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# **Disruption, dissonance and embodiment: creativity, health and risk in music narratives**

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**ABSTRACT** This article explores notions of creativity, health and risk, drawing on interviews with freelance musicians in the UK. The social context of insecure music work is explored along with hegemonic discourses of creativity in which hedonism, risk and sacrifice are connected. The study draws on narrative analysis in order to examine responses to disruptions that affect creative work. It also explores ongoing accounts of dissonance in music work. The research builds on the new musicology in exploring the cultural basis of creative ideals: these extend beyond the arts to influence many areas of social life. It highlights the way in which the exercise of aesthetic judgements, including judgements about the self, serve to include and exclude particular identities, valuing and diminishing their contributions. The study also builds on sociological debates concerning the regulatory functions of reflexivity and body management in the context of late modernity. Here, strategies of embodiment are also seen in relation to empowerment as challenges to hegemonic notions of creativity. Finally, the research builds on methodological debates surrounding narrative analysis, adopting a sociological approach that emphasizes the particular context of music work and identifies core narratives that reveal connections between everyday experiences and deeper cultural processes.

**KEYWORDS** *creativity; embodiment; health; music; narrative analysis; risk*

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This article outlines the results of a study of UK musicians' accounts of insecurity, health and risk using perspectives from narrative analysis. While the cultural context of music work at first glance seems unique, musicians' responses as 'flexible' creative workers may be of broader relevance to the study of new forms of employment in western societies as well as the social construction of creativity itself. Music work in the UK tends to be freelance and insecure (Harper, 2002) and working conditions are often poor, with high reported levels of occupational health problems among musicians (Bergman, Johnson, Boatright and Smallwood, 1996; Chesky, Nevroop and Ford, 2002; Guptill, Zaza and Paul, 2000; Harper, 2002; Lederman, 1994; McBride et al., 1992; Spahn, Richter and Zshocke, 2002; Zaza, 1992; Zaza and Farewell, 1997; Zaza, Charles and Muszynski, 1998). While music work can offer significant psychological and cultural rewards, the work environment of many musicians is characterized by a combination of high psychological demands and low levels of control and support (Fjellman-Wkilund, Sundlein and Brulin, 2002; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Increased recognition of occupational health problems in music work is evidenced by the growth of 'performing arts medicine' from the mid 1980s (Alford and Szanto, 1996). While occupational health services have been developed for some groups, such as elite classical musicians (Ackermann, 2002), for the majority self-regulation is important (Guptill et al., 2000) and the importance of body awareness is therefore increasingly recognized for musicians (Fjellman-Wkilund et al., 2002).

The notion of body awareness has been linked with social processes of identity formation in late modern societies (Featherstone, 1991; Turner, 1991). Sociologists have identified body management as a moral task of the reflexive worker in late modernity. Studies of regulatory practices in the workplace suggest that the body is instrumental in the commodification of the self (Du Gay, 1996). By taking part in self-regulatory activities, such as workplace wellness programmes, Adkins identifies a form of reflexivity in which

... workers are increasingly imagined and called upon to imagine themselves as entrepreneurs of their selves. (Adkins, 2002: 35)

In this context of reflexive work the metaphor of creativity is important. This has been extended beyond the arts to influence ways of thinking about people and organizations. Hence the notion of creativity is increasingly invoked in business discourse. Rickards (1999) explores different notions of creativity, identifying the damaging impact of romanticism, which emphasizes creativity's essential and mystical properties rather than its social basis.

By focusing on the connections between musicians' sense of themselves and the modern world in which they live and perform, this case study supports the argument that conditions of insecurity and risk are in part reproduced through socially constructed notions of creativity, risk and the

body. These conditions can also be challenged through socially situated notions of creativity. The current research draws on Bury's (2001) notion of core narratives to explore the connection between personal stories and social meanings. Two core narratives are identified: hegemonic creativity and embodied creativity. These are explored in relation to the cultural context of creative music work and through the stories of individuals whose creative identities have been challenged by insecurity, ill health and risk.

## **Hegemonic notions of creativity**

Notions of creativity developed during the romantic period emphasized the separation between artist and society. Likewise, modernist discourses that have shaped musical analysis during the 20th century, such as structuralism, which seeks to identify fundamental elements and aesthetic principles in music, have to some extent reinforced 19th-century notions of the composer as visionary, marginalized but waiting for recognition (Williams, 2001). For Boyce-Tillman, the creative process has been seen as a heroic journey involving struggle, mastery and conquest from which the notion of the musical genius emerges as

... male, isolated and rejected and only achieving fame after death. (Boyce-Tillman, 2000: 77)

One consequence of the influence of these ideas is the notion of aesthetic autonomy. Hence issues of musical semantics have until recently been treated with suspicion in mainstream music theory, which according to Leppert (1993) had limited the scope of musicological inquiry to those questions 'relating to the notes'. Since the 1980s, musicological writings have considered more explicitly 'how music means and how its meanings help produce both society and culture' (Leppert, 1993: 16). The production and reception of artwork has therefore been recognized as a social process with ideological foundations, although, as Shepherd (2003) suggests, the complexity of musical worlds precludes simple notions of ideological or organically rooted meaning (p. 75).

