Music as Immaterial Labour:

SoundCloud and the Changing Working Conditions of Independent Musicians

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Contents

Abstract

With the traditional recording industry experiencing a period of relative uncertainty, there are new opportunities for independent musicians to reach new audiences and establish a career. SoundCloud, a web platform that allows user to upload and share their music, represents one of the most significant instances of newfound musical opportunity. However, despite a rhetoric lauding the potential of such technology to democratize music making, platforms like SoundCloud are also indicative of the changing conditions of contemporary musical labour. Indeed, they demonstrate the new skills and working habits required to succeed in a competitive labour market. Under these new conditions, musicians must perform work that would have previously been carried out by intermediary figures and become increasingly self-reliant without the support of previously existing industry institutions. Consequently, musical labour begins to take on the qualities of post-Fordism, and work on SoundCloud in particular comes to resemble immaterial labour. In order to demonstrate this shift and its negative implications for musicians, I will conduct a historical overview of music labour so as to establish that contemporary circumstances represent a significant departure from the practices that characterized twentieth century music making. I will then employ theories of post-Fordism and immaterial labour to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the novel qualities of musical work. Finally, in my case study of SoundCloud, I will examine user experiences to demonstrate that this immaterial musical labour in effect normalizes a host of new working practices with associated risks of exploitation and precarity. Through this analysis, I aim to problematize these new sites of musical labour and establish the dangers that musicians may face in using them, as well as propose that truly emancipatory conditions for artists require institutions of mutual aid rather than tools that promote individual success and self-realization.

Résumé

Tandis que l'industrie du disque connait une période d'incertitude, plusieurs musiciens indépendants semblent pouvoir profiter de nouvelles ressources pour trouver des auditeurs et établir une carrière. SoundCloud, un site web qui permet aux utilisateurs de télécharger leur musique vers un server et ensuite la partager en ligne, est un des outils les plus populaires disponibles en ce moment. Cependant, même si ce genre de site est supposé améliorer l'accès à une carrière musicale, en réalité SoundCloud indique le changement des conditions de travail des musiciens contemporains et l'exigence de nouvelles compétences et d'habitudes de travail pour réussir dans un marché du travail compétitif. Les musiciens doivent donc compléter des tâches qui dans le passé auraient été la responsabilité d'un intermédiaire pour devenir de plus en plus autonomes sans le soutien des institutions de l'industrie. Par conséquent, le travail musical commence à manifester les qualités du post-fordisme et le travail sur SoundCloud en particulier devient une forme de travail immatériel. Pour démontrer cette évolution, j'effectuerai un aperçu historique du travail musical pour prouver que les conditions contemporaines de ce travail ont beaucoup changé relativement à celles du vingtième siècle. Par la suite, je vais employer les théories du post-fordisme et le travail immatériel pour mieux expliquer ces nouvelles conditions de travail. Pour terminer, je vais entreprendre une étude de cas sur le travail musical effectué sur SoundCloud. En considérant les expériences des utilisateurs, je démontrerai que le travail immatériel des musiciens sur le site normalise des pratiques associées à un risque accru d'exploitation et de précarité. Le but de cette analyse est de problématiser ces nouveaux sites musicaux et de dévoiler leurs dangers associés, ainsi que de suggérer la nécessité d'institutions d'aide mutuel au lieu des outils basés sur la réussite individuelle et la réalisation de soi, afin de mieux promouvoir des conditions d'émancipation pour les musiciens indépendants.

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Introduction

We find ourselves in a period of unprecedented optimism for many musicians: emboldened by the Internet and new digital technologies, music can be produced cheaply and independently and then shared with a global audience via the Web. With the traditional recording industry struggling in a changing market, new musical distribution platforms have become a vital outlet for independent artists to disseminate and promote their work, as well as a way to build relationships with listeners and peers. At the same time, as the work of being a musician increasingly takes place online, these platforms come to represent not only spaces of sociality but above all sites of labour. Thus, despite obvious gains for working musicians, it is necessary to look at the wider significance of these online music platforms so as to consider the ways in which artists have seen their working conditions radically altered – and not always for the better. Indeed, a closer examination reveals an uneasy affinity with many of the dogmas that define contemporary labour: a growing emphasis on self-management, the ability to multitask using a diverse skill set, and an individualized approach to risk management. While there are a variety of such platforms available to musicians today, SoundCloud represents a particularly viable case study due to its significant popularity and characteristics that set it apart from its competitors.

A Brief Introduction to SoundCloud

Since being founded in 2007 by Alexander Ljung and Eric Wahlforss, SoundCloud has become a key resource for musicians seeking to reach a wider audience and grow their careers. However, it is not the first music platform aimed at helping independent artists: one of the earliest and most noteworthy examples is MP3.com, which launched in November 1997 and was

considered the "[G]eocities for music" of its time;[1] later, the social networking site MySpace, which launched musician profiles on its platform in 2005, became the first significant instance of an online music platform being able to launch an independent artist's career.[2] Even today, SoundCloud is not alone amongst platforms geared towards aspiring musicians, as Bandcamp represents another key resource for independent artists. However, Bandcamp generally operates according to existing retail models: while listeners may stream music on the site, its primary focus is on allowing artists to sell their music (digitally and physically) and retain a larger share of the profits. Conversely, SoundCloud suggests a new model entirely, one oriented towards sharing, networking, and collaboration.

This profoundly social approach stems from the site's creators themselves.[3] Indeed, Ljung describes Wahlforss and himself as "artists" interested in "[developing] tools for creators, [in order to] help them reach fans all over the world."[4] This creators-first approach is a likely a significant contributor to site's success: its monthly listenership has swelled to approximately

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[1] John Alderman, *Sonic Boom: Napster, MP3, and the New Pioneers of Music* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 47–48; Andrew Leyshon et al., "On the Reproduction of the Musical Economy after the Internet," *Media, Culture & Society* 27, no. 2 (2005): 189, doi:10.1177/0163443705050468; Sherman Young and Steve Collins, "A View from the Trenches of Music 2.0," *Popular Music and Society* 33, no. 3 (2010): 342, doi:10.1080/03007760903495634.

[2] Patryk Galuszka, "Netlabels and Democratization of the Recording Industry," *First Monday* 17, no. 7 (July 1, 2012), http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3770; Carey Sargent, "Local Musicians Building Global Audiences," *Information, Communication & Society* 12, no. 4 (2009): 474, doi:10.1080/13691180902857660; Tamás Tófalvy, "'MySpace Bands' and 'Tagging Wars': Conflicts of Genre, Work Ethic and Media Platforms in an Extreme Music Scene," *First Monday* 19, no. 9 (September 2014), accessed March 12, 2015, http://pear.accc.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4354.

[3] Eliot Van Buskirk, "SoundCloud Threatens MySpace as Music Destination for Twitter Era," *Wired*, July 6, 2009, http://www.wired.com/2009/07/soundcloud-threatens-myspace-as-music-destination-for-twitter-era/.

[4] Alex Ljung, "Introducing On SoundCloud, Our New Creator Partner Program," *Soundcloud Blog*, August 21, 2014, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2014/08/21/introducing-on-soundcloud/.

175 million distinct users,[5] while uploaders contribute in the vicinity of 12 hours of audio per minute;[6] perhaps more importantly, these users represent a highly valuable "young and millennial" demographic.[7] Consequently, SoundCloud's valuation now exceeds $1.2 billion as of December 2014.[8] However, a perceived inability to directly profit from this immense popularity has caused some unease among investors. Indeed, SoundCloud's accounts indicate that its revenues for 2012 totaled a mere $13 million, resulting in net losses of $20 million.[9] To reverse this trend, the company has attempted to forge a closer relationship with major record labels;[10] although negotiations have as yet proved fruitless with Universal Music Group and Sony Music Entertainment,[11] SoundCloud signed an agreement with Warner Music Group in November 2014. Warner subsequently gained a 3 to 5 percent stake in the company and also ensured that its artists will receive compensation for their music being played on the platform,[12] which is part of a broader effort to introduce advertising so that artists can begin earning royalties.[13] SoundCloud has been careful to qualify these measures as beneficial for the community and "a step towards

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[5] Ben Sisario, "Popular and Free, SoundCloud Is Now Ready for Ads," *The New York Times*, August 21, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/21/business/media/popular-and-free-soundcloud-is-now-ready-for-ads.html.
[6] Evelyn M. Rusli, Hannah Karp, and Douglas Macmillan, "SoundCloud's Valuation Could Top $1.2 Billion With New Fundraising," *Wall Street Journal*, December 9, 2014, http://blogs.wsj.com/digits/2014/12/09/soundclouds-valuation-could-top-1-2-billion-with-new-fundraising/.
[7] Eric Blattberg, "How SoundCloud Makes It Rain Ad Dollars," *Digiday*, March 4, 2015, http://digiday.com/platforms/soundcloud-makes-rain-ad-dollars/.
[8] Rusli, Karp, and Macmillan, "SoundCloud's Valuation."
[9] Sisario, "Popular and Free."
[10] Rusli, Karp, and Macmillan, "SoundCloud's Valuation Could Top $1.2 Billion With New Fundraising"; Sisario, "Popular and Free, SoundCloud Is Now Ready for Ads."
[11] Nina Ulloa, "SoundCloud's Major Label Negotiations Crumble...," *Digital Music News*, October 10, 2014, http://www.digitalmusicnews.com/permalink/2014/10/10/soundclouds-major-label-negotiations-crumble.
[12] Ben Sisario, "SoundCloud Signs Licensing Deal With Warner Music," *The New York Times*, November 4, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/05/business/media/soundcloud-signs-licensing-deal-with-warner-music.html.
[13] Sisario, "Popular and Free."

building a new creative ecosystem;"[14] nevertheless, suspicions over this rapprochement with the recording industry and the emergence of corporate sponsorship have resulted in growing user discontent.[15] However, despite the erosion of SoundCloud's artist-friendly image, there has yet to be a critique of the platform as a site of musical labour. Such an analysis is particularly pressing given that SoundCloud has increasingly become normalized as an essential tool for musicians.[16]

I therefore propose that the platform is representative of an ongoing shift within the recording industry and the field of musical labour: as opposed to the comparatively rigid structures of the industry during the twentieth century – the record label system, recording contracts, and established channels of artist promotion – SoundCloud demonstrates a new paradigm of flexibility that places key tasks in the hands of artists themselves. SoundCloud is thus indicative of the ways in which musical labour is changing to better fit the conditions of post-Fordism, a political-economic system oriented towards flexibility as a means of maintaining profits under economic uncertainty. Beginning in the 1970s, this post-Fordist reconfiguration has meant a shifting emphasis from material to immaterial labour and an erosion of the divisions

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[14] Clyde Smith, "High [and Low] Points In SoundCloud's Failed Attempts To Communicate With Angry Musicians," *Hypebot*, July 11, 2014, http://www.hypebot.com/hypebot/2014/07/high-and-low-points-in-soundclouds-failed-attempts-to-communicate-with-angry-musicians.html; Eric Wahlforss, "SoundCloud and Copyright: An Overview," *SoundCloud Blog*, December 18, 2014, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2014/12/18/soundcloud-and-copyright-an-overview/.

[15] Clyde Smith, "SoundCloud WTF? Universal Has Direct Access To Pull Tracks Leading To Account Cancellations," *Hypebot*, July 2, 2014, http://www.hypebot.com/hypebot/2014/07/soundcloud-wtf-universal-has-direct-access-to-pull-tracks-leading-to-account-cancellations.html; Nina Ulloa, "SoundCloud Puts Listeners Over Creators with New iPad App," *Digital Music News*, January 29, 2015, http://www.digitalmusicnews.com/permalink/2015/01/29/soundcloud-caters-listeners-creators-new-ipad-app.

[16] Leslie Horn, "How SoundCloud Changed Music Forever," *Gizmodo*, June 16, 2014, http://gizmodo.com/how-soundcloud-changed-music-forever-1588811594.

between work and non-work.[17] As a key body of knowledge on the subject, Italian post-*Operaismo* is fundamental to elucidating this changing nature of work.

Post-*Operaismo* and the Social Factory

Operaismo – which translates roughly as 'workerism' – began around struggles in the factories of northern Italy in the 1960s. However, many *Operaisti* theorists focused on the changing conditions of labour, which meant shifting their attention from the industrial factory to the 'social factory.'[18] Based on feminist theories of reproductive labour, the social factory encompasses the various forms of waged and unwaged labour outside the industrial workplace undertaken by the "socialised worker," whose entire life is suffused by capital.[19] This marked an important break after which theorists falling loosely under the banner of 'post-*Operaismo*' would continue to research the ways in which diverse forms of activity – and, indeed, subjectivity itself – have become productive as so-called 'immaterial labour' under post-Fordism.[20]

I will therefore attempt to understand the changing nature of musical work according to theory established by post-*Operaisti* such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno, Christian Marazzi, Franco "Bifo" Berardi, and Carlo Vercellone; I also

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[17] Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (London: Semiotext(e), 2003), 100–103.
[18] Lucio Castellano et al., "Do You Remember Revolution?," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Michael Hardt and Paolo Virno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 227.
[19] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High Technology Capitalism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 134–6, 158, http://www.fims.uwo.ca/people/faculty/dyerwitheford/.
[20] Marco Boffo, Review of *Ceti Medi Senza Futuro? Scritti, Appunti Sul Lavoro e Altro*, by Sergio Bologna, *Vita Da Freelance. I Lavoratori Della Conoscenza e Il Loro Futuro*, by Sergio Bologna and Dario Banfi, and *Felici e Sfruttati. Capitalismo Digitale Ed Eclissi Del Lavoro*, by Carlo Formenti, *Historical Materialism* 22, no. 3–4 (2014): 426, doi:10.1163/1569206X-12341372.

employ the work of Tiziana Terranova, Matteo Pasquinelli, and Isabell Lorey, whose ideas are influenced by many of these aforementioned figures. I will also include references to writers employing post-*Operaista* theory in their own analyses of immaterial labour, as well as others outside of this lineage in instances where their work is complementary. This framework thus accentuates the novel conditions of exploitation of post-Fordist capitalism: in this sense, I echo Gill and Pratt's emphasis on post-*Operaista* theory as well-suited to an analysis of the changing nature of work and associated "processes of precarization and individualization."[21]

Thesis Outline

I will begin by conducting an overview of the history of musical labour up to the ascendance of the recording industry in the late twentieth century. In so doing, I intend to demonstrate that musical work during this period, while not entirely consonant with Fordism – indeed, not even New York's famous 'Tin Pan Alley' compares to a Taylorist assembly line – can be considered 'pre-post-Fordist' compared to current conditions given the recording industry's structure and musicians' experiences of and responses to precarity. In order to fully unpack the reconfiguration of musical labour, I will continue with an in-depth consideration of post-*Operaismo* theory as it pertains to post-Fordism and immaterial labour. I will thus establish the defining characteristics of these concepts as well as examine their implications for workers. This also requires a discussion of the relation between immaterial labour and the production of subjectivity, workers' experiences of precarity, and forms of exploitation.

