et al. 2016; Collins et al. 2018; Collins and Fahy 2011; Luckman 2018; Oakley et al. 2018). The twin tendencies identified in much of this literature—towards ‘burnout’ and environmental exhaustion—are rarely addressed concurrently. This chapter shows how the tactics that creative workers employ in order to ward off or manage a state of burnout are bound up with a range of other concerns, including the environment.

12.3 The Creative Economy: An Exhaustion ‘Machine’?

In *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher (2009) argues that the encroachment of capitalist dynamics into all areas of social life has led to our inability to imagine alternative economic and social futures. For Brigstocke (2016), who draws on Fisher’s (2009) work our ability to engage productively with the future has been worn away by a sense of powerlessness and exhaustion in the face of the seemingly-unstoppable twin processes of capitalist expansion and environmental degradation. For these authors, the future has been ‘occupied, colonized [...], destroyed’ (Ibid., p. 20). In this work, there are echoes of Gilles Deleuze’s (1996) philosophy of exhaustion.

Where Deleuzian theory has been used within creative-economic scholarship, it has normally been in relation to his work—in collaboration with Felix Guattari—on the assemblage, and the rhizomatic social formations that can disrupt or subvert established ways of ‘doing’ or ‘thinking’ the creative economy (see Daskalaki and Mould 2013). Assemblage theory allows us to theorize how the creative economy is a product of the interactions between multiple policies, institutions, intermediary agencies, creative businesses and individuals. This highlights a key tension at the heart of the creative-economic project between what Deleuze and Guattari (1988) call the ‘arborescent’ structure—the established policies, practices and modes of evaluation that constitute the creative economy—and possible ‘lines of flight’, attempts by artists, activists and critics to recover the progressive potential in creativity. The language of assemblage is appealing because it contains the possibility of change (Nail 2017) and it has been used productively to trace the development of social movements and changes within institutions and organizations. Deleuze also explicitly linked creativity to lines of flight: it is our desire to escape the status quo that leads us to create (Deleuze and Parnet 2007; for creative-industries specific applications see Duff and Sumartojo 2017; Lithgow and Wall 2018; Mar and Anderson 2010).

However, in his later work, Deleuze moved away from theorizing the productive nature of creativity. His short essay *L’epuise (The exhausted)* (Deleuze 1996)

initiatives relating to sustainability within the sectors they fund, including requiring funded organizations to report on their carbon footprints and sustainability initiatives, and offering advice and support to creative businesses on how to act more sustainably.

sketches out the contours of a state of complete exhaustion. For Deleuze, exhaustion is more than just a feeling of tiredness, or of being 'worn out', but instead a state from which it is impossible to recover: '[t]he tired has only exhausted realization, while the exhausted exhausts all of the possible. The tired can no longer realize, but the exhausted can no longer possibilate' (1996, p. 3). This sees a fundamental 'closing of the infinite forces of creation and potentiality that [Deleuze] had been attempting to release in his earlier work' (Kerslake 1996, p. 113). Exhaustion is the state that is reached when it is evident that an arborescent system is no longer functioning, and where the formation of lines of flight have been arrested.

We are no longer able to ignore the fact that the creative economy contributes to the exhaustion of resources—human and environmental. Creative work is often extremely precarious and recent scholarship shows that long hours, low pay, and a sense of constantly having to 'hustle'—or juggle multiple income streams—can, over time, contribute to burnout (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2013; Njaradi 2014). Within the creative economy, where much work is freelance or project-based, this can be compounded by a lack of opportunities for further training and career development, and for breaks for illness, child-rearing or other caring responsibilities (Siebert and Wilson 2013). These conditions also limit creative workers' ability to plan for the future, leading to feelings of paralysis (Schlesinger et al. 2015) or, in Deleuzian terms, leaving them unable to 'possibilate'.

