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Post-Fordist Reconfigurations of Gender, Work and Life: Theory and Practice

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Abstract

Based on an in-depth study with 56 informants (25 women and 31 men), across the ICT (Information and Communication Technology), creative and academic sectors in one city/regional hub in Ireland, this article investigates the so-called revolution in work/life practices associated with the post-Fordist labour processes of the Knowledge Economy from the perspectives of workers themselves. Recent theorisations of post-Fordist work patterns emphasise a rearranging of work and life *place boundaries*; a reconfiguring of work and life *time boundaries*; and a dissolving of the gendered boundaries of *work and life* (production and social reproduction)(Adkins and Dever 2014; Morini and Fumagalli 2010; Gill and Pratt 2008; Weeks 2007; Hardt and Negri 2004). Our findings suggest that, instead of dissolving boundaries, workers constantly struggle to draw boundaries between what counts as work and as life, and that this varies primarily in relation to gender and stage in a gendered life trajectory. Work extensification is compensated for via a perceived freedom to shape one's own life, which is articulated in terms of individualised boundary-drawing. While younger men embraced 'always on' work, they also articulated anxieties about how these work habits might interfere with family aspirations. This was also true for younger women who struggled to make time for life in

the present. For mothers, boundary drawing was articulated as a necessity but was framed more in terms of personal choice by fathers. Although all participants distinguished between paid work and life as distinct sites of value, boundaries were individually drawn and resist any easy mapping of masculinity and femininity onto the domains of work and life. Instead, we argue that it is the *process* of boundary drawing that reveals gendered patterns. The personalised struggles of these relatively privileged middle-class workers centre on improving the quality of their lives, but raise important questions about the political possibilities within and beyond the world of post-Fordist labour.

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Introduction

The emergence of what has become known as the Knowledge Economy in advanced capitalist economies is characterised by post-Fordist, customer-led flexible production processes, based on 'individually-negotiated and individually tailored contracts' (Henry and Massey 1995: 61) and a transnational division of production. This shift has profound implications for the relationship between work and life in advanced economies (Mitchell et al. 2004; Weeks 2007). Post-Fordist commodity forms are forged from 'human faculties, competences and knowledges' such that production is 'first and foremost production of knowledge and subjectivity' (Hardt and Negri 2009: 132/131). [1] Moreover, the value of these commodity forms relies on their reception and/or consumption so it cannot be related to a single individual (Lazzarato 1996). Instead, social relations are put to work to create 'surplus in relation to collective cognitive mechanisms' (1996:6). As such, the economy is folded into society to the extent that it 'has no obvious or clear-cut "outside"' (Adkins and Dever 2014:2). In the Fordist industrial order, reproductive labour and productive labour are linked to the division of social realms into household and economy onto which naturalised models of gender are mapped (Weeks 2007: 237). This 'separate spheres model' is seen as confounded by post-Fordist processes because the commodities produced rely on capacities and practices that cross these boundaries (Weeks 2007: 238). Because processes of post-Fordist production

> integrate the labors of the hand, brain and heart… production and reproduction are more thoroughly integrated in terms of both what is (re)produced and how it is (re)produced. What could once perhaps have been imagined as an "outside" is now more fully "inside"… (ibid.).

As such, the ‘binaries of productive and reproductive men and women’s work [are] …increasingly inadequate’ for high-level knowledge workers at least (2007: 239). The dual nature of the KE means that these workers rely on the low-paid and marketised care and domestic work undertaken mainly by women (often migrants) (Lutz 2016), for whom such divisions are differently configured.

States are active agents in promoting this dispersal of economic activity across society (Gill and Pratt 2008:7), including the off-loading of responsibility for social reproduction onto the market, individuals, households and civil society (Perrons 2007; Katz 2008; Adkins 2009). Some see this diffusion and privatisation of social provisioning as putting the institutions and structures of social life and extra-market relations of social reproduction in crisis (Roberts 2013; Bakker 2007; Caffentzis 2002; Mitchell et al. 2004). Indeed, post-Fordist social arrangements have been charged with ‘undercutting and hollowing out … the conditions required for the renewal, sustainability and reproduction of material life’ (Adkins and Dever 2014: 5).

With both production and social reproduction being transformed and dispersed across social domains, Morini and Fumagalli (2010) argue that the boundaries between work and life *places* become blurred, and work and life *times* intertwine such that the relationship between production and social reproduction is transformed. Indeed, they assert that ‘the tendency not to establish “limits” is actually prototypical of contemporary production’ (2010: 245). Our aim in this article is to investigate the evidence for these transformations from the perspectives of ‘high-level’ knowledge workers themselves.[2]

Because their accounts point to an interpenetration of work and life such that '[w]ho one becomes at work and in life are mutually constitutive', we, like Weeks, see 'life' as a more capacious term than that of social reproduction (2007: 246). This is because the term 'life' 'does not risk corralling the practices constitutive of social life into the space of the household or, even more narrowly, equate them with the institution of the family' (ibid.).

Post-Fordist processes of production, innovation and knowledge diffusion are materially organised via regional/city-based agglomerations of ICT, creative industries and higher education (James 2013: 3; Walby et al. 2007). ICT industries tend to be the flagship sector in the post-Fordist economy and are seen to be 'at the vanguard of new working practices' (James 2013: 7). Academic institutions also play a central role as resources (or more proactively as generators) of new knowledge through innovation (Brennan et al. 2008). Increasingly conceived in 'entrepreneurial' terms, the university sector is expected 'to transform academic knowledge into economic and social utility' (ibid.:57). The creative industries, described as 'paradigms of entrepreneurial selfhood' (Ross 2008: 32), make up the third key sector in this economy. This work involves 'individual creativity, skill and talent' and contributes to 'wealth and job creation and the generation and exploitation of intellectual property' (DCMS 2001 in Henry and Johnston 2007: 212).