This new musicology has revealed the importance of musical metaphors in driving home extra musical ideas, for example, establishing and naturalizing social hierarchies such as class, gender, ethnicity and caste (Leppert, 1993; Williams, 2001). While the concern with particular social categories has given way to a more pervasive concern with identity (Shepherd, 2003), interest in the role of music both as a medium of social order and a means of articulation of the self remains strong (Frith, 2003).

Musicologists have deconstructed the central metaphors of music genres, particularly those of canon, virtuosity and risk, all of which are important in western music traditions. For example, in his influential text, (Weber, 1992) documents the social forces that led to the establishment of the canon in 18th-century England. Before this, the notion of performing music more

than 20 years old was unfamiliar to audiences. The development of the secular state, the emergence of cities and the growth of domestic consumption created new social bases for music repertoires and rituals, linked to the pursuit of particular moral ideologies and the hegemonic struggles of established and emergent social classes. The contingency of aesthetic judgements surrounding risk and talent were explored in Kingsbury's 1980s anthropological study of a North American conservatory (Kingsbury, 1988). Here, the sacred character of 'musical feeling', the cult of the soloist and the ritualized separation between performer and audience were seen as sustaining a particular cultural system. Leppert (1993) also suggests that the rituals of western music cultures are closely linked with ideological forces. For example, the concert-going etiquette of disciplined passivity and bodily control is seen as mirroring macrocosmic processes of social order.

Hegemonic notions of creativity in western classical music have been under sustained challenge since the 1980s. Yet for Boyce-Tillman (2000), traditional values continue to exercise a hegemonic influence on music education, training and the socialization of professional musicians. While forms of contemporary and popular music have challenged elitism, she maintains that the emphasis on materialism and the commodification of music in these forms perpetuates a decontextualized view of the arts. In a recent critique, Green (2003) argues that while music education has been somewhat transformed by the inclusion of 'popular', 'jazz' and 'world' musics, music education often affirms pre-existing ideologies of musical value, skill and knowledge.

### **Embodiment and creativity**

Cultural notions about creativity exercise a powerful influence on creative work. These influences have been explored by Alford and Szanto (1996), in their study of pianistic pain. They identify a number of discourses and practices, such as intense competition and technologically driven notions of excellence, which both produce and deny the existence of pain among professional piano players. They also explore the responses of professional, pedagogic and medical worlds to the problem, showing how the language and organizational practices of different disciplines, including performance medicine, serve to create, obscure and individualize risk. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of habitus as embodied knowledge, they show how damaging practices become naturalized, and they paint a picture of a potentially dangerous virtuoso world in which young pianists develop in an isolated hot house atmosphere, trained to think of themselves as psychologically and physically unique. The phrase 'no pain, no gain' suggests that at some level, pain is seen as necessary for virtuosity. At the same time, there are strong disincentives to acknowledge and seek remedies for pain:

As pain ridden pianists stain the pristine image of the virtuoso, whose almost sacred talent is expected to be unencumbered by profane biological impediments. Pianists in pain do not symbolically qualify for virtuoso standing, nor can they be confidently booked for performances. (Alford and Szanto, 1996: 7)

According to Shepherd (2003) the attitudes of 'high culture' in music education have been challenged by the contributions of sociology, anthropology and ethnomusicology. Academic music may be ready for a paradigm shift. Boyce-Tillman's work suggests one alternative paradigm in which music moves away from hedonism and heroism in order to be reconnected with communities through more ancient notions of healing and service.

Others have stressed the importance of embodiment in music. Finnegan (2003) suggests that, while romanticist approaches have celebrated the emotional side of the intellect/feeling polarity, more commonly, scholars have privileged music's cognitive and non-bodily aspects (p. 181). For Williams, the insistence on aesthetic autonomy is associated with a denial of contingency and connection in music, in turn leading to a denial of the body. In particular, the modernist quest to eliminate the subject, together with a general desire to avoid the feminine and queer connotations sometimes associated with art, has led to an emphasis on internal unity in music at the expense of other elements, including gesture and sensuality:

By elevating music to an art form primarily concerned with structural coherence, music theory marginalizes many aspects of music: its timbre and intensity; its affect on the body and its ability to give pleasure. (Williams, 2001: 55)

The rest of this article explores these issues in relation to a qualitative study of musicians' accounts of health, risk, and creativity<sup>1</sup>.