I will then proceed with a discussion of contemporary musical labour using SoundCloud as a case study. After presenting the major changes that have occurred in the recording industry

[21] Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt, "In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7–8 (December 1, 2008): 20, doi:10.1177/0263276408097794.

as indicative of a shift to post-Fordism, I will analyze user activity on SoundCloud as a key form of contemporary musical work that bears the defining characteristics of immaterial labour. This analysis will centre on user experiences gleaned from interviews with the platform's 'Premier Partners,' who can be considered representative of the ideal 'successful' SoundCloud user based on their elite status in this invitation-only 'Premier' program. Furthermore, I will attend to the discursive tropes employed on and around SoundCloud using interviews with the site's founders, promotional blog content, and key user resources such as Budi Voogt's *The Soundcloud Bible* (2015), which functions as an unofficial guide for building a successful SoundCloud presence.[22] Throughout my analysis, I will draw attention to conditions of insecurity brought on by heightened flexibility and recount working musicians' experiences of precarity and exploitation so as to draw out the negative implications of immaterial musical labour. In so doing, I aim to problematize the overly positive image of SoundCloud as a benign tool for musician empowerment and demonstrate the need for alternate institutions of musician solidarity as a means of opposing precarious and exploitative working conditions.

[22] Budi Voogt, *The Soundcloud Bible* (Budi Voogt, 2015).

Chapter 1: A Historical Overview of Musical Labour

Prior to a discussion of contemporary circumstances, it is necessary to proceed with a historical survey of musical labour. This will demonstrate that the history of musicianship has largely been one of precarity; however, I intend to elucidate, such precarious circumstances are historically contingent, and a variety of forces and events have shaped the sites and experiences of musical work. This survey will begin from the emergence of the musician as a distinct professional category, but it will nonetheless be primarily focused on the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: this period may be considered particularly tumultuous for working musicians, as significant upheavals of the organization of musical production meant rapidly changing working conditions for musicians of all kinds. Consequently, it will become apparent that, although the particulars are distinct to each historical period, precarious working conditions have been a constant reality for musicians from pre-capitalist times to the present. Moreover, while musicianship remains a distinct form of labour, this history will nevertheless reveal a degree of correspondence between the working experiences of musicians and labourers in general; in this sense, it will reinforce the notion that musical labour is indeed *labour* as such and is necessarily conditioned by the dominant mode of production, and that it remains so in the current historical moment.

At the same time, this chapter will also incorporate a parallel consideration of music technology: this is because the evolution of these technologies is deeply interrelated to the working conditions of musicians, whether it be in their tools of musical production, their sites of performance, or the media which enable the distribution of musical commodities. Speaking of

the changing conditions of American professional musicians in the early twentieth century, James P. Kraft offers this succinct analysis:

> The deployment of new sound technologies into the mainstream of commercial activity transformed the musicians' world, turning a diffused, labor-intensive, artisanal structure into a centralized, capital-intensive, highly mechanized one. Technological change affected wages, working conditions, patterns of hiring, definition of skills, and above all job opportunities. It brought higher incomes and improved standards of living to many, and fortune and fame to a few; but for the majority the change meant dislocation, retracted or lost opportunity, and sustained conflict with management.[23]

However, this is not to suggest a technologically determinist relationship; rather, it is crucial to consider these technologies as products of historically specific socioeconomic conditions and modes of production. Therefore, throughout this discussion, the story of musical work will demonstrate a kind of pendulum motion, with setbacks followed by adjustments to new musical terrains. Nevertheless, the situation Kraft describes, one of seemingly endless uncertainty and vulnerability exacerbated by capitalist enterprise, will prove to be an all too common refrain in the history of musical labour.

The Origins of Music as Labour

Not surprisingly, the development of the musician as a distinct category of work occurred alongside the emergence of the division of labour in general; in the West, its origins can in fact be traced to the travelling players of the medieval period, who themselves descended from itinerant magicians. This nomadic lifestyle has been a source of low esteem for many musicians since this early period: Peter J. Martin suggests that early performers were often viewed with suspicion due to "their unusual occupation, their geographical mobility, and their 'scandalous behaviour,'" and they were thus generally accorded little social prestige. These suspicions towards musicians were so deeply rooted that they in fact lingered into the Industrial

[23] James P. Kraft, *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890-1950* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 2.

revolution.[24] It is also important to note the distinction between these professional musicians and those who practiced music as members of the clergy or aristocracy, as the latter would not perform for compensation. Conversely, musical work during this pre-capitalist period was typically compensated in food or lodging rather than currency.[25]

The emergence of capitalism as the dominant mode of production brought with it sweeping changes in the nature of musical work. Martin suggests that the rise of capitalism, alongside the evolution of Western religious customs, jointly contributed to the long-term rationalization of music, which resulted in the emergence of professional music making and composition as distinct forms of work.[26] As labour in general continued to become more specialized, there was also a relative legitimization of musical work, and payment in money became more commonplace.[27] Accordingly, musical work itself became increasingly specialized, as the slow evolution of instrumentation led musicians to focus on becoming proficient with a single instrument.[28] However, changing forms of employment and compensation would also produce a new set of insecure conditions for professional musicians. Honigsheim notes that while income would now arrive in the form of money, earnings were nevertheless largely irregular depending on one's source of employment, which was frequently short-term and offered little security, as in the case of the sudden resignation or death of a sponsor. Likewise, musicians employed by aristocrats would have to do without payment during times of political instability; so too would payment depend upon a musician's chosen instrument, as those

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[24] Peter J. Martin, *Sounds and Society: Themes in the Sociology of Music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 206.
[25] Paul Honigsheim, *Sociologists and Music: An Introduction to the Study of Music and Society* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 160.
[26] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 224–5.
[27] Honigsheim, *Sociologists and Music*, 161.
[28] Tim Blanning, *The Triumph of Music: The Rise of Composers, Musicians and Their Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 188–9.

proficient with highly sought after instruments could command greater compensation. It must nonetheless be noted that these instruments – which were costly – were rarely provided by city or church employer.[29]

Such persistent difficulties had immediate implications for the social lives of musicians: they frequently found themselves rejected by potential parents-in-law due to their perceived inability to provide for a spouse; this was compounded by the lack of protections available to widows of musicians. These concerns were undoubtedly well founded, as old-age security was non-existent except when arranged informally by a musician's admirers, although such admiration was entirely dependent on one's professional status. Likewise, the availability of pensions varied according to employer, and did not become widespread until the nineteenth century – even then, those available were inferior by the standards of other professions. Consequently, the inherent precarity of musical work necessitated various forms of secondary employment for all but the most prosperous; these could sometimes be found in other musical contexts, but typically had to be non-musical in nature.[30]

Conditions would, however, improve in some respects during the nineteenth century; this was particularly the case for composers, who enjoyed a relatively superior degree of autonomy in their work.[31] This is largely due to the gradual transition from a musical economy supported by patronage to one determined by market relations, in which composers and instrumentalists would come to be regarded as "independent professionals." Such an upheaval was of course in keeping with broader circumstances in a rapidly industrializing Europe: of particular importance was the ascendant bourgeoisie and subsequent rise in musical demand.[32] However, there were also

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[29] Honigsheim, *Sociologists and Music*, 155–63.
[30] Honigsheim, *Sociologists and Music*, 161–5.
[31] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 74.
[32] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 226.

notable increases in musical literacy among the public and a corresponding growth in mass-market music publishing.[33] Indeed, art music – as opposed to more popular forms – came to be regarded as importance for newly wealthy middle classes, as one's presence at concerts served as a demonstration of wealth and distinction; this simultaneously served to exclude lower classes and create a hierarchy of musical taste, thereby cleaving a rigid and enduring distinction between high and low musics.[34] Furthermore, the expansion of the music market resulted in an increased demand for musicians, particularly in England and Wales, from the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century[35], although there is no indication that a rise in jobs corresponded with improved working conditions. Additionally, the ideological shift of the Romantic period increasingly saw the virtuoso musician or composer accorded the status of 'genius.'[36] For Adorno, Beethoven was the composer who most symbolized the shifting conditions of this period, both as a result of his work's embodiment of bourgeois emancipation as well as the composer's own status as a freelance professional.[37] That being said, as Paul Honigsheim notes, although a select few were able to prosper from these new labour conditions with greater social status, "the majority of musicians… either had to live like the petty bourgeoisie or even in abject misery."[38] As later discussions will demonstrate, this scenario – a few prosper as the majority face economic uncertainty – is a recurring theme of musical labour.

Composers were also subject to their own particular assortment of market-based difficulties. While in the past they lamented a certain lack of security – the result of insufficient

[33] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 18–19.
[34] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 229–38.
[35] Ibid., 226–7.
[36] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 95–96.
[37] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 207.
[38] Honigsheim, *Sociologists and Music*, 156.

remuneration and prestige under musical patronage[39] – changing conditions saw work grow ever more unstable.[40] Income was particularly irregular, and largely dependent on finding a willing publisher; this often necessitated minimizing publisher risk through composers' use of subscription lists, which sought to guarantee a certain number of buyers interested in a published composition. Nevertheless, success could never be assured, as the copying of works was prevalent and copyright protections were minimal.[41] Furthermore, works would only be published – unsurprisingly – according to perceived market demand; for instance, the music of Brahms was rejected on the basis of its perceived difficulty for amateur performers, while its often unusual instrument combinations limited its marketability even further.[42] Therefore, while the demise of patronage seemed to promise a new degree of artistic autonomy, this was not necessarily the case: a composer's success was largely based on a growing yet unpredictable musical market,[43] a dilemma familiar to subsequent generations of musicians.

Musical Precarity in the Late-Nineteenth & Twentieth Centuries

These dynamics would only become more starkly rendered approaching the twentieth century, as the music industry continued to evolve. While it was possible for a working musician to enjoy some success during this epoch, it was certainly not obtained without a great deal of effort and personal sacrifice. In keeping with the history of the musician as necessarily mobile, professionals were subject to taxing travel and performance schedules, which tended to discourage "all but the most dedicated;" likewise, the working conditions during these frequent tours could be arduous, while frequent changes in employment and unpredictable periods of

[39] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 13.
[40] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 207.
[41] Honigsheim, *Sociologists and Music*, 158–160.
[42] Ibid., 171.
[43] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 227.

unemployment mirrored the inherent instability of musical work from an earlier time.[44] In this sense, Jason Toynbee characterizes the musical subject as essentially insecure: the enduring nomadic quality of musical life inevitably produces certain pressures, which are further exacerbated by the "profit imperative" of an industry that would become increasingly rationalized and capitalistic.[45]

However, musicians in general did not necessarily recognize their own status as workers at this time, and it is likely for this reason that there was little collective opposition to the precarious conditions within which they operated. Rather, as Kraft suggests, musicians largely persisted in regarding themselves as artisans, despite the forward thrust of industrialization in the nineteenth century and its obvious effect on "wages, working conditions, patterns of hiring, definition of skills, and above all job opportunities." This was exacerbated by the relatively encouraging new opportunities they enjoyed in comparison with skilled artisans in other sectors of the economy, who did not enjoy such beneficial outcomes from processes of industrialization.[46] Musicians were thus unable to recognize any sort of solidarity with other "workers as workers;" this was particularly true for instrumentalists in the classical milieu, who insisted on regarding their practice purely as art.[47] As Raymond Williams notes, it is common for cultural producers across a variety of sectors to disavow their own place in market relations; for professionals exhibiting such false consciousness, "even where the cultural work is quite clearly a commodity it is almost always, and often justly, also described in very different terms" so as to reinforce this idea of artisanal production.[48] In actuality, this misinterpretation threatened to

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[44] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 9.
[45] Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music: Musicians, Creativity and Institutions* (London: Arnold, 2000), xi.
[46] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 2–7.
[47] Ibid., 22–23.
[48] Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981), 50, 67.

compound difficult working conditions for professional musicians in the long-term prior to eventual unionization efforts: Kraft suggests the greatest danger to musical labour during this period "was not mechanized factories in faraway places but [professional musicians'] own reluctance to recognize and act on their common concerns as workers."[49] Nicholas Garnham further proposes that such a misrepresentation of cultural production as artisanal work allows for "capital to keep [its] labour force divided and weak" while also ensuring "the risks and overheads for this production… are born directly by labour."[50] These realities would only become more evident with the rapid industrialization of musical production as twentieth century progressed.

Musical Labour in Film and Radio

While technological change is not solely responsible for modifying the organization and exploitation of musical labour, the introduction of new forms of technologically mediated musical practice nevertheless helped to enable certain fundamental shifts to the music industry. Consequently, the first quarter of the twentieth century offered a number of new opportunities for musicians in the form of the phonograph, radio, and – most significantly – silent film.[51] At this time, phonograph recording promised limited if nonetheless interesting opportunities for a select group of classical musicians, particularly conductors, singers and virtuoso instrumentalists; on the other hand, composers saw the classical canon ossify and their opportunities for dissemination become limited.[52] However, conditions were not glamorous for early recording

[49] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 8.
[50] Nicholas Garnham, "Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass-communication," *Media, Culture & Society Media, Culture & Society* 1, no. 2 (1979): 139, doi:10.1177/016344377900100202.
[51] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 33.
[52] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 201.

artists, as direct-to-disc recording necessitated that performers play a piece repeatedly in order to "duplicate" additional copies,[53] making it a largely inefficient and costly means of musical dissemination. Rather, with the recording industry yet to become a significant source of work, the accompaniment of silent films represented the most important new avenue of musical employment.[54] Jobs were indeed plentiful during this time, as all theatres necessarily employed musicians, be it a single pianist or a full orchestra depending on the size of the hall.[55] As cinema's popularity surged, it became necessary to construct ever-bigger theatres, which in turn called for the hiring of larger orchestras to provide the requisite "volume power and musical versatility." Consequently, at the peak of silent film, some estimated that theatre work provided more full-time employment than all other forms of musical work in America combined. Furthermore, by 1928 this meant that even lower ranking orchestra members could hope to earn roughly twice the monthly wages of a skilled labourer in the building trades.[56]

That being said, while this period resulted in the proliferation of new musical employment and better wages, working conditions and overall job security did not necessarily improve as well. In fact, seemingly because of the unpredictability of such work, professionals could not afford to turn down a job; while demand for musical services soared, most professional musicians in America worked seven days a week until the early 1920s.[57] Even then, unionized musicians were still vulnerable to competition: military bands often offered their services at a lower price due to already enjoying primary employment and subsidized instruments, while

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[53] Ibid., 197.
[54] Sarah Angliss, "Mimics, Menaces, or New Musical Horizons? Musicians' Attitudes Toward the First Commercial Drum Machines and Samplers," in *Material Culture and Electronic Sound*, ed. Frode Weium and Tim Boon, vol. 8, Artefacts (Washington: Smithsonian Institution University Press, 2013), 101.
[55] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 165–6.
[56] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 37–46.
[57] Ibid., 39–40.

visiting foreign ensembles benefited from notoriety which might earn them employment instead of locals.[58] Elsewhere, itinerant performers in America could expect to perform in six to seven different cities in a given week, travelling overnight with little time to eat before performing and generally finding themselves subject to "bad food, lack of sleep, and a host of other inconveniences."[59] For those subject to the rigours of theatre performance, repetitive stress disorders were – and remain – a legitimate concern.[60]

