Chapter 23 – The Entrepreneurial Self
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In 2000, management guru Tom Peters presented a millennial subjectivity for the dotcom age: ‘Icon Woman’ would be ‘[…] turned on by her work! The work matters! The work is cool! She is in your face! She is an adventurer! She is the CEO of her life! […] She is determined to make a difference!’¹

Recognising that the discipline of architecture has become entangled with – and compromised by – the political and economic power shifts of the last forty years, architects and academics have responded with calls for strategies of engagement with some of the major actors in neoliberal capitalism in order to affect change. It is a concept with a number of different nuances: Rem Koolhaas’ cynical engagement with Silicon Valley², Keller Easterling’s subversive ‘playing with the rules of the game, manipulating things from within,’³ and Sam...
Jacob’s call for architects to embrace the skills of ‘communications agencies, advertising and design’ and ‘fulfil the core disciplinary remit of making the world a better place.’

While the tactics and standpoints differ, they all point to the limitations of oppositional politics and the marginalisation of the architect as a political agent, proposing instead new strategic performances with which architects can ‘expand [their] repertoires of political activism,’ and the enactment of subjectivities and skillsets commonly found in the tech industry. These subjectivities will either leverage the effects of ‘disrupting the mechanisms of capitalism’ through day-to-day activity, or aim to take a seat at tables of power. The argument for getting engaged at the table is that architectural academics and practitioners can be more influential than they would be if their engagement is antagonist to ‘direct capitalism into more responsible enterprise.’

The logic behind the argument is, in part, a recognition that we are firmly implicated in the processes of neoliberal capitalism: there is no longer an ‘outside’ from which to launch a critique or resistance. It is also the celebration of an agent derived from the neoliberal model of the entrepreneur – the archetype of which is the knowledge worker of the tech industry – an inventive and autonomous tactician which, it is hoped, holds potential to outdo capitalism on its own terms. However, this subjectivity has an ambiguous status: it is a trope, celebrated by McKinsey consultants like Peters, based on a pervasive myth about the potentials of disruption, and it also echoes a Marxist political concept which hopes to locate within the contradictions of capitalism a possibility of emancipatory change or collapse of the system.

One of the most fully realised proposals that both acknowledges, and to some degree struggles with, the immanent difficulties of deploying a covertly subversive and disruptive subjectivity that can ‘play in the system, but use it to their own ends’ is Peggy Deamer’s ongoing work on architectural labour. Deamer invites us to see the valences of the knowledge worker as a subjectivity that can be advantageously occupied without resorting to power structures that monetise it, she nonetheless warns that the entrepreneur is neoliberalism’s ‘dream child’ and the ‘pretty face’ of ‘precarity, hyper-individualism, competition, and the inability to identify as a class in need of common security.’

Drawing on a line of thought from the Autonomia movement in Italy that identifies the worker in post-Fordist economies of the knowledge industry as having a new agency, the knowledge
worker suggests a possibility for autonomous ‘self-actualisation’ and consciousness. Deamer’s hope is that in recognising their roles as labourers, specifically as immaterial labourers, there is a ‘potential for mining the advantages of capitalism’s new focus on production for architectural labour, value and relevance while also having a more fulfilling, less passive, and more disruptive role in capitalism.’

As Deamer makes clear, architects are late to theorise their work as labour and, as a result, have underdeveloped strategies to address the nature of the economic and political conditions of neoliberal capitalism – this inability to identify as workers, she argues, means that ‘we fail to politically position ourselves to combat capitalism’s neoliberal turn.’ While some of her proposals are aimed towards immediate, pragmatic concerns about the specific labour conditions of architecture (the culture of unpaid interning, unpaid overtime, the apprentice system, and exploitation) Deamer proposes that aligning architectural labour with the most radical elements of theories of immaterial labour can enable it to evade ‘neoliberalism’s grasp.’

It is necessary, if unwieldy, to run through a set of definitions and characterisations of concepts of labour – immaterial labour, knowledge work, and emotional labour – in order to assess this subjectivity and to consider what the implications are for women who take on the role of the entrepreneur. First, by focusing on Deamer’s work, I will assess the perceived autonomy of the entrepreneur through critiques of immaterial labour in the creative industries, and ethnographies of knowledge work. Second, I will consider the formation of a passionate and entrepreneurial subjectivity – who in ‘getting engaged’ uses her affects to induce in another party a particular disposition and change in values – through Arlie Russell Hochschild’s concept of emotional labour.