## **Methodology**

In-depth interviews were conducted with freelance musicians who had identified health and risk issues as problems in their work. The author is also a practical musician, and respondents were recruited through networks such as concerts, conferences and through an article in a national professional journal. The current article focuses on data from the first 10 interviews. Seven respondents had undergone formal education and training in music, with the remainder self-taught. All of the sample defined themselves as engaged in creative work in the sense of seeking to make an original contribution to music, whether this was as a composer or a performer extending perceived boundaries of established practice. There were five male and five female interviewees, all of whom were aged over 30. Four of the interviewees identified themselves as belonging to an ethnic or cultural minority. In this and other written accounts of the research, the names and other identifying details of the participants have been changed.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data

analysis was assisted by the computer software package Atlas.ti. The analysis used theoretical insights of narrative analysis as well as identifying common themes linking individual stories with social meanings attached to the body and creativity. The inspiration for the research came from personal experiences of ill health and injury that affected my own work and music making for several years, and as sociologist and musician my story is known to the participants.

Procedures of narrative analysis (NA) vary but its general purpose is to see how individuals impose order on experience. Data analysis requires an examination of each story in terms of the linguistic and cultural resources on which it draws as well as how it persuades the listener of authenticity (Riessman, 1993). As Radley and Billig (1996) have noted, thinking about health and illness is both ideological and dilemmatic: defining a 'healthy life' involves moral judgements, and accounts of illness are offerings to others that both articulate and authenticate a position in the world (p. 222). Hence Bury (2001) identifies 'moral narratives' that help to explain changes between the person, the illness and social identity as well as to restore the individual's moral status.

Here, the analysis focuses on the way particular stories served to restore the individual's moral status as a creative individual in the face of challenges and threats. In doing so, it explores and extends the notion of disruption, a key metaphor in NA arising from the theoretical insight that each culture is seen as having an expected life course, with western societies emphasizing linearity, development and progress (Becker, 1997). Narrativization is seen as a response to disruptions, which occur when expectations of the life course are breached, as they are frequently, for example by illness and other bodily crises (Bury, 1982; Frank, 1995; Riessman, 1993). As Becker suggests:

Such disruptions represent loss of the future. Restoring order to life necessitates re-working understandings of the self and the world, redefining the disruption and life itself. (1997: 4)

In the current study, the analysis examines instances of disruption in the stories, as well as exploring alternative metaphors that emerged.

In NA there is a concern to identify narrative structures or forms (Bury, 2001). For example, in relation to stories of people who have had a cancer diagnosis, Frank identifies a powerful restitution narrative, privileged by western institutions including medicine. Restitution narratives emphasize the return of bodily predictability. They are used to reaffirm a pre-illness identity and recount efforts to discipline the body; they reflect dissociation from vulnerability. In contrast, Frank (1995) describes quest narratives, which embrace suffering and rework it for the purposes of personal development, education and social change. The features of quest narratives are contingency, acceptance and communication, and their functions that of memoir and manifesto. In the current study, the analysis sought to

examine narrative genres and reworkings in relation to the particular challenges of creative identity in the context of insecurity and illness.

In NA, stories are more than personal and there is a concern to identify narrative elements that are meaningful in the context of a shared cultural repertoire. Here, extracts from the accounts are grouped thematically in order to explore core narratives and common narrative reworkings. While the presentation of data extracts can be fracturing in relation to the sequence and context of stories (Riessman, 1993), presentation of whole stories is not always practicable given requirements of space, anonymity, and the focus on cultural repertoire. Hence the current approach to data analysis and presentation is informed both by NA and by the constant comparative approach, which supports the inductive processes of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Silverman, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

## **Results and discussion**

The analysis sought to explore the role of stories in maintaining and restoring the individual's moral status as a creative individual in the face of challenges and threats. The notion of disruption, which is emphasized in the NA literature, was one such challenge, here taking the form of illness that was serious enough to prevent the individual from working. Even when such disruptions were not present, the insecure context of music work meant that the potential of disruption was still a feature, along with chronic tensions arising from uncertainty. These elements are characterized in terms of dissonance.

The analysis also sought to examine narrative genres and reworkings in relation to the particular context of the research, emphasizing those elements that are meaningful in the context of a shared cultural repertoire. Here, two core narratives emerged: hegemonic creativity and embodied creativity. Narrative reworkings drew on both of these, with hegemonic creativity offering at times a restitutive resource and at other times being the focus of re-evaluation. The characteristics of hegemonic creativity are explored in this article; they include a conflation of music and self, the notion of music as a 'gift', the necessity of risk and sacrifice, and the requirement of mastery. The strongest articulation of these themes exists in a form of hedonistic masculinity: here the notion of restitutive hedonism as a narrative device has some parallels with Frank's notion of restitution narrative. These themes are now explored in more detail.

## **Disruption and dissonance**

Most of the stories explored in some way the relationship between musical identity and sense of self. Music, as creative work, was sometimes presented as being beyond 'normal work', as Anthony recounts:



*health: 9(1)*

I once tried a 9-to-5 and I nearly died, I just couldn't do it. I couldn't deal with the mentality. I couldn't deal with the predictability of it all. I couldn't deal with the fact that these people enjoyed the fact that they'd come to the same place every day and meet the same people, the same thing, the same break, have the same conversations. . . . I thought, 'there's more to life than this'. And that was only a couple of weeks and they were good people, they were interesting people, but I just, it was just that whole environment, I just couldn't. And . . . I think as concerns music, I think it's my destiny, because it's in my soul, everything is to be a musician. I think I was meant to be a musician.