The Nomadic Work/Life (NWL) project, on which this article is based, involved a five-year collaboration (2008-2013) between the Departments of Sociology and Computer Science and Information Systems at the University of Limerick and focused on one

city/regional hub in Ireland. It consisted of three sub-projects investigating workers in the three key sectors of ICT, Creative Industries and Academia. Via this collaboration we sought to capitalise on 'emergent synergies' between the sociologies of work and mobility and the fields of computer-supported cooperative work, human-computer interaction and ubiquitous computing (Büscher 2014). The project also responds to Perrons' call for a 'holistic approach' that focuses on 'people and places to understand the increasing social, spatial and gendered divisions that characterize contemporary society' (2004: 58). Taking the work/life experiences of these three categories of middle-class 'knowledge workers' as its starting point, this article asks to what extent and in what ways work at the high end of the post-Fordist Knowledge Economy colonises the lifeworlds of workers as suggested in the post-Fordist literature; how workers themselves negotiate the activities of work and life (production and social reproduction); and how these negotiations might be gendered.

The remainder of the article is structured into five sections: the following section briefly introduces the empirical study upon which the article is based. The three subsequent sections identify emergent themes in the data that both resonate with and challenge the key maxims of recent theoretical debate regarding post-Fordist work patterns: first, the rearranging of working and life *place boundaries* (Henry and Massey 1995; Weeks 2007; Gregg 2008; Morini and Fumagalli 2010); second, the reconfiguring of working and life *time boundaries* (Weeks 2007; Gregg 2008; Morini and Fumagalli 2010); and third, the renegotiation of the gendered boundaries of *work and life* (production and social reproduction) (Adkins and Denver 2014; Roberts 2013; Bakker 2007; Mitchell et al. 2004). The concluding discussion draws on our findings to challenge theoretical

assertions of a post-Fordist order in which 'social life itself becomes a productive machine' (Hardt and Negri 2004: 148), so that there is an elimination of boundaries; there is no outside.

Researching work and life in the post-Fordist economy

In the period of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy between 1998 and 2007, GDP per capita in Ireland rose from about 60 per cent to over 120 per cent of the EU average (Russell et al. 2009a). Key factors underpinning this rapid economic growth included the attraction of high-tech FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), a strong educational and ICT infrastructure, Ireland's English-speaking population and its membership of the Single European market (Paus 2012). Following the economic crash in 2008, the same economic model remained in place and was pursued even more vehemently. The state's economic policy as articulated in a series of government reports including the *Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2006-2013* (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation 2011), *Building Ireland's Smart Economy* (Government of Ireland 2008) and the *Report of the Innovation Taskforce* (Government of Ireland 2011), all emphasise ideas, creativity and innovation. 'Smart Economic Growth' is described in terms of 'Building the Ideas Economy - Creating the "Innovation Island"' based on an 'interdependence between four forms of capital accumulation… human or knowledge capital …; physical capital; natural or environmental capital…; [and] social capital' (Government of Ireland 2008: 13/32). Amongst other things, the 'Smart Economy' was to involve 'enhancing productivity per person by investing in human capital; [and] incentivising innovation and commercialisation' (2008: 33). The knowledge sectors of ICT and creative industries

have continued to grow since 2008, with higher education playing an increasingly important role, having shifted over the past decade 'from … a public service ethos to focusing on creating workers for a capitalist knowledge economy' (Grummell et al. 2009: 194; National Strategy for Higher Education Group 2011).

During the Celtic Tiger years, women's employment rose by 52 per cent reaching an employment rate of 60.4 per cent in 2010, while men's employment rate increased by only 33 per cent in the same period (Russell et al. 2009a:6).[3] Moreover, the number of women in 'knowledge-intensive activities' exceeded that of men (European Commission 2012: 22). As employment and dual earner households grew rapidly during the economic boom, Russell et al. (2009b) found work–life conflict to be higher for women than for men, for those with higher educational qualifications, and among employees with young children.[4] These findings are reflected in James' study of the IT sectors in Cambridge and Dublin between 2006 and 2008. He found that women workers in Dublin 'generally exhibit[ed] greater levels of work-life conflict' and negative work-to-home spillovers than their counterparts in Cambridge (James 2013: 21-22). Factors such as the lengthy commutes due to the urban sprawl around Dublin, the absence of statutory provision for paternity leave, discretionary rather than legal provision for part-time and job-sharing work arrangements, lower levels of paid maternity leave and high childcare costs all contributed to this (ibid.). Childcare remained a particular problem as the new marketised child-care structure developed in the 1990s only partially replaced informal and family-based arrangements and proved inadequate to the exponential growth in labour market participation of mothers with young children (Devitt 2015; Gallagher 2012). So, despite the increased presence of women in the highly-skilled labour force, evidence points to the

tenaciousness of traditional gendered patterns in the division of labour across employed and unpaid work.

The aim of the NWL study on which this article is based was to get closer to the everyday lives of workers in the ICT, creative and academic sectors and how they negotiate work/life. It involved in-depth research with 48 workers across these sectors (18 in ICT – mainly small-medium Irish companies; 16 in academia (in disciplines of communication and computer science, sociology and education); 14 independent creative entrepreneurs), and with 8 key regional and national development agency actors. Of the total of 56 informants, 25 were women and 31 were men. Most were white Irish with a few of European or north American origin but living in Ireland on a long-term basis. In-depth interviews (in some cases two interviews) were conducted with all informants. In the case of academics, the research also involved shadowing and time-space diaries and, in the case of creatives, an analysis of presence on social networking platforms complements the interview data. In this article we analyse the interview data only (using pseudonyms), and focus on the ways in which workers across the three sectors negotiate the so-called revolution in work and life practices associated with post-Fordism.