I foreground feminist debates on the nature of contemporary work, supported by ethnographies of knowledge work and emotional labour, over Maurizio Lazzarato’s thesis on immaterial labour, since the former are grounded in empirical study and reveal a far more precarious subjectivity than is hoped. The work of Hochschild, and Angela McRobbie, cautions us against underestimating the private and personal costs of entrepreneurial work, whilst Gideon Kunda, Catherine Casey and Yiannis Gabriel signal that we may overestimate the agency of the entrepreneurial subject.
However, I also want to propose that the political premises of Deamer’s consideration of architectural work as labour,\textsuperscript{15} and indeed Easterling’s investigation of the operational modes of the institutions and corporations and dominant power players in the built environment, are timely and valuable.\textsuperscript{16} Drawing on Rosi Braidotti’s encouragement that we make ‘adequate cartographies of our real-life conditions,’\textsuperscript{17} I suggest that their work provides us with the basis from which to develop our practices.

**Immaterial Labour & Knowledge work**

Immaterial labour is defined by Lazzarato as the ‘labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity.’\textsuperscript{18} It refers in the first instance to the work of abstracting and translating processes of production into computer networks, algorithms and data flows, and in the second to ‘the kinds of activities that are not normally recognised as “work”.’ It is the implications of these affective processes, ‘defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion’,\textsuperscript{19} that I will elaborate on.

In 1959, the management consultant Peter Drucker introduced the term ‘knowledge worker’ to describe an increasing number of people who ‘think for a living’. This includes doctors, teachers, finance workers, engineers – and indeed architects – those who work in the creative industries and information technologies, applying existing knowledge to solve complex problems, creating new knowledge or transferring knowledge into new domains.\textsuperscript{20} The outputs of knowledge work are often ‘innovative’ and non-standard: they can be products or designs, patents, intellectual property, software, artworks. The value of knowledge work is not primarily the material worth of the physical product but its immaterial and abstract qualities.

The concepts of immaterial labour and knowledge work are closely connected, yet there are assumptions about the possibilities of the former that are contradicted by the history of knowledge work. Lazzarato has identified ‘polymorphous self-employed autonomous work’ as the most pervasive form of labour in neoliberal capitalism, and the intellectual worker as an entrepreneur who is ‘inserted within a market that is constantly shifting and within networks that are changeable in time and space.’\textsuperscript{21} While this implies that management has had to
reactively cultivate this potent new force of labour, ethnographies of knowledge work instead describe these exact same practices as constitutive: they produce the subjectivities of knowledge work.

The concept of autonomy rests on the worker’s investment in her own cognitive capital signalling the ownership of both the means of production, and the product – and is thus a key step in the identification of subjectivity as a potential for political transformation. However, the central processes at work in forming an entrepreneurial subjectivity, while documented extensively in management theory, are not fully elaborated in Lazzarato’s political critique of work. In theories that develop Lazzarato’s immaterial labour thesis, there is an overemphasis on the idea that the worker can ‘achieve fulfilment through work’ and ‘find in her brain her own unalienated means of production.’ Deamer draws on this articulation of the worker as preceding his/her ‘insertion into a labour context’ as a subject that industry does not itself create ‘but simply takes it on board and adapts it’ and therefore distinguishes knowledge work as ‘that which capitalism chews on easily’ from immaterial labour as ‘that which it can’t easily digest.’ Yet Angela McRobbie calls attention to the ‘aggressive neo-liberal underpinning of immaterial labour and the forms of biopower which shape up amenable kinds of subjectivities, giving rise to a new kind of society of control.’