Pain and incapacity can be devastating to the identity of the musician (Zaza et al., 1998), perhaps because musical and creative activities are seen as expressions of self, rather than forms of work. Devastation features strongly in Alison's story, which centres on the impact on her life of a playing-related condition that had developed ten years previously and had gradually worsened, leading to her current situation in which her ability to perform nearly all work and domestic tasks was limited severely by chronic pain, and in which she was increasingly reliant on others. In response, and in an attempt to stay active musically, Alison had switched her focus from her 'first voice' of solo piano to part-time singing in a group. In Alison's story, loss of the self is a strong element:

If I didn't have a disability, I'd probably be a full-time musician . . . I'd probably be accompanying myself at the piano. In terms of money it would be one person to pay, not two or three people. I'd probably be doing, trying to get regular evenings, which can't be . . .

Musically, it's more complex. My first instrument is the piano. I can't play it for long periods of time. I love singing, but . . . what gets really frustrating for me is that I get people coming up and saying, 'You're such a good pianist and we want a pianist' . . . and then I have to explain, 'Well, no, I can't, because . . .'. I don't get that when I sing. People enjoy my singing and say, 'You've got a good voice', but in not nearly the same way. . . . They get my spirit but they don't quite get my soul. . . . So that notion is really upsetting for me, that I can't give what people latch on to.

The relationship between creativity and self featured in most of the stories, even when serious disruptions did not feature. As well as disruption, the research also identified the more ongoing problem of dissonance arising from engagement with creative music work. Such dissonances relate to feelings of insecurity, disappointment and unease in relation to risk, competition and expected roles, such as that of breadwinner. The following quote by Veronica, a freelance performer and teacher, provides an illustrative example:

Well I've got so used to it now. . . . I used to feel very depressed because I didn't know if I would ever earn enough money to keep going. It's a constant threat and feeling of misery.

Hence a key finding from the research is that dissonance as well as disruption can provide the impetus for the reworking of creative identity.

### **Challenged identities: hegemonic creativity**

The notion of musical identity as an essential part of the self belongs to a repertoire here identified as hegemonic creativity. These stories reveal the way in which the achievement of creative identity itself is a continual task, framed by hegemonic notions. These notions can sometimes offer a restitutorial resource in the face of disruption, and one narrative possibility is the reaffirmation of hegemonic notions in relation to the self, despite the actual restrictions faced. More often, disruption and dissonance necessitate a reworking of hegemonic creativity. Linked with essentialism is the idea of musical talent as a 'gift'. Few of the stories were without reference to this, although it emerged as a problematic notion.

### **The 'gift' of music**

The notion of a musical gift, recognized and developed through childhood, is one narrative element through which individuals make sense of themselves. Claims to creativity are mediated through this notion of the gift of music.

For those affected by pain and chronic illness, memories of music in childhood can offer restorative power. For example, Alison's sense of herself as creative, which is strongly challenged by her present circumstances, is strengthened by reference to personal history.

Int.: . . . in terms of your creative music making. When did that start?

Alison: For me? I don't know, when was I born? When I was probably three or four, I suppose. . . . I started having lessons at about eight years old.

Int.: And what about music as a professional activity? Is that something that you thought you would always do, or . . . ?

Alison: Yes. I mean I'd already started writing songs in junior school and singing . . . get parts and sing, musical things when I was about 10 or 11 or something. And then I had a little trio when I was about . . . Oh, how much do you want to know, I mean this is relevant?

Int.: Yes.

Alison: Yes, I got really into song writing after I was . . . started writing songs prolifically after I was about 11/12 and then . . . throughout my whole teenage, just writing and writing and. . . . Then I won a couple of song competitions as well, and then when I was 16 I had a trio and we did our first sort of semi-professional thing and I included some original things for that.

Challenged identities are also explored through stories about the development of musical ability in childhood, reflecting processes of inclusion, exclusion and marginalization. Paul has suffered from a debilitating chronic illness for several years. During this period, his music work has progressively diminished, most of his energies going in to managing and understanding his illness. His experiences have raised a series of questions and doubts about his previous goals and efforts which are expressed through his account of early musical experiences:

Paul: OK. I suppose I could start by saying I came to music, playing music, relatively late in terms of being, I suppose, 12 or 13. . . . I think the thing is, having developed musically at that age . . . on a physical level for example, learning an instrument when you're very small you develop a kind of musculature appropriate to playing the instrument and the later you start, in a way, the more you're running counter to the habits that you might already have, so I think there was an element there for me from the beginning of a . . . a compromise, in a sense. . . . I think also getting involved in music at that kind of age, 16/17/18, there was also a kind of dissonance there with what culturally I was expected to be doing and what I wanted to be doing. . . . So I think that that also laid some seeds for some difficulty which I suppose manifested when I was about 18 or 19 . . . I wanted to be a musician . . . but that had not real basis, there was no basis for that in my family or my school for doing that, because I didn't . . . one thing I perhaps should say is that I didn't study music at school formally . . . so I was kind of this outsider playing rock and jazz and em . . . so when I wanted . . . to get into music college. . . . How am I doing so far? Is this the kind of thing . . . ?

