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## **Transforming Creative Potential in Project Networks: How TV Movies are Produced under Network-Based Control\***

**Stephan Manning<sup>a)</sup> and Jörg Sydow<sup>b)</sup>**

<sup>a)</sup> *The Fuqua School of Business, Duke University, 1 Towerview Drive,  
Durham, NC 27708–0127, USA  
stephan.manning@duke.edu*

<sup>b)</sup> *Institute of Management, Free University of Berlin,  
Boltzmannstrasse 20, 14195 Berlin, Germany  
sydow@wiwiss.fu-berlin.de*

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### **Abstract**

Project networks have been identified as dynamic, yet relatively stable organizational forms in project-based creative industries. They materialize in longer-term actor relationships which are actualized by and institutionalized through particular projects. This article examines how project networks transform creative potential for and beyond particular projects. The transformation process is enabled and constrained by the dialectic of network-based control which refers to the capacity of actors to reproduce relational power and autonomy within actor constellations in project networks. This study is empirically based on a qualitative analysis of two projects launched from project networks of two major German TV production companies. Theoretically, the study draws on concepts from structuration theory.

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**Introduction: Creative Work in Project Networks**

Project work is often creative work: by most conventional definitions, projects are unique, yet organized endeavors, undertaken by heterogeneous teams of specialized workers who collaborate to fulfill complex, interdependent tasks for specific purposes (e.g., Lundin and Söderholm 1998). Though projects always include some routine operations, in particular if taking place in multi-project environments, they are said to have an innovative character, in terms of the products or services created and the human resources combined (e.g., Eskerod 1998). This is true in particular if the tasks to be fulfilled in the project are, or if the project itself is, ill-defined (Mumford and others 2002). Also, the fact that often the customer is integrated in the development of projects contributes to this perception (Lundin and Söderholm 1998). However, rarely has the attempt been made to analyze how 'creative work' in projects comes about, against the background of the context in which projects are situated. In particular, the way social relationships in which projects are embedded constrain, yet enable 'creative project work' has been largely overlooked (but see Perry-Smith and Shalley 2003). Finally, the way 'creative potential' is 'enacted' and 'transformed' from creative actors and their relationships for particular projects lacks understanding.

This issue seems particularly relevant in 'creative industries' (e.g., Drake 2003), where creative products are often made in a project-based fashion. To capture the way creative resources and the actors who control those resources are organized beyond particular projects, the concept of *project networks* has been put forward and applied to the TV industry (Sydow and Windeler 1999; Windeler and Sydow 2001), the advertising and software industry (Grabher 2002, 2004) and the film industry (Storper and Christopherson 1987; Jones 1996; DeFillippi and Arthur 1998). Most importantly, project networks are characterized by only temporary employment relationships, which, however, are embedded in *more than* temporary systems (Sydow and Windeler 1999). The way creative poten-

tial is anchored in project networks and, eventually, transformed in and through particular projects has not been analyzed yet. This study promises to give insights into the transformation of creative labor in project-based work systems, and extends the labor process view *beyond* regular employment relationships. In so doing, the study contributes to a growing literature on non-standard employment (e.g., Ward and others 2001; Purcell and others 2001), while it looks explicitly at the way the labor process gets decomposed (Holmes 1986) *and* re-integrated in network forms of organization (Knights, Murray and Willmott 1993). Finally, it belongs to an increasing number of studies on project organizing which take a critical, power-sensitive perspective (Hodgson and Cicmil 2006).

Theoretically, this study makes use of concepts from network research and structuration theory, in an attempt to account for the interplay of network relationships and social practices. Also, taking the process of creative labor transformation seriously, concepts from the organizational creativity literature and critical labor research will be employed. Methodologically, this paper takes a processual and comparative, two-level case study approach, to examine the similarities and differences of creative labor transformation in two project networks. In doing so, project data based on film archives as well as semi-structured interviews with project members of two major German TV production companies have been collected and analyzed for this study.

In the following sections, first the concept of project networks as an organizational form is introduced in more detail. The theoretical focus is on the process of creative labor transformation and the control of this transformation process within project networks. Next, the way creative resources are transformed in projects and project networks in the German TV industry are examined in some more detail. To do so, two in-depth case studies are employed which show how projects are organized from project networks. Finally, conclusions are drawn for future research on the labor process within and beyond the TV industry.

