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‘DIY in decline? The survival strategies of contemporary independent musicians in Toronto’

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D.I.Y. in Decline? The Survival Strategies of Contemporary Independent Musicians in Toronto

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Abstract:

Although digital technologies and restructuring in the music industry have furnished musicians with unprecedented levels autonomy and are widely considered emancipatory, the working lives of contemporary independent musicians are fraught with risk and uncertainty. To date, however, little is known about the strategies musicians are developing to overcome the inefficiencies of the 'Do It Yourself' (D.I.Y.) model and mediate the risks associated with the hyper-competitive marketplace. Drawing on 65 interviews, this paper explores the interrelated spatial, organizational and commercial strategies being used by independent musicians in Toronto, Canada.

Introduction

"If you actually want to make a living as an indie musician, it is a tough go. You've got to pretty much do it yourself" – Interview

Since the late-1990's, digital technologies and the rise of entertainment alternatives such as DVDs, video games, cell phones and the Internet have radically altered the North American music industry. To date, geographers have examined the rise of file-sharing, the so-called 'MP3 Crisis' and the implications for major record labels, music retailers and recording studios (Connell and Gibson 2003; Fox 2005; Power and Hallencreutz 2007; Hracs 2012; Leyshon 2014; Watson 2014). However, less is known about the impact of industrial restructuring on the working lives of musicians. Consider, for example, that inexpensive computers, software and

equipment have democratized the production of music by allowing recording, editing, mixing and mastering to be performed in home studios instead of capital-intensive recording studios (Young and Collins 2010; Watson 2014). Digital technologies and online retail spaces have also allowed musicians to enter the world of marketing, fundraising and distribution for the first time. Using the Internet, independent musicians can cheaply and easily set up websites and social media platforms to engage with their fans/consumers directly and to promote and distribute digitally recorded music tracks in MP3 format. This has resulted in lower entry barriers and less dependence on major record labels and the established centers of music production such as Los Angeles and London. Beyond creating a new geography of music production, digital technologies have transformed the traditionally niche 'Do It Yourself' (D.I.Y.) model from a punk-inspired alternative to the dominant organizational form for up-and-coming musicians (Spencer 2008; Hracs 2015). In Canada, for example, 95% of all musicians are not affiliated with either major or independent record labels (CIRAA 2010). Instead they operate as entrepreneurs who are individually responsible for the growing range of creative and non-creative tasks, including music writing and recording, but also fundraising, marketing, communication and booking tours.

This transition has furnished musicians with unprecedented opportunites, freedom and control over how and where they work. In practice, however, the demands of independent music production, the inefficiencies of the D.I.Y. model and intense competition in the marketplace serve to constrain this freedom. As musicians de-specialize, multi-task and spend less time making music they suffer from what McRobbie (2002) has termed the 'corrosion of creativity.' This trend is exacerbated by the rising cost of space in many large cities and the declining value

of music in the digital age which squeezes traditionally low incomes and increases the need to take on debt and multiple jobs (Hracs et al. 2011).

This paper draws on a case study of independent musicians in Toronto to explore the interrelated spatial, organizational and commercial strategies that some musicians are developing to overcome the inefficiencies of the D.I.Y. model and mediate the risks associated with the global and hyper-competitive marketplace. After outlining the research methods and situating the case of Toronto, the paper demonstrates that independent musicians are exchanging their bohemian identities and spatial preferences for professional personas and banal live/work spaces in Toronto's suburbs. Organizationally, it argues that musicians are shifting their networking practices from traditional social networking to what Grabher and Ibert (2006) call 'connectivity' networking. This shift relates to the strategic decision by some musicians to move beyond the constraints of the D.I.Y. model by 'getting help' from a range of skilled collaborators and intermediaries. The paper also highlights how musicians are fusing sonic and visual styles and harnessing the construct of 'exclusivity' to generate, distinction, value and loyalty in the crowded marketplace. Ultimately, this paper contributes to existing literature on music, creative entrepreneurship and geography in the digital age.

