

CHAPTER 1

*The Transformation
of Everyday Life*

Something's happening here but
you don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?

—*Bob Dylan*

Here's a thought experiment. Take a typical man on the street from the year 1900 and drop him into the 1950s. Then take someone from the 1950s and move him Austin Powers-style into the present day. Who would experience the greater change?

At first glance the answer seems obvious. Thrust forward into the 1950s, a person from the turn of the twentieth century would be awestruck by a world filled with baffling technological wonders. In place of horse-drawn carriages, he would see streets and highways jammed with cars, trucks and buses. In the cities, immense skyscrapers would line the horizon, and mammoth bridges would span rivers and inlets where once only ferries could cross. Flying machines would soar overhead, carrying people across the continent or the oceans in a matter of hours rather than days. At home, our 1900-to-1950s time-traveler would grope his way through a strange new environment filled with appliances powered by electricity: radios and televisions emanating musical sounds and even human images, refrigerators to keep things cold, washing machines to clean his clothes automatically, and much more. A massive new super market would replace daily trips to the market with an array of technologically enhanced foods, such as instant coffee or frozen vegetables to put into the refrigerator. Life itself would be dramatically extended. Many once-fatal ailments could be prevented with an injection or cured with a pill. The newness of this time-traveler's physical surroundings—the speed and power of everyday machines—would be profoundly disorienting.

On the other hand, someone from the 1950s would have little trouble navigating the physical landscape of today. Although we like to think ours is the age of boundless technological wonders, our second time-traveler would find himself in a world not all that different from the one he left. He would still drive a car to work. If he took the train, it would likely be on the same line leaving from the same station. He could probably board an airplane at the same airport. He might still live in a suburban house, though a bigger one. Television would have more channels, but it would basically be the same, and he could still catch some of his favorite 1950s shows on reruns. He would know how, or quickly learn how, to operate most household appliances—even the personal computer, with its familiar QWERTY keyboard. In fact with just a few exceptions, such as the PC, the Internet, CD and DVD players, the cash machine and a wireless phone he could carry with him, he would be familiar with almost all current-day technology. Perhaps disappointed by the pace of progress, he might ask: “Why haven’t we conquered outer space?” or “Where are all the robots?”

On the basis of big, obvious technological changes alone, surely the 1900-to-1950s traveler would experience the greater shift, while the other might easily conclude that we’d spent the second half of the twentieth century doing little more than tweaking the great waves of the first half.¹

But the longer they stayed in their new homes, the more each time-traveler would become aware of subtler dimensions of change. Once the glare of technology had dimmed, each would begin to notice their respective society’s changed norms and values, and the ways in which everyday people live and work. And here the tables would be turned. In terms of adjusting to the social structures and the rhythms and patterns of daily life, our second time-traveler would be much more disoriented.

Someone from the early 1900s would find the social world of the 1950s remarkably similar to his own. If he worked in a factory, he might find much the same divisions of labor, the same hierarchical systems of control. If he worked in an office, he would be immersed in the same bureaucracy, the same climb up the corporate ladder. He would come to work at 8 or 9 each morning and leave promptly at 5, his life neatly segmented into compartments of home and work. He would wear a suit and tie. Most of his business associates would be white and male. Their values and office politics would hardly have changed. He would seldom see women in the workplace, except as secretaries, and almost never interact professionally with someone of another race. He would marry young, have children quickly thereafter, stay married to the same person and probably work for the

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same company for the rest of his life. In his leisure time, he'd find that movies and TV had largely superseded live stage shows, but otherwise his recreational activities would be much the same as they were in 1900: taking in a baseball game or a boxing match, maybe playing a round of golf. He would join the clubs and civic groups befitting his socioeconomic class, observe the same social distinctions, and fully expect his children to do likewise. The tempo of his life would be structured by the values and norms of organizations. He would find himself living the life of the "company man" so aptly chronicled by writers from Sinclair Lewis and John Kenneth Galbraith to William Whyte and C. Wright Mills.²