### **Project Networks as Mechanisms of Coordination and Control**

Project networks, as described here, are regarded as a coordinating mechanism that materializes in longer-term, yet project-based relationships of

actors which are reproduced by the very projects in which they collaborate (Sydow and Windeler 1999; Windeler and Sydow 2001). In fact, project networks resemble other ideal types of dynamic organizational forms, such as the dynamic network (Miles and Snow 1986), the virtual corporation (Davidow and Malone 1992) and the latent organization (Starkey, Barnatt and Tempest 2000). Unlike these forms, however, project networks have been analyzed more explicitly in terms of the way they get reproduced as intermediary social systems between singular projects and the organizational field. To illustrate how they do so, the empirical field of the TV industry will be looked at in terms of its structural properties and conditions for project-based organizing.

*Project Networks as Organizational Forms: The Case of TV Production*

The television industry in Germany can be characterized as a volatile, risky and innovative, yet mature and consolidated business where customer demands change rapidly, and entrance barriers and cost pressures are fairly high. In content production, in particular, competition is fierce since 'good' content is both a scarce and perishable resource. Looking at different content types, however, content can be of a simple or complex, as well as standardized or idiosyncratic nature. While TV news and soaps are examples of rather simple and standardized content, produced in a quasi-industrial fashion, TV movies are both complex and idiosyncratic and, therefore, require a project-based form of production. Unlike in earlier times, however, when even some fictional content had been produced in-house by the TV broadcaster, in the course of privatization of German television in the 1980s, industry practices have changed completely and content production has been (quasi-)externalized, mainly to reduce costs and to promote content innovation and competition. In effect, semi-autonomous TV production firms have been established that produce content within project networks in close interaction with the broadcaster (Windeler and Sydow 2001). Having (quasi-) externalized production, the broadcaster, however, remains in a powerful position, as broadcasters form an oligopoly in this industry and largely control not only distribution but also financial resources for making TV movies.

Looking at these project networks more closely, three systemic levels must be distinguished, yet examined in relation to each other in terms of their systemic reproduction: projects, project networks, and organiza-

tional fields (see Figure 1). TV *projects* are regarded as ‘temporary systems’ (Goodman and Goodman 1976) of production, managed by representatives of TV channels and TV production firms, involving creative artists, e.g., writers, directors, and film actors, and technical services, e.g., camera teams, cutters, and lighters, most of whom work for TV production firms on a temporary basis. However, these actors are recruited from already established pools situated in *project networks* which TV producers and channels coordinate, more or less reflexively, as ‘more than temporary systems’ (Windeler and Sydow 2001).

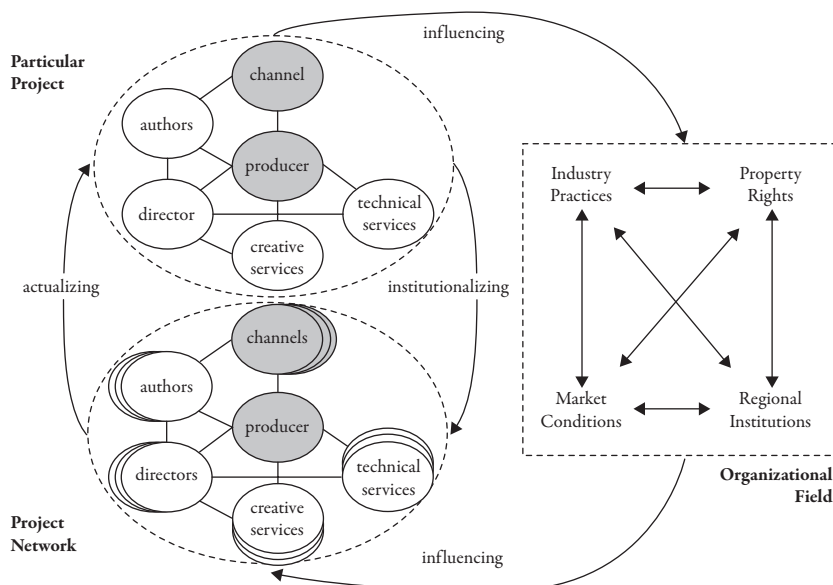


Figure 1. Projects, Project Networks and Organizational Fields.

However, unlike internal resource pools which can be enacted and controlled within hierarchies, quasi-external pools are less bounded, merge into the market and, therefore, embody a (creative) resource potential which needs to be transformed in order to be available for allocation. At the same time, these pools are ‘network-specific’ as the resources provided match with what particular producers and channels demand for collaborative projects. That is, the projects launched *from* the network are constrained by the resource potential *in* the network, which, in turn, is

actualized by and institutionalized and, eventually, changed through particular projects. Thus, managing creative labor does not just mean 'controlling the work process' in the course of a particular project, but includes also what we term 'network-based control'. In addition, managing projects differs from managing project networks with regard to the level of reflexivity: while project management is a rather reflexive activity even in cultural industries, project networks are still reproduced and 'used' less consciously.

