In this chapter, we pay full attention to the structural conditions and human cost of precarious labor in a particular local instance of the games industry. But at the same time, we attempt to shift the debate on precarity from the existential (the creative individual attracted to industries promising autonomy and meaningful work and finding only casualization, no work/life balance, and poor management) and the totalizing (all work under regimes of neoliberal hypercapitalism is increasingly characterized by precarity; indeed a whole new class—the precariat—is posited as emerging) to a focus on analysis for actionable reform.

Significant “creative destruction” through the global financial crisis (GFC) led to games industry restructuring and consolidation, including withdrawal of major publisher investment in many dispersed regional hubs of games production. More fundamentally, major platform shifts and new business models started before the global downturn and continue through this contemporary period of slowdown in the world economy. There has been major consolidation at the console production end of the games industry, with more expensive blockbuster or AAA titles, a hollowing out of the midrange games market, and rapid growth and proliferation of casual gaming and mobile applications with unprecedentedly lower production costs and barriers to entry.

What has happened to one such regional hub, the Australian games industry, spatially remote from the centers of publisher power and hubs of creative ferment?

A recent “perfect storm” of factors has arisen to change the face of the Australian games industry. The industry had grown on the model of work for hire producing “catalog fillers” for the major publishers; very little original IP was produced. And while very few AAA titles were made in Australia, games companies had a
reputation for quality. However, the business proposition was buttressed by more than a decade of favorable exchange rates, which (literally) underwrote international investment. The industry by 2007 was structured around approximately forty-five midsize small businesses. Notable companies included Krome, Pandemic, THQ StudioOz, Creative Assembly, Torus, and 2K.

The global financial crisis saw higher-end production scaled back, a withdrawal by the major publishers from spatially distended supply chains, and a new preference for formally affiliated production companies. At the beginning of 2007, the Australian dollar was 75 cents on the U.S. dollar. During the GFC, the Australian dollar became a “currency haven,” such that by the start of 2012 it was worth US$1.02, gutting the industry of its price advantage. Of even greater structural consequence for the industry was the simultaneous explosion of apps-based mobile casual games play based on the smartphone platform and later the tablet.

Official statistics tell a stark story of destruction of value. Of the 1,431 reported employees in 2007, only 581 remained by mid-2012, and reported game development income had dropped from A$116.9 million to just A$44.4 million. The industry’s spatial pattern in 2007 evidenced a significant presence in Queensland and Victoria, with additional studios in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, and South Australia. By 2012, the majority of the bigger studios had closed, and the industry had retreated to be concentrated in Victoria. Those whose doors had closed or who had radically downsized included Krome, Pandemic, THQ StudioOz, Blue Tongue, Team Bondi, SEGA Creative Assembly, and Tantalus Media Brisbane. The major studios remaining included Halfbrick (Brisbane), 2K Australia (Canberra), and in Melbourne, Big Ant, Torus Games, Tantalus, and Wicked Witch. According to the Games Developers Association of Australia (GDAA), the main advocacy and professional association for the industry, somewhere between 60 and 70 percent of industry workers had either moved to another industry (many skills, preeminently programming skills, are very transferable) or had left Australia for more resilient industry locations or those better supported by government policy and programs.

In 2014, the GDAA characterized the industry as composed of two hundred formally registered businesses, of which 92 percent are considered to be independents. It defines independent as a typically small-scale enterprise that concentrates exclusively on original IP and self-publishes on the new digital platforms (Apple App Store, Android, Steam). It estimates about eight hundred workers now in the industry. This is a recent history of an industry much reduced in turnover and traditional employment, but which has transformed its revenue base from 80 percent work for hire to 75 percent original IP—an almost complete reversal in the balance between business models.