Research Design

The analysis presented in this paper is based on 65 interviews conducted in Toronto. Using a purposive sampling strategy, 51 independent musicians were asked about their employment experiences. The sample also includes 14 interviews with key informants who work in the Toronto music industry as educators, producers, studio owners, managers, union representatives, government employees and executives at major and independent record labels. These individuals

provided invaluable information about the broader context of industrial restructuring within the music industry and the challenges associated with contemporary independent music production. To get a broad cross-section of experiences and opinions, the respondents varied by age, gender, level of education, genre, and career stage. The location of these interviews included 'third spaces' such as coffee shops, home studios, offices, performance venues, recording studios and music stores. The diversity of these locations is noteworthy because it afforded the opportunity to observe the range of spatial environments where independent musicians live and work. The interviews, which lasted an average of 75 minutes, were recorded with the consent of the participants and coded thematically. Verbatim quotations are used throughout the paper to demonstrate how participants expressed meanings and experiences in their own words.

Place Matters: Profiling the Toronto Case

Regardless of where musicians choose to live and work, the demands and challenges associated with independent music production are arguably universal. Yet, as the literature asserts, specific places are not mere containers of economic activities. Rather, local conditions shape the way work is rationalized, practiced and experienced (Vinodrai 2013). This section provides some context about Toronto and highlights specific local conditions that influence the experiences and strategies of musicians.

Toronto has long been recognized as the largest and most diverse music center in Canada. The city is home to several important educational and performance institutions, all of the major Canadian record labels and features the largest number of recording studios and performance venues in the country. Given its size and infrastructure, Toronto supports a diverse array of genres, including jazz, classical, blues, rock, pop, country, hip hop, electronic and punk (Berman

2009). Toronto has also developed a strong reputation as 'the place to be' for established and aspiring musicians who continue to migrate from smaller regional centers across the country (Hracs et al. 2011). In Toronto, the specific contours of music-work are shaped by local conditions, including labor market dynamics, cost of living and institutional supports. Although Toronto supports the country's largest number of music venues, live music competes for consumption dollars with the city's diverse range of other cultural and entertainment choices including theatre, restaurants, sports and nightclubs. Toronto has a static number of performance venues and a steady inflow of ambitious musicians. The market has responded to the surplus labor by driving down the value of live music and the earning potential of musicians. At the same time, the cost of space in Toronto for living, rehearsing and recording is increasing rapidly, especially in the city-center. In contrast to other large Canadian cities, such as Montreal where affordability for lower income students and 'creatives' is regulated through strict rent controls, musicians are more likely to be priced out in Toronto (Cummins-Russell and Rantisi 2011). Moreover, whereas music in Halifax and Montreal enjoys strong government supports and policies, music in Toronto comes second to other more celebrated and unified sectors such as film and fashion. Thus, unlike Halifax and Montreal, where musicians tend to form strong local networks of collaboration and support, Toronto's expensive and highly competitive marketplace pits musicians against one another, individualizes the experience of risk and exacerbates the difficulties of earning a living as an independent musician (Hracs et al. 2011).

Moving Beyond Bohemia: The Spatial Strategies of Independent Musicians

"You can make music from anywhere" - Interview

How do independent musicians in Toronto achieve their primary goal of making a sustainable living from music? My findings suggest that some musicians in Toronto are becoming more disciplined and professionalized (working harder) and becoming more strategic and specialized (working smarter) (Hracs 2015). As subsequent sections will demonstrate, professionalization entails abandoning bohemian practices, such as 'hanging out' in cafes. It also means taking advantage of spatial freedom, optimizing locational choices according to a range of factors and literally moving beyond the bohemian spaces in Toronto's downtown core (Hracs 2009).