Finally, the way project networks are reproduced and creative potential is transformed in social practice must be viewed against the more or less regionally embedded *organizational field* (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) actors refer to when launching particular projects (see Figure 1). Without going into too much detail here, organizational fields contain deeply institutionalized industry practices, such as the variety-seeking motive of TV channels, the reputation-seeking behavior of creative artists, the cultivation of demarcation lines between the public and the private world of television, and the recursive interplay of art and commerce (see Lawrence and Phillips 2002; Faulkner 1976). Beyond that, the organizational field contains regional institutions such as film boards, training schools and film festivals which serve as locations of 'noise' (Grabher 2002), provide opportunities for signalling (White 2002) and, thereby, fuel and support the reproduction of project networks (Lutz, Sydow and Staber 2003). Also, property rights backing large media corporations as well as market conditions, such as the level of competition, cost pressure and the availability of qualified labor, co-determine the way projects are launched and project networks are coordinated in the TV industry. Keeping the structural properties of the organizational field in mind, in this study, however, the transformation of creative potential at the levels of projects and project networks as well as between those two systemic levels will be our focus.

#### *Creative Transformation under Network-Based Control*

The management of creative workers can be regarded as a managerial challenge, for, by definition, creativity always involves some degree of novelty and contingency (see e.g., Mumford 2000) that can be neither planned nor controlled *as such* in the labor process. That is, the transfor-

mation problem, as proposed by management scholars (e.g., Drucker 1988) and labor process theorists (e.g., Knights and Willmott 1990), seems to be particularly relevant and specific in fields of ‘creative work’. However, mostly the transformation problem has been looked at from an organizational perspective, emphasizing direct and indirect managerial control strategies, contrasted by mechanisms of market control outside (yet, increasingly internalized inside) organizations (Friedman 1977).

By comparison, this study examines mechanisms of control, as prevalent in ‘creative industries’, from a project network perspective which emphasizes the relational and dynamic character of *network-based control* as a distinct form that complements and combines mechanisms of hierarchical and market control. Taking the omnipresent “dialectic of control” (Giddens 1984) into account, network-based control is based upon relational power and makes use of long-term relationships, latent or actualized, for selecting and managing critical resources, here above all creative artists in a particular project. Due to this dialectic of control, network-based control, like hierarchical and market control, is never complete but full of tensions and contradictions. However, the oligopoly on the part of the broadcasters insures that network-based control takes place in the shadow of their powerful relational position. At the same time, arguably, the power of creative artists might go beyond ‘responsible autonomy’ (Friedman 1977), yet be constrained by their embeddedness in project networks.

In more detail, the creative labor process can be understood as a social process by which novel and appropriate ideas and solutions are generated for specific problems (e.g., Unsworth 2001). From an organizational perspective, creativity involves collective sense-making and framing of issues and, thereby, builds on existing social practices of problem-solving, agenda-setting and ‘creative interaction’ (e.g., Ford 1996; Drazin, Glynn and Kazanjian 1999). This creative process is directed by group norms, organizational structure and leadership (see e.g., Mumford 2000; Woodman and others 1993). However, though organizations clearly take an important role as social contexts for creative action (e.g., Woodman, Sawyer and Griffin 1993), in particular in ‘creative industries’<sup>1</sup> individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Creative industries produce goods and services of economic and symbolic value. Often the terms ‘cultural industry’ and ‘creative industry’ are used interchangeably. While the former

and their 'self-directed services' are key to understanding how creativity is conducted (e.g., Drake 2003). Moreover, in the TV industry, writers and directors, as well as camera operators and cutters, are employed only on a project basis. That is, between and in the face of upcoming projects, creative artists are exposed to rules of the organizational field which they can enact as resources of domination.

Yet, such practices must be viewed against specific sets of social relationships in which particular projects are embedded. These are often considered to form the basis of social capital (Adler and Kwon 2002) which mainly exists within the project network but, in some cases, extends to the wider organizational field and can well be used as a basis for power and influence. As emphasized by many sociologists, network relationships can be examined by the position and role actors take in relation to each other (White, Boorman and Breiger 1976; Baker and Faulkner 1991). For instance, a successful film within a series of films would reproduce the position actors take in relation to others affiliated with the series. This can be true for the producer as the main project and project network coordinator, as well as for particular film actors and writers with whom a film series or genre is associated. Enacting their position, these actors can powerfully apply rules of signification and legitimation in organizing or getting involved in creative projects. That is, looking at relational positions is the key to understanding how the dialectic of control operates in project networks.

