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'Raw Talent in the Making': Imaginary journeys, authorship and the discourses of Expertise

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Abstract

In the digital age, it seems that participation has been conflated with literacy; content with engagement; novelty with innovation; and ubiquity with meaning (see for example, Thornham & McFarlane 2014, Gillespie 20010, Dean 2008, Livingstone 2009, van Dijck 2013) and encapsulated in terms such as 'digital native', 'digital divide', or 'born digital'. In turn, these conflations have done something to *technology,* which is constructed as malleable, a supportive facilitator; and the *user*, who is constructed as active agent. Neither of these, account for *mediations,* or – crucial for us – the notion of the imaginary, which emerges in our research as so central to expertise.

Drawing on ethnographic work carried out in Studio 12, a media production facility for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds in Leeds, UK, we propose that the concept of expertise emerges through a bigger array of social capital as well as traditional structures of power such as class, gender and race. Expertise is claimed, evidenced, and generated. For us, however, expertise emerged not only

as *elusive*, but also because it was premised on a disjuncture between lived and everyday youth, and the promises of becoming in a future orientated (technological, imaginary and creative) landscape.

Keywords

Expertise, authorship, creativity, imagination, third sector, capital, Leeds, young people

Preamble

Over the past few years there have been a number of automatic syllogisms (to borrow a phrase from Fenton and Barassi 2011: 189) that seem particularly endemic to the discourses around expertise in the advent of digital and social media. To offer a brief summary, they work to conflate (for example) participation with literacy; content with engagement; novelty with innovation; and ubiquity with meaning.[i] Some are encapsulated in terms such as 'digital native', 'digital divide', or 'born digital', where the attempts to explore mediations with new technologies have met with a wider discourse of neoliberalism and technological determinism.[ii] In turn, these syllogisms have done something to *technology,* which is constructed as malleable, a supportive facilitator (and a tool to goal-oriented activities); and the *user*, who is constructed as active agent. Both of these work to doubly emphasise the role of the individual authoring imagining subject as powerful, discerning, creative agent: an expert. Neither of these, account for *mediations,* which requires a much more nuanced approach, or – crucial for us – the notion of the imaginary, which seems central to expertise.

We use the notion of the imaginary to refer to questions of desire, motivation, imagined (future) selves and imaginary journeys: those elements encapsulated in an understanding of future-orientated expertise that includes ideal and stereotyped conceptions of the expert, the author, the artist. To a certain extent these slippages or syllogisms can be seen as part of a wider metrification of our culture which is further exacerbated by the discourses and promises of big data or "quantified selves" – a need to find numerical evidence, a fetishisation of amount whether that materialises as number of visits to a website, number of posts, traffic through a website or users of certain technology.[iii] But they also, of course, (re) emerge in significant moments of change brought about by (for example) technological innovation, political change or – for the context of this article – socio-economic change. Indeed, the context of austerity – in which this research is located – shifts the financial and lived realities of experience, re-ordering it into what we might call pragmatic and logistical frames on an individual level, rather than a wider social or cultural imaginary. But what is interesting is that, despite this reordering, the imaginary remains powerful because the idea of the individual authoring user is also prevalent.

In detailing this terrain at the outset, our aim is threefold. Firstly to recognise the complexity of expertise, that has been variously labelled and approached through different routes and disciplines. Our argument here is that a claim of and towards a digital native (for example) is also a claim of and towards expertise (framed in particular ways). This moves us from simply drawing the connections between discourses, to thinking about how they emerge, and the implications of them. Secondly, we also want to recognise that the wider discourses of digital technologies

forces a number of encounters between academic disciplines and practices, so that it is also important to ask what different disciplines and practices have to say to the issues presented here (not least because a focus on 'expertise' seems to require a reflexive consideration of such things). Finally, the particular context in which this research is undertaken is the creative third sector – where some of the discourses above are longstanding. Authorship and individual agency (for example) are powerful and necessary tropes within this sector that are frequently drawn on to 'evidence' empowerment and (therefore) transformation.[iv] Transformation, in turn, is a necessary (and longstanding) political, economic and social claim that organisations employ to demonstrate success and secure resources and support. The ironies of these manoeuvres are not lost on the organisations with whom we work – measuring transformation through objects, footfall, take up, or access are longstanding practices within the third sector (and beyond) *and* widely perceived as inherently problematic. At the same time such measurements have become normative measurements *of* 'success' and necessary methods in the securing and maintenance of resources. Conversely, in the deployment of certain discourses which are seen as a necessary step that precludes meaningful engagement, such discourses also become the measurements against which engagement is 'tested' and expertise is demonstrated, and therefore in and of themselves measurable.