*Undoing the separation between working-place and life-place***?**

In the transition to capitalism, productive and reproductive tasks were separated and redefined with homes and workplaces being systematically divided on the basis that 'the making of people and the manufacture of things should properly operate by an entirely different logic in places that have nothing to do with each other' (Graeber 2006: 62). Morini and Fumagalli argue that these arrangements are being recast in post-Fordism as

the '[t]he *separation between working-place and life-place* is overcome' by the constant production of 'working non-places' (2010:239; emphasis in original), or what Kakihara et al. (2002) call 'fluid workplaces'. One of the ways in which work place becomes dispersed is via the extensive travel associated with a post-Fordist global 'kinetic elite' (Henry and Massey 1995; Gregg 2008; Costas 2013; D'Andrea and Gray 2013). In contrast with the notion of place, which suggests a sense of meaningful belonging achieved via long-term familiar inhabitation, the much-contested notion of 'non–place' is taken to refer to those generalised, standardized spaces (e.g. airports, hotels or shopping malls) that facilitate travel, transactions between strangers, or consumption, and are occupied mainly by transient mobile agents (Augé 1992; Morini and Fumagalli 2010). As such, the production of 'working non-places' and 'fluid workplaces' is associated in much of the literature with frequent work-related travel.

Yet, for nearly all of those taking part in our study, long-distance or frequent mobility was resisted in favour of the maintenance of relationships, a sense of belonging and social life associated with place and a relatively sedentary lifestyle. Valued local roots and organic social relations (family, friends, place) were the main reasons for residing and working in the city area and in Ireland. For the ICT workers, mobility tended to be associated with age, as young people were presumed to be more free and willing to move in order to start careers. As such, long-distance corporeal mobility was valued most negatively by those at later stages in their careers. International mobility for academics and creative entrepreneurs was infrequent and sporadic rather than a regular aspect of

day-to-day life. Instead their work involved different registers of mobility (Büscher 2014).

Of course, those technological advances that 'facilitate more spatial mobility also have the potential to support the opposite outcome: a reduced need for spatial mobility' (Hislop and Axtell 2007: 39; Ciolfi et al.2012; de Carvalho et al., 2017; de Carvalho 2014). The mobilization of technologies to avoid travel was most prevalent amongst workers across the creative and ICT sectors in our study. Nonetheless, all participants moved their work between locations, mobilizing technologies to convert diverse places into productive places. For example, Dan (Company Director - interactive solutions, web development, apps & 3D animation; late-20s and living with partner without children), whose work-related travel is within Ireland, makes multiple places into workplaces in order to maximize productivity:

> When I'm moving around ... I'm always ... connected to what's going on like with the iPhone ... it has made a massive difference to my mobility ... I'm still 75 per cent contributing what I would have done if I was in the office ... if you're not mobile and connected … you're losing so much time ... you can't justify the cost like…

In contrast with Dan's emphasis solely on productivity, the decision to convert diverse places into work places was most often motivated by how productivity could be combined with other lifestyle considerations. For example, Charles (ICT Company owner in his late 40s who lives in a relatively remote rural area with his wife and two children

under 10) is determined to maintain a home-based work lifestyle. He has an office in the city where a number of software engineers are based. However, after 25 years in ICT work in the US and Ireland, his aim now is to maintain a family and community-oriented lifestyle. Regarding work, he states:

> In my past corporate life I did a lot of travel, and I am kind of allergic to travel. It takes a lot to make me move ... I don't go meet people if I can, because the level of effort is very high ... My contact with IT employees, salespeople and clients is done via email … it is wonderful because you spend more real time with your children and also do the household chores which are shared better… taking the children to school and so on.

Life stage is central in Charles' account as his aversion to travel and ability to choose a relatively sedentary lifestyle arise from his early-career hypermobility and current status as a company owner. He also makes creative use of ICT technologies to enable 'real time' presence with his family and in his locality while maintaining work relationships at a distance. Charles brings a portfolio of life activities together in a particular place and works hard to protect it as a place of both work and family life. Similarly, Sean (Marketing Consultant and Director of a software development firm, in his 50s, in second marriage with two children at home) manages his work/life by limiting travel and working mainly from home: 'I focus my travel. I try not to travel every day if I can. … I try to treat myself as a sort of a business in itself, do that as efficiently as I can'.

These accounts can be read in relation to Feher's argument that individuals are increasingly becoming 'entrepreneurs of themselves … investors in themselves' (Feher

2009: 30). Feher contrasts the Fordist labourer who entered into an employment contract to sell his/her labour with 'a new form of subjectivity: human capital' that he sees as characteristic of post-Fordism (Feher 2009: 24). This human capital does not just relate to investments in education and training but to 'all that is produced by the skill set that defines me' (2009: 26). It arises from 'the things I inherit, the things that happen to me, and the things I do' (ibid.). As such, the management of work places to optimise skill and lifestyle preferences helps to optimise, maintain and interweave personal and professional human capital.

Sara (Self-employed web designer and developer, married and in her mid-30s without children), like Charles, tries to minimise travel and work from home to achieve her preferred home-based lifestyle:

> I do leave my house, and I probably go out for meetings [locally] once a week and I'm definitely going [to another city], or at a conference or giving a presentation on a BarCamp,[5] or whatever … which I consider to be travelling for work, once a month. But I do try to restrict it to just once a month … My preference is to work at home … I could do it from anywhere in the world as long as there was an ashtray and some broadband, but … I think I'm just a home body and … I like my husband being around.

To simultaneously preserve her home-based work location and attract work, Sara has to get her name known and become her own on-line brand (McRobbie 2005):

> I have a male communication style, I know that and I'm aware of that ... it doesn't

> extend to anything other than the way I ... manage my business... I am my own brand... the snarky opinionated ranty crankypants stuff, and that's how my brand is built...