But, invoking Joseph Schumpeter, how “creative” has this destruction been? A rigorous critical organizational-studies analysis of the Australian industry
advances the argument that severe power differentials between publisher and producer/developer have persisted across this momentous industry restructure and continue to compromise local agency in global supply chains. An equally rigorous media-studies argument anatomizing poor labor conditions in the industry globally is nevertheless clear that “the most plentiful and well-paying jobs in the video game industry continue to be those provided by major video game publishers either directly or indirectly.” Neither view offers much comfort for the idea that this destruction could be in any way “creative.”

These perspectives, however, contrast with the self-understanding of many of those games workers (whom we have interviewed for the research that supports this chapter) who survived the shakeout or are sufficiently new to the industry to know no other conditions. Culturally and industrially, original IP—and the conditions under which it can be prioritized—tends to be championed by these developers against fee-for-service and as a normative aspiration. Industrially, a dominant narrative in the industry has been the desire to move from fee-for-service (where the company is a price taker and doesn’t control its own destiny) to original IP. Culturally, this aspiration also speaks to many developers’ creative impulse and is actually enshrined in the advocacy and the definition of indie established by the representative body, the GDAA. It is reinforced by normative criteria built into state policy and program funding support.

Given the degree to which higher-end fee-for-service business has dried up, while essentially self-publication on major digital distribution platforms (Apple’s App Store, the Google Play Store, Steam, and so on) has grown exponentially, necessity has become a virtue. Conditions have crafted an industry that is much reduced in terms of turnover and traditional employment but now operates within a disintermediated value chain that radically forces the pace of innovation. Despite much commentary that treats Apple, for example, as basically yet another global corporation “taking their (un)fair share of financial profits,” near-global dissemination via the digital platforms on a 30/70 split of income derived represents an ostensibly better deal than the power asymmetries enshrined in dealing with the major publishers.

Australian companies, in particular Halfbrick after its huge success with *Fruit Ninja* (2010), made hay while the sun shone in the early days of apps-driven games and became a sort of template for national ruminations on how to succeed in the new environment. It is distinctly harder now to capture attention: massively lower barriers to entry create conditions in which it is estimated that more than 1.3 million apps are now available on the App Store with duplication across the platforms, of which around 20 percent are games. Mobile games production is markedly less driven by the crunch associated with games development under the dominant business model of fee-for-service work, in which development schedules were driven by milestones at the behest of large international publishers. This has led,
Antony Reed suggests, to a situation where the industry has seen much less attrition in last few years. Furthermore, there is arguably a great deal more innovation activity in original IP. Indeed, there is runaway innovation, with the rapid shift from games as a product to games as a service driving the mobile apps purchase price points to zero, accompanied by the proliferation of in-app purchasing. And these rapid shifts have in turn been challenged by a return by some to premium mobile app pricing as well as premium pricing for games released through Steam.

**THEY STILL MAKE GAMES**

It is to these identities and motivations—the scripts games developers have written for themselves to adapt to the new conditions—and their relation to business models and production cultures that we now turn.

Predominantly, we encountered a sense of pride in the fact that these developers were still making games. They had found a way to survive the changes upending the Australian industry. Many emphasized that they were now doing this more on their terms and that the shift from fee-for-service to original IP meant they enjoyed greater creative control and autonomy. In describing this sense of creative control, none of the developers were remotely Panglossian about the precariousness they and the workers around them routinely face. Many recounted the pain of downsizing and seeing fellow workers lose their jobs, with many needing to leave the country for work in the United States, Britain, and Canada. Others told us about their companies coming repeatedly to the brink of closure and yet finding a way to keep the doors open. Nevertheless, this assertion of creative control came through in a comment by Dean Ferguson at 5Lives (a Brisbane-based group of five developers making the Kickstarter-funded game *Satellite Reign*, 2015): “It’s probably the first time in a number of years where I’ve felt like I’m crafting a game and not simply part of a cog. Before ‘the crash,’ I worked with and formed great relationships with many very creative people, with really well-meaning people, including publishers, but it often came down to pure economics much of the time. It could be a real struggle to just craft something, and while it sounds tacky, a lot of us do this largely for the love of crafting.”