The silent era, along with its increased demand for musical labour, was to prove short-lived, as the first 'talkies' were introduced, first with *Don Juan* in 1926 and then, more famously, *The Jazz Singer* in 1927. However, Kraft cautions that while it may seem inevitable from a contemporary historical perspective, the success of talkies was hardly assured: industry management initially proved as fearful of technological change as their musician employees, as the industry shift promised to endanger already profitable investments and generate significant new costs in adapting theatres for sound. In actuality, it was largely thanks to then industry upstart Warners and the studio's aggressive promotion of film sound, coupled with rising audience demand for talkies, that saw sound came to occupy a central place in cinema. Of course, at the same time, the long-term benefits for theatres that could afford the transition were obvious: not only would replacing a sixteen-piece orchestra with a new sound system result in savings of $3,000 per week for a given theatre, there was also the added stability that came with replacing employees who were given to making wage demands, striking, or exhibiting undesirable work habits.[61] Assessing the impact of this reorganization of musical labour, Toynbee describes the shift from theatre orchestra to recorded sound as "a quite brutal form of

[58] Ibid., 28–29.
[59] Ibid., 74.
[60] Catherine P. Mulder, *Unions and Class Transformation: The Case of the Broadway Musicians* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 49.
[61] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 47–49.

the capitalization of cultural production."[62] This would mark one of the first and most significant expressions of technology as explicitly labour-saving in the history of musical labour, although it would certainly not be the last; indeed, the experiences of working musicians displaced from the cinema would go on to inform later musicians' union critiques of music technology perceived to replace human performers, most notably the drum machine.[63]

The difficulty that this turn of events represented for professional musicians – one third of whom were already without employment in America – would be compounded by the beginning of the Great Depression, especially as many lacked skills that would allow them to find other non-musical work.[64] As Kraft suggests, unlike workers in other industries, "theater [sic] musicians could not be retrained and given new tasks within the businesses that employed them."[65] While those in large urban centres were able to weather this difficult period to a degree, conditions in smaller cities were less auspicious.[66] By 1934, there would be only 4,100 theatre musicians still employed, and those few remaining jobs would dry up shortly thereafter. In effect, this scenario represented a long-term decline in demand for musician labour, and it would prove to be a period from which it was difficult to recover.[67] This major upheaval also extended beyond the management of individual theatres: the film industry itself would undergo a period of restructuring, becoming more "centralized [and] capital-intensive," while professional musicians would come to find themselves employed in an industry now "dominated by large business enterprises."[68]

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[62] Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 22.
[63] Angliss, "Mimics," 102.
[64] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 33, 50.
[65] Ibid., 57.
[66] Ibid., 72, 109.
[67] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 202.
[68] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 33.

The continued dominance of cinema – albeit with musicians now recording for soundtracks rather than accompanying films in theatres – alongside the emergence of radio contributed to a newly ascendant division of musical labour: the role of session musician would thus become one of the main forms of employment during this period. However, while this did generate new opportunities and a better standard of living for those able to obtain such employment, session jobs were geographically concentrated – in America, they were situated primarily on the west coast – and musicians were forced with the choice of relocating or attempting to find work in increasingly dire local job markets.[69] Moreover, even once relocated, such jobs could be difficult to actually obtain, as instrumentalists often had to deal with contractors serving as intermediaries in the hiring process. In this sense, employment was dependent on fostering a positive rapport with particular individuals, and those who "carefully nurtured relationships with contractors and kept their complaints about the hiring process to themselves" stood to benefit enormously.[70] This likely contributed in part to an increasing gulf in both income and status among the ranks of studio musicians during this period. Regardless of hierarchy, musicians employed in the film industry were, as in the past, subject to highly demanding working conditions. Superior sight-reading skills were imperative, as instrumentalists were often provided complex musical scores with minimal time for rehearsal; failure to keep up could see them quickly replaced, with a large pool of available and willing peers available to perform in their place. While composers enjoyed generally superior circumstances, their employment could be similarly grueling: as production schedules necessitated composing

[69] Ibid., 106; Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 22.
[70] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 91.

"frantically for several weeks after the end of filming," such work was considered both "tedious and nerve-wracking."[71]

Conditions would not prove to be much better in the long-term for those able to find employment in radio. While the inadequate quality of recorded music during this period initially ensured numerous opportunities for work with strong union bargaining power – jobs sometimes paid roughly double the average monthly manufacturing wage[72] – the labour could nonetheless be as demanding as film work. Network radio required a high degree of musical flexibility from its performers, as well as the ability to cope with irregular working hours; even for orchestra leaders, the greater prestige they enjoyed over their 'sidemen' was tempered by the responsibility of various administrative duties that fell on their shoulders.[73] Moreover, both networks and independent stations often protested any meaningful compensation for radio musicians, citing the value of their broadcast performances as free publicity;[74] admittedly, at the time there was some validity to this claim, and musicians were often enthusiastic about performing for radio even without immediate compensation.[75] It is nevertheless striking that such a notion – exposure as compensation – remains common to this day for non-established musicians, a point to which I will return later in my discussion of SoundCloud. Finally, any security that could be expected from radio employment was hotly contested, as stations repeatedly employed tactics such as bootlegging and replaying broadcasts[76] or using ostensibly legitimate yet nonetheless controversial "electrical transcriptions" to substitute live performances for recorded ones.[77] This would be exacerbated in America by legislators becoming increasingly unsympathetic towards

[71] Ibid., 93–105.
[72] Ibid., 66–67.
[73] Ibid., 98–99.
[74] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 206.
[75] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 65.
[76] Ibid., 108.
[77] Ibid., 78–80.

labour in general, resulting in the "Lea Act" being passed in 1945 to effectively curb musicians' union bargaining power.[78]

To make matters worse, while initial prosperity seemed to bode well for the long-term conditions of musicians working in radio, particularly given the relative security and employment benefits that came with such positions,[79] this optimism would prove to be fleeting. With network programming becoming increasingly hegemonic, local station musicians were replaced by remote transmissions of a few renowned orchestras.[80] Furthermore, as network broadcasters became increasingly dominant within the industry, musicians' bargaining power further decreased accordingly, and in several instances the American Federation of Musicians was forced to make meaningful concessions in an attempt to salvage what few station orchestra jobs they could.[81] Speaking to the changes taking place in the industry at this point, Kraft suggests, "The nature of the radio industry, a closely knit web of a few vertically integrated firms, not only centralized but also facilitated the exercise of employer power."[82] As the situation worsened into the late 1950s, with recorded music now widely available to compound the issue, the entire American radio industry "employed barely 350 full-time musicians and tendered less than $1 million from single-engagement employment."[83] Even for the lucky few that were able to find work in these new media, positions were regarded merely as a supplement to live performance and touring, which – despite the arduous nature of this mobile and unstable work – offered a greater degree of musical autonomy.[84] Overall, however, there is an indication that due to these conditions, musical labour in America became highly casualized and subject to

[78] Ibid., 169–72.
[79] Ibid., 72–73, 98.
[80] Ibid., 77.
[81] Ibid., 188.
[82] Ibid., 82.
[83] Ibid., 199.
[84] Ibid., 102; Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 23–24.

increasing income insecurity after 1945.[85] Therefore, in the case of film and radio, Kraft's assessment is poignant when he suggests that "[w]hat technology gave, it eventually took away."[86]

Musical Labour and The Ascendance of the Recording Industry

Around this period, the steady growth of the recording industry meant that it had begun to rival radio and cinema as the primary source of media employment for musicians. Sarah Angliss highlights the 1950s in particular as the period that saw the pronounced shift from live to "transmitted" musical performance as the dominant mode of music consumption.[87] Indeed, recorded music would become so significant that by 1960 record sales would exceed the gross revenues of other entertainment media.[88] However, as in the past, new working conditions also brought with them new forms of instability and unemployment. Tim Blanning describes a scenario of widespread redundancy as the principal result:

> For every person who found employment in the new [recording] industry, many more found themselves on the scrap heap. Just as the division of labour and assembly-line production had made craftsmen redundant, so the mechanization of music reduced the need for traditional musical skills.[89]

It does bear emphasizing that Blanning stresses that it is precisely *traditional* musical skills for which the demand dwindles; indeed, the possibilities afforded by new recording technologies permitted previously unheard of musical styles and techniques to emerge.[90] In that sense, recording session work could be quite profitable for some working musicians and it provided

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[85] George Seltzer, *Music Matters: The Performer and the American Federation of Musicians* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 221–39.
[86] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 57.
[87] Angliss, "Mimics," 108.
[88] Richard A. Peterson and David G. Berger, "Cycles in Symbol Production: The Case of Popular Music," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), 127.
[89] Blanning, *Triumph of Music*, 202.
[90] Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 77.

opportunities for novel modes of expression. However, as in film recording, there were tradeoffs: a performer required both expertise and flexibility, and had to suspend her/his own artistic impulses, or what one studio instrumentalist referred to as "not [giving] a damn."[91] Musicians were also susceptible to fluctuations in employment in accordance with economic trends, as producers would compensate for rising wages by recording smaller ensembles or replacing a number of instrumentalists with a single organist.[92] There were also concerns over compensation, as payment for recordings varied until strict prices were eventually set by musicians' unions.[93]

The structure of the industry itself was continuously subject to change, in no small part due to "successive waves of technological innovation" which continuously influenced both the production and distribution of recorded music.[94] The most significant advances in recording during this period were undoubtedly the introduction of magnetic tape and, subsequently, multitrack recording, both of which contributed greatly to the widespread adoption of the medium. The former, introduced to studios in 1949, drastically reduced the cost of recording and allowed for easier entry into the industry for a larger number of musical entrepreneurs and performers, thereby decentralizing – at least initially – what had become a geographically concentrated and tightly controlled business.[95] One need look no further than the increase in the production of "race records" during this period for evidence that new doors had indeed been opened for previously disregarded musicians.[96] This process of limited if nonetheless important industry democratization also had ramifications for the position of musicians within the studio, as this early "entrepreneurial mode" of recording allowed for greater performer collaboration

[91] John Harvith and Susan Edwards Harvith, *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph: A Century in Retrospect* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 213.
[92] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 123–4.
[93] Ibid., 61.
[94] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 239–240.
[95] Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 80.
[96] Ibid., 74.

with regard to making technical decisions.[97] Such advances would be short-lived, however, as production techniques would soon become more rigidly codified and controlled once they came to be considered as part of "the core of the aesthetic, and therefore exchange, value of the record commodity."[98] The shift away from recording as documentation to a more artificial form of production also aided in fostering the flexible "reproducibility" of popular music as a means of increasing profitability.[99]

The introduction of multitrack recording only served to exacerbate this situation. Paul Théberge considers this emergent recording technology as a crucial form of capitalist rationalization that took aim specifically at musical performance, "guided by goals of economic efficiency and technical control" and serving to promote worker discipline.[100] Indeed, the flexibility and economic advantages of multitrack recording seemingly promoted its rapid adoption, as it became possible to produce the sound of an entire group with only a few multitasking instrumentalists.[101] Similarly, through multitrack recording, costly unionized orchestras could be recorded in only a few sessions, leaving producers and engineers to ensure the correct sonic balance through careful mixing on their own time, with minimal need for additional recordings.[102] Consequently, through these new studio conditions, "the technical mastery of musical time becomes inextricably linked with the technical mastery of labour relations."[103] Moreover, through such careful separation, both physical and acoustic,[104]

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[97] Edward Robert Kealy, "The Real Rock Revolution: Sound Mixers, Social Inequality, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music Production" (Ph.D., Northwestern University, 1974), 176–7, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text (302731730).
[98] Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 89.
[99] Paul Théberge, "The 'Sound' of Music: Technological Rationalization and the Production of Popular Music," *New Formations*, no. 8 (1989): 104.
[100] Ibid., 99–100.
[101] Ibid., 106.
[102] Harvith and Harvith, *Edison, Musicians, and the Phonograph*, 347–8, 364.
[103] Théberge, "The 'Sound' of Music," 106.

multitrack recording also preserved a hierarchy amongst musicians: this allowed 'stars' to ensure a perfect take through repeated overdubs, while ensuring that rhythm tracks recorded first would both facilitate and not "complicate" the recording of additional musical layers.[105] However, while acknowledging this labour-saving function, Toynbee also stresses the creative autonomy that multitrack recording could offer the emerging "self-contained author-performer unit" of the rock band; nevertheless, he does concede that this scenario could also serve to disempower performers who were uncomfortable working in an increasingly technologically complex studio environment. Toynbee also notes the entrenchment of "a highly routinized and centralized process of music-making" as multitrack recording became increasingly commonplace, as well as worsening conditions of access due to ever more financial and cultural capital being required to enter the studio. However, a converse trend can be noted in the production of relatively low-cost mass-market music technology since the 1980s, which has allowed for better access to music production outside the confines of the music industry proper.[106] Indeed, the increasing technologization of instrumentation and musical activity in general has allowed new modes of musicianship and cultural production to emerge.[107] In many respects, these new modes of musicianship have become central to the way independent musicians operate currently.

Considerations for Contemporary Precarious Musical Labour

As I have attempted to demonstrate, precarity has been a longstanding reality for working musicians but also one which has been historically contingent throughout. From the origins of

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[104] Ibid., 101–2.
[105] Ibid., 106–7.
[106] Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 90–95.
[107] Angliss, "Mimics," 122; Simon Frith, "Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music," *Media, Culture & Society* 8, no. 3 (July 1, 1986): 264, doi:10.1177/016344386008003002; Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 94–96.

the profession in pre-capitalist times to its ongoing specialization into the twentieth century, musicians have been subject to uncertainty with regards to pay, strenuous work conditions, and insecurity in the term of their employment. This admittedly cursory survey of the changing conditions of musical labour yields a number of important and interrelated issues for moving forward with an analysis of contemporary musical production.

First, it is important to consider the changing place of self-promotion and individual responsibility as requirements to a professional musician's success. While a strong recording industry with integrated promotional capacities perhaps rendered this entrepreneurial approach less necessary in the mid- to late-twentieth century, the preceding period did see musicians make use of a number of methods of self-promotion: these included organizing concerts – which meant incurring the cost of doing so themselves – to generate publicity, which sometimes necessitated filling theatres with friends and family to give the impression of success;[108] later, this would be evident in musicians' willingness to perform freely on radio broadcasts in the hopes of obtaining better paying and more important work later.[109] These strategies of course carried with them considerable risks to the already insecure life of the musician. As the music industry became more rigidly organized, largely due to the emergence of recording technology, this need for self-promotion would in a sense become mediated by an industry apparatus that allowed for some degrees of standardization of musical work and pay in the form of recording contracts. However, as the industry struggles to deal with changing business practices and market conditions, such securities represent an impossible luxury in the face of a demand for greater flexibility in order to cope with uncertainty.[110]

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[108] Honigsheim, *Sociologists and Music*, 157–8.
[109] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 73.
[110] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 253.