The empirical data that supports this analysis is based on ethnographic work carried out in Studio 12, a media production facility for young people with disadvantaged backgrounds in Leeds, UK, from March to September 2013. Our 'data' is comprised of participant observation in the Studio and the Studio's activities, interviews with participants and the staff, and engagement through social and digital

media. Our aim is not to critique the Studio itself, nor the aims, practices and efforts of those involved. As suggested above, the creative art sector is a continually shifting and negotiated space in which every decision (it seems to us at least) is complex and framed by competing tensions around making the organisation work within a sphere of metrification, reduced funding and pressures of self-sustainability (that invariably mean economic self-sustainability). At the same time, there is a political and ethical ethos that is borne out of experience, hope and faith in the possibility of an alternative system. The majority of people we encounter in our engagements with this sector are critical, reflective and political (and politicized through working in this sector).

In using Studio12 here, we are using a specific example to talk about a wider problematic that is in no way endemic to one organization, but rather embedded in wider culture.[v] In what follows we offer a brief introduction of the Studio with the following aims. Firstly to locate our thinking around expertise within the specific (complex) discourses that emerge within the frameworks of community and creative arts more generally and the specific context of this Studio as an emergent and arrived-at entity. Secondly, the particular rationales and frameworks of the lead facilitator/director of Studio12 offer a springboard for thinking about notions of expertise-as-access and provision in relation to a tangible location. Finally and in relation to this, focusing on location offers an initial marker for considerations of the imaginary, which emerge here in relation to discourses of authorship, desire and creative autonomy but are always already shaped by the Studio itself as a legitimating force. In other words the *space* of Studio12 functions in a number of ways, each revealing a number of nuances for/to expertise.

Studio 12: Access, Provision and Emplaced Imaginary

'Raw Talent in the Making'

Studio12 is an audio-visual media project providing free access for 16-30 year olds to a production studio, training and accredited qualifications. The Studio started in 2002 as part of Pavilion, a commissioning organisation based in Leeds that dealt with contemporary art and its politics. In 2009, Studio12 became a tangible part of Leeds City Library. Most of the energy, drive and vision for the Studio comes from its director, a committed artist who defines himself as 'the only dyslexic librarian'. He has created a self-sustainable space that has, since 2002, moved from third sector funding to commercial and public sector funding (salaries are paid by the Council, but funding for the equipment and resources comes from commercial outputs). Young people become members of the studio through their initial log in process and in so doing provide demographic information that is used to detect and target new users in future campaigns. This information also details a clear profile of the active user (those with more than 100 hours of use). 'He' lives in particular postcodes around Leeds – those associated with disadvantaged neighbourhoods. 'He' is between 17-21 years old, from a minority background (mostly African/Caribbean). 'He' is likely to be unemployed. Women represent less than 20% of the active users of the studio. Although people tend to come and go, the Studio has a 'core group' of around 50 long time users.

The tagline for Studio12 is, as suggested above, ‘Raw Talent in the Making’ and the webpage invites participants to 'bring your ideas and visions to the studio and make them happen'.[vi] We want to use these two taglines as a framing rhetoric for the rationales offered to us by the Studio, firstly in relation to Studio12 as a community and creative arts venture, and secondly in relation to the location of the studio in a discrete and central area of Leeds. It seems clear to us that the initial and public facing front of the Studio draws on normative understandings of expertise, creativity and youth, even if these are ultimately critiqued through the engagement that goes on in the space. Consequently this is a useful starting point for us because it indicates the (necessary) tensions and contradictions that operate within the sphere of creative community arts that we want to use the taglines to elucidate.

The first thing to note about the notion of ‘raw talent in the making’ is the underpinning suggestions of positive transformations (‘in the making’), natural aptitude (‘raw talent’) and the future-orientation of the tagline. These, in turn, resonate with wider conceptions of young people as on a particular kind of ‘journey’ towards adulthood (Gadlin 1978: 236, Bennett 2007: 24), which in itself lends to a future-orientation– what Sara Bragg has called ‘becomings’ (2010:22) – where the interest is in the possibilities of the future individual and what they might/could/should become. While these are common and even normative conceptions, they are not without criticism, not least because the liminal space of youth that is constructed is rarely the experience *of* the young people themselves (see Thornham and McFarlane 2011; 2014, Livingstone, Lange and Ito 2010). A further criticism is that it compounds wider discourses of neoliberalism, celebrating the individual discerning subject who moves through the spaces of youth on a journey towards adulthood,

whilst simultaneously undermining the lived experience of youth because of its future-orientation (see Bennett 2007, Bragg 2010).