Int.: Fine. This is the kind of thing . . .

Paul: Right. That's the kind of thing. OK. So . . . as I say, I was working intensely to change my track, you know, to get into music college which, in fact, I did and . . . although I was delighted to get in and although that did give credit to the efforts that I'd been putting in . . . I had no foundation in the history and the culture of the music.

In these accounts, identity, belonging and embodiment are linked. The two examples reveal the ways in which hegemonic notions of gift and canon can both assure belonging, offering a restitutive resource in the face of difficulty, at the same time as marginalizing some identities and diminishing the value of their contributions.

## **Risk and sacrifice**

In most of the accounts, the notion of risk taking was at the core of creative identity, and sacrifice was often presented as a prerequisite for creative success. Creative identities were changed and made by risk, and moments of risk taking were often critical narrative landmarks. Simon's story reflects both a sense of frustration arising from balancing the need to make a living

with creative ideals as well as a sense that security and creative lethargy may be linked. After a long period in which he felt he was compromising by working as a teacher at the same time as performing, a health crisis prompted him to choose between the two. His story tells of the frustrations and rewards of this course of action.

Simon: . . . the key moment was playing in XXX I started getting very disenchanted and I started to get completely torn. . . . Because . . . I found the demands of trying to do full time teaching and rehearse and do gigs and satisfy the musical side of things impossible. So eventually I went part time . . . and eventually two years ago I gave it up completely . . . from that moment on that was kind of it, my life has changed really and got immeasurably better in some respects, in most respects probably.

Int.: So when you first made that kind of decision, did it feel like a big risk?

Simon: It did, it took me a long time to work up to it. . . . I mean, I think I am probably a naturally cautious, slightly fearful person anyway . . . I have given up the financial support structure that I have had since I was . . . in my late 20s. . . . One thing that I do worry about . . . is if I was ill, because it has happened over the . . . a couple of points over the last couple of years, I have been ill and I have been unable to rehearse, I have been unable to do gigs, I have been unable to do work I have been offered and therefore I didn't get any money. At all.

The notion of risk as requiring sacrifice is articulated in Anthony's story. Anthony is a successful international solo performer who describes an erratic lifestyle of highs and lows, including alternate periods of high financial reward and dire scarcity.

Anthony: . . . the whole job for life thing is just a joke, to me, I actually think it's bad. . . . In music the thing that stops you growing is habit. Because we're naturally – as human beings I feel we're controlled by our fear, fear and laziness, those things together. I know people who can't stand their job and they're there for 30 years and I think, 'Why don't you change it?'. Musicians you see, we've no choice . . . you're not afraid to take risks because it's already a risk being a musician anyway.

Int.: Do you ever feel personally that doing what you do is bad for you?

Anthony: Yes. It might have destroyed my life.

Int.: What, being a musician?

Anthony: Yes, because it's so obsessive. It's cost me so much in every way. I've made so many sacrifices, decisions, everything.

In stories like this, risk and sacrifice belong together and creative achievement seems impossible without a high personal cost. In this sense, hegemonic creativity can be seen to impose a culture of individual sacrifice that leaves little room for alternative constructions.

## **Embodiment and mastery**

None of the respondents experienced music work without a sense of physical challenge. In Anthony's case, physical challenges had been relatively easy to minimize or overcome:

Anthony: Well, I've developed really good breath control, because, I didn't have a lot of air when I was a kid so you have to learn to use it well . . . it changed my life. Because you have to control your air. So that element has been amazing, and it's also encouraged me to work out in gyms and things, the cardiovascular side. And so now, breath control is one of my biggest strong points, which is quite ironic as I'm asthmatic.

Physical challenges represented the potential for disruption in the stories, and notions of body awareness were ever present, as in Susan's example below:

Susan: Yes, I actually got quite unwell in the autumn but I mean I am 50 this year so I am not doing badly but I am hitting time of life stuff which you don't really think about until you get there . . . and also unrelated, just bad digestion and it was beginning to incapacitate me like I was worrying about having to sit on the stage for two hours you know without my stomach giving in . . . and that was not to do with nerves it was just to do with the fact that my digestion was . . .

Int.: Was it to do with eating patterns?

Susan: Bad diet . . . because you have an hour between sessions and so you grab a sandwich, although I am not doing it anymore. . . . I went to see a nutritional therapist and she put me on an elimination diet and I am just so pleased I did it and I . . . just stopped eating wheat and I cut out dairy products, the lot, and six months later the digestion stuff is better, I shouldn't be drinking coffee, but I do. I can gauge it now.