Despite the well-established body of literature which suggests that musicians, and other creatives, are attracted to a common set of urban aesthetics, some musicians in Toronto are becoming disenchanted with bohemian living (Bain 2003; Lloyd 2006). For these musicians, the allure of inhabiting decaying urban frontiers is wearing off - if it ever existed - and the grit, danger and isolation of bohemian spaces are cited as 'push' factors. As one musician explained: "I would rather live in a safer or nicer area than right where the scene is if it's really run down or dangerous." Musicians also reported that too much 'buzz' was a hindrance to productivity and the creative process. In the era of digitally-driven independent music production the free time once available to experiment creatively and indulge in the 'rock star' lifestyle has been lost. As a consequence, professionalizing musicians in Toronto spoke of the danger of being sucked into activities that, in such a competitive climate, might derail their career goals. As one musician, who saw his fledgling music career thwarted by a 'rock-star fantasy' and cocaine addiction put it: "There is a partying lifestyle that comes with being a musician in a band…There is late night stuff, drinking, drugs…you can get sucked into the party atmosphere as an entertainer…I fell victim to it."

In addition to the negative externalities associated with local buzz, other factors including rising rents, overcrowding, competition and changing preferences are pushing serious musicians out of Toronto's downtown core. As one musician explained: "When areas with lots of artists become vibrant, just like Queen Street (inner city bohemian quarter), they become popular and suddenly the artists can't afford it anymore because the prices go up." But their flight from these spaces is not random. Indeed, a range of 'pull' factors including more affordable and music-friendly space, better employment opportunities, greater control over their work/life balance and isolation from career sabotaging temptations are attracting musicians to banal spaces in the inner and outer suburbs of Toronto.

As many of my participants complained about the costs of independent, finding cheap or even free space emerged as the most prominent pull factor for musicians. As one respondent put it: "Proximity is great, but it has to be economically feasible." Moreover, as some of these musicians leave Toronto on tour for long stretches during the year a further goal was to avoid paying high rents for unused space. The strategy of this musician was to move out of the bohemian inner city neighborhood of Queen West and relocate to Oakville, a suburban community within easy commuting range:

> I used to live in Queen West, but in January I moved home with my parents, because I spend most of January and February on the road. I'm going to be gone for most of May, so I need to save money and stuff like that. So I've been commuting back and forth from Toronto to Oakville.

Musicians also reported being attracted to suburban spaces because the built form is flexible and more conducive to the creative process. In addition to needing enough space to store their equipment and hold rehearsals, musicians also need to be able to make noise, often outside of the 9-5 work day. As one musician recalled: "In an urban environment there have been times where I practiced late at night out of necessity and I had neighbors and people knocking on my

door complaining about the noise." Interestingly, musicians also require silence to create and recharge from their hectic schedules. For these reasons some musicians prefer larger more isolated spaces in the suburbs to small, crowded apartments in the city with sleeping neighbors next door. This musician, moved to the outer suburbs to make noise and concentrate on the creative process in complete silence:

> In an ideal world I would have an apartment with a studio (in the downtown core) and I would practice in my pyjamas at 11:30 at night. But that is not possible in the city. But here is the twist. As a musician I make a lot of noise, which is bad enough, but I also need to live somewhere where there isn't a lot of noise, because I can't be creative with that noise. I need that silence to be effective and to focus on what I'm doing. I also need the peace and quiet just to rejuvenate myself from the stress of my working life…So where can I actually live to accommodate my needs? The only place is where I live now in the outer suburbs.

Perhaps even more important than the ability to facilitate the creative process and provide affordable and flexible space, Toronto's suburbs allow struggling musicians to sustain their creative passions by providing better employment opportunities. In Toronto's downtown core the oversupply of musicians drives down the value of live music and many musicians end up playing for free or worse, paying to get on stage. As this musician explained, however, playing shows in the outer suburbs and smaller towns in the periphery often generates better attendance and pay because the market is less saturated with musicians and entertainment alternatives:

> The music scene in the slightly less populated areas north of the city is getting to be really good…kids have less to do and there are fewer entertainment options for them. In Toronto there are a million things to do so if there is a live band those kids are gonna go and you can sell tickets easier. The highest turnouts to any of our shows have all been in Newmarket and Keswick (both outer suburbs of Toronto)

Another key finding is that 'just-in-time' access to specific spaces (studios), activities (performing) and people (collaborators) is more important than permanent proximity. As this musician argued: "You can live wherever as long as you can get to things. I have lived in five different neighborhoods in Toronto and if I need to go to a specific space, I go to that space."