Furthermore, it is vital to consider the importance of solidarity amongst professional musicians. While many pre-literate and folk cultures considered musical production a "group manifestation" even when developed by a single performer, the notion of the composer as an individual has become increasingly prevalent in step with broader ideological trends in Western culture since the Renaissance and, even more so, the nineteenth century.[111] This emphasis on individualism has also been extended to soloists and conductors, the best of who are celebrated as singular talents.[112] However, the story of musical labour is one in which mutual aid amongst musicians has been crucial to their ability to negotiate difficult working conditions. This includes medieval guilds, eighteenth century organizations for mutual financial support, as well as relatively recent gains brought about by organizations such as the American Federation of Musicians (AFM).[113] Indeed, for the latter, resolute musician solidarity and organized opposition to the industry was crucial to the union's ability to successfully negotiate important and lasting gains, such as the Record and Transcription Fund of 1943, a key means of securing and redistributing income to the AFM's most vulnerable members.[114] Nevertheless, despite the positive impact of musicians' unions, it must be stressed that these institutions were not universally beneficial to all artists and often helped some at the expense of others: during the mid-twentieth century, the AFM did not accept vocalists, who therefore earned less and suffered worse conditions than the instrumentalists with whom they worked. This was all the more problematic due to the greater incidence of female singers – women instrumentalists were more likely to work as educators than performers at the time – who faced rampant misogyny in

[111] Honigsheim, *Sociologists and Music*, 107–8.
[112] Ibid., 110.
[113] Ibid., 164–9.
[114] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 155.

addition to the lack of protections in their profession.[115] So too did African American musicians face exclusion from segregated locals in the AFM's infancy, while predominantly black groups were often marginalized at national conventions on top of already facing racist hiring practices.[116] Thus, when we talk about musical precarity, we must specify that it is always differentially experienced according to a musician's identity and socioeconomic circumstances. Moreover, as these examples demonstrate, unions have been valuable if imperfect, and their shortcomings should not be ignored.

That being said, it is undeniable that as the structures of musical employment have changed and legislation has made it more difficult for musicians' unions to negotiate,[117] institutions of musician solidarity have grown conspicuously absent. Instead, the recording industry has come to be defined by individualism and competition, and technology has compounded this to a degree: the adoption of multitrack technology has enabled lone artists to realize complex works through technologically mediated performance;[118] so too has the resurgence of the self-sufficient "one-[person] band" as a legitimate musical practice been facilitated by a range of new musical technologies.[119] This highly atomized industry structure has understandably impacted the precarious working conditions for professional musicians: as Peter J. Martin suggests, "where there is no sense of shared attachment to a moral order or a status culture, social relations may be problematic, unpredictable and stressful."[120] Similarly, a perception of music making as artisanal practice rather than cultural production, as was prevalent prior to unionization efforts, seems to linger in the contemporary situation through the

[115] Ibid., 18, 75–76.
[116] Ibid., 30–31, 100–101.
[117] Ibid., 198–9.
[118] Théberge, "The 'Sound' of Music," 105–6.
[119] Dale Chapman, "The 'One-man Band' and Entrepreneurial Selfhood in Neoliberal Culture," *Popular Music* 32, no. 3 (October 2013): 452–3, doi:10.1017/S0261143013000317.
[120] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 255.

widespread casualization of musical activity as a result of its 'democratization' in the home studio. Overall, the possibility of institutionalized musician solidarity comes to be regarded as a relic of the past.

Given the scenario described above, the music industry clearly finds itself at a juncture of uncertainty and changing working conditions in which existing forms of security are eroding. As I have proposed, the timing and general outline of this transformation corresponds to the emergence of post-Fordism in Western capitalism. Therefore, in order to better understand these changing conditions and the risks they pose to working musicians, I will proceed with a discussion of post-*Operaista* theories of post-Fordism and immaterial labour so as to provide a framework for interpreting this shift.

Chapter 2: Post-*Operaismo*, Post-Fordism and Immaterial Labour

Enda Brophy and Steve Wright propose the concept of post-Fordism as one of the few undeniable recurring themes of post-*Operaismo*.[121] In particular, Brophy regards post-*Operaismo*'s 'social factory' as a harbinger of the emerging shift to a post-Fordist reconfiguration of work.[122] So what, then, does post-Fordism signify? Wright proposes that it can be understood as a framework for the elaboration of a "new relationship of labour and capital."[123] There are, however, various characterizations of post-Fordism within post-*Operaismo* literature, as well as differing terminology – at times equivalent, but also with dissimilar emphases – to describe these phenomena, including cognitive capitalism,[124] semiocapitalism,[125] or

[121] Enda Brophy, "Italian Operaismo Face to Face: A Report on the 'Operaismo a Convegno' Conference, 1-2 June 2002 - Rialto Occupato, Rome, Italy," *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 1 (2004): 286–7 (in footnote), doi:10.1163/156920604773564096; Steve Wright, "Back to the Future: Italian Workerists Reflect Upon the Operaista Project," *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 7 (2007): 274, http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/back-future-italian-workerists-reflect-upon-operaista-project.

[122] Brophy, "Italian Operaismo Face to Face: A Report on the 'Operaismo a Convegno' Conference, 1-2 June 2002 - Rialto Occupato, Rome, Italy," 281.

[123] Wright, "Back to the Future," 274.

[124] Andrea Fumagalli and Stefano Lucarelli, "A Model of Cognitive Capitalism: a Preliminary Analysis," *European Journal of Economic and Social Systems* 20, no. 1 (2007): 1–2, http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/28012; Yann Moulier Boutang, "Cognitive Capitalism and Entrepreneurship: Decline in Industrial Entrepreneurship and the Rising Collective Intelligence" (paper presented at Conference on Capitalism and Entrepreneurship, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 2007), 12–13, http://www.philosophie-management.com/docs/2010/Cognitive_Capitalism_and_Entrepreneurship-Moulier_Boutang.pdf; Matteo Pasquinelli, "Vercellone on Anti-cpe Movement and Cognitive Capitalism," *Rekombinant*, April 19, 2007, http://permalink.gmane.org/gmane.culture.internet.rekombinant/2045; Matteo Pasquinelli, "Italian Operaismo and the Information Machine," *Theory, Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (May 1, 2015): 60–61, doi:10.1177/0263276413514117.

[125] Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009), 108.

postmodernization.[126] Numerous organizational features reoccur across these theorizations: the shifting of production from vertical integration to an international, diffuse, and networked form; a related change from planned mass production to flexible 'just-in-time' production to reduce the unnecessary accumulation of stock; a reliance on information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support and enhance production organized via networks; a new emphasis on tertiary (service) industries; mass deregulation and imposition of market-oriented systems to ensure and optimize the flow of capital; a consequent increase in flexible, self-employed, and casualized work; and finally, an unprecedented infusion of cognitive, linguistic, and communicative capacities into labour itself.[127] In keeping with David Harvey's notion of "flexible accumulation,"[128] we may understand post-Fordism as, above all, a process of doing away with the rigidities of production and labour organization so as to stress flexibility as a normative value.

These changes can at least partly be understood as a response to the stagnant economic conditions of the 1970s,[129] but it would be incorrect to consider post-Fordism as a purely technical response to these circumstances:[130] for Christian Marazzi, the coming of post-Fordism

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[126] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 280.
[127] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 76; Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, 157; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 285; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 82; Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Affects: The Politics of the Language Economy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 15–24; Brian Holmes, "The Flexible Personality," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, January 2002, http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en; Michael Rustin, "The Politics of Post-Fordism: Or, The Trouble with New Times," *New Left Review* 175, no. 1 (1989): 55; Cristina Tajani and Gigi Roggero, "Bibliografia Minima Ragionata Sulle Trasformazioni Del Lavoro," in *Precariopoli: Parole e Pratiche Delle Nuove Lotte Sul Lavoro*, ed. Francesco Brancaccio et al. (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2005), 153–4 (translated in Wright, "Mapping Pathways Within Italian Autonomist Marxism," 135).
[128] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 147.
[129] Rustin, "Post-Fordism," 55.
[130] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 76; Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 27.

required an "external shock" in order to institute its changes.[131] In this sense, post-Fordism can also be considered in relation to the demands of the Fordist industrial working class during this period, particularly in the Italian context wherein post-*Operaista* critiques had contributed to an increasing militancy among workers.[132] These included a desire for less regulation and greater autonomy within the workplace, freedom from the oppressive nature of full-time work, more creative and intellectually fulfilling roles within production, and a greater emphasis on individuality in general.[133] However, as Angela McRobbie cautions, this account typically centres on a predominantly male working class, and we must also acknowledge the significance of a growing number of women entering the workforce who also demanded more and better opportunities for female workers.[134] Despite this growing worker discontent, capital was able to pursue its post-Fordist restructuration while opportunistically meeting many of these demands in ways that pacified the working class and served its own interest. In this sense, post-Fordism represents for Dyer-Witheford "a technological and political offensive aimed at decomposing social insubordination" and ensuring ongoing profitability.[135]

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[131] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 28.

[132] Enda Brophy, "The Organizations of Immaterial Labour: Knowledge Worker Resistance in post-Fordism" (PhD diss., Queen's University (Canada), 2008), 71, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text (304399877); Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 275; Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 27; Angela McRobbie, "Reflections On Feminism, Immaterial Labour And The Post-Fordist Regime," *New Formations* 70, no. 1 (January 13, 2011): 63–64, doi:10.3898/NEWF.70.04.2010; Virno, *Grammar*, 112.

[133] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, 76; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 274; Marazzi, *Capital and Affects: The Politics of the Language Economy*, 27; McRobbie, "Reflections," 63–64; Angela Mitropoulos, "Precari-Us?," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, March 2005, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704/mitropoulos/en; Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 112.

[134] McRobbie, "Reflections," 66–67.

[135] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, 150.

Post-Fordism and the Changing Nature of Labour

This emerging shift to post-Fordism of course brought with it numerous fundamental changes to the conditions of work. Angela Mitropoulos characterizes these changes as part of a new reliance on the cognitive dimension of labour: under Fordism, management aimed to "sever the brains of workers from their bodies" through strict control and planning, whereas post-Fordism grants an unprecedented degree of autonomy to workers,[136] and thus necessarily implicates a greater variety of workers' skills and knowledge within the productive process.[137] What results is an unprecedented reliance on language and communication within post-Fordist work as a vital means of forming relations, fostering flexibility, and coping with new modes of lean production which require constant re-adaptation.[138] Virno describes the new value of communication in terms of 'sharing,' whether it be of information or tasks, which he considers fundamentally opposed to a rigid division of labour; for capital, "what really counts is the original sharing of linguistic-cognitive talents, since it is this sharing which guarantees readiness, adaptability, etc."[139] Given that these communicative faculties are now essential features of production, it also becomes necessary for capital to pursue new means of mobilizing them:[140] information technology therefore has the fundamental task of facilitating and accelerating the

[136] Mitropoulos, "Precari-Us?".
[137] Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 96; André Gorz, *The Immaterial: Knowledge, Value and Capital* (London; New York: Seagull Books, 2010), 10–11; Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 51–52.
[138] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 20–21; Cristina Morini, "The Feminization of Labour in Cognitive Capitalism," *Feminist Review*, no. 87 (2007): 50, doi:10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400367; Pasquinelli, "Italian Operaismo," 58.
[139] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 41.
[140] Vincent Mosco, "Marx Is Back, But Which One? On Knowledge Labour and Media Practice," *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 10, no. 2 (2012): 572, http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/377.

circulation of communication itself to ensure productivity.[141] This productive circulation is enabled by the network form, which permits cooperation to become – in stark contrast to the Fordist assembly line – ever more deterritorialized and virtual in nature.[142] For Hardt and Negri, these communicative, informational, and cooperative networks are "the primary axes" of production under post-Fordism.[143]

Under this new system, the nature of work becomes profoundly ambivalent in the sense that labour demands the entirety of the worker's subjectivity but also accords labour a greater degree of autonomy; it thus fosters the potential for resistance.[144] However, Wright is apt to note that many post-*Operaisti* theorists have tended to emphasize the negative connotations of post-Fordism,[145] albeit while maintaining a keen interest in its revolutionary potential.[146] For example, in becoming highly flexible and responsive to change – much as capital itself has become[147] – post-Fordist workers are increasingly faced with an overarching lack of security when compared with the protections of the Fordist workplace and the welfare state. In this gradual shift away from full-time work and the 'job for life,' post-Fordism has inaugurated an unprecedented degree of mobility on the labour market: employment becomes predominantly short-term and the

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[141] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, 162–3; Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 23; McRobbie, "Reflections," 63–64; Mosco, "Marx Is Back," 571.
[142] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 295–6; Tajani and Roggero, "Bibliografia," 153–4 (translated in Wright, "Mapping Pathways Within Italian Autonomist Marxism," 135).
[143] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 82.
[144] McRobbie, "Reflections," 64; Mosco, "Marx Is Back," 573.
[145] Steve Wright, "Mapping Pathways Within Italian Autonomist Marxism: A Preliminary Survey," *Historical Materialism* 16, no. 4 (2008): 134–5, doi:10.1163/156920608X357747.
[146] Brophy, "Italian Operaismo," 287.
[147] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 24; Paolo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 14.

frequency of changing one's job accelerates.[148] What is more, these workers find themselves increasingly vulnerable to being let go as they lack the protections enjoyed by full-time employees. The constantly shifting and short-term nature of post-Fordist work consequently undermines organized labour's bargaining power and weakens its ability to counterbalance an increasingly predatory capital.[149] This is exacerbated by networked production, which is better able to better organize "non-guaranteed labor, such as freelance work, home work, part-time labor, and piecework;"[150] Amazon's Mechanical Turk – an online marketplace designed for businesses to minimize employment costs by outsourcing short-term 'microtasks' to a large and ever-ready workforce – stands out as one of many recent examples of this phenomenon.

Moreover, while flexibility does undeniably engender a greater degree of autonomy, post-Fordist labour is still subject to capitalist control, but these forms of control cannot render labour inflexible.[151] Capital must strike a careful balance through the optimal channeling of flows: Terranova describes this as a process of nurturing, exploiting, and ultimately exhausting labour.[152] This control is also technological in nature, as the very structure of the network serves to ensure an ideal balance between autonomy and "productive discipline" remotely.[153] Control thus becomes non-hierarchical, deterritorialized, dispersed, and "incorporated into the flux" of

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[148] Antonio Conti et al., "The Anamorphosis of Living Labour," *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 7, no. 1 (2007): 85, http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/anamorphosis-living-labour.
[149] Fumagalli and Lucarelli, "A Model of Cognitive Capitalism," 5–6; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 296–7.
[150] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 297.
[151] Gorz, *The Immaterial*, 71–72; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 185; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 147, 259, 290.
[152] Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (2000): 38–43, 51, doi:10.1215/01642472-18-2_63-33.
[153] Holmes, "The Flexible Personality."

labour.[154] Perhaps most significantly, this also occurs at the level of workers' subjectivity:[155] Bifo characterizes such coercion as having become "embedded in the technicalities of social relations" and the "voluntary yet inevitable submission to a chain of automatisms" of post-Fordism, wherein an array of possibilities give the impression of freedom but merely serve to channel desired behaviours.[156] Similarly, Lazzarato proposes that post-Fordism is at its core "an economy based on potentialities" but also one that is preoccupied with "delimiting and circumscribing what is possible for a society at a particular time."[157] Consequently, while labour which depends on language would seem primed to embolden interpersonal solidarity, communication under post-Fordism is made to function instrumentally, which reinforces self-interest and undermines collective identification.[158] Christian Marazzi describes the resulting scenario as one in which there is a desire for cooperation alongside an urge "to re-*divide*, create hierarchies, segment and privatize the public – because common to all – resource of communicative action."[159]

Therefore we may say that post-Fordism is often inherently contradictory in that it promotes communication and collective production while at the same time channeling behaviour through increasingly convoluted means. It is within these ambivalent conditions of opportunity and control that we may begin to sketch a general description of the immaterial worker, who occupies a paradigmatic place within post-Fordist labour for reasons I will describe below.