Like the other informants, Sara produces immaterial goods i.e. ‘a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication’ (Hardt and Negri 2000: 292). Immaterial labour is ‘not only … founded on the exploitation of knowledge but of the entirety of human faculties, from relational-linguistic to affective-sensorial’ (Morini and Fumagalli 2010: 235 ftn 2). However, because ‘knowledge accumulation is individual by definition’, it relies on the affective labour of communication and translation; there is a ‘constant need of relational activity’ (Morini and Fumagalli 2010: 238). In communicating, translating and delivering her service, gender becomes part of what Sara produces and is fused into the promotion and content of what is offered (Adkins and Jokinen 2008). Her self-conscious masculine style mobilises gender transgression and provocative opinions to garner attention and insure against brand dissipation or depreciation. It is part of Sara’s portfolio of human capital: a strategic means of promoting herself as a business; a post-Fordist subject of human capital who manages ‘a portfolio of conducts’ pertaining to all aspects of her life at once (Feher 2009: 30). Her gender, via obvious gender playfulness and transgression is put to work to shape reception and consumer response.

Turning to those informants who were academics, some of their work activities, such as presence in lecture theatres at specific times, are place-specific. However, they all move work from place to place as a means of enhancing work creativity, productivity and

collaboration. For example, Jenny (Lecturer in her mid-30s, single and without children) purposely moves in search of specific resources for productivity (e.g. peace and quiet), for comfort (e.g. places where she can get a coffee or a beer), or connectivity (wireless). She notes that when she experiences too many interruptions she takes work home: 'So the two places would be work and home. On the very rare occasion I might go to a wireless cafe. … so I will occasionally go to some place where I can also get a coffee, or a beer and it has wireless'.

Similarly, for Tom (Lecturer, in mid-40s and single without children), work moves across all life locations because 'work is always with me…'. However, he observes that 'because most of what I do can be done effectively using computer technologies, I don't really have any need to sit down with somebody.' Nonetheless, he seeks out social contact in work because 'it's more fun, or it can be'. He adds that 'because humans are social animals … to be able to take advantage of that when that opportunity arises … is important I guess.' In situations where face-to-face collaboration is sought, Tom notes that:

> … it's frequently easier to go to a neutral location … we'd probably never get anything done unless we decamp. But being mobile allows us to choose locations where the potential to be interrupted is much lower and then there are all the benefits, you know, stimulating environment, etc.

The necessity of face-to-face contact to accomplish key aspects of knowledge work and the significance of place for optimising collaboration arose in many accounts.

Knowledge, to actualise its productive potentiality, requires the development of 'a net of relations; …if confined to the individual, knowledge is unable to grow productively' (Morini and Fumagalli 2010: 238). While relational, emotional and cognitive activities are relatively place independent, they require particular place ambiance.

Making work possible across multiple locations is adopted as a strategy to combine work and childcare in Aoife's account (Lecturer in mid-30s, married and with a new-born baby). Despite work having been 'technically more mobile' for some time via her mobile phone and laptop, Aoife explains that she would avoid working on trains because of difficulties concentrating. However, since the arrival of her baby she brings her laptop on all journeys to optimise work time and because the wider availability of broadband on trains enables this. If reproductive work in Fordism was seen as economically and socially external, then Aoife's account concurs with Gregg's findings that the work of childcare in post-Fordism is rendered 'invisible, a matter for women's private concern' (2008: 293).

The spatial mobility and multiple work and living possibilities (often afforded by ICTs and social media) transacted by these workers suggest a 'colonisation' of more and more spaces (e.g. home, cafes and travel spaces) by work. Workers are constantly managing the relationship between work and place, often relocating to achieve an optimum productive and creative work environment, to make a 'mental shift', or facilitate lifestyle choices, domestic or caring demands. Their accounts point to how technologies become 'plastic' as they are opportunistically incorporated into practices of everyday life

(Büscher 2014) in combination with decisions about where specific tasks can best be accomplished. While work moves across places, we found much less evidence of what might be considered 'life' activities taking place within the workplace. Those that did arise involved a father whose children joined him in the office in the absence of a carer at home, and a company manager who worked from Spain for a month so that her son could take a Spanish immersion course. The latter is the one example of when technology and travel combined to enable work availability when affective bonds required physical presence (Gregg 2008: 287).

For those without children, the turning of multiple places into places of work related mainly to creativity, productivity and sociability, but for those with children, the strategic blurring of life and work places enabled the flexible combination of work and family. Amongst those taking part in this study, middle-aged fathers were better able to determine where work was done, while mothers tended to adapt work to multiple places opportunistically to make more time for their children. The Fordist division between spaces of work and home, or posing of labour versus private life places are undermined by the mobility of work across places in the above accounts. Instead, places are made, remade and hybridized as they are 'skillfully used in managing relations with others' (work colleagues, family, or friends) (Brown and O'Hara 2003:1577) and, relatedly, as a means of enhancing productivity and creativity. The accounts discussed above point to the ways in which capitalism has come to 'imprint itself' on more spaces, not least via the affordance and suggestion of new opportunities for work. Yet, it is mainly in the

relational aspects of social reproduction or 'life world' that tensions surface in these workers' choice-framed narratives of work mobility and place.