As independent musicians professionalize they become more strategic and rational about where they live and work. As this respondent asserted: “In a capitalist economy it is not a viable expectation for musicians to be able to expect to live in a subsidized environment where they don't have to deal with market forces.” Based on their own unique criteria, musicians try to achieve the optimum balance between a range of factors including the affordability, accessibility and music-friendliness of the physical space and crucially the availability of paid work.

Collaborating…With the Right People: The Organizational Strategies of Independent Musicians

“It is a full-time job but only about 10% actually involves music” – Interview

In Toronto, it is easy to form a band and dabble in basic tasks such as performing and recording music but becoming a self-sufficient business entity requires mastering advanced functions such as financing, distribution, merchandising, public relations, marketing and branding. During my fieldwork it became clear that digitally-driven D.I.Y. is an inefficient system that makes reaching a sustainable level of creative and economic success difficult. Beyond the sheer number of demands imposed on independent musicians, the typical work-day is chopped up into tasks which are often spread across space. As a result, musicians struggle to find the time to write new songs, maintain their online storefront, apply for grants, book shows and promote their products. Several respondents complained about the creative conundrum in which they struggle to allocate their time and energy to creative and non-creative tasks and end up with mediocre results on both fronts. This section highlights the ways in which some musicians are reconfiguring their organizational approaches.

According to Scott (2006) the competitive pressures of capitalism force firms to continually revitalize their core competencies in the search for production and marketing

advantages. To do this firms observe and appropriate knowledge and strategies from other co-located firms and create their own internal solutions through a ‘learn-by-doing’ process. As entrepreneurs, independent musicians also have the freedom to evaluate and reconfigure ineffective organizational models. To overcome the main limitations of the D.I.Y. model some musicians are developing new ways to refocus on being creative while still completing all of their other tasks. In so doing, they are changing the way they practice networking and organizing their operations.

The existing literature on the networking practices of individuals in the creative industries suggests that social networking - cultivating weak ties through face-to-face interaction - is the best way to access local buzz, find sources of paid work and mediate risk (Christopherson 2002; Grabher and Ibert 2006). In his study of Wicker Park, Chicago in the 1990’s Lloyd (2006) describes artists as spending long hours working and ‘hanging out’ in coffee shops waiting for the lightning bolts of inspiration or a meaningful collaborative opportunity to organically materialize. Although my interviews confirm that coffee shops and third spaces remain popular cites of interaction for musicians in Toronto, several respondents explained the need to become more efficient with their time by strategically scheduling interactions and agendas. As this musician put it: “We are so busy that we actually book meetings just to see each other. We might meet at places like this coffee shop, where there is Internet access, to work on our websites or promotion.”

In creative industries such as new media, advertising and publishing social networking is vital to securing short-term contracts and projects. But for musicians in Toronto there is a lack of paid work and they have realised that every minute spent fruitlessly networking is time not spent on other tasks. As a result, the value (and practice) of social networking is declining. As one

musician argues: “It is difficult to balance everything and although networking is important…if I don’t take time to practice and be good at what I do…then nobody is going to hire me anyway…These are economic decisions and everybody does informal cost-benefit calculations.”

These calculations have also resulted in a strategic solution to the inefficiency of the D.I.Y. model. Rather than hanging out with musicians who have redundant skills, and are often viewed as competitors, some musicians in Toronto are shifting to what Grabher and Ibert (2006) call ‘connectivity’ networking. This entails ‘getting help’ with the range of creative and non-creative tasks from collaborators with complementary skill-sets including publicists, fashion designers, artists and managers (Hracs 2015). For example, to complete important tasks, which required skills she lacked, this musician contacted a web designer and a photographer: “I definitely have been involved with some collaborations, for my website, and photographs for the website and press kit” Or as this musician explains:

> I have recently paid a manager for specific services. I have my own little time and money equation in my head, so it made sense for me to hire somebody to do some work for me. He does specific things like book shows or business planning. He is more experienced and efficient with these things than I am. Plus it looks more professional to have somebody call on your behalf.