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[154] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 88–89.
[155] Carlo Vercellone, "The Hypothesis of Cognitive Capitalism" (paper presented at The Hypothesis of Cognitive Capitalism conference, Birkbeck College and SOAS, London, UK, 2005), 3, https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00273641/.
[156] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 192.
[157] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," *Theory, Culture and Society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 123, doi:10.1177/0263276409350283.
[158] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 41–45.
[159] Ibid., 53 (italics in original).

Immaterial Labour

Theories of immaterial labour undeniably harken back to Marx's distinction between productive and unproductive labour: the former results in material commodities whereas the latter often results in intangible and *immaterial* commodities – although not always, as in the case of a composer producing a score of their work.[160] Immaterial labour also has more concrete origins within post-*Operaismo* and the theory of the social factory, which in itself has its roots in Italian autonomist feminist theory of the same period; the latter in particular was groundbreaking in emphasizing the unacknowledged and unremunerated role of women in sustaining conventionally productive labour.[161] While this notion of immateriality remained a theme in autonomist feminist critiques of labour over the following decades,[162] it was not until later that a more general theory of immaterial labour was articulated and popularized through the works of predominantly male post-*Operaisti* thinkers – as a result, the influence of feminist thought and theories of female reproductive labour is often ignored within this history.

One of the first to explicitly propose a more general notion of immaterial labour was Maurizio Lazzarato in his text "Immaterial Labor" (1996). In this important work, Lazzarato broadly defines the concept as “the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity.”[163] Tiziana Terranova has further clarified this definition by describing Lazzarato’s notion of immaterial labour as “a virtuality (an undetermined capacity) that belongs

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[160] Brophy, “Organizations of Immaterial Labour,” 62–63; Leopoldina Fortunati, “ICTs and Immaterial Labor From a Feminist Perspective,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (October 2011): 139, doi:10.1177/0196859911417713.
[161] Brophy, “Organizations of Immaterial Labour,” 61; Fortunati, “ICTs and Immaterial Labor,” 141.
[162] Fortunati, “ICTs and Immaterial Labor,” 145.
[163] Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133.

to the postindustrial productive subjectivity as a whole."[164] We may therefore say that while there are distinct forms of immaterial work, its qualities are emblematic of post-Fordism in general. Furthermore, according to Lazzarato's theorization, immaterial commodities must be understood as altogether different from the commodities Marx discussed in *Capital* (1955), and their significance in post-Fordist production necessitates this analytical shift.[165] In particular, the use value of the immaterial commodity is "its value as informational and cultural content," and it is not destroyed when consumed; instead, the immaterial commodity has a transformative and generative impact on its consumer.[166] Later, Hardt and Negri would offer a similar albeit slightly expanded definition while speaking directly of the service sector of the post-Fordist economy, which they suggest does not yield a "material and durable good;" such labour can thus be considered immaterial in that it "produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication."[167] Crucially, Lazzarato also defines certain 'classic' or 'proper' forms of immaterial labour which correspond to his particular theorization: these include work with information technology, audiovisual/multimedia production, and various other forms of what we could consider cultural production.[168]

While their own formulation of immaterial labour roughly corresponds to Lazzarato's definition, Hardt and Negri further subdivide it into three distinct types: first, ostensibly industrial production processes that have incorporated ICTs; second, work dealing with "analytical and symbolic tasks," which can either be routine or creative (again using ICTs); and third, what can be considered affective labour, which "requires (virtual or actual) human

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[164] Terranova, "Free Labor," 41.
[165] Brophy, "Organizations of Immaterial Labour," 62–64.
[166] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 138.
[167] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 290.
[168] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 133, 137, 142–3.

contact."[169] Controversially, they also describe immaterial labour as having become the *hegemonic* mode of work under post-Fordism,[170] a point with which several of their contemporaries have concurred.[171] Such statements have understandably been met with harsh criticism, as they seem to ignore the continued existence of industrial production while celebrating a form of production that primarily employs privileged subjects.[172] However, as many have attempted to clarify, including Hardt and Negri themselves, this hegemony can best be understood as a *tendency*, and such a shift should be considered qualitative rather than quantitative; material labour still exists, and often under deplorable conditions, but it is increasingly – though not always – shifted to the Global South.[173] Therefore, the hegemonic status of immaterial labour is best understood as a trend within post-Fordism in general,[174]

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[169] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 293.
[170] Ibid., 285–6; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 65, 114–5.
[171] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 60; Moulier Boutang, "Cognitive Capitalism and Entrepreneurship," 11; Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 61–62.
[172] Brian Brown and Anabel Quan-Haase, "'A Workers' Inquiry 2.0': An Ethnographic Method for the Study of Produsage in Social Media Contexts," *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 10, no. 2 (2012): 492, http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/390; Nick Dyer-Witheford, "Cyber-Negri: General Intellect and Immaterial Labor," in *Resistance in Practice: The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*, ed. Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pluto Press, 2005), 147, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10479618.
[173] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 78; Wright, "Back to the Future," 274; Michael Hardt, "Immaterial Labor and Artistic Production," *Rethinking Marxism* 17, no. 2 (April 2005): 176, doi:10.1080/08935690500046637; Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 111–5; Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2015), 75 (in footnote); Rodrigo Nunes, "'Forward How? Forward Where?' I: (Post-) Operaismo Beyond the Immaterial Labour Thesis," *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organisation* 7, no. 1 (2007): 191–4, http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/7-1nunes.pdf; Gerald Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2013), 19; Ben Trott, "Immaterial Labour and World Order: An Evaluation of a Thesis," *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organisation* 7, no. 1 (2007): 218, http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/immaterial-labour-and-world-order-evaluation-thesis; Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 61–62.
[174] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 111.

although the application of this concept should be undertaken with care so as not to ignore the distinct material conditions of various forms of work.[175]

While Hardt, Negri, and Lazzarato are typically the post-*Operaisti* theorists most associated with the theory of immaterial labour, several of their contemporaries also explore similar concepts under different names, including Virno's 'post-Fordist labour'[176] and Bifo's 'cognitive labour.'[177] However, as Wright suggests, there is an undeniable similarity between these terminologies that cannot be ignored;[178] therefore, I contend that when considered together – and without disregarding important differences – the collective theorizations across post-*Operaismo* allow us to form a more robust understanding of immaterial labour than the one typically attributed to Hardt and Negri alone. Indeed, although these various terms entail their own particularities, Enda Brophy has offered a useful summary according to what he considers to be the general qualities of immaterial labour: capacities of knowledge, language, communication, and affect "have been 'put to work;'" the temporalities of work and free time have become increasingly difficult to differentiate as labour spreads from the traditional workplace to the social factory at large; and finally, immaterial labour is not a happy consequence of an emancipatory post-Fordism but is rather the latest antagonism of the "cyclical struggles between capital and labour."[179]

In keeping with Brophy's distillation, we must begin by considering the linguistic, communicative, and relational aspects of immaterial labour. Lazzarato as well as Hardt and Negri suggest that cooperation and interaction are both fundamental to and inherent within the

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[175] Nunes, "Forward How?," 198.
[176] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*.
[177] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 105.
[178] Wright, "Mapping Pathways Within Italian Autonomist Marxism," 121–7.
[179] Brophy, "Organizations of Immaterial Labour," 60–61.

activities of immaterial labour;[180] what is more, the latter suggest that such networked communicational interactivity has in fact become the major source of productivity within the post-Fordist economy.[181] Therefore, as Lazzarato suggests, the organization of such labour can be defined simply "as the capacity to activate and manage productive cooperation," which thus necessitates working subjects "capable of communication."[182] Lazzarato defines this productivity as the ability of immaterial labour to produce a "social relationship" – be it one of innovation, production, or consumption – which is in turn the main indicator of whether an immaterial activity generates economic value.[183] The relational aspect of immaterial labour requires not just linguistic capacities but affective ones as well. In their formulation of such 'affective labour,' Hardt and Negri have acknowledged the debt they owe to their feminist contemporaries: historically carried out by women, affective labour requires "human contact and interaction" and often takes the form of care work. However, it also extends to other sectors in which the "manipulation of affect" is essential (e.g. the entertainment industry).[184] This dimension of Hardt and Negri's work frequently falls under criticism in the way that their use of affect lumps together gendered labour, low-level service labour, and privileged intellectual labour and thus risks ignoring their vastly different conditions.[185] Consequently, while we should not abandon this affective dimension, it is important to understand that while all immaterial labour may be affective, the degree to which this is the case varies according to the specific form of work.

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[180] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 136; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 294.
[181] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 294.
[182] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 135.
[183] Ibid., 138.
[184] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 292–3.
[185] George Caffentzis, "Crystals and Analytic Engines: Historical and Conceptual Preliminaries to a New Theory of Machines," *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 7, no. 1 (2007): 44, http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/crystals-and-analytical-engines-historical-and-conceptual-preliminaries-new-theory.

Furthermore, Hardt and Negri repeatedly emphasize the role of ICTs within immaterial labour. In their estimation, the computer has become an essential component to a wide array of labour processes and has thus tended to reduce the heterogeneity of various forms of labour. The computer thus becomes "the universal tool, or rather as the central tool, through which all activities might pass."[186] However, it must be noted that the privileging of the technological dimension of labour can result in a gross generalization across sectors of immaterial labour and an inattention to the particular place of technology.[187] Nevertheless, it remains clear that certain key technologies have enabled a proliferation of immaterial production, including the Internet. Tiziana Terranova is a key theorist of online immaterial labour, and she suggests that the Internet plays a vital role in connecting isolated immaterial producers into larger networked collectivities. Crucially, Terranova also notes that such productive activities do not always take on the appearance of traditional work; instead, reading, participating in, and managing websites and forums exceed conventional Marxist notions of 'abstract labour' and productivity. These activities also serve to blur the line between production and consumption through an unprecedented "investment of desire" on the part of the user in the productive act.[188] Moreover, such immaterial labour becomes highly labour-intensive due to the requirement to constantly update one's work. In this sense, despite the unconventional nature of immaterial commodities, they "do not so much disappear as become more transparent, showing throughout their reliance on the labor that produces and sustains them."[189] Thus the technological quality of immaterial

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[186] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 291–2.
[187] Emma Dowling, "Producing the Dining Experience: Measure, Subjectivity and the Affective Worker," *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 7, no. 1 (2007): 118, http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/producing-dining-experience-measure-subjectivity-and-affective-worker.
[188] Terranova, "Free Labor," 42.
[189] Ibid., 48.

labour not only impacts the sites and conditions of immaterial labour but also the relation between labourer and commodity.

While immaterial labour is a valuable theoretical tool for this analysis, it also has some important shortcomings that must be attended to before continuing. Firstly, immaterial labour can appear quite an imprecise category. One of immaterial labour's most vocal detractors, George Caffentzis, has gone as far as to suggest "*immaterial labor does not exist*." For Caffentzis, the very term 'immaterial' betrays a dangerous inattention to the material conditions of labour, particularly as it regards the kinds of reproductive and affective labour typically carried out by women; moreover, he contends that the sheer breadth of often wildly dissimilar work considered by Hardt and Negri makes it a poor analytical tool.[190] Isabell Lorey also cautions that theories of immateriality can overlook the embodied nature of labour and ignore "a materiality not only of performative bodies, but also of subjectivations and socialities."[191] Other critics have rightly taken issue with an inattention to the differential nature of immaterial labour and a troubling disregard to important distinctions in class, gender, and race, and how these affect the basic conditions among various immaterial workers.[192] Indeed, Dyer-Witheford contends that it is primarily the high-tech 'informatic' worker – typically a white male – who is the privileged subject of immaterial labour, whereas the affective and gendered work considered by Hardt and Negri seems a poor fit with the rest of their theory.[193] Finally, there is a common criticism that many within post-*Operaismo* present immaterial labour as overly positive and

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[190] Caffentzis, "Crystals and Analytic Engines," 43–44 (italics in original).
[191] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 83–84.
[192] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, 503; Dyer-Witheford, "Cyber-Negri," 147–8; McRobbie, "Reflections," 60.
[193] Dyer-Witheford, "Cyber-Negri," 152–3.

emancipatory without sufficiently foregrounding instances of exploitation.[194] In particular, Brophy has acknowledged that clumsier uses of immaterial labour theory have displayed a deterministic quality in their suggestions of the impending self-organization of immaterial workers – the most infamous example being Hardt and Negri's notion of a "spontaneous and elementary communism"[195] – as if there were not significant impediments to their ability to do so.[196] Certainly many theorists of immaterial labour attend to these exploitative conditions,[197] but there is nevertheless a tendency for their more provocative optimistic claims to overshadow these important caveats.