The natural raw aptitude (creative talent) that can be positively harnessed also resonates with discourses of young people – particularly in the area of creative arts, but also, more recently in the concept of the digital native (see Willis 1990, Jones 2011, Livingstone 2009, Prensky 2011, Bennett et al 2008). In both these arenas (creative arts and digital) this inherent creativity that young people can harness is also necessarily conceived of as authored (Lange and Ito 2010, Thornham & McFarlane 2014) and connected with notions of agency and empowerment (ibid.) Indeed, continuing with these synergies, there is a certain parallel between the digital technologies – as malleable, supportive facilitator of the users' desire – and creative tools (also technologised) that simply need manipulating to best express the creative authors individual vision. It is also interesting to note these synergies or conflations between 'raw talent' 'natural creativity' 'authorship' and 'empowerment' run across these sectors – demonstrating at once their pervasiveness. They are also resonated by the participants of the studio themselves, who work to articulate *themselves* as authors, creatives, artists with a natural or pre-existing talent or interest that needs developing. Their rationale for engaging with the studio is about realizing their potential through the use of the resources there. While we return to this in more detail below, it is perhaps worth noting here that there is an evident synergy between how the studio represents itself and how the participants conceptualize themselves, which suggests on the one hand successful self-representation of the studio insofar as it attracts like-minded people. On the other hand it further demonstrates the pervasiveness and persuasiveness of this particular rhetoric – and that it also

reveals a powerful desire *to* imagine, position and claim themselves in these ways (which in turn *do* something to their own perception of self-as-creative/author/expert). Finally, all of these discourses, captured in the taglines of Studio12 speak to notions of expertise, locating it here as *potentiality* – perhaps, crudely, in the moment where raw talent meets authored (individual) voice.

The second thing to note about 'bringing your ideas and visions' is the continuation of the above with a clear emphasis on the individual as agent and the premising of some sort of journey. But this is also about process – in keeping with some of the central tenants of community arts practice, where the interest is in *methods of engagement* as a tool through which 'empowerment' can occur. Indeed, thinking about the legacy of community arts, there is a clear overlap between the taglines noted above and what Webster and Buglass claim as the central ethos to the creative activities found across the community arts sector: to 'give people the tools to be active, confident participators and creators to help communities discover, develop and use their ability to express themselves through creativity, and to find their voice' (2005, pp. 1–2).

To a certain extent, these claims and alignments are a necessary trope of Studio12's work, not least because, like much creative arts and indeed education, engagement is structured as an authored journey, and equipment is provided ready for take-up. Our critique is not about these discourses *per se*, but the way they have become enmeshed over time with positive connotations around transformation, empowerment, and expertise. In other words, while the discourse of a journey is a

longstanding feature of Western society, and it is a powerful imaginary trope and lived experience (the participants in Studio 12 *do* embark on a kind of journey); the problem is when the journey is claimed as straightforwardly or transparently empowering or transformative – particularly if/when it is *completed* and *measured* through an output: when it becomes enmeshed with neoliberal principles that rework the journey so that the measurement of transformation becomes the fact of being on journey itself or the output of it, rather than the lived experience of it. Transformation becomes something unnuanced and straightforwardly measurable. Expertise becomes the act of being on a journey. But when we talked to participants of Studio12, it was the lived experience of being in the Studio that they reflected on, and the *feeling* of agency and control that this engendered:

> The most important thing was basically just the atmosphere. As soon as you walk in you know what will be there for you, there's the computers you can be able to use, there's the booth, you can be able to use [sic]. There's a green screen as well and that's like something that you only see in those [professional] studios around Leeds.

Our point here then, is that rather than straightforwardly assert the transformative nature of the space of Studio12 is transparently and necessarily positive (and measured, evidenced, realized etc), it is far more interesting and revealing to note the different nuances around transformation (and expertise) that are offered across the public-facing elements of the studio, the people engaging in the Studio, the space of the studio, and the products created by the Studio. Each of these 'elements'

may broadly align to a wider rhetoric of transformative empowerment (for example), but they also emphasize different things and are framed or located in different ways so that automatic synergies with claims of transformative empowerment are problematic.