Our second time-traveler, however, would be quite unnerved by the dizzying social and cultural changes that had accumulated between the 1950s and today. At work he would find a new dress code, a new schedule, and new rules. He would see office workers dressed like folks relaxing on the weekend, in jeans and open-necked shirts, and be shocked to learn they occupy positions of authority. People at the office would seemingly come and go as they pleased. The younger ones might sport bizarre piercings and tattoos. Women and even nonwhites would be managers. Individuality and self-expression would be valued over conformity to organizational norms—and yet these people would seem strangely puritanical to this time-traveler. His ethnic jokes would fall embarrassingly flat. His smoking would get him banished to the parking lot, and his two-martini lunches would raise genuine concern. Attitudes and expressions he had never thought about would cause repeated offense. He would continually suffer the painful feeling of not knowing how to behave.

Out on the street, this time-traveler would see different ethnic groups in greater numbers than he ever could have imagined—Asian-, Indian-, and Latin-Americans and others—all mingling in ways he found strange and perhaps inappropriate. There would be mixed-race couples, and same-sex couples carrying the upbeat-sounding moniker "gay." While some of these people would be acting in familiar ways—a woman shopping while pushing a stroller, an office worker having lunch at a counter—others, such as grown men clad in form-fitting gear whizzing by on high-tech bicycles, or women on strange new roller skates with their torsos covered only by "brassieres"—would appear to be engaged in alien activities.

People would seem to be always working and yet never working when they were supposed to. They would strike him as lazy and yet obsessed with exercise. They would seem career-conscious yet fickle—doesn't anybody stay with the company more than three years?—and caring yet anti-

social: What happened to the ladies' clubs, Moose Lodges and bowling leagues? While the physical surroundings would be relatively familiar, the *feel* of the place would be bewilderingly different.

Thus, although the first time-traveler had to adjust to some drastic technological changes, it is the second who experiences the deeper, more pervasive transformation. It is the second who has been thrust into a time when lifestyles and worldviews are most assuredly changing—a time when the old order has broken down, when flux and uncertainty themselves seem to be part of the everyday norm.

The Force Behind the Shift

What caused this transformation? What happened between the 1950s and today that did not happen in the earlier period? Scholars and pundits have floated many theories, along with a range of opinions on whether the changes are good or bad. Some bemoan the passing of traditional social and cultural forms, while others point to a rosy future based largely on new technology. Yet on one point most of them agree. Most tend to see the transformation as something that's being done to us unwittingly. Some complain that certain factions of society have imposed their values on the rest of us; others say that our own inventions are turning around to reshape us. They're wrong.

Society is changing in large measure because we want it to. Moreover it is changing neither in random chaotic ways nor in some mysterious collective-unconscious way, but in ways that are perfectly sensible and rational. The logic behind the transformation has been unclear to this point because the transformation is still in progress. But lately a number of diverse and seemingly unconnected threads are starting to come together. The deeper pattern, the force behind the shift, can now be discerned.

That driving force is the rise of human creativity as the key factor in our economy and society. Both at work and in other spheres of our lives, we value creativity more highly than ever, and cultivate it more intensely. The creative impulse—the attribute that distinguishes us, as humans, from other species—is now being let loose on an unprecedented scale. The purpose of this book is to examine how and why this is so, and to trace its effects as they ripple through our world.

Consider first the realm of economics. Many say that we now live in an “information” economy or a “knowledge” economy. But what's more fundamentally true is that we now have an economy powered by human cre-

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ativity. Creativity—“the ability to create meaningful new forms,” as Webster’s dictionary puts it—is now the *decisive* source of competitive advantage. In virtually every industry, from automobiles to fashion, food products, and information technology itself, the winners in the long run are those who can create and keep creating. This has always been true, from the days of the Agricultural Revolution to the Industrial Revolution. But in the past few decades we’ve come to recognize it clearly and act upon it systematically.