However, despite these criticisms, Brown and Quan-Haase remind us that we must not disregard the utility of immaterial labour when employed in analyzing the changing nature of work under post-Fordism.[198] Similarly, Rodrigo Nunes suggests that immaterial labour theory

> helps make visible and politically problematic the progressive encroachment of circuits of capitalist accumulation into more and more areas of social life and the parallel movement of externalising more and more all the risks of entrepreneurial activity to workers (flexibilisation, precarisation) and to living beings as such….[199]

Coté and Pybus also propose that immaterial labour aids in exploring the "cultural and subjective turn" of capital as well as the changing relation between production, consumption, and

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[194] Enda Brophy and Greig de Peuter, "Immaterial Labor, Precarity, and Recomposition," in *Knowledge Workers in the Information Society*, ed. Catherine McKercher and Vincent Mosco, Critical Media Studies (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 179; Dyer-Witheford, "Cyber-Negri," 147–9; McRobbie, "Reflections," 69.
[195] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 294.
[196] Brophy, "Organizations of Immaterial Labour," 72; Nunes, "Forward How?," 187; Trott, "Immaterial Labour and World Order," 225–6.
[197] Franco "Bifo" Berardi, "Net Culture, New Media And the Social Body: An Interview with Franco Berardi Bifo," *World-Information.org*, April 12, 2002, http://world-information.org/wio/readme/992006691/1039009255; Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 80–82; Brophy, "Organizations of Immaterial Labour," 67; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 209–210; Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2014), 44; Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 63–68.
[198] Brown and Quan-Haase, "'Workers' Inquiry 2.0,'" 493.
[199] Nunes, "Forward How?," 195.

valuation.[200] It is therefore necessary to proceed, as Rodrigo Nunes suggests, by "treating [theories of immaterial labour] as tools," which requires "[sharpening] their practical usefulness by refining their scope and exploring their political implications."[201] This means avoiding the risks of over-generalizing immaterial labour,[202] and instead exercising caution in determining the forms of labour to which it might best apply.[203] Moreover, although I will be employing the concept of immateriality, I do not deny the material basis of labour; rather than simply regarding these as opposing qualities, we can instead consider the immaterial as a new dimension of the material, just as Christian Marazzi describes information – what he calls "the essence of the new productive technologies" – as "a new dimension of matter."[204] Similarly, Steve Wright suggests immateriality might be better articulated as being "a new means… of deploying the material in previously unforeseen combinations and upon unprecedented scales."[205] We may thus maintain an attention to the immaterial without denying the reality that the production of immaterial commodities inevitably requires material labour in some form;[206] this requires 'materializing' immaterial labor through a consideration of precarity.[207]

Furthermore, in order to confront the difficulty of comprehending the differential nature of immaterial labour, Paolo Virno suggests it is vital to acknowledge that these varied forms of labour have at once "precious little" *and* "everything" in common: while job descriptions and

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[200] Mark Coté and Jennifer Pybus, "Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0: MySpace and Social Networks," *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 7, no. 1 (2007): 89–94, http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/learning-immaterial-labour-20.
[201] Nunes, "Forward How?," 180.
[202] Trott, "Immaterial Labour and World Order," 224.
[203] Dowling, "Producing the Dining Experience," 118.
[204] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 87–88.
[205] Wright, "Back to the Future," 276.
[206] Greig de Peuter and Nick Dyer-Witheford, "A Playful Multitude? Mobilising and Counter-Mobilising Immaterial Game Labour," *The Fibreculture Journal*, no. 5 (2005), http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-024-a-playful-multitude-mobilising-and-counter-mobilising-immaterial-game-labour/; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, 132.
[207] Brophy and de Peuter, "Immaterial Labor, Precarity, and Recomposition," 180.

working conditions may differ, the cognitive and communicative nature of immaterial work means that labourers share "common emotional tonalities, interests, mentality, expectations."[208] In keeping with Hardt and Negri's terminology, these various modes of immaterial labour therefore share a common tendency that is qualitative rather than quantitative. As I will discuss below, this tendency is above all biopolitical in nature.

The Biopolitical Character of Immaterial Labour

In essence, the defining characteristics of immaterial labour imply the increasingly biopolitical nature of work. This starts from the idea of the 'social factory' and the extension of productivity to the entire sphere of social life,[209] but the biopolitical also has a deeper meaning. Paolo Virno suggests that biopolitics in general – a "technology of power" directed at the body and life itself[210] – is fundamentally based on labour-power as pure, undifferentiated potential and the ways in which it is mobilized. For Virno, when such labour-power "is sold, [it] is not separable from the living [body] of the seller… 'Life,' pure and simple bios, acquires a specific importance in as much as it is the tabernacle of dynamis, of mere potential." Capital, consequently, must take an interest in the life and body of the labourer, and this occurs to an even greater degree when the labour is immaterial in nature.[211]

Hardt and Negri first grappled with this concept in *Empire* (2000) by highlighting capital's intervention into the "biopolitical fabric" of social life and the production of subjectivity through language and communication;[212] indeed, they later have described post-

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[208] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 105–6.
[209] Trott, "Immaterial Labour and World Order," 211.
[210] Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (New York: Picador, 2003), 245–7.
[211] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 82–83.
[212] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 32–33.

Fordism as precisely a transition to biopolitical production in general.[213] Thus, although they did not abandon the notion of immaterial production altogether, beginning with *Multitude* (2004) Hardt and Negri decided instead to focus on the concept of 'biopolitical labour.' For the authors, this was also an attempt to produce a more nuanced and complex understanding of contemporary production, as biopolitical labour "creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself. The term *biopolitical* thus indicates that the traditional distinctions between the economic, the political, the social, and the cultural become increasingly blurred."[214] Under the regime of biopolitical labour, all of social life becomes engaged in production to the point that "living and producing tend to be indistinguishable" and "social life itself becomes a productive machine."[215] Elsewhere, Hardt and Negri list the definitive characteristics of biopolitical labour as "cooperation, autonomy, and network organization,"[216] while also emphasizing the role of "creativity as an expression of the common."[217] But above all, the crucial distinction in this new terminology appears to be that Hardt and Negri's conception of biopolitical labour emphasizes not merely the production of immaterial commodities but "the production of subjectivity itself."[218] However, they have not been the only post-*Operaisti* theorists to pursue this thread. Lazzarato has also foregrounded the biopolitical nature of immaterial labour in his own work:

> If production today is directly the production of a social relation, then the 'raw material' of immaterial labor is subjectivity and the 'ideological' environment in which this subjectivity lives and reproduces. The production of subjectivity ceases to be only an instrument of social control (for the reproduction of mercantile relationships) and becomes directly productive,

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[213] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 83; Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 264.
[214] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 109 (italics in original).
[215] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 148.
[216] Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 353.
[217] Ibid., 315.
[218] Ibid., x.

> because the goal of our postindustrial society is to construct the consumer/communicator – and to construct it as 'active.'[219]

Similar to Bifo's concept of the 'soul' now being put to work,[220] Lazzarato suggests that contemporary labour requires that the worker's subjectivity enter the immaterial factory. Consequently, the "very personality of the individual worker" now becomes productive.[221]

Hardt and Negri also suggest that, due to its increasingly hegemonic role within immaterial production, communication and the biopolitical have in effect become "coexistent."[222] Therefore we may posit that communication technologies of production represent tools of biopolitical power. In one pertinent example, Brian Holmes has studied digitally networked production and described a scenario in which capital does not employ coercive measures but simply mobilizes the labourer's drive for self-fulfillment and in turn modulates her/his behaviour as needed.[223] Yiannis Mylonas has also discussed these conditions with regards to the regime of so-called 'Web 2.0,' which is exemplified by social networking sites that interweave online production and consumption. Mylonas describes immaterial labour on Web 2.0 as an example of a "biopolitical model of capital reproduction" wherein

> users' attention, imagination, time, identity and socialization [are] succumbed in reflexively controlled digital environments, sustained by 'fun,' individualistic aspirations, and the deferred possibility of succeeding in the acquisition of cultural, social and economic capital, through the uncritical identification with the myth of the artist.[224]

In their theory of so-called 'Immaterial Labour 2.0,' Coté and Pybus specifically examine "social networks as biopolitical networks, insofar as they articulate new flows through differential compositions of bodies." This theorization also emphasizes the roles of user affect and

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[219] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 143.
[220] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 192.
[221] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 134–5.
[222] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 33.
[223] Holmes, "The Flexible Personality."
[224] Yiannis Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism: A Critical Study of Artistic Production in Post-Fordist Structures," *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 10, no. 1 (2012): 4, http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/287.

subjectivation in the formation of network relations.[225] Consequently, we begin to glimpse the implications of Isabell Lorey's assertion that participation – broadly meaning active self-government through one's conduct and amenability to "social, political and economic steering and regulation" – serves as the "motor" of biopolitics.[226] In the case of Web 2.0, such participation is both figurative as well as literal: participating in social networking sites, while apparently voluntary, has become increasingly necessary as a means of cultivating one's social capital.[227] Therefore "one *has to* express oneself,"[228] online or otherwise; capitalist control has shifted from the assembly line but still seeks to promote productivity through participation, given that the former has become social and subjective.[229] For Bifo, this has the consequence of abolishing the "space sheltered from the public eye" because all of social life must be become productive.[230] However, this biopolitical intervention also necessarily requires the restructuration of language, the redefinition of concepts, and above all the remoulding of identities.[231] Indeed, if biopolitical production produces subjectivity itself, the prevailing subjective profile is characterized by what Bifo calls "an implosive insertion of the neoliberalist form within the animated social body."[232]

This is an important consideration which requires some unpacking, beginning first of all with an understanding of what exactly neoliberalism represents. Generally speaking, Michel Foucault has characterized neoliberalism according to its rejection of state intervention and

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[225] Coté and Pybus, "Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0," 90.
[226] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 35.
[227] Brown and Quan-Haase, "'Workers' Inquiry 2.0,'" 494.
[228] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 135 (italics in original).
[229] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 178–180; Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 135.
[230] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 107.
[231] Aras Ozgun, "Creative Industries: Neo-Liberalism as Mass Deception," in *Culture and Contestation in the New Century*, ed. Jean-Marc Léger (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2011), 108, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10465923.
[232] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 186–7.

redistributive Keynsian economics;[233] contrary to these modes of governing, neoliberalism instead proposes the free market as the central organizing principle of the state due to the former's supposed rationality and self-regulating ability.[234] Furthermore, contrary to classical economics, the market is now understood not according to a core principle of exchange but rather one of competition, which must be promoted and produced through policy. As such, the neoliberal state concerns itself not with ensuring equality but rather fostering the conditions of inequality so as to better incite competition and allow the free market to flourish.[235] Foucault therefore describes a "complete superimposition of market mechanisms, indexed to competition, and governmental policy. Government must accompany the market economy from start to finish."[236] Neoliberal government thus increasingly aims to deregulate and privatize public services so that they better conform to the free market logic;[237] this represents a "reversal of the 'socialization and mutualization' of wealth and property" in favour of individual access, which also succeeds in destabilizing forms of collectivity or solidarity.[238] However, Foucault also defines neoliberalism as a *biopolitical* form of governance in that it seeks to generalize its economic model across the entire terrain of social relations.[239] Neoliberal biopolitics thus transforms "every domain of social life… into an economic space" based on supply and demand and privatized services.[240] Consequently, every neoliberal subject must internalize and conform to this essential logic of competition by becoming what Foucault calls the 'entrepreneur of the

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[233] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 79, http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=418897.
[234] Ibid., 116.
[235] Ibid., 143; Maurizio Lazzarato, "Construction of Cultural Labour Market," *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, November 2006, http://eipcp.net/policies/cci/lazzarato/en.
[236] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 118–21.
[237] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 186–9.
[238] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 124.
[239] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 242–3.
[240] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 189.

self:' based on the pervasiveness of the enterprise form throughout society, neoliberal governance requires that the *homo oeconomicus* ('economic man') of exchange in classical economic theory becomes "the man of enterprise and production."[241] Therefore, under this neoliberal regime, *homo oeconomicus* represents "an entrepreneur of himself," "his own producer," and "the source of [his own] earnings."[242] This has the effect of internalizing an individualized conception of the self whereby life becomes above all "an economic venture" defined by winners and losers.[243] Moreover, the entrepreneurial self also becomes "eminently governable:" *homo oeconomicus*, as a rational actor, "accepts reality" and therefore remains open, adaptable, and systematically responsive to modulations of her/his environment so as to main optimal entrepreneurial profitability.[244]

Consequently, life must be governed not simply, as Foucault suggests, as a means of increasing productivity of concrete labour; rather, Virno's notion of biopolitical governance centres on labour-power as pure potential so as to ensure its exchangeability. Biopolitics thus attempts to ensure an optimal capacity of the very possibility of labour,[245] and capital perceives the worker as always able to give more of her/his untapped capacities. Therefore, under neoliberalism, the primary concern is in "[mobilizing] the dormant potentials of all inhabitants."[246] The fundamental logic of mobilizing and optimizing such potential takes on a particularly striking significance in the context of the networked digital production that characterizes immaterial labour, wherein the primary objective is "the dissolution of the person

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[241] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 147–8.
[242] Ibid., 226.
[243] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 120.
[244] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 269–71; Lazzarato, "Construction of Cultural Labour Market."
[245] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 83–84.
[246] Steen Nepper Larsen, "Compulsory Creativity: A Critique of Cognitive Capitalism," *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 6, no. 1 (2014): 160–163, doi:10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146159.

as active productive agent, as labor power." Put simply, Bifo suggests that capital seeks to mobilize depersonalized and fragmented labour-power as pure potential, the recombination of which occurs automatically through the very structure of the network.[247] When working online, the labourer therefore "no longer exists as a person." This is not to deny her/his corporeal existence or the material effects of work; rather, it demonstrates that "[h]e or she is only an interchangeable producer of microfragments of recombinant semiosis that enter into the continuous flux of the Net."[248] Bifo also cautions that such depersonalized fragmentary labour means the material needs of the worker are easily ignored by capital.[249]

In order to function under this regime, the entrepreneurial self requires a certain affective and psychological profile with which to optimize its adaptability. In his analysis of neoliberal social policy, Lazzarato describes the "intellectual worker" of immaterial labour as an entrepreneur requiring skills of self-management within the "constantly shifting" market of post-Fordist work.[250] Paolo Virno characterizes the emotional tonalities of this figure as "bad sentiments" which include "opportunism, cynicism, social integration, inexhaustible recanting, [and] cheerful resignation."[251] This internalized form of self-governance is above all concerned with cultivating "a strategic optimisation of the self."[252] This self-optimizing impulse also causes relations with others to suffer due to a competitive and self-referential "compulsion to prove one's own virtuosity;" in turn, Lorey suggests this results in a relation in which both "the other and the self become economically governable."[253] It is curious to note that the artist or cultural producer has been held up as the ideal model of this neoliberal subjectivity, not only due to the

[247] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 32–33.
[248] Ibid., 38.
[249] Ibid., 32–33.
[250] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 120; Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 138–140.
[251] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 84.
[252] Larsen, "Compulsory Creativity," 164.
[253] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 86.

communicative and flexible nature of such work[254] and its production of immaterial commodities;[255] most significantly, the artist must consider her/himself – in keeping with the entrepreneurial notion described above – as a form of human capital.[256] This self-capitalization is a significant feature of neoliberal biopolitics in general. Lazzarato describes this process as way of turning the worker into a "fragment" or "molar fraction" of capital. Above all, the entrepreneur as human capital must "insure its own valorisation by managing all its relations, its choices, its behaviours according to a logic of the costs/investment ratio and according to the law of supply and demand;" the final goal is not simply ensuring productivity but rather *profitability* as capital.[257] This naturally requires careful attention to one's investments (e.g. schooling, job training) so as to improve and preserve the profitability of human capital.[258] Thus, individuals function as 'investors,' for whom the very "conditions of life are the returns of a capital."[259] Consequently, the immaterial worker is increasingly invited to identify with and internalize the logic of capital itself, while any antagonism is merely a condition to be adapted to in order to preserve profitability. As Lazzarato grimly remarks, the entrepreneur of the self becomes "torn by the different, possibly opposite, rationalities motivating the earner and the saver:"[260] she/he is "both her/his own master and slave, a capitalist and a proletarian."[261]

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[254] Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 6; Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, 99, 119; Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 56.
[255] Matteo Pasquinelli, "Beyond the Ruins of the Creative City: Berlin's Factory of Culture and the Sabotage of Rent," in *Skulpturenpark Berlin_Zentrum*, ed. KUNSTrePUBLIK (Berlin: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2010), 6, http://matteopasquinelli.com/docs/Pasquinelli_Beyond_the_Ruins_of_the_Creative_City.pdf.
[256] Lazzarato, "Construction of Cultural Labour Market"; Angela McRobbie, "Is Passionate Work a Neoliberal Delusion?," *openDemocracy*, April 22, 2015, https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/angela-mcrobbie/is-passionate-work-neoliberal-delusion.
[257] Lazzarato, "Construction of Cultural Labour Market."
[258] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 229–230.
[259] Lazzarato, "Construction of Cultural Labour Market."
[260] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 125.