Morgan Jaffit, director of Brisbane’s Defiant Development, put the case even more strongly: “Australia has a history of terrible work-for-hire projects and shitty lowest-bidder poor-quality games. It not only erodes your studio but I think it kills your soul too.” Trent Kusters, founder and director of Melbourne-based League of Geeks, also noted the importance of “having an impact on the medium, and the progression of the medium, and where that is happening. That you as a creator, you’re not just pumping out some crappy title that’s, you know, just going to turn a quick buck. If you want to make things that matter, you need to have a cultural understanding. You need to be involved in that, the discussion of the
cultural zeitgeist of game development and games as a medium, and you can see a clear pattern between the people that are right now developing great games and the networks that they move within.” The values that these leaders of what has emerged as a profoundly different Australian games sector associate with “indie” game development need to be carefully interrogated; they are in no way opposed to commercial interests or business sustainability. Creative adaptation, experimentation, and opportunity have arisen under conditions of profound uncertainty and precariousness.

Many developers clearly feel there is a great deal more innovation potential—and identity reinforcement—in original IP. On the other hand, viewed from an industry-wide perspective, some companies continue to pursue fee-for-service work to offset the risk associated with free-to-play—and indeed with making original IP games generally. For some developers, work-for-hire remains important to the sustainability of their studios. Therefore, we now posit a typology of approaches to funding and releasing games in the overall ecology of the sector and then briefly profile companies that exemplify this range of approaches.

Along with licensed IP, there are five distinct variations on the exploitation of original IP: subscription, premium payment, free-to-play with in-game monetization, advertising supported, and pay-to-play. The subscription model is consistent with the games-as-service approach, where at the beginning of each period, usually monthly, the player pays to stay engaged with the game. This is typical of games like World of Warcraft, which continues to have a significant player base ten years after launch. The premium model is very much traditional in the games industry and is consistent with the games-as-product approach. The consumer pays for a complete experience with a one-off payment. Such a model is typified in AAA titles, such as the Call of Duty series (2003–) or titles like Minecraft (2011), but a quite different level of premium pricing also applies to variations on free-to-play.

Free-to-play can be adopted in a variety of forms, placing this category in both games-as-product, where you pay to unlock additional content but expenditure is capped—for example, Puzzle Retreat (2013)—or in a games-as-service form, where there is no cap on monetary expense (for example, Clash of Clans [2012] or Kixeye’s VEGA Conflict [2013]). The advertising-supported revenue model leverages advertising as the primary source of income by inserting advertising at regular or semiregular intervals; it is most typical of browser-based flash games. The final model is the pay-to-play monetization model. Typified by the original arcade machines, each play of the game requires an input of credit for the player to progress. The developers that we discuss in this chapter have tended to focus on emerging opportunities of free-to-play and premium payment approaches, especially in the context of the shift toward games-as-service models.

The funding for games development takes a variety of forms, depending on the availability and the scale of the project. Briefly, these sources include government
funding, in the form of loans or grants with funds available not just for development costs but also for travel or to engage marketing expertise; crowdfunding through platforms like Kickstarter; the traditional publisher model, where the developer is engaged to produce content at a set fee and with set milestones for delivery, essentially work-for-hire; variations on the work-for-hire approach that may involve undertaking projects such as game installations, serious games, or nongaming apps; and securing donations, where donations are received against the development costs.

As an index of the stakes involved in this challenging innovation space, consider the case of Halfbrick, the company that bet the farm on original IP on mobile game platforms. Halfbrick has continued this approach with recent releases like *Fish out of Water* (2013), *Collosatron* (2013), and *Bears versus Art* (2014). While the company’s recent releases experiment with various approaches to free-to-play and in-app monetization by drawing on analytics and metrics to inform their design, development process, and decisions, they have not as yet managed to repeat the stellar commercial success enjoyed by *Fruit Ninja* (2010) or the lesser but still substantial success of *Jet Pack Joyride* (2011). Halfbrick had led the industry in adapting to the shift from work-for-hire to original IP titles for mobile devices. In front of the pack when mobile games were all paid for upfront, success has so far eluded the company after the market shift to free-to-play and games-as-service.