The possibility of a ‘radical autonomy’ where the architectural worker is able to use capitalism to her own ends is pre-empted by the formation and re-formation of subjectivity through work, as elucidated by Kunda’s case study of the tech industry. The knowledge industry is indeed characterised by an emphasis on autonomy – certainly relative to administrative fields and factory work – and the shift of top-down management to self-management, since the knowledge worker is expected to take on the responsibility for their own continuing development and acquisition of new knowledge. This entrepreneurial subjectivity has its roots in the high-tech industries that arose in post-war America. West-Coast technology companies – particularly Varian and Hewlett Packard – sought to challenge the top-down hierarchical management styles of corporate America through innovative working practices. The new management style focused on the individual; celebrating an entrepreneurial spirit in their employees it encouraged risk-taking and, crucially, recognised that employees sought purposeful work. A necessity arose to foster a sense of shared objective between the company and the employee. These objectives, often vague and hyperbolic, downplayed the profit-making aspirations of a company in favour of ‘making a difference’
and ‘changing the world’ thus incorporating an employee’s need for personal growth and desire to do meaningful work with a bigger shared goal.  

This is achieved through what Kunda describes as ‘culture’, a feature of management that is not merely responding to the needs of a cognitively and affectively engaged workforce, but one that takes an active constitutive role in the formation of those workers. Kunda outlines the processes of eliciting affective states, especially positive ones such as passion and enthusiasm: specifically the way the motivations and values of its workers were operated on by ‘controlling the underlying experiences, thoughts, and feelings that guide [an employee’s] actions,’ Kunda explains that the aim of culture is towards organisational interest and self-interest becoming the same thing. Specifically highlighting the worker’s entanglement of the ‘real self’ with the employee’s need for self-actualisation and a yearning to realise positive change in wider society, the ideal candidate in Kunda’s study is the ‘self-starter’ – an entrepreneurial subjectivity elicited by ‘behavioural rules [that] are vague: be creative, take initiative, take risks, “push at the system”, and, ultimately, “do what’s right”.’ The resulting entrepreneur-employee is thus ‘driven by internal commitment, strong identification with company goals, and intrinsic satisfaction from work.’

It is important to note that the entrepreneur is not necessarily the CEO of a business, nor self-employed, but anybody who has taken on an entrepreneurial (that is risk-taking and self-driven) role within their own employment. And whilst the company cultures that are the basis of my argument address employees embedded in large corporations, the salient features of such cultures are no longer confined to any one organisation and their employees. As the Autonomia movement noted: worker relations left the factory and are now diffuse within society.

Academics from across the creative industries have noted that ‘artists, new media workers and other cultural labourers are hailed as ‘model entrepreneurs' by industry and government figures.’ The work of ‘creatives’ mirrors the political economy of post-Fordist work, not simply because it is precarious, but in its being ‘reliant on affective and cognitive work processes like communication, teamwork, improvisation, self-management and the performing body.’ Opening up discussions about the biopolitics of immaterial labour, specifically in relation to gender, Elyssa Livergent connects the defining conditions of employment: precarity, competition and ‘reliance on informal networks and communities to
access work’ with the fundamentally affective dimension of immaterial labour. The entrepreneur-performer ‘seeks to develop abilities and communities that will support her in innovating and risking with her body, her ideas and her relationships’ as she matches ‘capitalism’s aspirations for an ideal passionate, socialized and productive, post-Fordist worker.’ 37

The concept of passionate work: 38 the exuberant commitment demanded of ‘self-reliant’ (although already in debt) women, and romanticising of the all-nighter to ‘complete a fashion collection, or to wrap up a film edit’, expose what McRobbie calls a ‘gender effect’ which is missing in debates of immaterial labour. 39 She is adamant that any political potential of the ‘entrepreneur’ in neoliberal economies ‘is decisively pre-empted by the intense forms of biopolitical governmentality which constantly address women and their bodies’ in ways that connect personal satisfactions with consumer culture, and individualises the negative affects of a woman’s desire to become the CEO’s of her life. For McRobbie, there is an imperative to ‘explore the actual points of tension - the levels of anxiety, the new realms of pain and injury - which accrue from the excessive demands of these multi-tasking careers’ 40 as entrepreneurs in the creative sectors.