Being in the Right Place

As suggested above, the space of Studio12 seems crucial to understanding the various nuances of/for expertise. Before addressing the physical location of the Studio, we want to think further about the way that the Studio is conceived and produced *as* a particular place that offers meaningful engagement. This is a conscious consideration for the Studio director, who talked to us about the decisions behind locating Studio12 in Leeds Library. What we would add to his reflections is the notion that the construction of Studio12 as a located place works to shape (although not transparently or straightforwardly) how people come to engage in the studio, the kinds of people that are engaged, and consequently, ultimately, the studio itself.

A good way to understand the spatial relationship and meaning of Studio 12 is by contrasting it with another facility in the same building that, from the outside, could seem alike. Just a few steps away from Studio 12 is a room with the same dimensions, also with computers, chairs and an internet connection open to the general public: It is an IT facility that provides free access to computers and Internet. People in this room check emails, use Facebook, watch YouTube clips, gamble, search for jobs and/or romantic partners. Like the users of Studio12, they are people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, they usually don't have internet

access at home. The room exudes sadness and has a decaying atmosphere, it has the feeling of defeat and resignation. Just a few meters away, on the same floor, is Studio 12 – a room with similar characteristics that represents the precise opposite. It is also a small room in the city library full of computers (although these are much better), also used by people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds without the resources at home. Nevertheless, Studio 12 feels like a vibrant and busy please, it feels like a media facility in some university or media company. Users create music, videos, photography, design, webpages, and animations. They go to the studio not to access and *consume* digital information but to *create* it. This offers a framework of creativity rather than unemployment (see also Bassett et al 2013); their mediations with the technologies are prompted by desire and active intervention, their actions are beyond the routinized and repetitive actions in the other room.

The central idea for the Studio has always been to locate the responsibility of/for engagement with the young people. In conversations with us, the studio director talked about the various models of community engagement and the rationales for each one. Rather than locate the studio in the communities he was seeking to engage, the director wanted to locate the studio in the city centre, and through dialogue with the Library, has housed the studio within the established, institutional building of the city library. For him, this meant in the first instance that the studio was constructed in dialogue with, and as an alternative space to, institutional, educational spaces (see also Thornham 2013, Webster and Buglass 2005, Banaji et al. 2010). It also meant that 'digital' or 'creative' 'literacy' is located within a broader space devoted to learning. The location 'hails' (in an Althusserian sense) users in particular ways – as citizens, as wanting to learn. In the third instance it meant that

that the studio attracts committed, active and interested participants:

> We were interested about creating a central base where people came to us and it made them come to us and it made them really focus on what they wanted to do. It was about them getting out of bed, coming here to do something and initially by doing that you're mentally in the right place to engage and work on your own project…I spent years and years on projects where I had phone numbers and I would have to ring people and I would have to get them out of bed and we had some people who had to go and knock on their doors and literally drag them to the place. So I'd done five years of that and I thought 'actually this is not the right was to be working with people, if people are interested and want to do it and want to be engaged, then it's up to them to get themselves here'. (Studio12 Director).

The Studio 12 approach argues that the process of committing to the journey in and of itself serves to distinguish young people: "if people are interested and want to do it and want to be engaged then it's up to them to get themselves here" (ibid.). Indeed, it is worth noting that access to the studio is almost always a challenge for the users who live, by comparison, in the outskirts of the city. These 'spatialities of exclusion' (Thompson, Russell & Simmons, 2013) create important barriers for participants who have to pay for public transport into the city, their routes often involve travelling through challenging areas. The building is imposing, intimidating and unfriendly. Arriving at the studio is not an easy task.

For the director, this effort creates a unique space within the studio where new friendships can be established, where new methods and approaches can be considered, where new skills and demands (such as time management, focus, concentration) can be made. There are a number of issues we would like to note here with regard to notions of expertise. The first is that in setting these principles, Studio12 attracts a particular caliber of participant, usually already in some sense, digitally 'literate' or at least *interested*: 'before [Studio12] I was into music and I had sort of a studio at the end of my bedroom. It was my room but with a studio type setup'. The second thing to note is that this means that the standard of work (aesthetically, musically, in terms of rhythm, style, focus) is better; the level of engagement is deeper. We can see the benefit of this approach particularly if we think about what the studio is trying to do (create audiovisual material) and where it is located (as community facing but at industry standard). Indeed, when we compare it to other community organisations with whom we work, this approach clearly also enhances productivity (in terms of, literally being able to create a product); it approaches users as experts or aspiring experts (they are approached as artists and creatives); it means that the focus is on the work (and other issues such as legal status, job seeking, benefits, family issues are framed by the working relationship that is established at their point of entry). At the same time and problematically, this also seems to make certain elisions a little smoother, so that expertise *can* be located at the site of the individual and/or in the space of the studio; empowerment *can* be understood as the successful creation of a product; the journey *can* be something inherently progressive and positive.