Creativity is multidimensional and comes in many mutually reinforcing forms. It is a mistake to think, as many do, that creativity can be reduced to the creation of new blockbuster inventions, new products and new firms. In today’s economy creativity is pervasive and ongoing: We constantly revise and enhance every product, process and activity imaginable, and fit them together in new ways. Moreover, technological and economic creativity are nurtured by and interact with artistic and cultural creativity. This kind of interplay is evident in the rise of whole new industries from computer graphics to digital music and animation. Creativity also requires a social and economic environment that can nurture its many forms. Max Weber said long ago that the Protestant ethic provided the underlying spirit of thrift, hard work and efficiency that motivated the rise of early capitalism. In similar fashion, the shared commitment to the creative spirit in its many, varied manifestations underpins the new creative ethos that powers our age.

Thus creativity has come to be the most highly prized commodity in our economy—and yet it is not a “commodity.” Creativity comes from people. And while people can be hired and fired, their creative capacity cannot be bought and sold, or turned on and off at will. This is why, for instance, we see the emergence of a new order in the workplace. Hiring for diversity, once a matter of legal compliance, has become a matter of economic survival because creativity comes in all colors, genders and personal preferences. Schedules, rules and dress codes have become more flexible to cater to how the creative process works. Creativity must be motivated and nurtured in a multitude of ways, by employers, by people themselves and by the communities where they locate. Small wonder that we find the creative ethos bleeding out from the sphere of work to infuse every corner of our lives.

At the same time, entirely new forms of economic infrastructure, such as systematic spending on research and development, the high-tech startup company and an extensive system of venture finance, have evolved



to support creativity and mobilize creative people around promising ideas and products. Capitalism has also expanded its reach to capture the talents of heretofore excluded groups of eccentrics and nonconformists. In doing so, it has pulled off yet another astonishing mutation: taking people who would once have been viewed as bizarre mavericks operating at the bohemian fringe and setting them at the very heart of the process of innovation and economic growth. These changes in the economy and in the workplace have in turn helped to propagate and legitimize similar changes in society at large. The creative individual is no longer viewed as an iconoclast. He—or she—is the new mainstream.

In tracing economic shifts, I often say that our economy is moving from an older corporate-centered system defined by large companies to a more people-driven one. This view should not be confused with the unfounded and silly notion that big companies are dying off. Nor do I buy the fantasy of an economy organized around small enterprises and independent “free agents.”³ Companies, including very big ones, obviously still exist, are still influential and probably always will be. I simply mean to stress that as the fundamental source of creativity, people are the critical resource of the new age. This has far-reaching effects—for instance, on our economic and social geography and the nature of our communities.

It’s often been said that in this age of high technology, “geography is dead” and place doesn’t matter any more.⁴ Nothing could be further from the truth: Witness how high-tech firms themselves concentrate in specific places like the San Francisco Bay Area or Austin or Seattle. Place has become the central organizing unit of our time, taking on many of the functions that used to be played by firms and other organizations. Corporations have historically played a key economic role in matching people to jobs, particularly given the long-term employment system of the post–World War II era. But today corporations are far less committed to their employees and people change jobs frequently, making the employment contract more contingent. In this environment, it is geographic place rather than the corporation that provides the organizational matrix for matching people and jobs. Access to talented and creative people is to modern business what access to coal and iron ore was to steelmaking. It determines where companies will choose to locate and grow, and this in turn changes the ways cities must compete. As Hewlett-Packard CEO Carley Fiorina once told this nation’s governors: “Keep your tax incentives and highway interchanges; we will go where the highly skilled people are.”⁵

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Creative people, in turn, don't just cluster where the jobs are. They cluster in places that are centers of creativity and also where they like to live. From classical Athens and Rome, to the Florence of the Medici and Elizabethan London, to Greenwich Village and the San Francisco Bay Area, creativity has always gravitated to specific locations. As the great urbanist Jane Jacobs pointed out long ago, successful places are multidimensional and diverse—they don't just cater to a single industry or a single demographic group; they are full of stimulation and creativity interplay.⁶ In my consulting work, I often tell business and political leaders that places need a people climate—or a creativity climate—as well as a business climate. Cities like Seattle, Austin, Toronto and Dublin recognize the multidimensional nature of this transformation and are striving to become broadly creative communities, not just centers of technological innovation and high-tech industry. If places like Buffalo, Grand Rapids, Memphis and Louisville do not follow suit, they will be hard-pressed to survive.