It may be becoming harder to 'possibilate', to recover the progressive potential in the creative economy, but it is not altogether *impossible* (see Mould 2018). In this chapter, I reconfigure Deleuze to show how both the threat of exhaustion—and the feeling or state of it—can be generative and provide the impetus to 'do' creative work differently. My analysis highlights how creative workers' articulate the human and environmental cost of working in the creative economy. If the idea of exhaustion is already a key theme in scholarship on the experience of working within the creative economy, the concept of 'exhaustion' also animates much critical work on the creative and media industries' impact on the environment (Christensen and Nilsson 2018; Kääpä 2018; Maxwell this volume). In my research, creative workers occasionally elided bodily and environmental exhaustion, and saw reshaping their practice as key to managing both of these issues. My aim is to show how these twin concerns can give rise to lines of flight, animating creative production and creative workers' drive to rethink their practice and their orientation towards established ways of working in the creative sector.

12.4 Escape to the Country? Rurality as a Line of Flight

The creative economy is characterized by portfolio working, extreme precarity, high rates of burnout, and of physical and mental exhaustion (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2013). For a number of my interviewees, choosing to relocate to a rural location (or in some cases, to return home after years spent training and working away) stemmed from the desire to ward off, or respond to, a state of exhaustion (see also Gibson 2010; Luckman 2012; Waitt and Gibson 2013).

One craftsperson narrated her ‘moves’ around the country over the last decade. She had moved from her small hometown in the central belt of Scotland to Edinburgh to complete her degree. Upon completion, she moved to London—‘a common move’, she told me, among young graduates—to gain experience through internships, and to take advantage of the concentration of creative workers, businesses and clients in London. After a few years of ‘the grind’, and sensing burnout, she applied for a series of residencies in rural Scotland, eventually taking up an opportunity in the Northern Isles. She told me: ‘my mental health improved almost overnight’. She cited the slower pace of life, the close-knit community of artists (and non-artists) that she had slotted into, and the ‘nourishing’ effect of the natural landscape as important factors in her decision to relocate there permanently. She cautioned that relocation wouldn’t be for everyone but for her, it worked, and her creative practice and her orientation towards work had changed as a result. She was concerned with keeping her business manageable and protecting her work-life balance. She saw this as vital in order to protect her mental health and to reduce the potential for exhaustion, but also in order to ensure her enthusiasm for her practice wasn’t dimmed.

This craftsperson’s testimony was echoed by other interviewees, who also saw a move to the country as a way of dealing with exhaustion, or the threat of it. One textile artist, originally from Moray, told me that, after coming to the realization that she was ‘worn out’, she returned home to take stock:

I was living in London, I’d done internships, I was doing really well as far as it went. I was selling. But I was barely making enough to live on, commuting hours a day, working in a shop, no social life. Just worn out, and I thought ‘Fuck it’. The village’d got broadband, mum and dad still had my old room, so I went home for a bit and [re-thought] what I was doing.

There are a number of reasons that craftspeople may choose to base themselves in a rural area rather than a city (Luckman 2012). For my interviewees, advantages of a rural location included cheaper rents or lower property prices relative to cities; more space; a slower pace of life; and a feeling of being embedded within and valued by their communities.

One key problem for many of the creatives that I spoke to was that many intermediaries saw a commitment to ‘growth’ as a precondition for funding and support. Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)—a key funder for businesses in the Highlands and Islands, and for many of my interviewees—states in its cultural policy that ‘[a]spects of regional culture of importance to HIE are those which have the greatest potential to realise economic and social growth’ (HIE 2013, p. 6). It was felt that despite HIE’s commitment to supporting businesses that contributed to economic and social growth, economic growth was afforded primacy. Given the economic, social, cultural and environmental fragility of rural Scotland, this narrow focus on economic growth was seen as problematic and contributing to the exhaustion of resources—both human *and* environmental.