Reconfiguring the boundaries of working-time and life-time

The shift to post-Fordism is also associated with rearrangements of work time. If labour in Fordism was measured via abstract units of clock time, this form of measurement is deemed incapable of capturing 'the complexity of the temporalities of contemporary work practices' and the 'utter discontinuity in the relationship between working time agreements and working time practices' (Adkins 2009: 334; see also Hardt and Negri 2004:65). Moreover, the centrality of vital faculties to post-Fordist work is seen as dissolving 'temporal limits between working-time and life-time' (Morini and Fumagalli 2010: 240). Such temporal blurring might be expected if everything that defines the worker, from her skill set to inherited characteristics and lifestyle, goes into the commodity produced (Feher 2009). The impossibility of separating the product from the producer and extension of economic value to 'networks of social and vital relations' across all domains of society means that value is unhinged from 'human labour time' (or clock time) (Adkins 2009: 328/334). As such, value is seen to be 'constituted in novel forms' that involve the 'merging of time and matter' and 'a material reworking of time itself' (2009: 334/335).

While evidence for the merging of time and product emerges in our data, a desire to mark out non-work/non-productive time emerges in most of the accounts. However, for a few, the merging of work and life time was embraced and linked to a passionate commitment

to work and productivity. For example, Seamus (Independent IT entrepreneur, single man, mid-30s) noted:

> it's very hard to just say, to divide the time between that's my job and, because they're the same thing, my job and my hobby. I recognise that it's unhealthy some of the time but at the same time, is it unhealthy to be doing what you love all the time?

This merging of work and life boundaries is also evident in Derek's (Business Owner, IT Entrepreneur, living with fiancé, late-20s) account:

> When you work in a technology company … there's a passion for the technology, as in you want to be a good programmer at the programming level. You want to be a good project manager at the project manager level … It's like being a race car driver or an artist, you have a, the passion is the number one reason, the interest, the excitement …

For Seamus and Derek, both relatively young and without children, time devoted to work is experienced as life enhancing and an expression of self, although Seamus is conscious of the view that this devotion to work might be unhealthy. Tim (Creative Entrepreneur with an online design and adventure company, in his late 20s with a partner based abroad and living temporarily with his parents) distinguishes somewhat between life and work activities, but appeared to intermingle these seamlessly:

> I'm in the pool at about 8.30am and then I train until, probably train until 10.00 or 10.30… yes, from 11.00 on and then usually I work … solid until

> about maybe 5.00 or 6.00. Then I'll go and probably get dinner and then I'll be doing more (triathlon) training. So that could be running or kind of turbo training on a bike or another swimming session, depends on what day it is in the week and then I'll probably come back and do a little bit more work just kind of tidying up stuff, it's more kind of more relaxed and everything so, because what I'm doing, even when I'm training, I'm thinking about stuff that I've been doing in the day and I'm generating ideas. Like I've come up with my best ideas if I was just lying on the couch with my eyes closed just thinking about stuff.

It seems natural to Tim that his work, because it involves ideas and creativity, is with him regardless of time of day, location, or activity and this omnipresence of work is positively embraced and combined with intensive sports training. As in Massey's 1990s study of the ICT sector in Cambridge, 'everything – even the exercise of the body – is geared to the productivity of the intellect' (1995: 494). Massey also found that these mainly men workers, while concerned about 'a competitive workaholism and the inability to keep things under control,…did not want to lose either the feeling of autonomous commitment or the possibility of temporal flexibility' (1995: 496).

Seamus, Derek and Tim's accounts suggest a similar dedication to work and support the view that 'life itself is put to work and … directly incorporated within the productive activity…' (Morini and Fumagalli 2010: 236). However, most of the young men contributors in the ICT and creative sectors projected a work/life divide into their future

imagined lives. For example, Damien (Director of small consulting company, living with partner, no children, mid-30s) identifies with the masculine embodiment of the always-connected ICT worker, but is anxious about the implications of the constant work availability habit for establishing a family life in the future:

> You know the stereotype of the big guy with the beard and the sandals in "The Simpsons" …with his computer everywhere he goes … he has to be connected to the Internet? And a certain amount of being in a technology company means you need to be connected as much as possible … maybe we should step back a little bit from the business, accept a lower level of service for our customers, and go onto the next step … in life, which is creating a family, buying a … family home and … settling down really … So in terms of work-life balance and the busy schedule you kind of sometimes ask yourself "is it all worth it?"

Damien's temporalising practices with regard to work and life can be understood in terms of what Freeman (2010) calls 'chrononormativity'. For Freeman, time 'binds' our bodies 'into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation: … the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity' (2010:3). This temporal order produces expected heteronormative life trajectories so that there is a 'right' time for particular life stages, such as intensive career focus and establishing a family. For Freeman, these assumptions and their normative power reproduce capitalist ideologies and have the effect of disciplining bodies to be 'productive', both in relation to social reproduction and the economic production of commodities and capital. While younger men projected anxieties about combining work and life into a (hetero)normative

family-oriented future, those middle-aged men with a firmer footing economically demonstrate more freedom to shape their work time around chosen lifestyles (see earlier accounts from Charlie and Sean).

Although the women's accounts also suggested a high level of work commitment, they did not describe the merging of work and life in terms of a passion for work. And, while a few of the young women entrepreneurs articulated the same future-oriented anxieties as the young men, the accounts of mothers focused on the difficult task of unlearning 'always on' work habits in order to be available to their children. For example, Sharon (Creative Entrepreneur in online services, in her late 30s, married and the mother of three children under ten), like Damien, projects into the future, but with more concrete plans for how she will combine work and family:

> In 5 years time ... I think I'll probably still be working, still doing it until 3 o'clock or 2 o'clock, maybe doing a 4 day week because I'm just very conscious of time passing, I just don't want the kids to be latchkey kids, I don't want them to think back on their childhood "Mammy was always working. Mammy was always on Twitter. Mammy was always just trying to get this email done before"...

Sharon's account reflects the 'social importance of care and presence in defining what it means to be a parent or kin' (Strathern 1999:14). The never-ending status of parenthood (and motherhood in particular) is signalled by her determination to contain work time now in order to prevent being evaluated negatively by her children in the future.