In Paul's story, the problem of mastery is a major theme. His story picks up during his college training, where his adult perceptions of a professional music career began to take shape:

. . . I think I should say at this point that perhaps already, the physical demands of playing to that level that I was expected to play at by the end of college, I think physically I was not able . . . for example, to play a 45-minute classical recital. I mean I did do it . . . I finished three classical pieces and I was like, I was completely shot away because, as I say, physically I just didn't have the equipment to really master and deliver that music at that level. The other thing of course I should say is that, perhaps the more creative spark of my music-making, which probably at that time was expressed in jazz, that had also been squeezed out a little bit by the demands of a very intensive classical course. And I don't think I made the time or the energy to, kind of, keep my jazz going . . . and what the music scene was like . . . how competitive the scene was . . . and I became aware of all the factors that you would need to make a really successful career . . . that it wasn't just to do with talent. It was temperament and physical constitution and all kinds of other things.

The themes of embodiment and mastery relate to gender identity as well as sexuality. In Alison's story, hegemonic creativity emerges as strongly masculine. Mastery linked with issues of taste and style through which processes of inclusion and exclusion take place. Hence Alison describes her feelings of exclusion in relation to a dominant aesthetic of machismo hedonism:

My piano teacher . . . he'd give me a piece to do and, you know, it was a jazz standard and you improvised like this and, I didn't want to do . . . that wasn't my musical expression. . . . I played . . . stuff that was sensitive. It was gentle, meaningful and I was the only woman on my course, in my year. . . . The musical style . . . the dominant style . . . was you play, how do you play . . . fast, do you play weird. There was absolutely no room for you playing sensitively and meaningfully, you know. It was just like saying to me, 'Inconsequential, woman, girl.' . . . Basically he was trying to push me to . . . improvise loud and fast I can't in that kind of be-boppy style which is just not me. My style is very sensitive. I think it's a gender issue, certainly some sort of gender issue. So my lessons ended up being a big battle, basically, between him saying, 'You should do it like this', and me saying, 'I don't hear it like that'.

Alison describes this battle as being lived out in her body, her hands being an 'extension' of herself:

. . . I put such a lot of effort into my recital and really started to get quite a lot of pain in my forearms, my wrists, from trying to play these loud, fast things that . . . seemed to be required of me. . . . I came to the lesson and said, 'I'm really sorry, I've not done much practice because I've been in pain', and my teacher said, 'Well, if you want to be a musician you'd better get used to it, get used to the pain'. And that was it. That was my lesson for that day. . . . So I have to suffer, I have to be in pain if I want to play. It didn't even occur to me to challenge it in a way, because I thought, 'Yes'.

The link between ascribed roles in relation to gender and sexuality and acceptable creative identities are also apparent in Paul's story, which resumes at the point at which he 'fell into' the professional music scene after moving to a new city:

I fell into the jazz scene in XXX and . . . for the next few years at least – I began to perceive that there was a demand for kind of jazz piano and . . . maybe this is something that I could now take a bit more seriously. And I was very lucky as well in that some teaching jobs came up at a couple of schools. And so within a few years of moving suddenly found myself, you know, I would say a busy jazz musician in terms of playing a few times a week, teaching in the days, and it was handy because . . . 'handy' – that sounds a bit silly, but I was also living with a woman . . . and so suddenly my role and my kind of identity in a sense, was as a working man, a partner and a father.

But I guess what I haven't mentioned as an undercurrent is/were, perhaps, feelings, doubts around my sexuality and what I wanted from my life that I hadn't explored and certainly hadn't resolved, and things really came to a head with

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the birth of my daughter. I was suddenly forced to confront, I guess, being gay and thinking, 'Well, this isn't the kind of set up that . . . if that's what I am . . . this set up isn't going to work for me'.

## **Surviving disruption: reworking creative identity**

In this study severe disruptions to working lives seemed to necessitate creative reworkings: restitutive hedonism is difficult to sustain for long in this context. A large part of Paul's story focuses on this process of re-evaluation:

So I suppose, really, to bring the story a bit more up to date . . . gradually my performing life has been diminishing because physically I found it more difficult to sustain the energy necessary to perform. . . . But I would like to think that other aspects of myself have had a chance now to come forward, you know. It's almost as if prior to that time . . . I was so set on . . . well, I don't know that I was so set on making it, or being a successful jazz . . . that was just the way my life was kind of taking me and I was just going with it. But I suppose when I lost that I had to start thinking, 'Well, where do I now want to begin to direct my life?', you know.

So the last five or six years in particular, since I was diagnosed, . . . the last six years have been a slow recovery which I hope is still. . . you know, I'm still in that process . . . and . . . a letting go of . . . in some ways letting go of my identity as a musician. And I'm trying to reclaim my identity as a human being, as a person. I think I've got that out of balance. . . . For me, illness has come into my life and has been a challenge to change my life and to find what's important to me and to find values and, in a sense, I suppose whatever music I do now . . . somehow that broader, holistic view is reflected. . . .

For Paul, this holistic view centres on a number of elements including self-observation, embodiment and pacing, connection and spirituality:

. . . gradually I would say it's been about exploring the various areas of my life whether that be diet, exercise, sexuality, spirituality, areas one by one, kind of looking at them, seeing what improvements could be made, learning from people out there . . .