The final point to make in relation to this is that if the space of the studio supports and promotes certain claims and discourses around expertise that we take issue with, it is done within a wider context of what this approach also enables in terms of engagement – sustained technological use, one-to-one support, the creation of a tangible product that the author is proud of, enhanced feelings of authorship, creativity, ambition. So while we do not critique this approach – indeed it offers certain benefits that are deeply persuasive – we do note that it seems to strengthen certain tendencies around conflating individualism with agency with empowerment or expertise.

Imaginary journeys: expertise as becoming

As many cultural geographers have warned, reading place symbolically in relation to intended use reveals little about actual use which is often, by comparison, haptic, unintended or disruptive (see Kraftl 2010, Lees. 2001, Goss, 1993). More than this, of course, is that considerations of intentionality rarely account for lived experience, which is where we would like to turn now. Indeed, the accounts detailed below reveal that space plays a crucial, but not necessarily determining role (see also Jacobs 2006: 11; Rose, Degen & Basdas 2010: 346; Kraftl 2010:329) for their later engagements in the studio. In what follows we would like to explore these issues. More specifically we want to consider how the space of the studio frames a particular narrative of desire, motivation and what we call imaginary journeys for participants.

There are several interesting stories about how young people, often with serious troubles in their lives, began attending the Studio. Many of them also claim

the studio “changed their lives” in some way. For example, one of the informants recounts how he came to the Studio for the first time:

> I was walking through town once, nothing to do as usual … I was walking through town and someone had a leaflet and it said ‘Studio 12’. And I thought: what is this? How much is it going to cost me to actually record music there? I remember walking up to Studio 12 one afternoon and met [the studio director]. I was in my tracksuit, fresh off… language was bad. I went to talk to him, I said, “What is it you do?” And he said, “We can teach you how to make your stuff better. We do videos, we do music production and this and that”. I said, “Yeah, I’ll come”. But obviously back then things happened, situations happened, and I didn’t go back for a year. But then knowing that there was someone there or there was something there for me, an opportunity, like I said, I then went back. I sat down and played some of my music to [the studio director]. And he was like, “Right it’s good, but…”. And hearing that ‘but’ was the first time… to be honest – I’m not going towards a racial side or whatever – but he’s the first British person to take me serious or to take me for what I was.

We quote it in length because this story concentrates many of the issues discussed above. In relation to the studio ‘itself’, the space functions as a framing device to locate the journey narrative to and from the studio. This is an unintended, ‘chance’, ‘luck’ discovery that is entirely dependent on being in a particular place and a particular time. The second (re)discovery is intentional, and constructs the participant

as already in control: this is his journey and the visit is prompted by his actions ('I went back' 'I sat down and played'). Indeed, it is this latter narrative that is the most familiar across studio users, where there is clear intention and motivation claimed at the start: 'When I first came to Studio12 it was because I wanted to record my own material but I couldn't find a studio and I was talking to a few people and they mentioned Studio12. So I came in and had a look around.'

In the longer extract cited above, the studio director engages with the participant through his work – establishing a relationship based on respect of one another as artists/creatives, and the effect of this on the participant is profound, he tells us it was the first time he received constructive criticism for work he has produced ('hearing that 'but' was the first time') and the meeting serves to validate how he is constructing himself through his account as an artist/creative ('he's the first British person to take me serious or to take me for what I was'). The director and the studio become synonymous in this account, allowing the studio to be constructed as useful tool or resource and expertise to be located at the site of the individual (rather than, say, through engagement with the technology, in the studio itself, as collaborative or negotiated).

The final issue that we want to consider in relation to this section relates to the hopes and motivations of the participants. The comments below are all, in varying ways, about control and agency – seen here in terms of how they construct themselves and their hopes for the future. One participant told us after finishing an audio-visual project that the experience had inspired her to 'become a writer and write my own films and stuff'. But at the same time, she told us that she was

‘currently in the process of writing my own material to be filmed and put out there as well’. These accounts are reflective of the majority of the users of the studio and reflect a continuing oscillation between future imaginings and present positioning, between hope and lived reality and between expertise and student. When we talked to the users of the studio what emerged was an underpinning and future-orientated desire that clearly was part of what motivated them to engage with the studio:

> I'd love to have movies and I've started writing movie scripts. I'd love to see the music do well, like business and things like that. I'd love to get my family out of these kind of areas where we've come from so that I can move them and hopefully in that process I would also love to inspire people that have got the same potential, if not more potential than myself, into becoming things that are even greater than myself because that would be a brilliant achievement.