While this appears to trouble Deamer’s ideas, it might also help us to reconcile her timely work with a feminist position of situated ethics. Isabelle Stengers’ warning that the entrepreneur is a ‘person of “opportunity”, deaf and blind to the question of the world that their efforts contribute towards constructing’ 41 guides us to pay attention to the broader contexts that Deamer has been interrogating. For Rosi Braidotti ‘a subject’s ethical core is not his/her moral intentionality, as much as the effects of the power [...] her actions are likely to have upon the world’ thus re-inscribing historical accounts of activism, and ongoing accounts of present activity (in evidence in the 2017 AHRA Architecture and Feminisms conference in Stockholm) with an updated urgency. 42 These existing practices in architecture, in particular those that foreground the desire to ‘enter into modes of relation with multiple others’ 44 by bringing numerous stakeholders and disciplines into a discussion, enter into an ethical account of the consequences of actions taken.

As well as reveal relational models of agency that are not based on an individual’s entrepreneurial autonomy and disruptive potential, they also highlight the imperative to counter the hyper-individualism that underlies the proposal to get engaged entrepreneurially
with communities of care. The grounding of Jane Rendell’s Ethics in the Built Environment project in situated feminist practices, for instance, brought a pressing need for her to account for the sequence of events that led to her ‘standing down’ as dean of research, and to speak frankly about the affective costs for the individual who takes a stand.45

Making a transversal connection between the work of activism with Deamer’s proposition allows us to consider both taking a stand and taking a seat as a form of labour. Can we explore the ‘actual points of tension’ of the work of activism and interrogate the entrepreneurial subjectivity who takes her ‘seat at the table’ to influence or steer capitalism towards better ends? If we take an engagement to also be an attempt on the part of the political agent to affect the beliefs, values and actions of businesses, corporations and institutions, can ‘getting engaged’ and ‘playing in the system’ be considered a kind of affective and emotional labour?

**Emotional Labour**

To this discussion I bring the concept of emotional labour, first proposed by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild in her book *The Managed Heart*, as the management of a worker’s states of being (their emotions, attitudes and beliefs) in order to affect the states of being of another (usually their customers).46 It includes the work of flight attendants, call-centre workers and waiting staff – typically sectors endorsing service-with-a-smile – but can refer to any work where an emotional disposition is a requirement of the job, for instance doctors, teachers, academics, and – as noted by McRobbie and Livergent – creative workers.

An example from Hochschild is the management of the specific emotions in the airline industry – cheerfulness and anger. The smile in service-with-a-smile is expected by paying customers, but must at the same time appear genuinely offered. Anger, on the other hand, is an emotion that must be managed in the passenger, as well as in the flight attendants themselves as they are patronised, sexually harassed, and on the receiving end of passenger ire. Employees are ‘not just required to see and think as they like and required to only show feeling (surface acting) in institutionally approved ways’47 but must endeavour to really feel it – this is called ‘deep acting’. Hochschild’s attention is focused on how employees are expected to draw on personal emotional reserves, a company expects the ‘authentic’ self to be at work and ‘hopes to make this private resource a company asset.’ At the same time,
sophisticated techniques of ‘deep acting’ are deployed by the company who ‘suggest how to imagine and thus how to feel’. 48

Hochschild draws out the reciprocal and negative effects of deep acting on the sense of self, where managing affective states through a kind of acting is not centred on the contrivance of outward effects, but on the production of authentic emotions that are felt internally. Hochschild challenges the idea that a distinction can be maintained between ‘real’ emotions and those elicited by the company, asking whose emotions are being performed by an employee as they reconcile their private feelings with those expected at work: 49

The worker may lose touch with her feelings, as in burnout, or she may have to struggle with the company interpretation of what they mean. 50

The labour of emotional labour is both the requirement ‘to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ 51 as well as the process of reclaiming her own feelings. The flight attendants in Hochschild’s study are left to devise ways, both at work and at home, to set the boundaries of their own emotions themselves. Such an ambivalence is also the ‘most pervasive and manifest effect of the experience of working in the new culture’ 52 of the knowledge industry. Kunda writes that it is common for employees to simultaneously hold an adherence to a company culture and its contradictory cynicism:

While the culture is [...] founded on self-awareness, [there is a] deeply ingrained ambiguity. Where an overarching morality is preached, there is also opportunistic cynicism; and where fervent commitment is demanded, there is pervasive irony. 53