This psychic split can have troubling consequences. Indeed, the entrepreneurial self is not simply a role to be slipped in and out of as needed to foster personal success: as Bifo warns us, "[t]he subsumption of the mind in the process of capitalist valorization leads to a true mutation," the result of which is an increasing prevalence of mental illness.[262] In this respect, Bifo's work in documenting the psychological repercussions of this biopolitical regime is foundational: he draws an explicit connection between what he calls an "ideology of self-realization" and experiences of depression, in large part because this worldview precludes the possibility of failure despite its inevitability in a society based on competition.[263] Therefore this internalized demand for self-realization at all costs renders the worker vulnerable to never-ending self-blame at the hands of what Lazzarato calls the "despotic superego," which equates individual autonomy with a personal responsibility for every failure.[264] Moreover, Bifo suggests that the constant attention required for immaterial labour can result in tension, exhaustion, and "the nervous breakdown of the modern worker."[265] Particularly in the context of digitally networked labour, Bifo describes the ineluctable discrepancy between cyberspace and cyber-time – the former being infinite in its capacity for production, whereas the latter is not because it depends on the living body to process information[266] – as causing over-stimulation and a lack of empathy, while also producing "stress, aggressiveness, anxiety, and fear."[267]

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[261] Maurizio Lazzarato, "The Misfortunes of the 'Artistic Critique' and of Cultural Employment," in *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the "Creative Industries,"* ed. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig (London: MayFlyBooks, 2011), 47–48, http://mayflybooks.org/?page_id=74.
[262] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 34–35.
[263] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 98–100.
[264] Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, 53.
[265] Berardi, *Soul at Work*, 105; Brophy, "Italian Operaismo," 290.
[266] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 44–45.
[267] Ibid., 70, 85.

Similarly, Sarah Sharma has also framed time itself as a biopolitical matter, and she has aimed to problematize how it is "differentially managed, regulated, and experienced" to fully exploit "the latent capacities of the productive body."[268] Building on Sharma's concept, we may observe the increasingly porous divisions between the time of work and the time of leisure that characterize immaterial labour.[269] Given that work mobilizes the same capacities that are used in leisure time and ceases to be a separate and clearly defined sphere of activity,[270] labour may begin to 'follow the worker home' as it becomes difficult to register the switch in temporalities.[271] This is also exacerbated by ICTs, which enable and enhance the temporal and spatial flexibility of networked productivity;[272] the immaterial worker therefore has little choice but to "recalibrate" so as to keep up with the new temporalities of work.[273] Capital is also able to profit from this gap between the time of work, which is remunerated, and the rest of social life, which contributes to immaterial production;[274] meanwhile, non-work time comes to be viewed

[268] Sarah Sharma, "The Biopolitical Economy of Time," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 441, doi:10.1177/0196859911417999.
[269] Fortunati, "ICTs and Immaterial Labor," 149; Gorz, *The Immaterial*, 22; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 402–3; Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 93; Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, 95, 102; Tiziana Terranova and Trebor Scholz, "Trade Unionism, Digital Labor and the Sharing Economy," *EuroNomade*, July 26, 2014, http://www.euronomade.info/?p=2910; Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 102–3.
[270] Gorz, *The Immaterial*, 22; Trebor Scholz, "Crowdmilking," *Collectivate.net*, March 9, 2014, http://collectivate.net/journalisms/2014/3/9/crowdmilking.html; Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 102–3.
[271] Larsen, "Compulsory Creativity," 165; Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 93.
[272] Fortunati, "ICTs and Immaterial Labor," 149.
[273] Sharma, "Biopolitical Economy of Time," 442.
[274] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 105.

economistically through the lens of business relations.[275] The overall result is "an essential homogeneity" by which all of life is made to serve biopolitical production.[276]

On a more concrete level, the emphasis on making profitable investments and increasing one's human capital also profoundly alters the search for employment; the overarching market logic and the consequent demand for constant flexibility means that this becomes a never-ending process characterized by the staccato rhythm of short-lived and informal jobs.[277] Yet this process is not simply about job seeking but also constantly reinvesting in one's human capital to enhance employability. Tiziana Terranova regards the biopolitical governing of (un)employment as a way of sustaining the very "potentialities of work" by promoting constant training and discouraging – often through explicit legislative measures – what could be considered "antiproductive life-styles."[278] This ideology of potentiality means the entrepreneur of the self is subject to a never-ending collection of competing and often illusory opportunities that require careful navigation to ensure her/his profitability. Consequently, this renders one's relationship with possibility itself a fundamentally individual experience.[279] As such, flexibility and mobility constitute a key form of biopolitical government for immaterial labour that extends beyond the single disciplinary structures of the conventional workplace.[280] Indeed, Carlo Vercellone defines neoliberal policy that promotes flexibility as above all "a policy of generalized precarization."[281] Therefore, as I

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[275] Gorz, *The Immaterial*, 22, 111; Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 93; Carlo Vercellone, "From Formal Subsumption to General Intellect: Elements for a Marxist Reading of the Thesis of Cognitive Capitalism," *Historical Materialism* 15, no. 1 (March 2007): 34, doi:10.1163/156920607X171681.
[276] Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 103.
[277] Ibid., 43.
[278] Terranova, "Free Labor," 41.
[279] Paolo Virno and Max Henninger, "'On the Parasitic Character of Wage Labor' and 'Post-Fordist Semblance,'" *SubStance* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 45, doi:10.2307/4152851.
[280] Lazzarato, "Construction of Cultural Labour Market."
[281] Pasquinelli, "Vercellone."

will proceed to explain in further detail, immaterial labour, biopolitics, and precarity are all fundamentally interconnected.

Precarity

In recent years, Precarity has become an important point of consideration within post-*Operaista* theory, as well as in a variety of related contemporary social struggles.[282] This is largely because immaterial labour is understood as being highly precarious in nature,[283] particularly in the way it breaks down and redefines conventional distinctions between productive and nonproductive time.[284] In the words of Brophy and de Peuter, precarity stands as "one of the key material axes along which immaterial labor is organized, and thus one that defines its composition;" precarity therefore serves above all as a "conceptual tool" to better define and comprehend that conditions of immaterial labour.[285] However, when we speak of precarity, we must also make certain precisions. First of all, the security of the Fordist welfare state – to which precarity is often counterposed – must be understood as the exception rather than the rule under capitalism, in which life has historically been precarious.[286] Moreover, within this Fordist arrangement, security was only enjoyed by privileged subjects – typically white, male, and heterosexual – while precarity was experienced to different degrees by women, racial minorities, undocumented migrants, and citizens of the Global South.[287] If anything, the current resurgence of the discourse of precarity likely stems in large part from the fact that these

[282] Wright, "Mapping Pathways Within Italian Autonomist Marxism," 123–5.
[283] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 137.
[284] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 125; Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 75.
[285] Brophy and de Peuter, "Immaterial Labor, Precarity, and Recomposition," 180.
[286] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 31; Brophy and de Peuter, "Immaterial Labor, Precarity, and Recomposition," 187–8; Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 1; Mitropoulos, "Precari-Us?".
[287] Brophy and de Peuter, "Immaterial Labor, Precarity, and Recomposition," 187–18; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 247–8; Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 36–37, 49–50, 58–59; Mitropoulos, "Precari-Us?".

privileged members of society are beginning to feel its effects as well.[288] These precisions allow us to establish a more robust theorization of precarity that does not merely conceive of it as a kind of loss given that it has in fact been a historical constant.[289]

My general understanding of this concept will be primarily informed by Isabell Lorey, who is not explicitly a post-*Operaista* theorist despite her work engaging with the likes of Lazzarato and Virno. While the term 'precarity' is sometimes disparaged as a redundant neologism – adapted from the French *precarité* when the word 'precariousness' already exists – Lorey draws important distinctions within her terminology. She begins by broadly describing the 'precarious,' and thus precariousness, as "insecurity and vulnerability, destabilization and endangerment;" however, it is not a "transhistorical state of being human" but rather a shared existential condition, "an endangerment of bodies that is ineluctable and hence not to be secured, not only because they are mortal, but specifically because they are social."[290] Precariousness thus cannot be eliminated through security but must be approached from a social perspective. Lorey then posits precarity as the "second dimension" of precariousness, which describes the political, social, and legal effects of the ways in which the precarious is managed. For Lorey, precarity is never merely the antithesis of security,[291] because the former can only be hierarchically redistributed rather than eliminated.[292] Therefore, some are largely spared from this existential condition, while certain members of society "are perceived as other and considered less worthy of protection."[293] There is also a "third dimension" to the precarious, which Lorey calls precarization, and this represents a mode of biopolitical governing: it entails "not only

[288] Gill and Pratt, "In the Social Factory?," 2; Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines*, 154–5; Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 67.
[289] Conti et al., "Anamorphosis of Living Labour," 83.
[290] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 10–12.
[291] Ibid., 42.
[292] Ibid., 12.
[293] Ibid., 22.

destabilization through employment, but also destabilization of the conduct of life and thus of bodies and modes of subjectivation."[294] Precarization is therefore primarily a means of governing bodies through the application of conditions that augment their experiences of precarity.

However, the specific articulations of these orders of the precarious are historically contingent and the forms of domination that they enable are always different. Lorey observes within post-Fordist society and neoliberal governance a specific mode of precarization which sees precarity both normalized and democratized throughout society.[295] While earlier modes of precarization – not the least of which being the Fordist welfare state – sought to banish precarity to the "margins," under neoliberal policy it is increasingly "shifted to the middle of society;" in turn, neoliberal subjectivity internalizes and normalizes precarity, no longer viewing it as merely the condition of the other.[296] Lorey therefore proposes that neoliberal governance begins to function according to Lazzarato's notion of the 'minimum,' whereby the protections offered by socio-political institutions are reduced to a minimum threshold so as to produce a maximum of precarization; rather than fulfilling their protective function, these institutions have in fact been reformatted in order to produce insecurity.[297] This same logic also occurs through the imposition of a "new regime of time" with regards to work; understood in this way, wherein "precarity is a mechanism of control that determines the temporality of workers," the objective is once again to minimize protections – the time of non-work – so as to maximize availability, flexibility, and thus the potential of labour-power.[298] Overall, these stand as ways of undoing and reversing

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[294] Ibid., 12–13.
[295] Ibid., 11.
[296] Ibid., 39.
[297] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 128; Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 65.
[298] Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 146.

forms of mutualization,[299] and what Brophy and de Peuter describe as "the dismantling of the practices of solidarity associated with trade unionism, not to mention the welfare state itself."[300]

Consequently, experiences of risk and insecurity become individualized, as precarity helps to both reinforce and expand the biopolitical model of the 'entrepreneurial self' that I have outlined above. Indeed, Foucault first diagnosed in his work on biopolitics the neoliberal dictate that the individual must take it upon her/himself to optimize resources in accordance with the principles of human capital.[301] Based on Foucault's analysis, Lazzarato describes this as a process through which social policy aims not "to insure individuals against risks, but to constitute an economic space in which individuals *individually* take upon themselves and confront risks."[302] According to Bifo, this marks a fundamental reversal: whereas in the past it was the job of capital alone to assume risk as a function of seeking profit, it is now incumbent upon everyone to fulfill the same function as part of the becoming-capital of the neoliberal entrepreneur of the self.[303] Through this normalized neoliberal subjectivity, every member of society now requires "an individualized capacity for risk management," although this capacity will inevitably differ according to variables such as gender, race, and class. This process of individualization serves to promote inequality and thus competition, which is again the fundamental logic of neoliberal society,[304] as well as to harmonize the precarious worker with the market itself.[305] For Lorey, this results in "the individualization of precariousness" itself,[306] which denies its social dimension through which the precarious is collectively confronted.

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[299] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 121.
[300] Brophy and de Peuter, "Immaterial Labor, Precarity, and Recomposition," 183.
[301] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 145.
[302] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 118.
[303] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 120.
[304] Lazzarato, "Construction of Cultural Labour Market."
[305] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 111, 127.
[306] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 89.

This undoubtedly produces an array of negative effects. Individually, the precarious subject of neoliberal policy finds her/himself unable to plan her/his time due under insecure conditions.[307] This is consequently experienced according to the hierarchical nature of precarity itself: in particular, women find themselves forced to adopt "survival strategies" which their male peers would not (e.g. deciding not to have children) so as to better balance their personal and working lives in the face of unpredictability.[308] At the collective level, this generalized precarization stands to undermine the possibility of solidarity and collective organization. This occurs in part due to material impediments within the workplace: aggressive legislation has curbed the influence of unions,[309] while uncertain employment means workers are less inclined to risk their positions, thus functioning as a kind of disciplinary measure to discourage opposition.[310] Moreover, the entrepreneurial model of selfhood comes to define the ways in which one treats others,[311] and fundamentally individual modes of self-government render the possibility of collective action "ever less imaginable as a lived reality."[312] Bifo describes a similar scenario through the opposing concepts of conjunction and connection: while the former is fundamentally "becoming-other" and thus crucial for promoting genuine solidarity,[313] connection – which is the paradigmatic mode of exchange of digitized immaterial labour – is "a relationship between formatted segments" aimed above all at compatibility and thus

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[307] Merijn Oudenampsen and Gavin Sullivan, "Precarity and n/european Identity: an interview with Alex Foti (Chainworkers)," 2004, 1, http://www.sindominio.net/metabolik/alephandria/txt/Foti_Precarity.pdf; Brophy and de Peuter, "Immaterial Labor, Precarity, and Recomposition," 182.
[308] Morini, "Feminization of Labour in Cognitive Capitalism," 52.
[309] Brophy, "Organizations of Immaterial Labour," 262–3.
[310] Ibid., 264–6; Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 5–6.
[311] Brophy and de Peuter, "Immaterial Labor, Precarity, and Recomposition," 182.
[312] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 90.
[313] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 130.

productivity.[314] In keeping with Bifo's concept, we may consider the individualized 'entrepreneurial self' as the specific format of post-Fordism and precarization as a key means of formatting individuals. Without the possibility of a collective response to these conditions, isolated immaterial labourers are left exposed to the prevailing form of exploitation: the expropriation of common value via rent.