. . . probably the key thing has been a kind of self-observation, i.e., noticing when I'm beginning to feel tired and when's a good day and that process of kind of noticing and, and self-observing has really been helped in the last two years. . . . I would say that I have now reached the point where I can begin almost to budget my energy in so far as I can begin to plan the week ahead, knowing my limitations . . . and pacing myself.

So maybe, to sum it up, just as I had to go and learn to kind of say 'help', you know, ask for help from a counsellor and from various professionals, in my arts and creative work I've had to learn to . . . collaborate with other people and bring in other people from different disciplines and share the burden kind of thing.

That, for me, has probably been the key element and that means that on the creative process . . . and this is perhaps going into an area that we don't have time to talk about, is that maybe in the past I've seen the nature of inspiration as this kind of all-consuming fever that you have to go with at the time. You know, you have to just follow it and I think now I've had to come to question that kind of 'tortured genius' kind of thing and I've had to say: Is that true? Is that true? Can I get inspiration in a slightly more gradual and manageable and sustainable way, so that there aren't these great peaks and troughs, you know? I'll leave you, I'll leave you with that thought.

## **Creative reworkings: living with dissonance**

Themes of embodiment and connection also feature in other stories, where ongoing dissonance rather than disruption provides the impetus for story telling. The stories also feature a range of strategies in response to creative dissonance. These include reworking judgement through the metaphor of ambiguity; reworking compromise through the metaphor of diversity; and reworking heroism through the metaphors of housework and emotional labour, as illustrated in the following examples.

### **Embodiment and connection**

An illustrative example can be seen in Simon's account, in which self-observation and body awareness are key to creative emergence:

I have also suffered from a partly congenital and partly psychologically engendered stoop, which is connected with my lack of confidence which I have had a problem with over the years. . . . I used to play and point down and have a very apologetic and very bad posture that affected all kinds of things in my life . . . which I have rectified through lessons and through Tai Chi . . . and rectifying that has led to a subsequent upturn in my confidence, not without these huge blips when I have massive crises of confidence when no work is coming in or when I feel I am playing very badly, but on the whole I think changing my physical approach to playing has improved a lot of psychological things within me as well. . . . No matter what the context, no matter how difficult the music is, how nervous I am feeling about the gig, I feel some degree of confidence. And the flow of air through my body feels very different the way that I am rooted to the floor feels very different. I suppose I just physically feel much more connected, with, something.

### **Ambiguity and diversity**

The issue of judgement is a strong element of Anthony's story in which ambiguity is seen as an opportunity to evade the impact of established conventions:

. . . the instrument's quite unique that way because it hasn't got the same recognition. So that's also the reason you can live quite comfortably in that middle



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ground, and that's perhaps why I'm attracted to it. It's not classical, it's not jazz, it's in the middle. It's in this sort of no man's land where no one can categorize it, so I feel really safe there, 'cause you're not then disappointing anyone, you're doing your own thing, making your own rules if there is any.

Ambiguity seems linked to diversification, which was mentioned as a common tactic for managing contingency, as in Veronica's story:

Int.: Does it feel risky to do what you do?

Veronica: . . . over the years because I have learnt to take pleasure in the diversity . . . I have learnt to sort of, kind of shuffle things around so like when I am not working I will build up my teaching practice, and then if I am performing I sort of have to lay the students off for a little while and then pull them back in. . . . I even enjoy the fallow periods because usually I know something will come.

### **Housework, 'normal work' and emotional labour**

In Paul's story, the notion of 'budgeting' is important: it is only by measuring and rationing his energy hour by hour and day by day that he is able to maintain his creative self. This response addresses the ultimate impossibility of mastery, replacing mastery with contingency, limitation and the mundane. Other stories resonate with this. Simon describes himself as a perpetual list-maker, describing how this alleviates everyday anxieties about financial insecurity. These mundane metaphors and activities are expressed through the notion of 'normal work'. Similarly, Veronica manages potentially overwhelming feelings of insecurity and risk through the metaphor of housework:

Every week, I spend a certain portion of the week, doing what I call plotting and scheming. Basically, trying to think how can I get more work in the future. . . . So it's a constant sort of like housework; I constantly keep beavering away and dropping seeds. You never know where your next gig will come from. It can take a long time, so you have to be patient.

In Veronica's story, the relationship between creative identity and self has been reworked, and a repositioning of music as 'normal work':

I mean for a long time I fantasized that it would be nice to have a regular job and what a relief that would be. But I think the happiness thing comes more from inner work which I have been doing that has really helped me be happy in myself, regardless of the trials and fortunes of my career, because I don't think you can rely on that for happiness, it's too exterior. But I do think that the inner creativity side is extremely important, it gives my life meaning I suppose.