Wicked Witch, which was started, like Halfbrick, in the late 1990s, is different. It mixes work-for-hire with original IP development. During the industry decline, Wicked Witch radically downsized, almost closing. However, by continuing fee-for-service work for domestic sports titles that were not subject to the exchange rate crisis, together with developing original IP games for mobile devices, Wicked Witch has managed to rebuild a fifty-person studio. This makes them one of the largest companies in the new ecology. Successful titles include *Catapult King* (2012), released for both Android and iOS devices. Wicked Witch has also released *Whac-a-Mole* (2014) for Mattel, a conversion of the classic arcade game for Apple devices, and *Jet Run: City Defender* (2014), a free-to-play game with in-app monetization, for iOS and Google Play. Wicked Witch CEO Daniel Visser observed that in his opinion the free-to-play model was becoming “a race to the bottom that is so intense that we’re going to end up paying people to play our games.” Free-to-play is becoming such a crowded market, with such great potential for destruction of value, that developers need to explore other models, including premium payment titles for mobile platforms.

Melbourne-based League of Geeks exemplifies such an approach. League of Geeks is not banking on chasing the mobile free-to-play market. Since 2011, this group of developers, including designers, programmers, and artists, have come together to make *Armello* (2015), a game they describe as “a swashbuckling
adventure that combines RPG elements with the strategic play of card and board games, creating a personal, story fuelled experience.”

Structured as a core creative team of four directors and a loose coalition of programmers and artists who contribute collaboratively to the project, they are located in the Arcade in inner-city Melbourne, a game development space shared with other companies that has the look and feel of a creative start-up and is supported by the Victorian government. League of Geeks garnered attention in 2014, when they raised $305,000 from Kickstarter to keep the Armello project progressing. Director Trent Kusters describes League of Geeks as a game development collective rather than a formal studio. Kusters left the Australian industry in 2011–2012 to seek work overseas. He said that through this period he felt “disenfranchised” by the big studio developer culture. He worried that in such an environment he could end up being “a little cog in a big wheel, tweaking combat timings on some NPC for, you know, some multimillion dollar game.” In contrast to Wicked Witch, Kusters emphasized the importance of developing original IP, saying that fee-for-service work was “like quicksand.” Unlike Australian developers who retain some fee-for-service work to balance the risks associated with an original-IP-only approach, Kusters believes relying too much on fee-for-service can compromise a studio’s ability and commitment to create original IP.

The game development engine Unity was becoming widely available by the late 2000s, offering low-cost but high-quality technology for making games. Combined with digital distribution opportunities through the App Store and Steam, this radically changed the possibilities for making and releasing games. Kusters noted the emergence of online indie developer communities using productivity tools to manage distributed collaborations among teams around the world. Armello relied on a distributed network of developers that Kusters sees as exemplifying his vision of a game developer collective. Some developers were engaged through a points-based system in which they would receive a cut of the profit from Armello based on their contribution to the project. Others worked on the project through an arrangement that combined points with contracted and paid employment. Armello also raised funds to continue development through Kickstarter, but both national and state government funding was critical to Armello’s viability. League of Geeks plans to release Armello as a premium title rather than pursuing a free-to-play approach with in-game monetization. This model of indie development, Kusters says, is about “adapting to the current climate. . . . The market completely shifts underneath us all the time. We just have to be agile. We just have to do what we need to do, and that’s basically how we came up with the model . . . that doesn’t require us to have cash.” This is a business model that marshals government backing, deferred points-based payment systems, and crowdfunding to underwrite passionately conceived games that depend on innovation, reputation, and point-of-difference from most standard mobile games product.
Sharing office space in the Arcade complex with League of Geeks, Voxel Agents (a small studio of five or six employees) pursues the opportunities of original IP and free-to-play game releases for mobile devices with successful titles like the *Train Conductor* (2009) series and *Puzzle Retreat* (2013). Voxel Agents is tackling the shift toward games-as-service, which requires regular content updates and the use of metrics and data analytics to respond to player behavior. Voxel's Simon Joslin noted the value of working in a collaborative space such as the Arcade, which permits both formal and informal sharing of knowledge and experience about the rapidly changing video games market.\(^5\) This includes access to small specialist firms, such as Surprise Attack, which offers consulting services to developers as they seek to develop effective business models that embrace the demands of games-as-service, particularly expertise in game monetization and effective use of data analytics. Both state and national government support for business development was critical as they experimented with various approaches to the games-as-service model. Joslin noted that while the shift to original IP provided greater creative control, changing business models to games-as-service, especially free-to-play games like *Candy Crush Saga* (2012), may compromise the craft of making quality game experiences. He worried—as did other developers—that many of the monetization strategies associated with in-app game purchases relied on mechanics that may be addictive. He discussed the ethical and craft implications of free-to-play: "It’s a complex question, a gray area. . . . There are points where I’ve played games and I feel that’s the wrong way to do it. . . . I wouldn’t feel comfortable doing that to my players.”\(^6\) He talked about the steep challenge of adapting existing game design knowledge and skills to create engaging and compelling free-to-play titles while making effective use of metrics and analytics.