Kate (Creative Entrepreneur in online design, in her late 20s, with a partner but living alone) struggles against work habits that assimilate life in order to protect her health:

> …the first half [of the day] is purely administration work, so emails, correspondence, invoicing, following up on invoices, that type of work and then usually after, in the afternoon, the creative side so it's, it is full on design where I try and actually have had all the discussions I need to so I'm not interrupted for the afternoon and it's purely on development. That would probably go on till 6 or 7, stop for tea … usually just head away for about an hour, just to get time out, but I'll always come back and it's usually from, between 10 and 12 but it could be 2 in the morning as well (laughing) … And it just got too much and after about a year you really start to notice the ill health effects of it.

Health concerns were most prevalent amongst other contributors in the creative industries, and highlight the 'new realms of pain and injury' that accrue from the excessive demands of 'always-on' work practices (Gill and Pratt 2008: 15).

In contrast with those in the creative sector in particular, academics were more positive about the 'always on' nature of their work. For example, Jenny (see earlier) notes that work is always with her: '...I live my work ... I do it at home, I do it in the office, even if I'm travelling … I plan ahead because I never know when the mood to work will strike me'. Similarly, Tom (see earlier) states that 'because of the nature of work, it's always with me, so I don't consider going to work so much because, you know, I'm always working'. The temporal and spatial flexibility enabled by academia is embraced by

Elaine (Lecturer in her mid-30s, single parent with a teenage daughter) as a means of combining work and family:

> if I get a call from the school to say my daughter's sick and I need to take her home then … when you're working on teams … and there's different people performing different tasks, the fact that you can stay in touch with them, maybe outside of hours as well, so you know what's been going on when you get in the next day, that's useful as well.

It is time/space flexibility rather than the merging of time/space that is appreciated by Elaine as a way of avoiding work/life conflict.

There is no temporal unity of measurement in these accounts, working time and non-working time combine unevenly in the achievement of outputs. Although the location of value solely or primarily in 'the behaviour of working subjectivities' (Morini and Fumagalli 2010: 249) was confined to the accounts of a few men in their 20s and 30s working in both the ICT and creative sectors, work and productivity were central sites of value in all the accounts. Yet, to the extent that there is an 'assimilation between labour and life' in these young men's accounts, their family aspirations generate 'a potential contradiction within the working subjectivity itself, creating idiosyncrasy and instability in the basic organization of individual lives' (2010: 239). As such, even those accounts that are primarily framed by productivity also express concern about how a socially meaningful life trajectory that makes time for relationships and activities beyond work might be achieved.

While respondents who are mothers struggle with the actual demands of childcare, the battle for fathers is more about bringing about the conditions for a lifestyle that comfortably combines family and work. The responsibility for creating conditions conducive to caring and family are not articulated in relation to the state or the employer, but rather as matters of workers' own resourcefulness in negotiating work/life time /spaces and in more nuanced gendered terms than in the past. In the section that follows we consider how the relations of spatiality and temporality discussed above shape the ways in which work and life (linked to, but not defined by production and social reproduction) are lived.

In search of boundaries

In the transition to capitalism the reproduction of labour-power gained new significance and social processes and institutions dedicated to social reproduction were identified as separate from the sphere of work (Gill and Bakker 2006: 41; Bakker 2007: 544; Federici 2004). In contrast with the sphere of production, which was shaped by roles of commodity exchange, 'the sphere of reproduction [was] one that value[d] selfless giving, … exalt[ed] people's unconditional ties … and justifie[d] social services' (Feher 2009: 32). This Fordist production/social reproduction distinction worked to naturalise 'an arbitrary division of labour between what ended up being considered productive and what did not' (Alessandrini 2012: 13). This naturalised separation of spheres is seen as dissolving in post-Fordism, not least as a result of the kinds of work/life time and place blurring evident in the above accounts. Moreover, an intensified reliance on diverse social and vital relations is seen as spreading production across myriad social domains to

the extent that the boundaries between productive and reproductive time/spaces are no longer self-evident (Morini and Fumagalli 2010).

In contrast with such theoretical assertions, all of the contributors to our study (albeit to varying extents) adopted spatial, temporal and technological strategies to create boundaries between these activities. While some expressed ambivalence regarding boundary making, others described setting boundary rules and trying to adhere to them. For example, Charles (see earlier), one of the informants who was most optimistic about combining work and life, noted that:

> Work, especially when you enjoy it … can become addictive, and follows all of the patterns of addiction ... I make a very conscious effort not to get stuck in the workaholic track – keep the Blackberry out of the bedroom … I have rules to separate when we have dinner time, or together time ... we do consciously think about putting things aside, locking things away in that sense ... I would make sure the voicemail is on when we are having meals…we organise our lives so that there is clear differentiation as to what is working and what is leisure, *you need to be disciplined for that* (emphasis added).

Damien (see earlier) guards against the seductions of connectivity to avoid becoming like 'those people who are addicted to checking their emails'. He creates boundaries around work electronically by turning off his phone at 11pm and his email at 6 or 7pm: 'I try and manage my off-time because I find that you burn out ... and then you get sick of work and you end up avoiding work…So *you have to be disciplined'*. Life outside of work is

described mainly in terms of time to rest and recharge in order to enjoy work again and thereby maximize productivity.

Although Seamus (see earlier) struggles against a perception that he should set limits on his work, the question of limits concerns him:

> I'm still unmarried like, I don't have a family … so again, I'm not typical here maybe, but I love what I do, so I guess it would be my hobby … if it wasn't my job. So it's very hard to divide the time … because they're the same thing, my job and my hobby. *I recognise that it's unhealthy some of the time but at the same time, is it unhealthy to be doing what you love all the time?* … I don't have a whole pile of hobbies besides, besides what I do on the Internet and technology. I mean, that's just my passion and that's what makes it easy for me. I guess I'm lucky that way (emphasis added).