One designer summed up her reasons for ‘staying small’, explaining:

The pressure on small businesses is always more, more, bigger, bigger [...] I would like to sell more, yeah. But if I expand much more I will need to go to China for manufacture, maybe Turkey, Romania. That is going to be a lot more work for me. If I stay small, I can

keep my production in the UK, as local as possible, that's jobs here, shorter supply chain, probably less waste, less hassle.

For this designer, to commit to unrealistic or undesirable expectations of growth was to run the risk of exhaustion. However, she felt that intermediaries such as funders and support agencies 'weren't interested' if creative workers' ambitions were to stay small (see also Schlesinger et al. 2015). This designer's testimony shows an elision between her desire to ward off exhaustion by cultivating a manageable work-life balance, and her concern about her business's environmental impact: for her, 'staying small' is one way of dealing with both pressures. For these respondents, exhaustion had given rise to both a literal line of flight (a move to the country) and a figurative one (often expressed as a desire to 'stay small', or more generally to conceive of ways of working within the creative economy that privileged a healthy work-life balance, had a social or community-building function, and that safeguarded their physical and mental health).

A number of my interviewees felt that one way of responding to exhaustion was to opt-out of what one arts manager called 'funded culture', because of the expectations of business growth that came from funders such as Creative Scotland or HIE. Being part of funded culture often meant a loss of autonomy, something that Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2013) found was essential to people's conception of what constitutes 'good work' in the cultural industries. For some of my respondents, engaging with funded culture meant limiting creativity, a closing-off of creative lines of flight because of the need to align projects with institutional priorities and key performance indicators (KPIs), and submit to economic modes of assessment and evaluation. This arts manager told me, 'I didn't want to take [HIE's] money unless I had to because they would scrutinize the accounts, there would be so many targets to meet and reports to file.' This interviewee went on to say that taking money from funding agencies limited his ability to be responsive when coming up with new initiatives because of the inflexible 'input-activity-outcome' structure of many funded projects.

The creative-economic assemblage constructs 'linear, panoptic power structures' that subjugate creative workers, robbing them of their sense of autonomy (Lithgow and Wall 2018, p. 355; see also Holt and Lapenta 2010; Huws 2010). To return to the language of Deleuze, the prescriptive and panoptic nature of the 'arborescent' institutional funding and support infrastructure was seen by some respondents as a contributing factor in their exhaustion, or as introducing the threat of exhaustion. One photographer told me that he was considering giving up his practice, citing burnout: 'The whole sector is fucked [...] It's set up to profit off overwork, and people end up over-promising [in funding applications] and then either killing themselves to do what they said they'd do, or just [...] not getting it done.'

For this photographer, it was almost impossible to make a living in the creative economy without engaging with the institutional funding landscape. However, he felt that the way that the sector is currently organized undervalues labour and encourages overwork. For him, the institutional infrastructure of the creative economy—and the working practices it propagates—explicitly contributes to the exhaustion of the workforce.

12.5 Emerging Narratives of Environmentalism, or Entrepreneurialism Redux?

Thus far this chapter has highlighted how exhaustion was invoked by interviewees as the catalyst for changing their creative practice, and in some cases rethinking their orientation towards creative labour more generally. Talk of personal and environmental exhaustion was sometimes elided in interviewees' testimony: where individuals spoke of changing their practice in order to ward off or manage exhaustion, they may also invoke narratives of environmental concern. Creative workers' desire to 'go slow', or 'stay small' was seen as a way of responding to exhaustion whilst also reducing the environmental impact of their work (see also Luckman 2018).

Research by industry bodies has shown improving awareness of environmental issues within the creative sector in Scotland. For example, Creative Scotland requires all Regularly Funded Organizations to report carbon emissions, and a recent report by Creative Carbon Scotland (2017, p. 2) notes increased engagement with environmental issues, particularly around recycling and waste and the reduction of carbon emissions. Whilst creative businesses demonstrated a good understanding of environmental issues, they faced barriers when attempting to reduce their impact (Ibid.). My interviewees found the language of 'carbon emissions', and practicalities around monitoring and reducing emissions, were key barriers. These measures do not form part of creatives' training, even for those who had recently left art school or university. The onus for drawing down training in this area, reducing environmental impact, and quantifying this in line with intermediaries' reporting structures has come to fall predominantly on the shoulders of individuals.