Our fundamental social forms are shifting as well, driven by forces traceable to the creative ethos. In virtually every aspect of life, weak ties have replaced the stronger bonds that once gave structure to society. Rather than live in one town for decades, we now move about. Instead of communities defined by close associations and deep commitments to family, friends and organizations, we seek places where we can make friends and acquaintances easily and live quasi-anonymous lives. The decline in the strength of our ties to people and institutions is a product of the increasing number of ties we have. As a retired industrialist who was the head of a technology transfer center in Ottawa, Canada, told me: "My father grew up in a small town and worked for the same company. He knew the same fourteen people in his entire life. I meet more people than that in any given day."⁷ Modern life is increasingly defined by contingent commitments. We progress from job to job with amazingly little concern or effort. Where people once found themselves bound together by social institutions and formed their identities in groups, a fundamental characteristic of life today is that we strive to create our own identities.⁸ It is this creation and re-creation of the self, often in ways that reflect our creativity, that is a key feature of the creative ethos.

In this new world, it is no longer the organizations we work for, churches, neighborhoods or even family ties that define us. Instead, we do this ourselves, defining our identities along the varied dimensions of our creativity. Other aspects of our lives—what we consume, new forms of

leisure and recreation, efforts at community-building—then organize themselves around this process of identity creation.

Furthermore, when we think about group identity in this new world, we must rethink our notions of class. We often tend to classify people on the basis of their consumption habits or lifestyle choices, or, more crudely, by their income level. For instance, we often equate middle income with middle class. Though I view these things as significant markers of class, they are not its primary determinants. A *class* is a cluster of people who have common interests and tend to think, feel and behave similarly, but these similarities are fundamentally determined by economic function—by the kind of work they do for a living. All the other distinctions follow from that. And a key fact of our age is that more of us than ever are doing creative work for a living.

The New Class

The economic need for creativity has registered itself in the rise of a new class, which I call the Creative Class. Some 38 million Americans, 30 percent of all employed people, belong to this new class. I define the core of the Creative Class to include people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content. Around the core, the Creative Class also includes a broader group of *creative professionals* in business and finance, law, health care and related fields. These people engage in complex problem solving that involves a great deal of independent judgment and requires high levels of education or human capital. In addition, all members of the Creative Class—whether they are artists or engineers, musicians or computer scientists, writers or entrepreneurs—share a common creative ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference and merit. For the members of the Creative Class, every aspect and every manifestation of creativity—technological, cultural and economic—is interlinked and inseparable.

The key difference between the Creative Class and other classes lies in what they are primarily paid to do. Those in the Working Class and the Service Class are primarily paid to execute according to plan, while those in the Creative Class are primarily paid to create and have considerably more autonomy and flexibility than the other two classes to do so. There are gray areas and boundary issues in my scheme of things, to be sure. And while some may quibble with my definition of the Creative Class and the

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numerical estimates that are based on it, I believe it has a good deal more precision than existing, more amorphous definitions of knowledge workers, symbolic analysts or professional and technical workers.

The class structure of the United States and other advanced nations has been the subject of great debate for well over a century. For a host of writers in the 1800s and 1900s, the big story was the rise, and then the decline, of the Working Class.⁹ For writers like Daniel Bell and others in the middle to later 1900s, a second big story was the rise of a postindustrial society in which many of us shifted from making goods to delivering services.¹⁰ The big story unfolding now—one that has been unfolding for some time—is the rise of the Creative Class, the great emerging class of our time.