There are two key issues that emerge through the accounts above that we would like to elucidate here. The first is around desire and identity, and the tentative but confirmed status of self as artist or author. The second is around imagined future selves and the promises that such constructions of identity and initial realizations of desire unleash around motivation, aspiration and hope. Many participants at the studio told us they wanted to be famous or pursue a professional singing/acting/media career in the future. These accounts form what we call the imaginary journey: that is clearly a crucial element of expertise (how it is imagined, negotiated, desired). It suggests to us that expertise may always be future-orientated

insofar as it emerges as desire or promise. On the one hand this continues to construct the expert and expertise as elusive. On the other hand it also feeds into the constructions of young people discussed above – as on a journey, as future orientated, as agents of the journey but not necessarily the elements of that journey.

Authorship and legitimation: Expertise and identity.

> '[The Studio12 director] opened up so many opportunities to me personally, and brought skills that have enabled me to achieve what I'm doing now'

If expertise is future-orientated and imagined, the construction of this serves to doubly emphasise the notion of the journey. Seen here, what is accounted for and claimed by the participants as authorship, seems to be a necessary and initial stage of that journey. Another way to think of authorship might be as a kind of validation of possibilities that might increase (cultural) capital. Authorship is clearly not the same as expertise, partly because of how it is constructed and conceptualized by the young people – as aligned with creativity rather than skill (for example), but also partly because authorship is inherently located at the site of the individual and this means it is always in some senses disadvantaged or lacking because of how they locate/conceptualise *themselves*. Their 'journeys' always seem somehow thwarted, whether this is because of their geographic location, home lives, particular money issues or, as with one account below, because of past ignorance:

> Because you're not educated on the importance of say a credit rating with

> regards to borrowing, you've probably not bothered. You've probably even blagged: 'I didn't pay my mobile phone bill' or 'I didn't do this'. But you don't realise in not doing it you're actually damaging your own future financial standing. So, it's all those little things. They're very small but…
>
> Now that the fire is started – because when we started I just bought a cheap camera just to show people that it can be done – and now it's done, people have seen it, all it needs now is that improvement. That's where all those ceilings that are coming through now [sic], for you to get that industry standard equipment that we can use freely you need money. Where do you get money from? Probably banks. How do you get a loan in a bank? You need a good credit rating. You need to have a postcode where people are likely to pay back money. You need to have a job…

The accounts above position the participants as on the cusp of something but at the same time positioned and framed by wider issues that continue to impact onto their desires, lives and aspirations. Seen here, authorship becomes a kind of located, disadvantaged or frustrated expertise that is about knowing the 'route' but not necessarily being able to embark on it, or about having expertise, but not the *right kind*, or *enough* of the right kind.

The second issue we would like to discuss in relation to authorship is about their particular relations with the products they create. The projects they develop, mostly in the Studio, could be seen, to a certain extent as "tokens" of their expertise – in terms of tangible products that validate skills and knowledge and work to

enhance their feeling of themselves as authors. They are proud of what they have done. One studio user, for example, who recorded an EP at the studio that can be purchased on iTunes, tells in her webpage that she 'has done what most artists struggle to and created her own success and catalyst for great things to come.'

Set against this is the lived experience of creating something audio-visual that, in a similar vein to the extracts above, is framed by their socio-economic, ethnic or geographic identities and certain responses from authorities or residents (for example):

> Try and do a music video in the street you've got police coming there. Even today, try and do a music video in a street, like just get a camera out, before you know it you've had so many incidences with police coming. 'What are you doing?' 'Oh, we're filming'. 'What are you filming?' 'A music video'. 'Can we see that?'

The third relationship with their audio-visual creations relates to the showcasing of this material and the kinds of authorship they claim post-production. In the studio itself, users are often very humble and respectful of the space and of the director (as the quotes above suggest). Their social media profiles are often very different, however, and they portray themselves as consummate artists, engaging in conversations with fans in what seems to be an attempt to self-fulfill a prophecy of success. One of the heavy users of the studio, for example, writes on his webpage that he dedicates 'this masterpiece to my very important worldwide audience, especially my ever growing fan base, and to my brothers, sisters'.