Against this background, the next question raised is how creativity is enacted and transformed for concrete projects within project networks, in social practice. Particular attention is drawn to the dialectic of network-based control in this process, which refers to the ability of actors to 'act otherwise' and to influence activities of others by enacting resources of domination within relational power constraints. Still, the following empirical insights can be only one step towards understanding how creative potential is transformed in project networks.

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term refers to the product created, e.g., book, picture or film, the latter term refers to the process of creating this product. Though many scholars use the former expression (e.g., Hirsch 1972), this study makes use of the latter expression and thereby focuses on the production process (Drake 2003; Lawrence and Phillips 2002).



### **Transforming Creativity in Project Networks: A Comparative Case Study<sup>2</sup>**

The employment of a comparative case study approach serves the need for a deeper understanding of how creative potential is transformed in projects and project networks. This approach offers the possibility of ‘thick rich descriptions’ (Denzin 1989) and promises to illustrate the usefulness of established concepts and to generate new categories and hypotheses. Therefore, two seemingly similar cases of TV production firms have been chosen for this study (Eisenhardt 1989): Hood Productions and Beach Productions. Also, to account for the dynamics of project networks, they have been carried out on two levels – project and project network – allowing for a micro and macro perspective, and a processual analysis of creative transformation over a longer period of time (see also Langley 1999).

On the project network level, project data based on film archives and qualitative interview data are used to capture the historical development of both project networks (see in more detail, Sydow and Manning 2004; Manning 2005). On the project level, one project of each production company has been chosen for a detailed investigation. These are ‘Tough Guy’ by Hood Productions, and ‘Black Rose’ by Beach Productions. On this level of analysis, the way creative potential is transformed is looked at more closely. Twenty semi-structured interviews with team members of the projects (average duration: a quarter of an hour) are analyzed, to learn about the actors’ embeddedness in relationships prior to the projects and the way their creative potential has been transformed for the particular projects. Finally, the extent to which those actors reproduced relationships in the project networks through the particular projects is examined.

#### *The Project Networks of Hood Productions and Beach Productions*

Hood Productions (HP) was founded as a spin-off of, and is still owned by, Wood Productions (WP) – a major TV production company in Germany. Beach Productions (BP) is a family-run, formally independent enterprise. Both, HP (WP) and BP, developed in the public world;

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<sup>2</sup> All names of films, actors and organizations have been changed.

that is, as they were founded before private television started, both companies competed for public television, only. Over the years, HP and WP developed special competencies in different niches: HP cultivated their relationship to public Channel C, in particular, focusing on detective films, especially the 'Police' series, and single affiliated movies. By comparison, BP specialized in producing family-oriented movies, romantic comedies and melodramas, mostly for a mid-age audience for Channel A and B. That is, both companies have taken particular routes of film-making, in close connection with very powerful public channels, and particular time slots, reserved for particular formats, genres and viewers' profiles.

Thereby, both companies applied certain practices of cultivating customer relationships, and building up creative potential, beyond particular projects. Most importantly, they set up and maintained labels of film-making, reproduced by series of affiliated movies in particular time slots. These labels helped build up a reputation, e.g., through winning awards, and bind resources both from the channel and creative actors. While HP took over the 'Police' series from WP and, therefore, 'inherited' a label from WP from the start, BP has developed a number of series on their own, together with Channel A and B, such as 'Women in Danger' or 'Catwalk'. In particular, BP produced novel-based movies, notably romantic comedies for Channel A, involving mostly female protagonists. More recently BP established a series from novels by Kathleen Welch which fitted in the series of melodramatic films for Channel B. In consequence, both production companies were quite successful in counterbalancing, at least to some extent, the enormous power advantage of the broadcasters.

How those practices of project organizing and building up relationships have translated into relational structures over time has been examined elsewhere (Sydow and Manning 2004; Manning 2005). Here, the way two particular projects – 'Tough Guy' and 'Black Rose' – were launched from the project networks is looked at. The focus, however, is on the way established actor relationships were powerfully enacted for the projects and the way network-based control was exerted by critical actors on the creative labor process.

*Transforming Creative Potential for 'Tough Guy' and 'Black Rose'*

The idea for the HP project 'Tough Guy' was born in Channel C after the film 'Honour and Glory' by HP for the same channel became a major success. The plot was set in the same region as the also very successful 'Police' series, so that in part the collaborative label of HP and Channel C was enacted as a resource for that film. By making a successor film, set again in the same region and positioned on the same time slot, the editor-in-chief of Channel C saw a good opportunity to let *Joe Kramer*, who enjoys having a serial contract as the main protagonist of the 'Police' series and, consequently, is a continuous member of the project network, play a new character. In so doing, Joe could further develop his career, and Channel C could continue to benefit from his popularity, while further binding him to the company, in general, and the already established label, in particular.