One arts manager told me that she felt that creative workers had been egregiously slow to 'wake up' to their environmental impact. For her, the pressures of day-to-day work within the creative industries had, in her experience, long displaced concerns about the wider impact of creative production. However, she felt that growing concern over environmental exhaustion was driving change:

Artists are so worried about putting food on the table that they don't think about the environment [...] I think things are changing though, especially here, where people come to be [...] inspired by [the landscape]. Maybe they're primed in a way to think, 'Well what if this wasn't here?' or 'What if this was different?'

Among the creatives I spoke to, many had begun to introduce measures to reduce their environmental impact, aware of the role that their work might have to play in the exhaustion of resources. These included having a good understanding of supply chains and keeping them as short as possible; being aware of energy consumption and attempting to reduce it; use of renewables; use of natural or biodegradable materials for manufacture and packaging; ensuring products were recyclable; making products that had lasting using or appeal rather than a short shelf-life; ensuring products could be repaired rather than thrown away; and reducing travel.

The intertwining of creative work with individuals' lifestyles and sense of 'self' is well-recognized (Duffy 2016; Taylor and Littleton 2016). When narrating what they did to reduce their environmental impact, interviewees often conflated

work-related initiatives with lifestyle changes. The photographer quoted above listed his attempts to reduce his environmental impact in a WhatsApp conversation,⁵ some time after his interview:

Photography relies on extraction in the manufacture of cameras, SD cards, film, and in development, printing etc. This is bad, but I do what I can
(2nd hand cameras, repairing if possible, reducing waste)
I recycle
I avoid single-use plastics
I'm trying to be vegan (not always successfully)
I don't really fly and if I do I will carbon offset.

When visiting a fashion designer at her studio, I asked her what she was doing to reduce her environmental impact, and again, the intertwining of work and lifestyle changes was evident. Despite beginning to trade internationally, she was determined to stick with her current suppliers and factories: she uses local wool, machine knitted, and finished in the studio. This system kept her supply chain manageable. The combination of machine-knitting and hand-finishing meant she could exploit economies of scale but her products retained a crafted 'feel'. Whilst she recognised that her products were luxury goods, she felt that producing one-off pieces that were built to last was better than producing fast fashion. She travelled a lot for work, but had cut down significantly, using Skype and other digital solutions where possible. As with many rural creatives, her studio was attached to her croft house, hence many of her initiatives to reduce her environmental impact were shared between her 'home' space and her 'work' space. On the one hand this made living with a smaller environmental footprint easier, as it became 'second nature' to reduce consumption, but on the other it was hard to accurately track things like energy usage because it was impossible to separate work from everyday domestic life.

Given the way that creative labour is bound up with individuals' identities, lifestyles, and home-spaces, the commingling of work-related initiatives and lifestyle changes should come as no surprise. However this means that measures to reduce environmental impact within the creative economy remain largely individualized. My data suggests that creatives' entrepreneurial subjectivities have simply been 'expanded' in order to encompass these issues. In this way, environmental stewardship measures have become rescaled, with accountability shifted onto individuals. However 'lifestyle' activism of the type outlined here is recognized as largely ineffective in tackling climate change, in the face of continued capitalist expansion and the attendant exhaustion of natural resources. Furthermore, work-related and lifestyle changes of this kind are often the preserve of the (relatively) privileged, and out of reach of many who may be struggling. Only some creative workers are able to 'resist—generally from positions of class and racial privilege—the entrepreneurial imperatives otherwise presumed of idealised neoliberal subjects' (Luckman 2018, p. 317).

⁵This has been edited for clarity.