The reason modern society feels so different to our time-traveler is the staggering growth of this class. Over the twentieth century, the Creative Class grew from roughly 3 million workers to its current size, a tenfold-plus increase; since 1980 alone it has more than doubled. Roughly 15 million Americans, more than 12 percent of the workforce, compose the Super-Creative Core of this new class. The Creative Class in the United States today is larger than the traditional Working Class—for instance those who work in manufacturing, construction and transportation industries.

The long sweep of the twentieth century has seen the rise and fall of the Working Class, which peaked at roughly 40 percent of the U.S. workforce between 1920 and 1950 before beginning its long slide to roughly a quarter of the workforce today. The Service Class, which includes fields such as personal care, food service and clerical work, has grown steadily over the same period, doubling from roughly 16 to 30 percent of the workforce between 1900 and 1950 before climbing to more than 45 percent by 1980. With some 55 million members today it is the largest class in terms of sheer numbers.

Although the Creative Class remains somewhat smaller than the Service Class, its crucial economic role makes it the most influential. The Creative Class is also considerably larger than the class of “organization men” described in William Whyte’s 1956 book. Like Whyte’s managerial class, which “set the American temper” in the 1950s, the Creative Class is the norm-setting class of our time. But its norms are very different: Individuality, self-expression and openness to difference are favored over the homogeneity, conformity and “fitting in” that defined the organizational age. Furthermore, the Creative Class is dominant in terms of wealth and income, with its members earning nearly twice as much on average as members of the other two classes.

But the sacrifices we will make for money are very different from those once made by Whyte's organization men. Very few of us work for the same large company or organization for life, and we are far less likely to pin our identity or sense of self-worth on whom we work for. We balance financial considerations against the ability to be ourselves, set our own schedules, do challenging work and live in communities that reflect our values and priorities. According to one large-scale survey of people who work in information technology fields—a relatively conservative subgroup of the Creative Class—challenge and responsibility, the ability to work a flexible schedule and a secure and stable work environment all rank ahead of money as the key elements of what people value in their jobs. The upheaval in our private lives is epitomized by one well-publicized statistic: Fewer than one-quarter of all Americans (23.5 percent) accounted for by the 2000 Census lived in a “conventional” nuclear family, down from 45 percent in 1960.¹¹ These profound changes are not, as commonly portrayed, signs of the reckless self-indulgence of a spoiled people. They are undergirded by a simple economic rationality. We live by our creativity, so we try to take care of it and seek environments that allow it to flourish—much as the blacksmith once cared for his forge, and farmers took care of the oxen that drove their plows.

Creativity in the world of work is not limited to members of the Creative Class. Factory workers and even the lowest-end service workers always have been creative in certain valuable ways. Also, the creative content of many working-class and service-class jobs is growing—a prime example being the continuous-improvement programs on many factory floors, which call on line workers to contribute ideas as well as their physical labor. On the basis of these trends, I expect that the Creative Class, which is still emergent, will continue to grow in coming decades, as more traditional economic functions are transformed into Creative Class occupations. And, as the last chapter of this book will argue, I strongly believe that the key to improving the lot of underpaid, underemployed and disadvantaged people lies not in social welfare programs or low-end make-work jobs—nor in somehow bringing back the factory jobs of the past—but rather in tapping the creativity of these people, paying them appropriately for it and integrating them fully into the Creative Economy.

Not all is rosy in this emerging mainstream of the Creative Age. With no big company to provide security, we bear much more risk than the corporate and working classes of the organizational age did. We experience and often create high levels of mental and emotional stress, at work and at

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home. We crave flexibility but have less time to pursue the things we truly desire. The technologies that were supposed to liberate us from work have invaded our lives. And though the Creative Class does not have a monopoly on creativity, it certainly has cornered the lion's share of the market for it—while segmenting both the labor market and society in new ways. Significant fault lines are appearing as the values, attitudes and aspirations of the Creative Class inexorably clash with those of the other established classes. Our society may well be splitting into two or three separate types of economies, cultures and communities, with deepening divides of education, occupation and geographic location.