This is why the Studio is so important, because it is a safe space where these negotiated and sometimes conflicting relationships with their work, themselves and their imaginings can be experimented with, performed and/or created. But the studio also of course serves as a legitimating force – ultimately it is the studio that 'has' expertise and 'is' expert. For notions of authorship, this means that the studio simultaneously author-ises them, positions them as author rather than expert ('raw talent in the making'), and legitimatises and frames their work in particular ways. As the studio director points out:

> Our young male audience [those coming to the studio] can rap and do grime lyrics… So out of that we really wanted to take some of those lyrics, what young people are saying and get them to really think about what they're writing and what they're saying and then turn that into something that people will actually listen to…it's a creative process that those people are going through. Being an artist or being a singer or songwriter is down to the environment they come from… but by coming here we can then take them through to video, we can take them through to photography, take them through to graphic design, we can take them through to film and it's about letting those young people explore. [Them being an artist is] quite often very much a starting point when we're working with young people.

The quote above suggests (to us) a different set of priorities and principles behind the studio's engagement with young people by comparison with the motivations of the users. For the studio director, the skills and abilities of the users on entering the

studio are a starting point for a journey that is about a widening of knowledge and skills beyond whatever the individual arrives with. For the participant, however, their main aim is to refine these skills, to exploit the technologies of the studio to promote and enhance their 'raw talent' (to reiterate the studio's tagline). While these differences are perhaps unsurprising, these differences are interesting to note when thinking about legitimisation, journeys and authorship. In what follows, we would like to explore the relationship between authorship and legitimization further, using a particular case study at the studio, to suggest that the tensions these two elements create are also crucial for understanding expertise.

Writing Britain: from expertise to legitimation

During the time of our fieldwork there was an activity that could exemplify the relationship between expertise and legitimation in a clear way. The most important activity developed by the studio during the time of the fieldwork was the project 'Writing Leeds', a second part of the project 'Writing Britain', originally an initiative developed by the British Library that 'asked young people from across the United Kingdom to write about their sense of place'. Studio12, partnered with Left Eye Blind, a film production company based in the city, decided to change the original call and put the words to film. As they stated in a brief report of the activity: 'Our revolution would be televised'. After the success of the film, in the summer of 2013, Studio12 once again partnered with Left Eye Blind to deliver what they considered to be Part 2 to the Writing Britain project. Fifteen young people, all of them users of the Studio, were interviewed and assembled to take part within the project. As Studio12 reflects: 'we wanted to go further than the idea of sense of place. We asked our writers to not

look at their sense of place, but the sense of their place. Within society or their family, religion or history, city or street'. After a writing workshop and a later filming where each of the participants individually created a first version of the film, three particular projects were chosen to be filmed. Two of the people chosen were already part of the first 'Writing Britain' project and all of them were long-term users of the studio. The texts were polished and worked further, the young people discussed some of their original ideas with the filmmaker and finally a professional crew, using professional equipment, shot the three films. While all of these young people used the studio for their own projects, their most important achievement was a film, written by them, where they became actors of their own lives. The three films, with an amazing technical quality and a powerful message, were then presented in a commercial cinema in Leeds, at the University of Leeds and finally hosted on the BBC3 Fresh webpage.[vii] The young people were present in all the screenings as the writers, authors and artists behind the films. People from the city Council, academics from different universities, third sector organizations and artists attended the screenings.

During one Q&A screening of the Writing Leeds project at the University of Leeds, one of the participants answered the question about how he felt presenting his film at the University: 'It feels great, but when this goes off [pointing at the screen], we will all be back to our reality'. One the one hand, the Writing Leeds project is considered by Studio12 as its most successful project in the history of the Studio, but on the other hand the participants response speaks to a number of issues discussed in this article. To a certain degree, the three users of the studio – who already considered themselves writers, producers, and filmmakers before the

completion of the film – finally achieved the role of 'authors' and even, one could argue, 'experts' in that moment when they stood alongside filmmakers, academics and the studio director in the presentations of the films. We could argue that the very act of showcasing produced them as authors, and legitimated their expertise. Similarly, in being asked to reflect on their work, they also doubly author it – in terms of locating it, offering context and rationale for it, considering it in a variety of ways. By doing this, they construct themselves as separate from, yet in dialogue with, their work.