The creative industries have a soft power, their ability to influence others through their communication of ideas (Leach 2016). This influence is one distinctive contribution that creatives might make to addressing environmental issues. As Boykoff et al. (2010, p. 2) argue in relation to media representations, ‘cultural politics of climate change—the production and consumption of a multiplicity of climate change media and media forms— is as crucial to getting climate change “work” done as the climate science itself.’ Many of my interviewees saw themselves as raising awareness, both through their creative practice and through dialogue, lobbying, and helping others to solve problems, moving away from individualized approaches towards collective responsibility.

One visual artist from North West Scotland had shifted her practice to focus on landscapes: ‘People come here to buy and we always have a conversation about the piece. My latest collection is all seascapes, so I talk to them about the sea, about fishing, warming, changes I’ve seen myself.’ She saw herself as practising consciousness-raising through her art. Artists can play a role in communicating climate change science (Doyle 2016; Nurmis 2016), but most research has focused on specific artworks or exhibitions rather than how artists’ or creative workers express their values in a range of activities ancillary to their practice. For example, my research shows that elements of creative workers’ branding could be seen as having a similar consciousness-raising aspect. At an industry event run by HIE in July 2015, a panel of creatives spoke of how they exploited the possibilities of improved ICTs in order to offset the problems of working from rural areas. A designer on the panel said that ethical consumption was becoming increasingly important to consumers, and that this was a market she was trying to tap into through emphasising her ‘slow’ approach to fashion. Astute use of social media allowed her to showcase the provenance of her products. As she spoke, I checked her Twitter and Instagram, as well as the accounts of other designers she was linked to; a large part of their ‘advertising’ through these channels entailed giving followers an insight into life on the islands. The visual nature of these media allowed them to create ‘virtual studios’ (Budge 2013) and enabled them to document how local histories of making had influenced their practice, and how a rural location had influenced the aesthetic of their work. This had the effect of conveying a sense of the importance of craft, history, and the natural environment.

Digital ‘solutions’ of this kind are not always as ‘environmentally-friendly’ as they appear; they also contribute to resource extraction and exhaustion (Kääpä 2018). Greenpeace (2014) estimates that the ICT sector now comprises 2% of global emissions. Whilst using Skype might, on balance, be better than flying to a meeting, the environmental impact of ICTs was routinely underestimated by my respondents.

Creative workers often see themselves as having responsibilities towards their communities, particularly where economic, social, and environmental systems are fragile. An arts manager spoke of how concern about environmental degradation and planetary exhaustion had led members of the local creative community to instigate island-wide measures to reduce their environmental impact. The following is adapted from field notes:

In her interview, this arts manager had told me: 'A lot of us have come here for the same reason, to reclaim a work-life balance [...] Here we can put back into the community [more easily]. It's about keeping this place going.' After spending some time shadowing her, and speaking to other residents, I saw examples of this community-wide approach in action. The island is already self-sustaining in terms of energy, with all households and businesses powered by renewables. However the community was trying to do more to reduce its environmental impact. My interviewee had spoken about how the island was attempting to streamline suppliers (even doing a community-wide online shop, rather than a number of individual ones), band together to recycle waste (especially where specialist recycling facilities were needed) and increasing use of car-shares and other forms of community travel.

In this arts manager's testimony—which, taken as a whole, represented one of the most nuanced, complexly wide-ranging examinations of 'exhaustion' that I came across—we can see how creative labourers are beginning to 'de-individualize' concern for the environment, to push back against the expansion of entrepreneurial subjectivities to encompass environmental issues. The manner in which the island banded together around the huge, multi-faceted issue of climate change was heavily influenced by its distinctive community history. On one level, their community-wide initiatives were important because individual responses were seen as largely inadequate to tackling the issue of planetary exhaustion, with more radical solutions needed. On another level, however, 'de-individualizing' responses to pressing issues was seen as a way to ward off exhaustion on the part of individuals who may already be struggling with the burden of forced entrepreneurship (Oakley 2014), or the unmanageable expansion of those entrepreneurial subjectivities that are increasingly necessary for survival within the creative economy.