'Tough Guy' was meant to let Joe play a new character. This is good for his image, because he comes from the theatre, and he wants to vary a little. In fact, as a successful 'Police' officer he is afraid of getting stuck in this role, and he longs for playing a different character. (Producer, HP)

The importance of Joe Kramer for both Channel C and HP derives from the fact that, over time, the success of the 'Police' series has at least partly been associated by the audience with the main protagonist. That is, Joe Kramer himself is part of the label which HP enacts in the long-term cooperation with Channel C. In fact, Joe Kramer and HP have become interdependent on each other, such that the label they co-created can be enacted, reflexively, by both parties as a resource of domination, both towards each other, when making new contracts for follow-up films, and towards third parties, such as TV channels, when acquiring projects, which is a good example of the dialectic of network-based control.

Yet, how this particular project idea, 'Tough Guy', would turn out in the end, was far from clear at the beginning. Still, based on the long-term collaboration of HP and Channel C, in particular with regard to the 'Police' series, the channel put trust in the further development of the project, yet only in connection with the pre-set cast of Joe Kramer:

Over one year we have about 30 projects in development out of which 10 materialize. . . . If the project [‘Tough Guy’] had failed, I believe we would have implemented other projects with other production firms. *Together with HP*, we would have further worked on the *project with Joe Kramer* to be implemented maybe the year after. (Channel C editor)

The channel’s commitment facilitated the creative process, giving the producer slack time for the realization of the initial idea. At the same time, as will be seen, the customer’s commitment to a ‘Joe Kramer film’ channelled the creative attention of the actors involved in the project and thereby also constrained and controlled the creative process in the further project development (see also Mumford and others 2002; Hirsch 1972). In particular, as is typical in this industry, the broadcaster would externalize the financial risk of production to the production firm which, in turn, would put creative and technical artists under financial pressure. In fact, only shortly before the actual shooting, the broadcaster would eventually pay the full amount agreed upon for the project.

Similar to ‘Tough Guy’, the film ‘Black Rose’ by BP for Channel B followed up a predecessor project. In fact, ‘Black Rose’ is part of the series of films based on novels by Kathleen Welch who is famous for deep stories about the destiny of women. In particular, the fact that both Kathleen Welch as a book author and BP as a production firm have specialized in producing content around female protagonists, which itself is part of BP’s reputation as well as part of the profile of Channel B, has helped commercialize Kathleen Welch content to the channel. Again, a production firm, a channel and a major creative actor, an author in this case, have become interdependent on each other. This constellation helped enact the idea for the film ‘Black Rose’ even *before* the base novel was written.

‘Black Rose’ is not the first Kathleen Welch production for our channel. . . . The interest in making follow-up productions, after *Wind of Change* [another K.W. film], was mutually shared. In fact, K.W. had told us about ‘Black Rose’ even before her book was finished, and, therefore, an interest in making the film arose very early. (Channel B editor)

Again, a creative artist – Kathleen Welch – embodies a collaborative label which stabilizes the relationship between the production firm – BP – and the broadcaster – Channel B. As in the case of Joe Kramer, the autonomy

of Kathleen Welch depends on her opportunity to sell her creative labor power both to the TV production and indirectly to Channel B. Again, a three party constellation creates a situation of interdependence (see also Burt 1992), where the power of the TV production firm to enact Kathleen Welch as a creative resource can be potentially counteracted by Kathleen Welch collaborating with a different production firm. However, built on systemic trust, the long-term collaboration of Channel B and BP constrains her ability to act otherwise, yet depends on her willingness to comply, which is a key characteristic of the operation of network-based control.

Looking now first at the further development of the HP project, once Channel C was committed to supporting the project idea, a competent script writer had to be recruited. Following the rule 'Never change a winning team', first, the script writer of the predecessor project was enacted (Writer 1). It was most critical to find someone who had the potential to write a story that suited the main actor, Joe, for whom the film was made. However, Writer 1 failed to do so:

One problem was the character Joe. He possibly stood in the way of the writer's imagination. Otherwise Writer 1 is a nice person and writer, but this time he did not meet our expectations. . . . After two versions, Writer 1 was not engaged for the project again. (Film Producer)