But of course, in that moment of standing in front of the screen, they also are objectified, positioned and on display – as embodying and representing the issues the films speak to. They are positioned first and foremost as young people on a journey; they may speak as authors, and even to a certain degree as 'experts', but this authorship and expertise is forged *through* their embodied identities, experiences and knowledge (in the first instance they are gendered, classed, raced, positioned as young 'talent', the subject and object of their stories - and it is all of this that enables them to speak 'as' authors). For us, this moment returns us to the notion of expertise constructed in neoliberal and individualized terms as discussed at the start of this article, because it seems that those individualized terms do not account for located, embodied or lived. In fact it seems that located, embodied, lived and 'expertise' may be, actually, inherently irreconcilable because the former relates to a lived experience of frustrated expertise, legitimation and problematic authoring, while the latter relates to imagined and future-orientated expertise – a possibility that may only be achievable as a desired and imagined aspiration. For us, this raises two issues. The first is what 'individual' is conceived through neoliberal and individualized

notions of expertise as 'expert'? The second issue relates to what alternative conceptions of expertise *can* account for the issues central to this article in lieu of the ones discussed here? Perhaps, for example, expertise as system, as relation, or as negotiation, would be better alternatives?

Discussion: alternative expertise

Our goal in this article has been to investigate expertise in relation to our ethnographic fieldwork with Studio12. We have suggested that expertise is subsumed into a bigger array of social capital as well as traditional structures of power such as class, gender and race. Studio12 draws on wider normative discourse around youth, creativity and natural talent and in so doing re-evokes the powerful metaphor of the journey that is so prevalent across youth and neoliberal culture. These discourses are also, importantly, evoked by the young people themselves in their accounts of coming to the studio, of their experience and in their relationships with their own creative work. Seen here, expertise is produced by them as a form of *authorship* that is, in turn, claimed by the young people, legitimated through their encounter with the studio, framed through their engagement, and ultimately problematized through the showcasing of their work. In thinking about what individual is conceived here, it is clear to us that authorship is *not* expertise, but it is lived, embodied and individualized, it is (momentarily, problematically) claimed and asserted. It seems an inadequate conflation (authorship-as-expertise) and part of that inadequacy is because in the end, authorship requires the legitimation of more traditional channels, institutions and cultural gatekeepers.

At the same time, expertise as an imaginary journey (as something that speaks to issues of identity, desire, motivation) is rarely sufficient as a driving force for social change – expertise on its own does not 'enable' the young people, 'empower' them, or elevate them. Instead, without legitimation, they are repeatedly challenged and disrupted and authorship or expertise is routinely un-recognised – located elsewhere and inherently future-orientated. This in turn continues existent power/knowledge roles, and the young people remain on their perpetual journey – authorship is momentary, expertise is elusive.

Bassett et al. propose that 'expertise is productively understood as techno-social system' (2013: 28). It is a process that is always 'contextualized within social contexts… that temper or condition how expertise is acquired' (2013: 28), and this is where we now turn. It seems to us, in thinking about the limits and contexts of what is and is not claimed, available or legitimated here, that the limits of expertise correlate to the automatic syllogisms discussed at the start of the article. Widening the concept away from the individual seems a useful task, not only because it acknowledges the longstanding power relations within contexts and relations, but it also means that expertise emerges *through* these relations in inherently problematic ways (rather than being 'owned' by an individual, for example).

Although our goal was not to criticize the work that Studio12 does, nor community arts organizations in general, we do want to raise the awareness of how these automatic syllogisms permeate not just the work of many of these organizations, but also the assumptions and expectations, discourse and rhetoric of the young people themselves. The 'imaginary journeys' that frame certain claims around creativity, literacy, success, authorship, however, seem fundamentally at

odds with a notion of expertise as owned skill or knowledge, which means, in turn, that expertise is necessarily elusive, future-orientated and never, actually reconcilable with a lived, embodied identity. Expertise, it seems, is as imaginary as the journey itself.

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Notes

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i.
For a critique see for example, Thornham & McFarlane 2014, Gillespie 20010, Lange and Ito 2010, Dean 2008, Livingstone 2009, van Dijck 2009, 2013

ii.
See for example Thornham & McFarlane 2011, Thomas 2011, Prensky 2011, Lange & Ito 2010

iii.
See boyd and Crawford 2011, Andrejevic 2013, Bollier 2010

iv.
See Thornham 2014, Webster & Buglass 2005, Herbert 2005, Cunningham 2011, Selzer & Bentley 1999, Banaji et al 2010, Bassett & Fotopoulou 2013

v.
We could equally be talking about our own educational institutions, normative assumptions, constructions of our own children and students for example – and indeed our work with Studio12 is part of a long engagement with creative people and organizations. All of this is drawn on here.

vi.
www.studio12.org.uk

vii.
http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p019xhm0

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