Connectivity networking also implies a shift to ‘just-in-time’ interactions through virtual channels instead of face-to-face encounters in coffee shops, bars and other third spaces. As this music industry insider argues: “You don't have to necessarily be in physical proximity…There is the virtual component of message boards, blogs and file sharing.” Musicians use these virtual spaces, and increasingly social media, to promote their shows, interact with fans/consumers, recruit new collaborators, learn about music-related tasks, buy and sell equipment and to distribute their music-related products. Virtual channels of communication also allow musicians

to connect asynchronously and work when gaps in their hectic schedules appear. As this musician explained:

> Networking has changed so much. It happens on the Internet. Everyone has got a Facebook page and who knows what else and you work a lot in that forum. That's where the hanging out happens… It is much more strategic… An enormous piece of my schedule is coming home from gigs at 12 or 2 in the morning and spending an hour on the computer answering emails because that is when I have the time. Now I've got an iPhone and I can do it on a break during the gig.

Although virtual spaces allow musicians to network and collaborate with individuals located anywhere in the world, there is still a strong preference and propensity for locally rooted relationships. As one musician argued:

> You can easily make a record with somebody in Australia without actually seeing each other these days, and that kind of thing happens. But most collaborations are project-specific and local. It's not just chatting with people all over the world for the sake of it.

Far from becoming 'flat' the specificity of the 'local' remains crucial because musicians can only borrow equipment from people within physical proximity or learn about government grants from people who understand the local institutional landscape. In this way interactions in virtual spaces are not replacing face-to-face interaction but rather facilitating and extending the shift toward connectivity networking. Indeed, as this musician asserted: "There is a generous overlap between the local physical community and the local electronic community."

Changing networking practices underpin the shift toward re-specialization and the re-configuration of the D.I.Y. model (Hracs 2015). In exactly the same way that firms identify their core strengths and outsource functions that others can do cheaper, faster and better, some musicians are getting help from a range of skilled specialists and free laborers. Interestingly, these helpers can be compensated in different ways depending on career stage and financial resources. Indeed, 'helpers' can be equal partners, scene members who exchange services through bartering or contractors who are simply hired to perform tasks for a fee (Hauge and

Hracs 2010). Given their limited economic resources, musicians also make extensive use of free labor from family members, fans and pseudo creatives/hipsters who volunteer on creative projects to earn social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984).

As the size of the team and organizational complexity of the enterprise grows, musicians run the risk of allocating too much of their time and energy to project management. Interestingly, I found that musicians who reach this conundrum apply the same logic and simply outsource management tasks, which are becoming more available in affordable a la cart packages. Services, including business planning and project coordination, are being provided by pioneering managers who work freelance in Toronto's creative sector after losing their industry jobs during the 'MP3 Crisis' (Hracs 2015). But beyond choosing where and how to work the biggest challenge facing indie musicians is making enough money to support their creative vision and avoid taking on additional jobs.

Embracing Enterprise: The Commercial Strategies of Independent Musicians

"The best thing about technology is that now anyone can make music but the worst thing is that now anyone can make music" – Interview

Digital technologies, global integration and broader restructuring have altered the way music-related goods, services and experiences are produced, curated, promoted, distributed, valued and consumed. In the early 2000's illegal downloading and the 'MP3 Crisis' reduced the value of recorded music. As one key informant put it: "Now we have an entire generation that is used to not paying for music." At the same time declining entry barriers and the rise of digitally-driven D.I.Y. created fierce competition and market saturation. Consider, for example, that Apple's iTunes music store offers over 37 millions songs. Together, the 'dilemma of democratization' curtails the ability of independent musicians to market and monetise their creative content (Hracs

et al. 2013). Moreover, whereas music once enjoyed a privileged position atop the entertainment pyramid, consumers can now choose to spend their time, money and attention on a greater range of alternatives such as video games, social media, cell phones and the Internet itself (Hracs 2012). Thus, beyond the struggle to produce music and complete tasks, independent musicians struggle to stand out in the crowded marketplace, and more specifically, to generate distinction, value and loyalty (Hracs et al. 2013). This section will outline some of the strategies musicians are using to enhance their live shows, sell recorded music and interact with fans/consumers.