That is, though unexpectedly, as happens sometimes in creative projects, the creative potential attributed to Writer 1 did not materialize as planned. One reason for this was possibly the contradictory task to tailor a story for Joe that does not resemble previous stories made for him. This in fact shows how market-based power is enacted by the production firm which, by drawing on a quasi-external pool of writers, can more or less easily exchange one with the other, as long as the customer's commitment to the project is not endangered. This seems to be the case here, as Channel C left open to the producer who should write the story for Joe Kramer. After the dismissal of Writer 1, a new writer had to be found, half a year before the shooting. To do so, the producer – inventively – made use of personal contacts outside the project network and proposed Writer 2 as a script doctor:

I know the producer from the time when he was still a junior editor. That was ten years ago. When he calls me and says: 'I have a problem, please have a look at it!' and I have time, of course I try to help. There is a personal bond

between us. The project was not a big challenge, neither from a financial nor an artistic point of view... For some years now, I have been doing such rewrites, but only for some producers. (Writer 2)

In fact, like Writer 1, Writer 2 made his own creative impact on the project, which itself had by then developed its own dynamics. In particular, Writer 2, who specializes in 'dramedies', put humour into the plot. However, Channel C was still not satisfied:

But there was still some 'warmth' lacking in the character of the tough guy. This is something both men (writers) have not managed to integrate in the script... Then I thought about asking Writer 3, foremost as a director, but I knew she could write good stories as well. (Channel C editor)

That is, though the channel grants operational autonomy to the production firm in recruiting creative and technical staff, at the same time, it more or less directly intervenes if those actors selected do not seem capable of doing the job required. This underlines the powerful position of broadcasters in this industry, who, increasingly, even in the creative department, claim their influential role. Unlike Writer 1 and 2, Writer 3 (= to-become Director 1) was, in fact, selected by the channel editor, and was unknown to the producer. He agreed, however, as time proceeded and pressure increased. Unfortunately, Writer 3 got into trouble with one of the other team mates, so, in the end, Writer 3 refused to continue, three weeks before the shooting, which was an emergency situation. Still, the editor-in-chief of Channel C demanded a director of the 'top league', otherwise the film was not to be financed. Quite a number of possible candidates were called before the producer drew his joker.

The producer, whom I have known for 15 years now, called me and asked whether I wanted to do the job... He was editor for Channel E many years ago, when I made my first film for his then editor-in-chief. We got to know each other and felt sympathy from the very beginning... Normally, I reject such offers, because it is foolish to embark on such a project shortly before the shooting begins. I only agreed to read the script because of him and because I had time since another project had been cancelled. (Director 2)

Again, a long-term relationship, this time with Director 2, turned out to be a great help, together with a bit of good fortune, since Director 2 became available for the job at short notice. Availability is, in fact, one of the major concerns for producers when enacting creative potential from the network. This is why it is of particular interest for producers to maintain 'latent' or 'sleeping' relationships with a number of creative talents who might get attracted by the projects the producers launch (see Hadjikhani 1996; Starkey, Barnatt, and Tempest 2000). These relationships are maintained by occasional calls and meetings, as well as other rituals of maintenance (Cova and Salle 2000). Mutual observation then promotes the perception of weak signals for making a project deal and, thereby, helps activate the relationship (see also White 2002). The reason Director 2 did the job was, eventually, that he saw an opportunity to refresh his image and to do something different from his normal work.

What I want in fact is to make a movie for a film theatre. That is why I am interested in single TV movies.... We [the producer and I] had long waited for an opportunity to work together, and now it happened. (Director 2)

Yet, the transformation of the creative potential of Director 2 was constrained against the background of the pre-developed project and a pre-existing project team. Typically, directors prefer their own camera operators and cutters. In this case, however, Director 2 knew none of them. The camera operator, Cop 1, who had been quite active in the HP network, not least for 'Police' movies, was originally enacted by Writer 3 (Director 1):

I did not know the camera operator, and there was the question of whether he would do it and I would do it. But my directing assistant, whom I trust, knew him and said: He is OK. It was a 'blind date' for me. (Director 2)

Director 2 would have possibly not chosen me.... HP asked me whether I wanted to stay, after Director 1 left the team. I had to stay because I needed the money.... In case I had shot 4, 5 films with Director 1 before, I would have left also.... [Yet], I was very disappointed she left, because I really got along with her very well.... Director 2 and I had not the same language.... I do not want to say I know everything better, but sometimes you need to

trust your camera operator. . . . But we did not have the same visual language, so it became quite difficult. (Cop 1)