Philip (Lecturer, in late-30s and married and with two early-teenage children) also expresses ambivalence about setting limits:

> I don't think I have [any boundaries]. For example, my wife is going to call in here [the office] now … to take advantage of my better Internet access ... My kids call up fairly regularly ... In general they're collected by their mother but if there's after school or whatever they can come to me here and they can do their homework on the table here. So I don't think I set any boundaries. At home I would always be, most evenings I'd be online either checking emails or doing bits and pieces.

Although he embraces the intermingling of work and life as enhancing flexibility, Philip ambivalently suggests that he needs to get better at boundary-making, which is presented as a personal failure to structure his time better:

> I suppose the strategy is to have a more structured timetable … it needs you to be stronger, it probably does need me to go on a voicemail here at certain times of the day, it does need me to turn off email at certain times of the day, and not be so easily distracted and that requires *greater discipline*, definitely and *it's discipline that I promise to get better at* (emphasis added).

While Philip happily accommodates family and work activities in his work place, Sean, who works mainly from home (see earlier), focuses on how he can prevent the encroachment of home-based chores on his work time/space.

> I just make myself inaccessible … I usually have the Skype set at hidden … Anyway, the thing is that *the discipline is very much based around the One-Minute Manager*, … And I had that perfected for a while… the determinate of my productivity now is me, so the only battle is with me and my laziness, or tendency to just get distracted … the room … [is] at a suitable remove from day-to-day life … I'm not necessarily being distracted too much … I've got reasonably good at exhibiting a sufficient level of stress and worry and fidgeting to make things go away … because I stay at home … … I'll often get, "would you do this? Would you do the dishwasher? (emphasis added).

Sean's efforts to maintain work routines in the home and to keep domestic work at bay reflect key characteristics of Massey's 'high-tech masculinity' (1995:491). Although most of the men's accounts suggested more flexibility with regard to domestic and caring tasks, most of the women contributors assumed primary responsibility for these. For example, Orla (Self-employed, online animation company, in her early 40s and a married mother of three children) set up her own business to facilitate family life and sees it as her responsibility to set time limits:

> Yes, well I suppose that's where *you need to be disciplined* and block off time … you can have a conference call to LA from home you know, on your laptop and all of that, I mean the fact that everybody has conference technology in their own homes now... So I think the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages. I think the disadvantages are easily overcome *with a little bit of discipline* (emphasis added).

Similarly, Angela (Managing Director and co-owner of small programing company; married with 2 children aged 14 and 9) describes her efforts to set up a personal Skype ID separate from her professional one as a means of separating work and personal calls at weekends. She also keeps her home office door closed to avoid being pulled into responding to email: '*you just have to be disciplined* in separating … the urgent from the important … particularly when ... at home'. The emphasis here is on preventing work from encroaching on the domestic.

Kate, (see earlier) struggles against the temptation to work 24/7 that contributed to her

recent ill health. Her response is to confine work to the office by moving the office out of home and not installing Internet in her apartment.

> … it used to be the case that I might finish up at like 8 or 9 [pm] and I'd sit in bed on the laptop or at home and I just, my bedroom is work closed off now … *I've broken that rule on occasion*. If it means staying here [in the office] till 2 in the morning rather than take it home, I will stay here till 2 in the morning. And deliberately, well I've just moved into an apartment in town, I haven't got the Internet in purely, so that it will stop, I'm forced to now, to actually come into the office (emphasis added).

Although the addictive aspects of connectivity and work availability are experienced as oppressive, Kate emphasises her autonomy and agency in creating spatial and electronic boundaries. As in other accounts, these privatised and individualised practices are articulated as a sign of autonomy and a kind of self-empowerment.

In the post-Fordist economy, 'responsibility for economic viability becomes one's own, ongoing life problem', but is reframed as empowerment through a discourse of autonomy (Moore and Taylor 2009):

> [A]utonomy is now seamlessly integrated into profit-making and what is presented as perfect economic rationality. The word "autonomy" comes from two Greek words for "self" and "rule", and the ideology of self-rule suffuses knowledge-producing work environments (2009: 111).

Yet, discourses of individual ability to set rules and achieve autonomy 'mask an actual

erosion of real autonomy' (Büscher 2014: 228). Instead, 'a new kind of self-disciplined worker-citizen' emerges whose focus is more on self and lifestyle than social or collective issues as the 'operations of power … ensure that one learns to find mistakes in oneself and then hold oneself to blame' (Brunila 2012: 12 in Büscher 2014: 229).

The personalised sorting of work and life spheres articulated in the above accounts reconstructs work and family through the connections and divisions made between places, people and things, such as communication devices (laptops, iPads and smart phones). While ICT technologies afford different 'styles' of work, life and identity, it is the spatialising and temporalising practices through which workers interact with these affordances that produce particular work/life arrangements. Work and life temporalities are separated and sorted via the individualised and contextualised creation and refusal of technological and spatial boundaries and are articulated as practices of self-discipline. Such self-disciplinary practices form spatial and temporal frameworks that simultaneously organise individual bodies, populations and economies (Grabham 2014).

Despite the promise of autonomy, the temporal and spatial practices that distinguish work and life are framed by gendered (e.g. compare accounts of Sharon, Kate and Elaine with those of Charles, Derek and Seamus) and classed self-regulatory norms (middle-class aspirations and practices of all workers taking part) of high level work performance, availability and flexibility, as well as norms of family, care and leisure. The racialised structuring of the KE into high and low-skilled labour and the ways in which this is managed by immigration and labour market regimes remain outside the frame. As such, the risks of capitalism are displaced onto individuals and households and 'productivist

(and reproductivist) norms are restored through intimate self-management' (Mitropoulos 2011). These conditions might enhance creative freedom but also make for greater (self) exploitation (McRobbie 2002). As such, these accounts point, less to the much heralded dissolution of the production/social reproduction binary, than to new gendered and generational practices of boundary making and more hybridised understandings of the activities of work and life that lie on either side of the shifting boundaries between these hybrised domains. They also demonstrate the power of individualised choice narratives to obscure the (re)structuring and stratifying dynamics of the KE.