Whereas live shows used to promote the sale of recorded music, MP3s and CDs are now often given away to promote shows which have become the dominant revenue stream for independent musicians (Young and Collins 2010). In Toronto, however, the market for live music has become saturated due to a steady inflow of musicians and a static number of venues (Hracs et al. 2011). As musicians (and venue owners) realise that the originality of individual songs and quality of musicianship is no longer sufficient to attract paying fans/consumers some musicians are trying to stand out by crafting unique visual styles that work in tandem with their sonic styles. As one musician put it: "[Musicians] are not playing behind a wall. They are on stage and people are looking at them. Every little thing, it is so visual…People need an image, you can sell an image." And this musician added: "We wear different outfits for every show and we want people to keep coming back to see you what we're wearing this time."

Although the D.I.Y. model requires musicians to develop visual campaigns and clothing on their own, many musicians lack the creative and technical expertise. Thus, strategic musicians use connectivity networking to get help from artists, photographers and above all fashion designers. As this musician explained: "Fashion is an area that I am constantly involved in

because it is important. I teamed up with this designer and she made clothes for me for a while…I found her through social media."

Interestingly, although the fashion designers may be friends, scene members or simply contracted, their 'help' is almost always described as a favor. As this musician explained: "Audiences are becoming more sceptical and are able to smell bullshit from a mile away. So [on stage] I would say 'do you like my outfit? It's by my friend so-and-so.' Or 'look at what my friend made,' or 'this is a test outfit what do you think?'...So I'll just try to be genuine." This example demonstrates how musicians shrewdly invoke the same bohemian ethic that they have abandoned to guard against accusations of 'selling out.' Indeed, independent musicians and fashion designers need to brand and collaborate to compete but they also need to disguise these strategies to make it appear unplanned, organic and authentic because 'trying too hard' is not cool.

To enhance the value of their goods musicians use the constructed concept of exclusivity (Hracs et al. 2013). As Simmel observed in The Philosophy of Money ([1900] 1978), consumers desire objects that are not merely given but attained by the conquest of distance, obstacles and difficulties. While global producers use technology to make consuming easier than ever, some musicians are strategically restricting supply and access in order to turn their inability to afford larger production runs and mass distribution into a source of symbolic value. For example, musicians produce handcrafted albums that feature hand-painted artwork, photographs of the band, poetry, individual numbering, and handwritten thank-you cards. These albums are marketed as unique products that contain layers of value that are not offered by digital downloads or mass-produced CDs. As one respondent explained:

> It ends up being a package that you wouldn't normally see. It is not a mass-produced package and with all of the handcrafted detail we only issue about 300 units. We take it on

> the road and sell it for [CAD] $25 instead of $15 so we are selling them for a premium…People start saying 'I was one of the few to snag this new cool album.'

Just as the literature suggests, musicians have realized that consumers will pay more for products that they perceive to be exclusive and unique because finding and obtaining such products requires high levels of cultural, social and economic capital which puts consumers in select company (Bourdieu 1984; Shipman 2004; Hracs et al 2013).

Despite finding ways to enhance the symbolic value of their live shows and recorded music, strategic musicians understand, like many firms, that building and maintaining a positive and trusting relationship with their fan/consumer base is vital. Yet, in the contemporary era where infinite consumer choice, inauthentic marketing and ephemeral interactions pervade, capturing the attention of consumers and their loyalty is difficult, especially with limited economic resources.