So far, with the exception of Wicked Witch, we have emphasized GDAA-defined indies in this survey of the precarious but widening range of business models and company and developer identities. But some U.S. company presence remains in the country. Kixeye, situated in Brisbane with a staff of some fifty to sixty, manages the distance from centers of developer culture by being a wholly owned subsidiary of San Francisco–based Kixeye, a developer of online browser-based strategy and combat games, such as *Battle Pirates* (2011), *War Commander* (2011), and *VEGA Conflict* (2013). The studio director, George Fidler, a veteran of the industry, emphasized the fundamental challenge of shifting from a work-for-hire and games-as-product model to a games-as-service market environment.\(^7\) He suggested that while the fundamental skills of programming, art, and good design were still crucial, new skill sets and expertise in digital retail now needed to be integrated into the production process and studio culture. Australian development studios still lacked the skills crucial to successfully making the shift to games-as-service. Fidler commented that the work-for-hire origins of many Australian studios and developers meant that they perhaps had not gained the market discipline
of focusing on a core competency or a core market. Speaking of the games-as-service shift, Fidler concluded that for Australian developers, “it’d been tough to create those kinds of games early in the cycle, because the expertise simply wasn’t there.” By expertise, he clarified the product manager and producer skills required to combine and balance retention, monetization, and engagement: “We’ve got thousands of game designers in Australia. No problem at all, but we have very, very few experienced product managers, and that’s meant most of the attempts have fizzled out, because if you think of the build-measure-learn cycle, we built, we didn’t quite know what we were measuring, and we learned nothing.”

**PRECARIOUSNESS AS A FUNCTION OF POLICY AND INDUSTRY CULTURES**

In the overwhelmingly nonunionized games industry, advocacy for the sector is largely conducted by professional associations, and support is offered through state policies and programs. This section considers the extent to which precariousness is a product of policy, advocacy, and industry self-governance.

A key feature of the games industry is that it is poorly understood by the political class. This is despite its size and growth rates globally dwarfing anything remotely comparable, and is an outstanding example of creative content and use driving technological innovation and take up, not the other way round, as is usually constructed in innovation policy and business strategy. It tends to fall between the three “stools” of cultural policy, industry and innovation policy, while its main interface with the political class and the wider populace is around social and educational policy concerns (violence, game-playing addiction, claims and counterclaims about educational benefits). Inconsistent or nonexistent policy support, particularly compared to other cultural industries, such as film and television, contributes to precariousness. Such policy inconsistency across different countries, as well as policy entrepreneurship or arbitrage between countries in bidding for the services of this high-skill component of the “creative class,” contributes to the hypermobility of games creatives.