Veronica's story also emphasizes the importance of emotional labour. By identifying her work as a service and by focusing on the needs of the audience rather than her own fears she is able to cope with performance

anxiety. Likewise in Simon's story, financial sacrifice is offset by the opportunities that performance gives to connect with others:

... I can't think of many, if any, musical experiences I have had which I have been paid for, which I haven't enjoyed on levels other than financial, or felt were giving out on levels other than financial. Even the seemingly mundane weekly residency I have in a pizza restaurant is actually a source, generally of quite a lot of pleasure to me because people come up, they haven't paid to come in, they had no idea there is going to be music, it's probably the last thing they wanted, and yet nevertheless people do come up and say thank you and. . . . Again it just seems to be a point of contact with people and really that gives me a real buzz. Even if there are other nights when nobody listens, claps and does anything other than complain about us or blow smoke in our faces (laughter) . . .

... Those positive human encounters do make it worth while so I think it always operates on more than a financial level I think. And when you think of the amount of finance involved anyway (laughter).

Emotional labour is addressed in the occupational literature as a source of exploitation and risk, particularly for women workers (Hoschild, 1983; Lloyd, 1999). In these stories, emotional labour emerges as a resource for wellbeing and as part of a narrative reworking of creativity in which 'compromise' is re-evaluated through notions of service and connection with others. In Jennifer's story these elements come together through the metaphors of unfolding and acceptance, here presented as opposite to predictability and mastery:

When I first left my teaching job I really had this vision of me writing songs, performing my songs, making recordings and doing, hopefully, sort of larger scale gigs and travelling, and. . . . It's not that I have lost track of that vision . . . but what has happened is been an amazing unfolding of other things that I actually really, really love . . . work related to music. . . . Another thing that has really blossomed and came out of nowhere was working with people over the age of 60 in the community. I just love it . . . I can't even begin to describe how brilliant it is. It's so beautiful to just sit in a room with these great people who just have an enormous bank of shared songs and I am there as a kind of catalyst, but it's just as likely that a song will come up, you know, from anybody in the room and we will all sing it; it's just joyous really. So that's another way that it's sprouted in an unforeseen direction. . . .

In this example, embodiment and connection are linked. Jennifer goes on:

... It is a very deep change of attitude . . . there is definitely a sort of holistic movement helping me and a kind of integration and also a sort of coming together of things and I think taking better care of myself is definitely a part of that. I think what I bring to the music, whether it's performing or facilitating people, people can sense that there is a difference. . . .

Similarly, service is seen explicitly as a resource for wellbeing:

... I feel like I can ride a wave of energy when I am bringing music to people. I can get out of myself as well, if I am going through any difficulties . . . there

was a woman that said to me the other week, something like, 'You have made my life worth living again'. Really. She said that, 'You have brought me back to life', that was it. There is that feeling with older people, maybe they live alone, obviously so many of them have experienced loss, or maybe they are struggling with pain, and I see it with them as well that they are coming to that session and the songs pick them up and carry them and it's just amazing. So it's a big factor in what I do and it's part of what I love.

## **Conclusions**

This study has explored the role of stories in maintaining and restoring musicians' individual moral status as creative workers in the face of the challenge of disruption and the threat of dissonance. The research builds on the methodological debates surrounding narrative analysis, examining narrative genres and reworkings in the particular context of creative music work. Hegemonic creativity is identified as a core narrative, some of its elements being the conflation of music and self; the notion of music as a 'gift', the necessity of risk and sacrifice, the requirement of mastery and hedonistic masculinity. These elements sometimes offer resources for the reworking of identity, with restitutive hedonism, the reaffirmation of hegemonic creativity in the face of circumstances in which the ability to fulfil it is constrained, here identified as paralleling Frank's notion of a restitution narrative. More often, hegemonic notions of creativity frame processes of marginalization and exclusion. The research therefore builds on the new musicology in exploring the cultural impact of creative ideals that extend beyond the arts to influence many areas of social life. It highlights the way in which the exercise of aesthetic judgements, including judgements about the self, serves to include and exclude particular identities, valuing and diminishing their contributions.

Alternative narrative types are here seen as offering personal resources for making sense of risk and insecurity. Alternative elements, including embodiment and connection, ambiguity, housework and emotional labour, are linked in the notion of embodied creativity, another core narrative emerging from the research. Bury (2001) identifies some potential limitations of NA in a critique of an interpretive stance identified as a 'postmodern morality' of renewal and change linked with religious and secular moralities of redemption. Viewed from this perspective, embodied creativity can be seen as having some characteristics of a redemption narrative. It is also one response to the ultimate unsustainability of hedonism in the face of vulnerability, insecurity and risk, contributing to a broader cultural critique of hegemonic notions of creativity and work.

This discussion of musicians' stories of insecurity, health and risk offers broader insights into debates surrounding reflexive work as well as the social construction of creativity in western societies. In doing so, the study

builds on sociological debates concerning the regulatory functions of reflexivity and body management in the context of late modernity. In the current study, strategies of embodiment, including emotional labour, are also seen as strategies of resistance and empowerment. Nevertheless, hedonism and heroism remain powerful influences on creative work, naturalizing sacrifice and leaving little room for alternative discourses such as entitlement or rights.

### Note

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