This shows, first of all, how important trust is in the creative process, despite the operation of control. While the affirmation of the director's assistant initially provided swift trust (Meyerson, Weick and Kramer 1996), the actual cooperation turned out quite difficult. In fact, trust seems to be a coordinating mechanism in the ongoing creative process that saves on transaction costs which is why creative artists, even camera operators, prefer to work with their 'own' staff (see also Manning 2003, 2005). From the viewpoint of the production company, however, camera operators more than creative staff are very flexible resources, not only in numerical but also in functional terms (Atkinson 1985):

Putting a camera operator from a 'Police' movie to different TV movie is not as a great step as it is for a writer. The camera operator has lots of opportunities to work for different genres. . . . There is a demand for craft rather than artistic capabilities, whereas the essence of creative work of writers is the creation of something which has not been there before. (CEO of HP)

Therefore, some camera operators as well as cutters would try to enact network-based control to enhance their bargaining position by claiming close relationships to certain directors who are considered a more critical resource by the production company. At the same time, however, those camera operators or cutters would depend on those particular directors and thereby potentially lose employment opportunities. This may result into double-bind situations, such as in the case of Cop 1, who eventually decided to break loyalty to Director 1, who left the project, in order to stay. That is, the dialectic of network-based control is a mechanism full of tension, between flexibility and stability, as well as autonomy and dependency, to which all actors, though at different levels, seem to be exposed.

Looking now at the further development of the BP project, the story for 'Black Rose' had already been written which provided a good basis for implementation. Yet, the book story was not primarily created for the film audience, but for readers. Therefore, a script writer had to be engaged who knew about the symbolic and economic requirements of the chan-



nel. Recommended by the channel, BP engaged a script writer with whom the production firm and the TV channel have already worked.

Writer 1 was engaged because he was strongly bonded to Channel B... It is difficult to say, what really 'qualified' him for this job... I think he had simply some experience with the genre. (Assistant producer, BP)

This is a writer who went through the writer training programme of Channel B. He writes for us also in other contexts, but he also was involved in the production of 'Sister, Sister' [K.W. film]. Writing for such a film requires great dramatic skills. (Channel B editor)

In addition, the channel, like in the case of HP, demanded for a star actress to play the main character of the book. Since BP has produced quite a number of films for the channel, in particular involving female protagonists, the main producer could enact contacts with the actress Alisa Bronson who seemed to suit the mid-age audience targeted by the film. However, as in the case of Joe Kramer, the recruitment of Alisa Bronson would further direct the creative process:

You have to staff *this* role before thinking about the other roles... Alisa Bronson was an important factor for the further development of the project. We talked about the scripts with her, which has to do with her person as well as with her role she plays in the film. (Channel B editor)

The engagement of Alisa Bronson, in fact, had a great impact on the writing of the script, since, more than other actors, she could enact her 'star' status as a powerful resource to co-determine the very conditions under which she was expected to play the role. In contrast to the book author and the star actress, the script writer, in fact, had a minor power position in this constellation. Having experienced those situations before (notably in BP projects), the script writer correspondingly defined his role in the production process:

The art of script-writing is to keep everybody in the boat. That's what we are paid for: Mrs. Welch, the channel editors, the producers, the director, the main actress – they all have their wishes which they want to recognize in

the script... [In particular] the channel editors have developed a strong understanding of power;... Editors are the actual 'creative actors', whereas script writers, directors and producers are supposed to implement their creativity... Of course, there is always pressure on the editors not to make mistakes, because they are embedded in hierarchies, it's about careers up and down... You have to make editors feel it was their idea not yours. (Writer 1)

The very fact that, by taking such a role, a script writer can hardly develop his/her own creative potential and reputation, is reflexively translated by Writer 1 as a necessary compromise, in particular but not only when writing novel-based scripts. In fact, Writer 1 even experiences this role switch from a 'creative' actor to a 'technical' assistant as a step towards greater 'autonomy' in this business, which shows how network-based control in creative work may get internalized and objectified by actors:

I think if a script writer wants to create something big, something of his/her own, then [novel-based] script-writing is like hell. But if you say, it is just a job, you can more freely go for it, you are not anymore constrained by anything. (Writer 1)

Once the script was written, a director was needed who was familiar with the requirements of Channel B. Similar to the script writer, the channel was able to find someone who was prepared to do the shooting under the conditions set, in particular, by the main actress, whom the channel demanded for the film.