Concluding discussion

As work becomes a more definitive marker of subjectivity, the 'political possibilities of self are … diminished in the neglect of other "life-worlds" than those of labour' (Haylett 2003: 781). Read in Fordist terms, participants in our study can be seen as resisting the commodification of their labour and themselves by seeking 'some aspects and regions of themselves [that] remain inalienable, lest they end up entirely robbed of their selves' (Feher 2009:29). However, our analysis suggests that work and life are framed by these workers as a mutually constitutive portfolio of conducts that suggests 'no position of exteriority…; [as] work is clearly part of life and life part of work' (Weeks 2007: 246). Yet, these domains are not indistinguishable as the distinction is constantly made by participants. More generally, as Weeks points out, 'the common phrase "get a life"' demonstrates that a distinction is made in everyday life but with reference 'primarily to a *quality of living* that one wants to achieve or expand' (2007: 246; emphasis added). The

struggle, Weeks argues, is ‘for a different quality of experience’ (2007: 247). Our study identifies the nuanced gendered processes of boundary drawing between work and life as these middle-class knowledge workers seek a better quality of life.

In her study of (mainly men) ICT workers in Cambridge over 20 years ago, Massey found that ‘[w]hile domestic time [was] …porous, work time [was]… not’ (1995: 494). In our study this division was much less rigid but we did find both the space and time of home/life to be more porous than those of work. Participants frequently referred to the mobility of work time and place as evidence of freedom to invest in self-actualisation, to achieve optimal productivity and to improve quality of life by creatively combining work and life. However, reflecting Gregg's view that the ‘terminology to speak of work limits’ is lacking (2009: 212), participants struggled to distinguish between work and life experience while attempting to articulate a distinction primarily via individualised logics of boundary drawing. Although, the drawing of boundaries tends to accommodate work rather than challenge its encroachment on other domains of life, the perception of work and life as distinct values and activities is constantly in play via these personally configured boundaries. An emphasis on productivity and passionate work commitment shapes the practices of the young men informants in particular to the point that ‘pleasure itself may become a disciplinary technology’ (Gill and Pratt 2008: 17). As such, they construct selves and gain pleasure in and through the affective structures of post-Fordist work practices. Although embracing ‘always on’ work, they also expressed anxiety about how these work habits might interfere with family aspirations. These patterns were also evident for younger women who additionally struggled to make time for life in the

present. For mothers (and some middle-aged fathers), care and connection with their children are achieved via the blurring of work and life boundaries in some contexts and the creation of boundaries in others. The drawing of boundaries was articulated in terms of enhancing quality of life for fathers but as a necessary requirement for mothers.

These gendered patterns of boundary drawing narrow 'the ethical horizon of labor politics – feminist or otherwise – to the individualism of personal choice' (Gregg 2008: 295). Individual liberty and autonomy are thinly understood in terms of personal freedom to blur or reconfigure boundaries and come 'at the expense of …equality and solidarity' (2008: 295). Indeed, the dual nature of the KE and post-Fordist promise of autonomy, flexibility and gender equality produce new kinds of classed, gendered and racial inequalities by entrenching 'divisions between mental and manual labour' (2008: 296). The promise of managing personal quality of life serves to render the social inequalities that underpin this thin version of autonomy invisible and to obscure the anxieties and stresses of middle-class personal boundary-drawing.

For Berlant (2010), the transformations of work/life in the everyday (re)production of the post-Fordist economy require a 'radical rethinking of the relation of labor and time, of sacrifice, security, and satisfaction'. The workers in this study, while buying-in to values of work availability and productivity, articulate and attempt to sustain time/spaces of alternative value as necessary to making life liveable. Their experiences deserve attention at a time when control over 'the terms of social reproduction … over the apparatus for the creation of persons, and the forms of value created in the process …are being fought

between the Right and liberal elites' (Graeber 2011: 198). The complex individualised and gendered sorting of time/space into work and life can be read as 'ongoing struggles among *value practices'* that traverse subjects (De Angelis 2005:2). Subjectivities forged through productive work emerged as a strong theme in all accounts, yet work and life were repeatedly distinguished as distinct sites of value. The much heralded post-Fordist dissolving of work/life boundaries has the effect of depoliticising relations within and between these domains, as well as between mental and manual labour. It is powerfully challenged by these workers' constant (re)negotiation of work and 'life' as distinct domains of activity and values.

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Notes

1. Hardt and Negri see the increasing autonomy of labour as opening up a new political space by providing 'the tools or weapons that could be wielded in a project of liberation' (2009: 136-7).

2. Although conscious of the class-segregated nature of the Knowledge Economy and its widening social divisions, the focus of this article is only on middle-class knowledge workers.

3. However, the significant growth in female employment in computer software occupations, at 73 per cent, was far exceeded by a growth in male employment of 167 per cent, so the female share fell from 37 to 27 per cent, confirming its status as a 'male dominated occupation' (Russell et al 2009a: 51). Yet, the growth rate in the number of women researchers in engineering and technology in EU countries was highest in Ireland at 49 per cent between 2002 and 2010 (European Commission 2012: 68; see also O'Connor 2014).

4. Work-life conflict is understood as arising when meeting demands in one domain such as paid work makes it difficult to meet demands in the other, for example, the home (McGinnity and Whelan 2009:55).

5. BarCamp is an informal conference-style event, organized by the participants themselves, in order to present and discuss on topics related to the web and social computing (see http://barcamp.org/).