The nation's geographic center of gravity has shifted away from traditional industrial regions toward new axes of creativity and innovation. The Creative Class is strongly oriented to large cities and regions that offer a variety of economic opportunities, a stimulating environment and amenities for every possible lifestyle. The nation's leading creative centers include major East Coast regions like Washington, D.C., Boston and the greater New York region, and leading high-tech centers like the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle and Austin. These places offer something for everyone—vibrant urban districts, abundant natural amenities and comfortable suburban “nerdistans” for techies so inclined.¹² But large regions do not have an exclusive hold on the members of this new class. Smaller places like Boulder, Colorado and Santa Fe, New Mexico boast significant concentrations of the Creative Class, as do less obvious places like Gainesville, Florida; Provo, Utah; and Huntsville, Alabama.

This remaking of our economic geography is intimately tied to class identity. Today's professionals see themselves as members of a broad creative force, not as corporate officers or organization men. Thus they gravitate to stimulating creative environments—to places that offer not only opportunities and amenities, but openness to diversity, where they feel they can express themselves and validate their identities. They are fleeing older working-class strongholds and in many cases avoiding newer but conservative Sunbelt cities—increasingly opting out of places where tradition is more valued and where the social norms of the organizational age still prevail. In fact, many of these places are being almost entirely abandoned by the Creative Class.

One of the most significant fault lines of our age is the growing geographic segregation of the Creative Class and the other classes. The geographic trends I will describe in this book do *not* favor the tightly knit old-style communities that are so often celebrated in our songs, stories

and sentimental TV commercials. Moreover, a number of serious social commentators in recent years have urged us to recultivate and rebuild the old forms of “social capital” found in these communities. Such efforts are fruitless, since they fly in the face of today’s economic realities. A central task ahead is developing new forms of social cohesion appropriate to the Creative Age.

The Transformation of Everyday Life

Economic shifts are thus altering the structure of everyday life. The rise and decline of the New Economy did not cause these changes, though it did help push them to the surface and make them more noticeable. In a deeper and more pervasive way, the September 11, 2001, tragedy and subsequent terrorist threats have caused Americans, particularly those in the Creative Class, to ask sobering questions about what really matters in our lives. What we are witnessing in America and across the world extends far beyond high-tech industry or any so-called New Economy: It is the emergence of a new society and a new culture—indeed a whole new way of life. It is these shifts that will prove to be the most enduring developments of our time. And they thrust hard questions upon us. For now that forces have been unleashed that allow us to pursue our desires, the question for each of us becomes: What do we really want?

I have spent the past several years conducting research on the changing attitudes and desires of the Creative Class and the other classes, as well as the key factors that have brought new attitudes to the fore. I have interviewed and conducted focus groups with people across the United States and elsewhere. I have visited companies and communities of all kinds in my attempts to determine what is going on. And with teams of colleagues and graduate students, I delved deeply into statistical correlations to develop more substantial evidence of the fundamental trends and patterns. Based on my research, I would describe several dimensions of the transformation that I see, corresponding to several basic categories of human existence: work, lifestyle, time and community. In each case, the changes reflect a society in which the creative ethos is on the rise.

The No-Collar Workplace

Artists, musicians, professors and scientists have always set their own hours, dressed in relaxed and casual clothes and worked in stimulating en-

vironments. They could never be forced to work, yet they were never truly not at work. With the rise of the Creative Class, this way of working has moved from the margins to the economic mainstream. While the no-collar workplace certainly appears more casual than the old, it replaces traditional hierarchical systems of control with new forms of self-management, peer recognition and pressure and intrinsic forms of motivation, which I call *soft control*. In this setting, we strive to work more independently and find it much harder to cope with incompetent managers and bullying bosses. We trade job security for autonomy. In addition to being fairly compensated for the work we do and the skills we bring, we want the ability to learn and grow, shape the content of our work, control our own schedules and express our identities through work. And companies of all types, including large established ones, are adapting to this change by striving to create new workplaces that are more amenable to creative work. In this, they have no choice: Either they will create these kinds of environments or they will wither and die.