Alisa Bronson planned to spend some time in Malaysia together with her agent whose friend produces films there... The final decision to do the shooting in Malaysia, therefore, played a significant role for committing Ms. Bronson to the film... The Director agreed on spending half a year in Malaysia for the shooting which is why he was engaged. (Production assistant, BP)

The script took two years to develop, then, suddenly, an opportunity arose to adapt the script to the shooting location of Malaysia... Plus, Alisa Bronson had some spare time to play... Then, everything developed quickly. They needed a director. The editor knew me from other films, and she recognized that I had some experience with shooting in South-East Asia. And she thought Asia equals Asia, which is nonsense, of course... (Director)

Finally, the engagement of Alisa Bronson even influenced the recruitment of the camera operator, which shows, from the viewpoint of the production company, that maintaining flexible pools of creative and technical staff is crucial under conditions of network-based control.

Alisa Bronson knew the camera operator from previous films. Of course, the camera operator also worked together with the director before, but the fact that Alisa Bronson knew him was decisive for his recruitment. (Production assistant, BP)

Overall, with regard to the control of the creative labor process, both projects showed several similarities. In both cases, control was largely maintained by the demands of the customer channel in conjunction with critical creative actors who more or less explicitly and reflexively enacted their powerful positions to co-determine the very conditions for their project engagement. The producer, in turn, mediated the demands of the channel and the creative star along with his/her own interests and conditions of project organizing to the other actors involved. Once the critical actor constellation – producer, channel and creative actor – had formed and mutual commitment to project accomplishment was achieved, other creative and technical actors were largely exposed to network-based control which constrains and enables the creative labor process as it operates in the light of particular project conditions and future project opportunities in the same or similar actor constellations.

However, the projects differed in terms of the degree of ‘professionalism’ under conditions of network-based control. While for the BP project ‘Black Rose’, the ‘creative’ demands were clearly articulated and the ‘creative’ roles clearly understood by the actors involved, the HP project ‘Tough Guy’ suffered from a lack of understanding of what the requirements of a project’s success were. Among other things, the self-concepts and qualifications of the script writers and directors conflicted with the constraints set by the critical actor constellation of Channel C, the production company and Joe Kramer. This finally shows the limits of ‘network-based control’ in the labor process, since more than hierarchical or market control, it unfolds as a process of (re-) negotiating and (re-)interpreting claims and positions enacted by different parties which may translate into conflicting demands.

Yet, over time, mechanisms of dealing with network-based control get institutionalized in project networks as projects help reproduce the relational positions of critical actor constellations for future projects. In particular, typifications of projects – ‘novel-based film’ or ‘movie series episode’ – help communicate constellations of roles and procedures in the creative labor process. So, in the case of HP, spin-off projects from TV movie series might institutionalize along collaborative projects with TV channels to such an extent that expectations from administrative and creative actors might become clearer, so that maybe ‘spin-off’ writers might establish as a niche role model.

### **Conclusions and Implications for Further Research**

This study has examined how creative potential is transformed in project networks of TV production. In particular, the study has looked at the interplay of creative processes and the dialectic of control in particular projects, in the shadow of longer-term project network relationships. To emphasize the quality of project networks as distinct control structures, the term network-based control has been employed to capture the way creative resources are powerfully enacted in dynamic, yet sustaining multi-party constellations.

In more detail, the following findings could be made: the dialectic of network-based control refers to the individual and cooperative potential to reproduce relational power in and through critical actor constellations. In particular, TV broadcasters and certain creative artists, mediated by production firms, form such sustaining, yet dynamic constellations which are enacted and reproduced by these actors. While network-based control operates as a relational power structure, broadcasters largely determine the conditions under which network-based control unfolds in the shadow of particular projects, not least because it’s mainly TV broadcasters who provide financial resources for film production. Yet, by definition, the creative process of film-making remains a contingent endeavor which cannot be planned or controlled to the full, since creative actors often enjoy a degree of autonomy that goes well beyond ‘responsible autonomy’ in the standard labor process. While ‘external’ control in the creative labor process is limited, however, network-based control may become institu-

tionalized and internalized in role models along collaborative projects which administrative, creative and technical actors enact in relation to each other.

These findings might stimulate quite a range of further empirical studies: first, the concept of network-based control could be elaborated based on research in other industries and other institutional settings. In particular, the intertwining of hierarchical and market control seems little understood, given that both seem to be present, e.g., in the television industry, despite (or because of) the demand for flexible production (e.g., Saundry 1998). Second, the way creative labor processes are embedded in structures beyond particular projects needs to be better understood, since research suggests that creativity and innovation stem from latent ideas and concepts which can be enacted in social practice (e.g., Hargadon and Fanelli 2002). Third, the study might stimulate rethinking fundamental aspects of labor research, such as the way labor conditions are institutionalized, the way labor markets are structured and the way ‘employability’ and ‘qualification’ is reconstructed in project-based industries and what role project networks play in this respect. Whether work in project networks will become a new standard in non-standard employment practices, however, remains to be seen.

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