To overcome this challenge some musicians are adding 'members only' portals to their websites to attract, reward, and stay connected with fans/consumers. In Toronto, musicians offer members the experience of previewing new material (songs, videos, live shows, photos, contests) before it is officially released to the public and provide access to exclusive 'members only' content (rare demos, behind the scenes footage and photos, private performances). According to Choi and Burnes (2013) fans/consumers value participating in these online communities because they enhance their sense of identity. Beyond exclusive content, however, fans/consumers seek interaction with musicians. As one respondent explained: "Fans want that experience. I think people are craving the human touch and that's what they can't get in a digital download. They want that human interaction. They want a piece of the artist as well."

To accommodate this demand, some musicians are developing on-going relationships that generate value through personalization, trust, loyalty and repeat business. Musicians were early

adopters of social media. By 2007, for example, 80 per cent of all musicians maintained a MySpace page (Antin and Earp 2010). Yet, with modern social media applications, such as Facebook and Twitter, musicians can engage directly with fans/consumers on increasingly personal levels and the relationship between these groups is becoming blurred. Many of the musicians in my sample have established online blogs and forums through which they invite selected fans/consumers to experience and participate in their creative endeavors, businesses and private lives. Although developing online personas, constantly updating creative and personal content and answering on-going correspondences with fans/consumers is demanding, my research suggests that 'creating conversations' and making 'meaningful emotional connections' is crucial to building a stable client base and surviving the volatile marketplace (Hracs and Leslie 2014).

Conclusion

As the contemporary marketplace for music continues to evolve this paper contributes to our understanding of digitally-driven independent music production. At a time of ongoing industrial crisis, global competition, market volatility, the corrosion of creativity and pessimism about the precarious working lives of musicians, and 'creatives' more broadly, this paper highlighted how some independent musicians in Toronto are re-writing the rules of the game. Overall, it argued that as entrepreneurs, musicians are professionalizing (working harder) and becoming more strategic (working smarter). Crucially, this has meant abandoning bohemian lifestyles and embracing enterprise. More specifically, the paper demonstrated that musicians are exercising their newfound spatial freedom and relocating from Toronto's downtown core to spaces in the inner and outer suburbs that are more affordable and conducive to the creative process.

Organizationally, musicians are forgoing traditional social networking in favor of 'just-in-time connectivity networking.' This shift facilitates the re-configuration of the D.I.Y. model by allowing musicians to re-specialize on making music while 'getting help' from a diverse range of collaborators. The paper also explored some of the innovative commercial strategies that independent musicians are using to market and monetize their products in the increasingly competitive and global marketplace. Specific examples included the strategic fusion of sonic and visual styles to enhance their live performances and harnessing the construct of exclusivity to generate value, distinction and loyalty.

Before concluding it is important to raise two caveats. First, despite their promise there is a danger of romanticizing the transformative potential of these strategies. For although they can improve the working lives of those who develop and adopt them, independent musicians still face a battery of risks and challenges including self-exploitation, temporal and spatial fragmentation and extremely uncertain and low incomes. Moreover, the strategies themselves can bring new hardships. For example, whereas websites and social media enable independent musicians to establish relationships with fans/consumers, build brand loyalty, crowd source creative ideas and secure funding for new projects (using sites such as 'Kickstarter'), these activities are time-consuming and require investments of aesthetic labor which create new risks and barriers to creativity (Hracs and Leslie 2014). Therefore, although working harder and working smarter may help independent musicians realize their creative freedom and become economically self-sufficient the majority are destined to fail (Banks 2007).

Second, it is important to acknowledge the role that local conditions in Toronto have played in driving the development of these strategies and to refrain from speculating about other markets without empirical evidence (Vinodrai 2013). Indeed, whereas intense competition within

Toronto forces its musicians to develop innovative strategies and the city's creative field possesses the right mix of spaces, collaborators and market dynamics to underpin them, this is not the case in other Canadian music scenes such as Halifax and most likely those in other countries around the world (Hracs et al. 2011). Therefore, future research should examine the evolution and diffusion of these strategies across space and the extent to which they are effective in helping independent musicians to reach their career goals over time.

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