12.6 Conclusions

We can no longer deny the fact that creative work contributes to the exhaustion of resources, both human and environmental. A profound anxiety about 'exhaustion'—the threat of it, and the feeling or state itself—was framed as a catalyst for change by creative workers in my study. These wide-ranging ideas about 'exhaustion' can usefully contribute to a range of research areas. This includes scholarship that explores working conditions within the creative economy and the development of entrepreneurial subjectivities (Gill 2014; Oakley 2014; Scharff 2016); that examines the role of the creative economy in relation to discourses of growth (Banks 2018; Luckman 2018; Oakley et al. 2018); and that has begun to explore creatives' growing awareness of the environmental impact of their work.

I have employed a tempered version of Deleuze's (1996) metaphor of 'exhaustion' to frame creatives' orientation towards the creative-economic 'assemblage'. Many of the creatives I spoke to found the experience of working within the creative economy profoundly exhausting, characterized by long hours, low pay, precarity and a frustrating lack of alignment between their own principles and those which animate the funding and support landscape. Interviewees developed several 'tactics' for responding to, or warding off, exhaustion including staying small, and

increasing their job satisfaction by incorporating broad-based economic, social, cultural and environmental concerns into their business models rather than prioritizing growth. Several of my interviewees had made the conscious decision to opt out of what they called ‘funded culture’, citing unreasonable expectations around growth as one reason for doing so.

Experts have warned that to avoid climate catastrophe, urgent action needs to be taken both in terms of limiting emissions and curbing resource extraction and environmental degradation. Whilst it is increasingly recognized that the industrial economy as we know it needs root and branch reform, and that continued capitalist expansion is not sustainable, national governments are unwilling to abandon the idea of growth. Hence a politically expedient portrait of the creative economy—as a key route to ‘clean’ growth—has emerged. However, those who champion the creative economy in this regard conveniently ignore the contribution that the creative, cultural and digital industries make to emissions, resource extraction and environmental degradation. As Banks (2018, p. 369) has written,

Creative, cultural and digital industries [...] are highly energy-intensive and often egregiously polluting; this includes many of the world’s leading digital technology and communications companies, the global film and television industries, publishing, music and the transport, circulation and logistical systems that sustain them.

Whilst many of my respondents expressed concerned but often contradictory views about the impact of their work on the environment, anxieties about exhaustion are undoubtedly driving environmental activism on the part of creative workers. Interviewees had incorporated a series of stewardship measures into business practice, including monitoring supply chains, monitoring and reducing emissions, waste management, and creative use of ICTs to reduce travel. Given the way that creative labour is bound up with individuals’ identities, lifestyles and home-spaces, work-related initiatives and lifestyle changes were often inextricably linked. Creatives also took on responsibility for consciousness-raising around environmental issues and coming up with collective measures to reduce their impact on the environment. However, given the structural composition of the creative economy—where most businesses are microbusinesses or sole traders—this drive intersects with discourses of creative entrepreneurialism in a way that rescales the issue of climate change. This amounts to a process of responsabilization ‘in which climate change becomes the responsibility of the individual rather than of governments or regulators who might affect significant policy changes through altering production and distribution’ (Boykoff et al. 2010). In this case, this rescaling may work to further absolve governments, regulators and intermediaries from their responsibility to intervene at the macro-scale to arrest damaging industrial practices.

I am not suggesting that the actions of a small set of creative workers is going to alter the trajectory of global capitalism. However, this chapter shows that awareness of, and commitment to, alternative ways of ‘doing’ creative work is gathering pace, driven by concerns about the exhaustion of human and environmental resources. Creative workers’ commitment to thinking outside of established economic models, and to privileging ways of working animated by principles of care rather than ‘growth’, has clear policy implications. It is imperative that policymakers and

intermediaries rethink the assumptions that underpin the current creative-economic assemblage, and the kinds of funding and business support that act as regulatory structures for the development of the creative economy.

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