These ethnographies support McRobbie’s suggestion that the subjectivities of post-Fordist work are neither robust nor fully-formed. Both Kunda and Hochschild report on individualised subjectivities that are vulnerable to burnout, 54 exhaustion and confusion: ‘the subject is ‘an ambivalent, fluctuating, ironic self, at war with itself and with its internalised images of self and other.’ 55
Hochschild’s work on the consequences of emotional labour correlates with Kunda’s findings on the management of affects – such as cheerfulness, passion and motivation – in strong company cultures within the knowledge and creative industries, and, by extension, any work where the manipulation of emotions and affect become part of labour. While neither Deamer nor Easterling have presented the entrepreneur as specifically gendered, I suggest that viewing the entrepreneur as someone who takes her seat at the table in order to affect change through her influence, pulls focus upon the emotional labour of influencing the values, beliefs and actions of systemic or institutional bodies – be they corporations, institutions or industry professionals.

This strongly suggests that the proposal to engage with institutions, companies and practices that one sees as ethically problematic by ‘taking a seat at the table’ in order to promote more responsible courses of action, and the hope of ‘making a difference’ is falsely premised. In showing that entrepreneurial subjectivity is itself constituted through the elicitation and production of affects, values, behaviours, experiences and desires that align with the company’s values, Hochschild and Kunda present a subject that is far more conflicted and compromised than Easterling and Deamer would hope, and also one that is unlikely to be radically autonomous.

‘Believe that together we can do anything’

The problem for the political project of radical autonomy (that is, a subject that precedes its insertion into work) is that in the entrepreneur all the moments that signify her autonomy are identified in ethnographies of work as moments where subjectivity is at its most precarious. Identifying the ‘the deeply constitutive effects’ and ‘specific performativity of emotional labour’ where the employee must go beyond ‘seeming to be but […] coming to be,’ Kathi Weeks affirms the findings of ethnographies of knowledge work, where management solicits shared objectives and channels (vague) behavioural rules in the course of realising a new employee subjectivity. These processes call into question the possibility of enacting a subversive subjectivity, and the possibility that such subjectivities can move the values, actions and beliefs of ‘capitalism’ into better modes.
McRobbie highlights the costs of enacting entrepreneurial subjectivities that have become privatised and individualised and warns that interstices that present themselves as the potential emergence of a political resistance are momentary and fleeting in the ‘landscape of capitalist domination, which entails new levels and forms of submission.’ 

Further, she queries the celebration of the ‘vitality and apparent proto-communism of contemporary economic forms’ in the political landscapes of the US, UK and Europe, where individual responsibility for health, work, and economic wellbeing takes precedence. For McRobbie meaningful work and a more autonomous, participatory and intelligent role in the workplace does not mean that we are ‘better able to re-imagine solidaristic forms of mutual support and co-operation.’ It is rather a remuneration for the losses of the welfare state; the dismantling of unions; and for the undermining of the power of solidarities in feminist and anti-racist activism, and this remuneration simultaneously restructures society through a complex biopolitics. These shifts run counter to solidarity since they inaugurate what McRobbie calls a ‘powerful regime which inculcates cynicism and opportunism manifest in the context of [...] network sociality.’

Indeed, for Yiannis Gabriel, cynicism itself disables any critical standpoint from which a critique of an organisation can be made. Cynicism, he says, is based on an individual’s acknowledgement of an instrumental dependence on the organisation and a simultaneous denial of psychological attachment to it. Thus, ‘the cynic’s core fantasy is the belief that they can remain “unpolluted” – untouched by the organisation’s iniquities, even as they profit from its bounty.’

Parallels can be drawn here with the architect-activist who hopes to engage with corporate or institutional entities in order to affect change, whilst resisting being affected by it, even as they benefit from that position. Cynicism, as described by Gabriel, is not so much an internal lack of sincerity in the subject, but a conflict between dependency and denial of attachment. Taking a seat at the table entails some degree of instrumental dependence on the protocols to secure that place: in order to get a seat in the first place one must enact a subjectivity that has to at least appear to have internalised of a set of values, beliefs and motivations that are counter to what one holds. The denial of attachment is the belief that the worker will remain unaffected by their engagement, or their failure to recognise that any position of influence is contingent – up until the moment that they speak up and disclose their true position.
In conclusion I want to return to another possibility within Deamer’s proposal, one that I find more hopeful. Whilst I propose that the subjectivities created and elicited by management itself, in line with its own culture, are not the location for enacting sustainability, resistance or situating ethical or subversive movements – the recognition that we are within the system that we intend to critique is an important step.

