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What supports the  
individualised employment relationship?  
Evidence from the creative industries

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# Structure

1. Contractual Dimensions of the Employment Contract
2. Work Identities
3. Creative Industries
  - Theatre
  - VFX
4. Employment Systems in the 'Network Economy'
5. Workers' Lifestyles
6. Conclusions

# The Employment Contract

- **Contract Perspective:**
  - Exchange
  - Mutual expectations and obligations
  - Freedom of choice and acceptance
- **Dimensions**
  - Legal
  - Economic
  - Psychological
  - ...
- **Current issues**
  - Commitment, loyalty, stability
  - Uncertainty, short-termism, temporariness, precariousness
  - Flexicurity?

# The Constitution of Work Identities

## Society

- Destiny / societal position by birth

## Organisation/Employer

- Duties, commitment and loyalty (old psychological contract)
- Workplace community
- Social status / symbolic capital (e.g. career steps, ranks, privileges, uniforms, awards, medals)
- Instrumentalism, clear boundary between work and life

## Transorganisational

- Occupation / craftsmanship / profession / devotion
- Solidarity and class consciousness
- Inter-organisational community; reputation

# Creative Industries

- **Based on** individual creativity / generation and exploitation of intellectual property
- **Cultural work / industries:** music, theatre, fine arts, dance, opera, literature; film, publishing , broadcasting
- **Creative work / industries:** design (fashion, web, advertising, software, games, perfumes, etc.), architecture, entertainment etc.
- **Properties (Caves 2000):** uncertainty of demand, infinite variety of products, intrinsic motivation, A-/B - list, project work / motley crews, time flies
- **Challenge** prevalent ideas about
  - Core-periphery structures / employment strategies
  - 'Best' HRM practices
  - Precarious employment
  - Psychological contracts