In Australia, federal policy and programs supporting the industry had been piecemeal, seeking to fit games into the established cultural template developed over decades for the arts, film, and television. They required developers to articulate game proposals as forms of storytelling to measure the cultural significance of the game. The long march toward a realistic balance between cultural and industry policy for the creative sector was accelerated by the industry transformations of the last five to seven years. Government accepted that very little original IP was being created; that Australian developers were locked into a fee-for-service system; that the country was no longer attractive to licensed IP; and that oversees competitive incentives were “luring” talent away from the country. A significant A$20 million
package was developed, the Australian Interactive Games Fund, whose objectives were to promote industry growth and sustainability, support the development of new intellectual property, encourage skills retention and renewal, and maximize the creative opportunities of fast broadband. With a change of government, however, the initiative was cancelled with only half the money spent.

At a state or provincial level, the policy rationale for support has been equally uneven, with an equal or perhaps even greater impact on precariousness for the labor force. The state of Victoria has been most consistent in its approach to games, which are recognized as a core component of the state’s industrial and employment base in its information and communication technology sector. Effective advocacy for the sector forestalled a cost-cutting attempt to close down support in 2012. Funding and programs in support of the sector are administered through a mainstream screen agency. The approach in Queensland was exclusively industrial and remained positive while the industry was generating jobs as midsize small businesses proliferated in the pre-GFC period. The collapse of several of the larger companies effectively eliminated games from a standard industry development policy logic as pursued within a department of state development and saw the policy focus narrow to a minor part of the screen agency’s remit. Government did little to arrest the collapse of the industry in the state, and has done little since. New South Wales, the most populous state and the one with the largest slice of GDP, had rarely focused policy and program attention on games, leading to the irregular doughnut shape of the industry’s geography. The effect of such policy variability is clear—Victoria has seen strong 15–20 percent growth in each of the last few years, while Queensland has not grown strongly out of the downturn. The mobility and associated uncertainties faced by game workers are often forced on them by the volatility of an industry whose profile with government is equally volatile.

Policy fluctuation and failure contributes to precariousness; so does the industry’s reputation for poor management. Some of its notoriously poor working conditions can be attributed to the immaturity of the industry and the need for self-governance reform. The industry’s still overwhelmingly male-dominated production base needs to change if it is to attract the best talent, improve balance and sustainability, and capture value in a rapidly evolving consumption environment. Women and girls now account for 48 percent of all gamers. The high skew toward men and boys—more than 78 percent in the console core demographic—underlines that women are in the majority in the more casual gaming areas of the market. GDAA survey data for 2014 suggests that, of the approximately eight hundred people now working in the industry, some 26 percent are women, and most of these are programmers and artists. This is beginning to align with the IGDA’s most recent survey results, which report 22 percent women employees globally in September 2014.

Management deficit is by no means confined to gender. Casey O’Donnell’s loving but forensic description of the “secret world of videogame creators” does
not spare the industry. Tacit knowledge has been poorly converted into transferable knowledge. This is a critical shortcoming because the daunting complexity of bringing together engineers, artists, designers, marketers, and managers in intense iteration can lead to crunches, “intense and extended periods of socially mandatory overtime, and a seemingly perpetual start-up environment for game development companies.” There is little industry formalization and representation. Invoking the analytical work of Gina Neff and David Stark, O’Donnell asserts that the industry is in a state of “permanent beta.” Cross-disciplinary collaboration—which causes unremitting creative tension at the level of the firm and poses some of the most challenging project management tasks in contemporary industry practice—is absolutely necessary for the industry’s future. The tendency is for the industry, because of its closed opacity (and, as we have seen, because of its extreme volatility), to continually reinvent the wheel. O’Donnell stresses the great breakthrough by Unity when it made transparent authoring knowledge of great value, for example, for developing country industries.