For Braidotti, a feminist immanent position ‘assumes the humility of saying “we are a part of capitalism”’ and counters the tendency to try to locate the specific break-points of capitalism. Reminding us that Capitalism ‘doesn’t break, it bends – it enfolds and unfolds’, Braidotti’s centre-staging of the biopolitical aspects of this enfolding can be addressed by bringing ethnographies, case-studies and specific empirical research into dialogue with architecture. The work of Deamer and Easterling could therefore be seen as a forensic account of the contemporary architecture sector in which, as architectural practitioners and academics, we now work. They both provide excellent analysis of the conditions of neo-liberal capitalism in relation to architecture and in bringing the discourses of immaterial labour into the pragmatics and realities of architectural work, Deamer has instigated a long-overdue project.

By connecting these discourses of subjectivity within the context of work, with feminist activist practices in the built environment, there is a potential to develop positions of critical practice that do not rely on the individualised, privatised management of affect in disruptive, tactical or subversive ways. Current academic practices in architecture that are negotiating their engagements with ethically questionable institutions, and with the real-world effects of neoliberal economic policies, reveal not only the necessity for, but the possibilities and positive affects of structuring ethical relations.

In working to create supportive frameworks we need to ensure that our attempts to make a difference mean that we neither merely shift or reproduce the exploitations of a system onto another group of people, nor leave those who do speak out open to vulnerability and institutional bullying. Whether we take a stand, or take a seat at the table, we must not ignore the costs of performing in this new economy.

**Bibliography**


Notes
4 Sam Jacob, ‘Architecture might have to become less architectural’, Dezeen.com <https://www.dezeen.com/2014/01/16/opinion-sam-jacob-how-architecture-can-regain-social-significance/>  
8 Disruptive talent refers to individuals who ‘see the world differently.’ This term was introduced to me by Katie Lloyd Thomas, and the concepts of ‘disruption’ and ‘disruptive innovation’ come from Clayton Christensen’s 1997 book, The Innovator’s Dilemma and has been heavily criticised for a lack of credible basis. Jill Lepore, ‘The Disruption Machine’, The New Yorker <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/06/23/the-disruption-machine>; A psychometric testing company based in Cambridge, UK claim to have originated the term and the BBC describe Richard Branson as an example of a disruptive talent. <https://www.cambridgenetwork.co.uk/news/assessing-disruptive-talent-going-beyond-psychometrics/>
12 Deamer, p. 146.
13 Deamer, p. 144.


Deamer, p. 144.

Deamer, p. 144.


They also have a strong connection with counter-culture movements such as the Human Potential Movement which drew on Abraham Maslow’s ideas and Douglas McGregor’s concept of Theory X & Theory Y.


Kunda, p. 11.

Kunda, p. 91.

Kunda, p. 90

Kunda, p. 91.


Livergant, ‘The Passion Players’,


McRobbie, ‘Is Passionate Work a Neoliberal Delusion?’; Peggy Deamer has also challenged the naturalisation of the all-night culture in architecture and its association with ‘passion’ and status, she actively prevents her students from working this way. <https://www.datumdiscourse.org/blog/2017/1/2/peggy-deamer-interview-with-datum>

McRobbie, ‘Reflections on Feminism’, p. 75.


It is impossible to name all of these since they were the rule, rather than the exception at the conference, but I refer especially to Peg Rawes and Douglas Spencer, Igea Troiani, Katherine Gibson and Doina Petrescu, Jos Boys and Lori Brown, in this volume.

In the United Kingdom Peg Rawes’ work on ethics, biopolitics and relational practices, and Jane Rendell’s situated ethical engagement with divestment in fossil fuels at UCL, and her Ethics in the Built Environment project are key examples.

Rosi Braidotti, ‘On Putting the Active Back into Activism’, p. 45.


Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, p. 49.

Hochschild, p. 49.

Hochschild, p. 197.

Ibid., p. 197.

Hochschild, p. 7.


Kunda, p. 222.

Hochschild, pp. 186-188.

Kunda., p. 222.


McRobbie, p. 70.

McRobbie, p. 69.

McRobbie, p. 64.

McRobbie, p. 63.

McRobbie, p. 65.