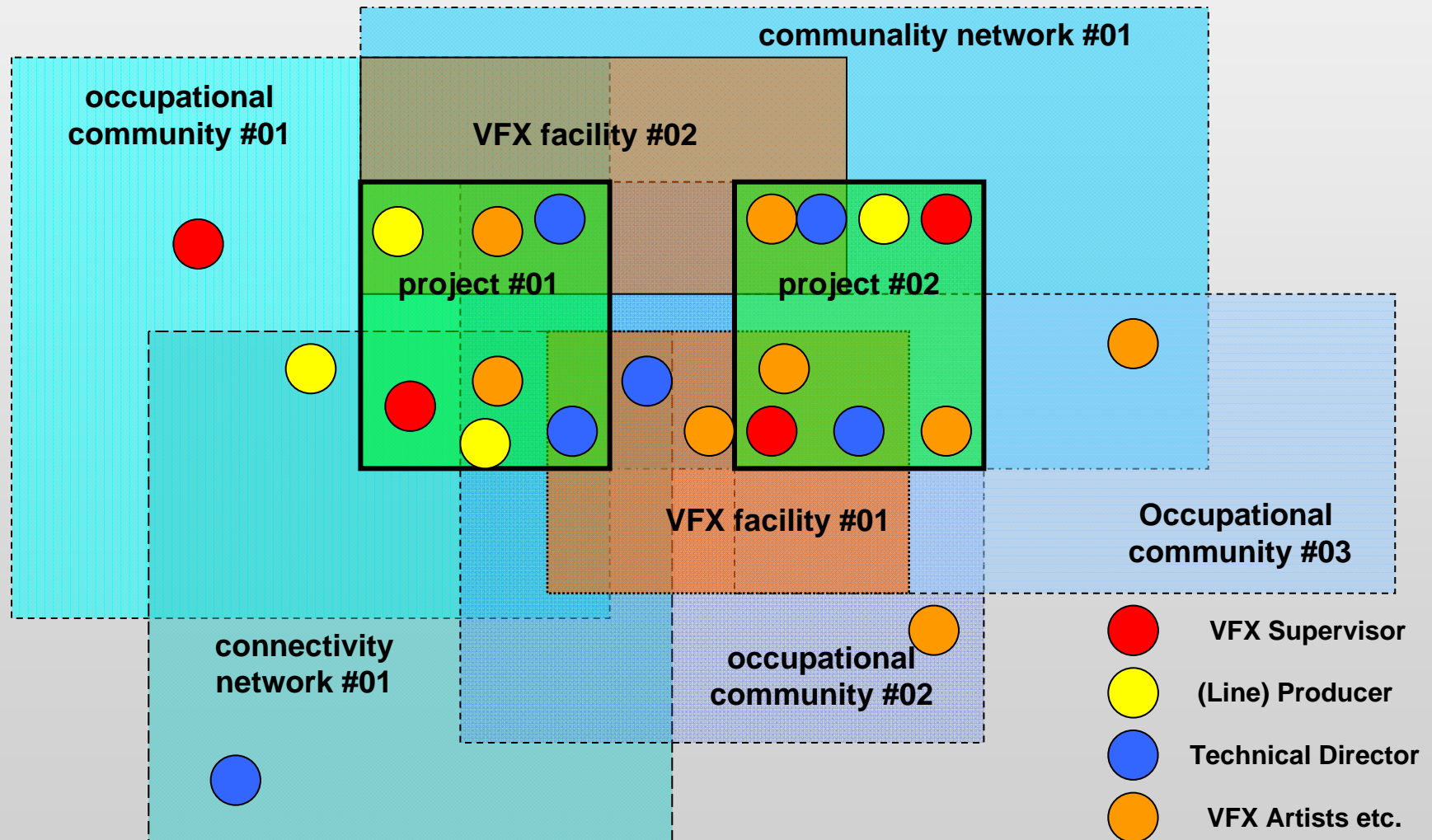
# First Example: Theatre

- Germany: repertoire theatres with resident theatre companies
- Project work  
(product, production process, repertoire, careers)
- Highly competitive internal and external labour markets
- Flexible work arrangements  
ensemble contracts (one or two years), 'guests'

# Second Example: Digital Visual Effects (VFX)

- 8000-10000 employed worldwide
- Local centres of production in London (Soho) and Los Angeles (Santa Monica & Burbank) + Canada and New Zealand
- 400 – 3000 VFX shots per feature film  
(e.g. Harry Potter IV: 3000 shots with 12 companies collaborating)
- Soho: 25-35 major feature films per year
  
- Project-based employment
- Project heterarchy:  
multiple shifting centres, overlap of organisational layers, loose coupling of practices, active rivalry between partially conflicting organisational logics ...

# Project Heterarchy of VFX



Source: Spelthann & Haunschild 2009

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# Some Common Characteristics

- **Flexible** work arrangements, **project-based** employment
- Employment **uncertainty**, **mobility** ('boundaryless' careers)
- **Competitive** (tight) labour market; pool of talents
- Strive for interesting / **cool projects**
- **Neither institutionalized HR functions nor explicit HR strategies**  
HR as a loose aggregation of (latent) practices, dispersed across different organisational layers
  - Training, recruitment, incentives, compensation ...
- **Authority** based on 'supervisors' artistic/creative reputation and impact rather than formal hierarchies

➤ **But: What provides stability?**

# Network Economy and Models of the Employment Contract

- **Employment System Perspective** (Marsden 1999, 2004)  
inter-firm rules and institutions regulating the employment relationship
- **New / other legal, economic and psychological contracts**
  - Social networks as bearers of 'psychological contracts' (reputation)
  - Deferred rewards (royalty-type incomes; stock options)
  - Employment stability and training within an occupational community
  - Representative institutions, credible commitments and contract enforcement

# BUT...

- ? Why do (some) workers accept or better cope with flexible (precarious) forms of employment?
- ? Where do expectations and preferences regarding work arrangements come from? How can they be explained?

## ➤ Work identities

based on  
lifestyles, fusion of 'work' and 'life'

# 'Laddish' Lifestyle of Digital Visual Effects Workers

- **Self-perception**
  - Fascination for technology, entertainment and 'cool' projects
  - Creatives, not artists
- **Milieu**
  - Mainly independent, mobile young men
  - Fairly working or middle class activities like playing pool or darts, watching football and 'hanging out with your mates'
- **Global clusters, work and mobility**
  - Work as major part of lifestyle
  - Cool places
  - Sleeping, eating, drinking at work: hotel-like function of facilities, stylish

(Pratt, Gill & Spelthann 2007; Eikhof, Haunschild & Spelthann 2008)



**Google: Zurich offices**

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**Pixar HQ, San Francisco – central atrium**



## **Songbird (Pioneers of the Inevitable) – office San Francisco**

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# Bohemian Lifestyle of Theatre Actors

- **Distinction** from bourgeois + middle-class values
- **Devotion** to 'art for art's sake'
- **Communication** in public spaces
- **Artistic perception** of work (neglect of economic logics )
- **Subordination** of private life to work

(Eikhof & Haunschild 2006)

# Lifestyles in VFX and Theatre help...

## ... Workers

- to accept a work-dominated life, mobility and transient relationships
- to combine individualism (uniqueness) and collectivism (community)
- to disguise economic rationales and market forces (self-marketing + self-perception as artist/creative)

# Lifestyles in VFX and Theatre help...

## ...Organisations / the Industry

- to keep work arrangements temporary and flexible
- to delimit extrinsic incentives and paid training
- to benefit from devotion and creativity

**→ *Social contract* between workers and organisations**

# Lifestyles as Social Contracts...

┌ ...link collective (but group-specific) cognitive, perceptive and behavioural schemes and the resulting work and employment preferences to industry and labour market structures as well as HRM practices.