All of these factors contribute to working cultures and conditions that see 50 percent leave with up to ten years exposure. On the other hand, Australian industry, GDAA claims, is rare in the way it shares knowledge and resources among industry players now that the industry is composed overwhelmingly of indies. This is not typical of companies based in the United States, and was also not common when Australian developers were producing licensed IP, as a result of nondisclosure agreements.

A better articulation of the broader value of the industry to the society and economy can address precariousness. Antony Reed, an industry advocate, asserts that “this industry could make such a huge contribution if only it was understood better.” Advocacy, he argues, should seek to raise awareness of, for example, the value of game design input into health and education; the transferability of games skills into mainstream IT or the burgeoning apps industry; and the highly skilled entrepreneurial games workforce, which any country should seek to retain as part of its creative class. This draws on evidence that uncertainty of work in games is mitigated to some extent by the capacity to work outside the sector (due to the high transferability of skills, particularly of programmers). There is also some evidence that companies and individuals manage precarious original IP development with sourcing licensed IP opportunities within the growing domestic apps industry, so-called serious (edutainment) games, and a small range of domestic purchasers of games products and services (sourcing licensed IP domestically can be more sustainable because it is not subject to currency fluctuation).

**CONCLUSION**

Deuze, Martin, and Allen stress the importance of mapping what they call “gamework”: “the key issues informing and influencing the working lives and
professional identities” of developers in the global computer and video game industry. Deuze and his colleagues were writing at a time when the dominant model involved developers working for large studios making games for publishing conglomerates like Electronic Arts. However, as we have seen in the case of the Australian industry, several options for making games and different workplace models confront developers. Some developers celebrate the creative freedom they experienced following the shift toward producing original IP games for mobile platforms, while others caution about the compromises associated with in-app monetization mechanics. The turmoil transforming the Australian games industry exemplifies precariousness. But it also includes adaptive experimentation in studio culture and associated changes in professional developer identity so as to continue the craft of making games in the midst of uncertainty. Analysts who have been very close to the industry and its developer culture, such as Casey O’Donnell, suggest that the current situation presents an opportunity to recapture the industry’s craft basis, the sustaining heart of the developer culture, stressing that gaming is not just a software industry. Creative destruction in the Australian games industry has been extraordinarily two-edged. As Gina Neff comments in the broader context of creative labor, “The trick for future media and business revolutions will be to find ways to support venture labor, so that innovative and creative jobs can also be stable and good jobs.”

To achieve this, programs designed to support the industry need stability and predictability. Turning the public support spigot on and off according to political whim and policy fashion escalates precariousness. Furthermore, the industry needs better management practices. In addition to providing a more welcoming workplace for women and managing the crunch, it needs to learn how and when to cooperate as well as compete, and how to identify and incorporate new skill sets to deal with “runaway” innovation. Advocacy needs to articulate the wider value of the industry to society and economy, and to emphasize viable career structures within it. Precariousness, we have suggested, is an addressable matter—one that governments, the industry as an associative entity, and those who still make games can work on together.

NOTES
5. Antony Reed, CEO, GDAA, interview with the authors, Melbourne, August 28, 2014.
6. Ibid.
7. Antony Reed, e-mail message to authors, September 30, 2014.
15. The research on which this chapter draws includes semistructured interviews conducted in Q3 2014 by the authors with sixteen developers from eight development studios, as well as with leaders in the games association and in government program support.
19. For a short history, see Banks, “The iPhone as Innovation Platform.”
22. Trent Kusters interview.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Simon Joslin, interview with the authors, August 29, 2014.
26. Ibid.
27. George Fidler, interview with the authors, September 10, 2014.
28. Ibid.
29. The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA), the largest and most established union and industry advocate for Australia’s creative professionals, has no section for games.
32. Queensland, the major northern state, and Victoria, the major southern state, have been the twin centers of the Australian industry; the largest state located between them (New South Wales) has had a smaller proportion of the industry.
36. Ibid., 28.
37. Ibid., 74.
38. Ibid., 161.
39. Antony Reed, interview with the authors, August 28, 2014.