The Experiential Lifestyle

Because we identify ourselves as creative people, we increasingly demand a lifestyle built around creative experiences. We are impatient with the strict separations that previously demarcated work, home and leisure. Whereas the lifestyle of the previous organizational age emphasized conformity, the new lifestyle favors individuality, self-statement, acceptance of difference and the desire for rich multidimensional experiences. David Brooks has argued in his clever book *Bobos in Paradise* that the new culture represents a blending of bourgeois and bohemian values.¹³ But we have done more than blend these two categories; we have transcended them completely so that they no longer even apply. Spurred on by the creative ethos, we blend work and lifestyle to construct our identities as creative people. In the past, people often literally “identified” themselves through several basic social categories: occupation, employer and family status (husband, wife, father, mother). Today, the people in my interviews identify themselves through a tangle of connections to myriad creative activities. One person may be simultaneously a writer, researcher, consultant, cyclist, rock climber, electronic/world music/acid jazz lover, amateur gourmet cook, wine enthusiast or micro-brewer. The people in my interviews report that they have little trouble integrating such multiple interests and personae. This kind of synthesis is integral to establishing a unique creative identity.

It's almost impossible to be a nonconformist today because conformity is no longer an issue. But at the same time, this more open attitude toward lifestyle forms a deep and growing division between the Creative Class and the more traditional classes.

The Time Warp

Creative people always have experienced and even cultivated a blurring of time. Writers, artists, musicians, scientists and inventors often have erratic and irregular schedules, working from home and seemingly playing at work. Now more of us do as well. How we organize and use time is changing in ways that go far beyond simplistic notions of the "overworked American" or the 24/7 workday. The core issue is not when we work or the number of hours we put in, but that our use of time has intensified. We pack every second—whether at work or at leisure—full of creative stimuli and experiences. And as we do so, our conception of time has completely morphed. The old boundaries that told us when we should do certain things have faded into oblivion. We in fact work at times when we are supposed to be off and play when we are supposed to be working. This is because creativity cannot be switched on and off at predetermined times, and is itself an odd mixture of work and play. Writing a book, producing a work of art or developing new software requires long periods of intense concentration, punctuated by the need to relax, incubate ideas and recharge. So too does designing a new marketing campaign or investment strategy.

A whole new social construction of time is thus emerging—and not only in how we use our time from day to day, but in how we use it over the course of a life. Careers, for instance, now tend to be front-loaded. Rather than climb the corporate ladder as they grow older, people now often pack their most intense and productive creative work into their younger years, when their potential for advancement and sheer physical energy are at a peak. Meanwhile the time-consuming obligations of marriage and children are deferred: The average age of women at childbearing in the United States recently topped thirty for the first time in history. Not only have the midlife crisis and midlife career change become more prevalent, they are being augmented by the "quarter-life" and "three-quarter-life" changes as people of all ages continue to seek new outlets for their creative capacities.

The Creative Community

Creative people have always gravitated to certain kinds of communities, such as the Left Bank in Paris or New York's Greenwich Village. Such communities provide the stimulation, diversity and a richness of experiences that are the wellsprings of creativity. Now more of us are looking for the same thing. Even if the community we choose isn't quite the kind of place where Gertrude Stein would live, it tends to meet a lot of the same basic criteria: a place that enables us to reflect and reinforce our identities as creative people, pursuing the kind of work we choose and having ready access to a wide range of lifestyle amenities. In place of the tightly knit urban neighborhoods of the past or alienated and generic suburbs, we prefer communities that have a distinctive character. These communities are defined by the impermanent relationships and loose ties that let us live the quasi-anonymous lives we want rather than those that are imposed on us.