- does NOT mean harmony and absence of conflicts
- problematic for workers who cannot maintain lifestyle

# Conclusions

- Non-standard employment not necessarily perceived as precarious
  - More complex relationship between work demands, work arrangements and work identities
  - Individualised / deregulated employment does not imply insignificance of collective phenomena
    - Social contracts
    - lifestyles are crucial for understanding work motivation, work-life boundaries and work practices of a growing group of creative workers
- Limits to legal, economic and psychological explanations
  - However, often workers heterogeneous regarding qualifications, motives / aspirations, work identities and lifestyles
    - Mismatch problematic: e.g. TAWs

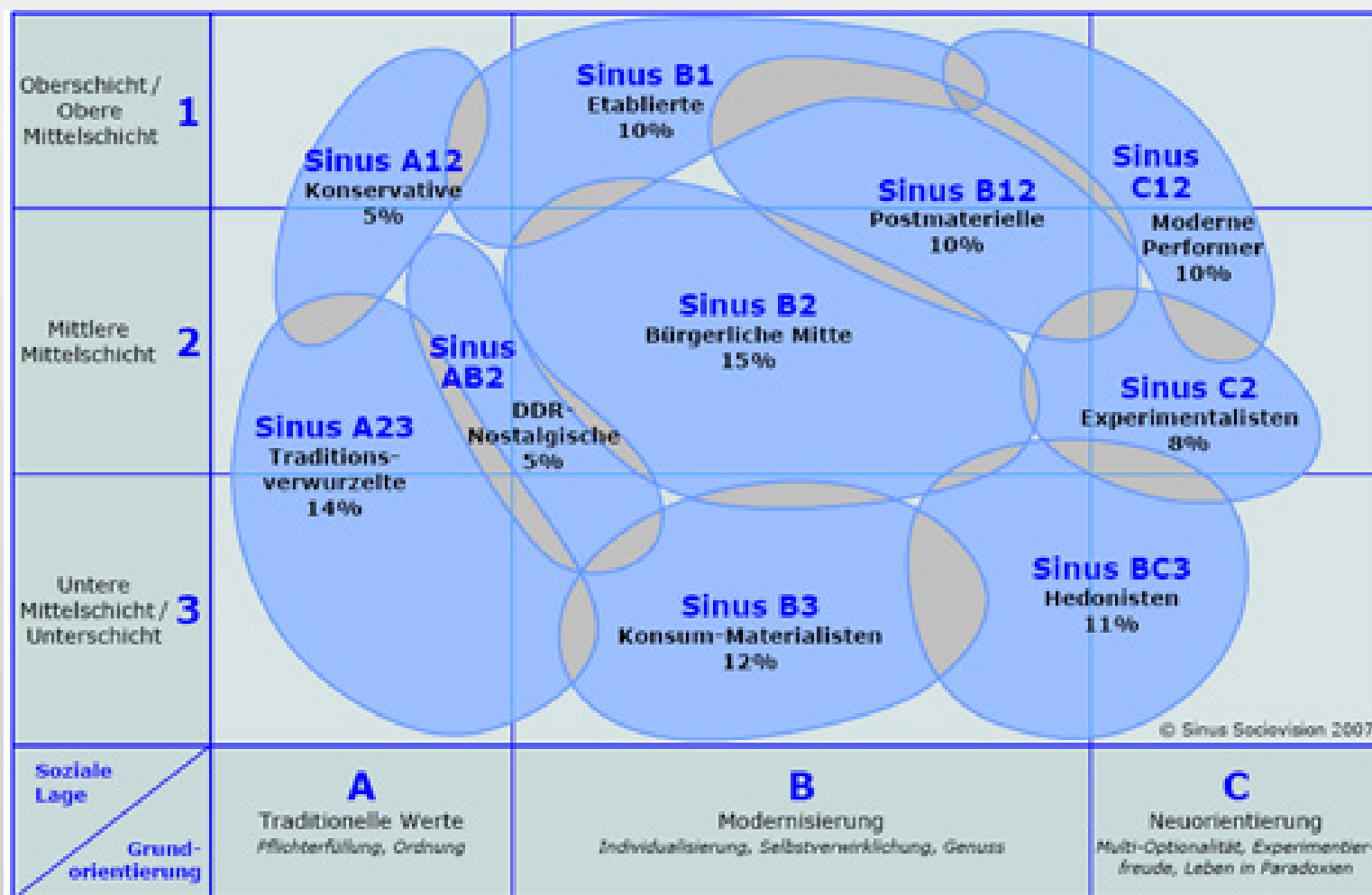


# Class, Milieus and Lifestyles

- **Class** (Marx):  
Objective conditions (education, economic capital)
- **Style of Life** (Simmel: Stil des Lebens; Weber: Lebensführung): Subjective values, conduct of life
- **Milieu** (Bourdieu):  
Subgroups in social space, characterised by objective life conditions, habitus (incorporated life conditions) and style of life

# Sinus Milieus

Class



Source: <http://www.sinus-sociovision.de/>

Values (traditional, modern, experimental)