The key to understanding all of these shifts lies in seeing them as part of a more global change—as thickly interwoven strands of a single underlying transformation that is affecting every dimension of our lives. This transformation is the shift to an economic and social system based on human creativity. Most people would never suppose that changes in our tastes for work, lifestyle and community might be driven by such basic economic changes. I argue that they are.

Romanticizing the Future, Glorifying the Past

After reading scores of books and countless articles on today's social changes, I have come to the conclusion that much of the time we are locked in a misleading and fruitless debate. The two sides in this debate amount to little more than flip sides of the same coin, opposing mythologies steeped in outdated ideologies, equally short-sighted and misleading.

On one side is an eclectic group of commentators with a utopian faith in the power of technology to cure virtually all social and economic ills. According to techno-futurists like George Gilder and Kevin Kelly, the combination of new technology and unfettered market forces promises to deliver us from the mundanities of everyday work and life and lead us toward an ever more prosperous and liberated future.¹⁴ Greater numbers of people are able to manage their careers as virtual "free agents," to use Dan Pink's phrase, moving from job to job or project to project at will, free

from bureaucratic incompetence and the inanities of everyday office life.¹⁵ More and more people will live “virtual” lives, coming together in on-line communities of like-minded individuals. There will be less and less need to shop or go to the movies when anything we desire can be delivered to our homes from a giant on-line mall. We can escape the constraints of geography; escape harsh, dirty and congested cities; and give up long commutes in favor of working from wherever we happen to be.¹⁶

Juxtaposed to this view are those who believe technology and unbridled market forces are making us work harder and faster, leaving us less time to enjoy each other and our interests, destroying human connections and damaging our neighborhoods and communities. If the techno-utopians romanticize the future, these techno-pessimists glorify the past. Unfettered hypercapitalism is leading to the end of work and the demise of high-paying, secure jobs, according to social critics like Jeremy Rifkin.¹⁷ Worse yet, the elimination of such jobs destroys an important source of social stability, argues Richard Sennett, casting people adrift, corroding our collective character and damaging the very fiber of society.¹⁸ The workplace is evolving into an increasingly stressful and dehumanizing “white-collar sweatshop” in Jill Fraser’s view, beset by long hours and chronic overwork.¹⁹ In the eyes of the cultural critic Tom Frank, business has become an all-powerful and hegemonic cultural force, as entities like MTV and The Gap turn alternative-culture symbols into moneymaking devices.²⁰ Neighborhoods, cities and society as a whole are losing the strong sense of community and civic-minded spirit that were the source of our prosperity, argues Robert Putnam.²¹ In his nostalgia for a bygone era of VFW halls, bowling leagues, Cub Scout troops and Little League, Putnam contends that the demise of these repositories of “social capital” is the source of virtually all of our woes.

Despite their obvious ideological differences, all of these viewpoints suggest that forces beyond our control are exogenously reshaping our work, communities and lives. All, as a result, underestimate the extent and power of the ongoing social changes at work today. By insisting that these social changes are somehow imposed on us, all of these commentators avoid the real question of our age: Why are we *choosing* to live and work like this? Why do we want this life, or think that we do?

In an insightful essay, the economic historian Paul David points to the limits of this kind of thinking.²² It is not technology per se that powers long-run economic growth. Technology is certainly important, but the sources of growth are more complicated and messy. Long-run growth re-

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quires a series of gradually accumulating changes in the organizational and institutional fabric of society, taking place over perhaps half a century. These changes are not dictated by technology; rather they are the result of incremental shifts in human behavior and social organization. We have been going through such a process of social adaptation, organizational readjustment and changing personal expectations. At first glance, these recent changes seem centered on new forms of information and biotechnology, much as the Industrial Revolution seemed to be powered by new machines and new forms of energy. But upon closer examination, the current transformation, like its predecessor, turns out to be broader.

The deep and enduring changes of our age are not technological but social and cultural. They are thus harder to see, for they result from the gradual accumulation of small, incremental changes in our day-to-day lives. These changes have been building for decades and are only now coming to the fore.