Value, Exploitation, and Rent

In the estimation of various post-*Operaisti* theorists, it is increasingly difficult to determine the value of immaterial labour because the "traditional criteria" of work have ceased to define productivity under post-Fordism.[315] As Hardt and Negri propose, these criteria are insufficient for describing and measuring the biopolitical nature of immaterial production:

> Industry produces no surplus except what is generated by social activity—and this is why, buried in the great whale of life, value is beyond measure…. The excess of value is determined today in the affects, in the bodies crisscrossed by knowledge, in the intelligence of the mind, and in the sheer power to act.[316]

In concrete terms, Aras Ozgun has considered creative labour (cultural production) as a key example of such unquantifiable activity: the overall worth of a work cannot merely be determined by the number of hours that went into producing it, nor its monetary value in circulation; even determining its "social use value" is difficult.[317] Of course, this does not mean that value has ceased to exist, nor that valuation is no longer a part of capitalist accumulation; quite the contrary in fact, as capital valuation continues to determine how immaterial work is compensated.[318] However, this value is simply *constructed* "beyond measure" and thus

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[314] Ibid., 98–103.
[315] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 94.
[316] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 365–6.
[317] Ozgun, "Creative Industries," 119–120.
[318] Dowling, "Producing the Dining Experience," 131.

somewhat arbitrarily.[319] What is measured is therefore "a multiplicity of factors" which attempt to describe a social space: the surplus value of labour is determined by sociality, cooperation, and what is common among immaterial production rather than individual wealth.[320] This construction of value is destined to under-compensate immaterial labourers, whose work – which implicates the totality of their subjectivity – always exceeds any criteria.

However, while the value of immaterial labour may become increasingly difficult to quantify, its mode of expropriation has become more specific. Post-*Operaisti* theorists have analyzed this loosely under the concept of what Carlo Vercellone calls the 'becoming rent' of profit. "Why becoming?" asks Vercellone: precisely because of this changing nature of value.[321] Vercellone defines rent in a general sense as "a credit title or a right to the ownership of some material and immaterial resource that [grants] a right to drawing value from a position of exteriority in respect to production."[322] Rent thus takes on its preeminent role within post-Fordism precisely because capital has lost its hegemonic control over the production of value: given the central place of autonomous human intellect in immaterial production and the wider availability of the means through which it is carried out – at least in the case of computer-enabled work and cultural production[323] – capital finds itself in this aforementioned "position of exteriority" as a mere organizer of labour or provider of the infrastructure through which productive work occurs. In order to continue to extract value under these conditions, capital must

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[319] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 356.
[320] Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 288.
[321] Carlo Vercellone, "The New Articulation of Wages, Rent and Profit in Cognitive Capitalism" (paper presented at The Art of Rent conference, Queen Mary University School of Business and Management, London, UK, February 29, 2008), 3–6, http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/26/55/84/PDF/The_new_articulation_of_wagesHall1.pdf.
[322] Carlo Vercellone, "The Crisis of the Law of Value and the Becoming-Rent of Profit," in *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles, and New Political Scenarios*, ed. Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 96.
[323] Nunes, "Forward How?," 188–9.

produce scarcity, as in the control and privatization of access, in order to sustain itself through rent;[324] however, it is not necessary for the immaterial commodity itself to becomes scarce, as its "free multiplication" is needed to generate value through its circulation.[325] In sum, rent can be considered the primary mode of exploitation inherent to post-Fordist capitalism and immaterial production, and its particular forms include software patents, communication protocols, and network infrastructures.[326]

There are consequently two important qualities of rent to consider. First of all, it is parasitic: whereas profit is based on surplus-value, which is itself established based on the cost of necessary productive labour, Matteo Pasquinelli defines rent as being independent of labour-costs because it is an "income an owner can earn just by owning an asset." Thus parasitic extraction can occur surreptitiously: production takes place regardless, and value is merely siphoned off;[327] in this sense, rent is the mode of value expropriation specific to the kind of free online labour which Terranova discusses.[328] Secondly, rent must be understood as parasitic specifically of the *common*. In fact, both Pasquinelli and Vercellone define rent as the other side of the commons, a notion that dates back to the enclosure of common lands,[329] and the privatization and commodification of common resources in general.[330] Speaking of contemporary circumstances, Hardt and Negri declare, "Just as we must understand the

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[324] Boffo, Book Review, 448: Gorz, *The Immaterial*, 38–39, 106; Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 137–41; Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 145–6; Vercellone, "New Articulation of Wages," 3.
[325] Ozgun, "Creative Industries," 120; Matteo Pasquinelli, "The Ideology of Free Culture and the Grammar of Sabotage," in *Education in the Creative Economy: Knowledge and Learning in the Age of Innovation*, ed. D. Araya and M. Peters (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 9, http://asounder.org/resources/pasquinelli_sabotage.pdf..
[326] Pasquinelli, "Beyond the Ruins of the Creative City," 5.
[327] Pasquinelli, "Ideology of Free Culture," 8.
[328] Terranova, "Free Labor."
[329] Pasquinelli, "Ideology of Free Culture," 8; Vercellone, "New Articulation of Wages," 3.
[330] Vercellone, "New Articulation of Wages," 4.

production of value in terms of the common, so too must we try to conceive exploitation as *the expropriation of the common*. The common, in other words, has become the locus of surplus value."[331] Indeed, for Hardt and Negri, the exploitation of immaterial labour – that is, labour that is fundamentally social, communicative, and relational – is itself *biopolitical* because it is precisely the exploitation of the common.[332] So too does Pasquinelli define the immaterial parasite of rent as one which primarily exploits "biological production through the semiotic and technological domain."[333] This biopolitical exploitation takes place in "the field of social labor, operating on the level of information flows, communication networks, social codes, linguistic innovations, and practices of affects and passions."[334] More than simply extracting value, however, expropriation of the commons through rent also de-socializes both the common and labour-power itself.[335]

Under these conditions, capital aims to generate income primarily from the circulation of immaterial commodities. In order to do so, immaterial rent must become a specifically *technological* rent, the kind that typifies the ostensibly free spaces of online communication and cooperation. Pasquinelli suggests that this form of rent differs from one that merely siphons off value from knowledge production in that it also exploits the material and immaterial spaces of common production;[336] therefore technological rent is specifically tethered to monopolistic ICT infrastructures, including the social networks of Web 2.0. It functions according to a "spectacular" logic by "simulating a fictional world, building a collaborative environment or

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[331] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 150 (italics in original).
[332] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 140–141, 385.
[333] Pasquinelli, "Ideology of Free Culture," 3.
[334] Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 141.
[335] Vercellone, "New Articulation of Wages," 11.
[336] Pasquinelli, "Ideology of Free Culture," 10.

simply providing communication channels."[337] Consequently, the immaterial parasite of technological rent – Pasquinelli offers Google and its various services as a key example – may appear benevolent because it does not promote a rigid copyright regime and supports free and collaborative production; however, it does so because these represent a seemingly endless reservoir of value which can be extracted with little opposition through algorithmic processes, the most notable of which being Google's AdSense web advertising service. In Pasquinelli's theorization, this parasite functions according to Virno's notion of biopolitics: it is primarily a biopolitical structure that seeks to capture the potentiality of labour-power within online spaces of collaboration.[338] It is, as Pasquinelli declares, "a machine to capture living time and living labour and to transform the *common intellect* into *network value*."[339]

What then is this 'network value?' Pasquinelli suggests it is primarily a means of describing the social relations of an immaterial commodity.[340] Specifically, the measure of the "social dimension" of information and "its transformation into value" occurs through metadata. Pasquinelli defines metadata in general as "*as the measure of the value of social relations*," the accumulation of which is mediated by digital technologies. These technologies, amongst which he includes online social networks, serve as "a punctual cartography of these productive [social] relations" and fundamentally "measure value in terms of number of links per node."[341] Bifo offers a similar understanding of value production within collective digital labour: it is enhanced through a greater number of connections within a network, which enables the acceleration of

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[337] Ibid., 3.
[338] Matteo Pasquinelli, "Google's PageRank Algorithm: A Diagram of Cognitive Capitalism and the Rentier of the Common Intellect," in *Deep Search*, ed. Konrad Becker and Felix Stalder (London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 2–7, https://www.academia.edu/1992027/Googles_PageRank_Algorithm_A_diagram_of_Cognitive_Capitalism_and_the_Rentier_of_the_Common_Intellect.
[339] Pasquinelli, "Google's PageRank Algorithm," 2 (italics in original).
[340] Ibid., 6.
[341] Pasquinelli, "Italian Operaismo," 63–64.

circulation and surplus value creation.[342] Consequently, Pasquinelli proposes that "[t]he extraction of metadata describes… a sort of network surplus value."[343] It is not surprising, then, that the collection and processing of user data has become both highly lucrative and contentious, leading Hannes Grassegger to define it as a new kind of privileged commodity – "the oil of the 21st century."[344]

This holds important implications for immaterial production. While the material consequences of precarization can be self-evident, it is not always easy to make the claim of exploitation when immaterial labour takes place within networks that are free and understood as sites of play rather than work. However, as Pasquinelli suggests, no matter how outwardly progressive and emancipatory digital technologies and networked production may purport themselves to be, they cannot be considered truly democratic if they subsist off the expropriation of network surplus-value through metadata;[345] until then, such platforms will tend to function as a kind of private "virtual real estate"[346] or "digital serfdom."[347] It therefore becomes essential to make these platforms legible as sites of exploitation for a broader public in order to even begin constructing an opposition to the expropriation of immaterial labour through rent.

As I will further elaborate, these conditions increasingly apply to the field of musical labour, both because the recording industry has entered a post-Fordist phase and because artists increasingly perform immaterial labour by using online platforms as the primary means of disseminating and promoting their work. Therefore, using the post-*Operaismo* framework I have

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[342] Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody*, 44–45.
[343] Pasquinelli, "Italian Operaismo," 63–64.
[344] Hans Grassegger, "I Am Capital," *Motherboard*, May 28, 2015, http://motherboard.vice.com/read/i-am-capital.
[345] Pasquinelli, "Google's PageRank Algorithm," 9.
[346] Trebor Scholz, "Market Ideology and the Myths of Web 2.0," *First Monday* 13, no. 3 (March 2008), http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2138/1945.
[347] Grassegger, "I Am Capital."

established, I will proceed with a critique of the emancipatory potential of platforms such as SoundCloud in order to demonstrate the conditions of precarization and exploitation that they can promote if approached uncritically.

Chapter 3: Contemporary Musical Labour on SoundCloud – A Case Study

As I have described previously, greater access to inexpensive musical equipment has seen home studio-based music production becoming accessible to a larger number of people.[348] However, the ability to reach a wider audience with their music is a relatively novel phenomenon. Prevailing thought suggests that the catalyst for this has been the emergence of the MP3 file format as a convenient means of sharing music online, which has in turn challenged the dominance that the recording industry had accrued over the twentieth century and enabled new alternative means of distribution such as SoundCloud. However, while facile narratives of digital music disrupting the recording industry and its ossified power structures are pervasive – particularly surrounding the emergence of Napster and the so-called "MP3 crisis"[349] – the reality is more complex and reveals the ongoing post-Fordist shift within musical production.

The Recording Industry, the 'MP3 Crisis,' and the Post-Fordist Shift

In actuality, this crisis represents the final tipping point for longstanding systemic problems – such as the vulnerability of even the most established record companies to unpredictable markets and the waning appeal of music compared to other consumer technologies – and has functioned as a rather convenient way of shifting blame to forces outside the industry.[350] In fact, the industry's marked decline could be blamed on its own reluctance to fully

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[348] Andrew Leyshon, *Reformatted: Code, Networks, and the Transformation of the Music Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 130–134, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199572410.001.0001.
[349] Brian J. Hracs, "A Creative Industry in Transition: The Rise of Digitally Driven Independent Music Production," *Growth and Change* 43, no. 3 (2012): 442.
[350] Leyshon et al., "On the Reproduction of the Musical Economy," 182–5; Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 245.

embrace online distribution in its infancy, which allowed the technology sector to gain a crucial stranglehold over nascent revenue streams.[351] Indeed, far from the MP3 being antithetical to the commodification of music, the industry's inattention to the format instead created a new source of value which primarily benefited other industries,[352] which has in turn allowed these non-traditional actors to gain influence within the industry. In the years since this sea change, major record labels have appeared to make peace with their new diminished role, abandoning efforts to popularize proprietary online distribution channels and instead opting to rely on third parties such as iTunes in order to maximize short-term profit and minimize risk.[353] Therefore, in part because of the growing influence of the technology sector, the recording industry is presently experiencing a "period of experimentation" which has resulted in "a more diverse ecology of the musical economy" with the overall goal of re-establishing stability.[354]

However, even with the overdue acceptance of digital music as a meaningful revenue source, its long-term profitability – and indeed the ongoing viability of the recording industry in general – remains uncertain. Although a period of booming digital sales prior to this crisis period offered hope that the industry was once again on the upswing, a closer inspection proves rather more discouraging: as of 2012, digital sales figures, while strong in the United States,[355] nevertheless paled in comparison to those of physical media industry-wide, and did so in a climate of overall stagnant musical demand.[356] Even the optimism in the American market was

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[351] Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 203–4.
[352] Ibid., 188.
[353] Patrick Burkart and Tom McCourt, *Digital Music Wars: Ownership and Control of the Celestial Jukebox* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 90.
[354] Leyshon et al., "On the Reproduction of the Musical Economy," 185.
[355] Josh Halliday, "Digital Downloads Overtake Physical Music Sales in the US for First Time," *The Guardian*, January 6, 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2012/jan/06/downloads-physical-sales-us.
[356] Leyshon, *Reformatted*, 3.

not to last, as digital music sales decreased for the first time ever in 2013.[357] Consequently, the recording industry faces continued instability and uncertain prospects for the future. Yet this crisis also represents an opportunity, and SoundCloud has come to exemplify the ways in which emerging talents are attempting to take advantage of a changing and destabilized music industry.

Therefore, much as capital has responded to economic uncertainty and changing market conditions through a newfound emphasis on flexibility, so too can we consider the changes currently underway within the recording industry and musical labour as an ongoing shift in line with these post-Fordist ideals. The industry has in fact been moving towards an increasingly flexible and decentralized structure since the 1990s,[358] but more recent developments have rendered this restructuration ever more urgent: much as Marazzi has stressed the necessity of an "external shock" to set post-Fordism in motion,[359] the 'MP3 crisis' has prompted industry reorganization and a redefinition of the relationship between musical capital and labour. This is largely because the emergence of new digital technologies and the growth of file-sharing has undermined the industry's ability to manage risk,[360] which has also resulted in major labels becoming increasingly reliant on established artists as guaranteed investments.[361] Faced with such conditions of increased risk and uncertain profits, traditional recording industry actors have sought to ally themselves with forces in the technology sector – particularly in the form of new streaming services, including Spotify, Tidal, and SoundCloud – whether by developing working

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[357] Ed Christman, "Digital Music Sales Decrease For First Time in 2013," *Billboard.com*, January 3, 2014, http://www.billboard.com/biz/articles/news/digital-and-mobile/5855162/digital-music-sales-decrease-for-first-time-in-2013.
[358] Martin, *Sounds and Society*, 253.
[359] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 28.
[360] Burkart and McCourt, *Digital Music Wars*, 36.
[361] Hracs, "A Creative Industry in Transition," 453.

relationships or through direct investment.[362] Essentially, these services permit cost-cutting strategies through the imposition of conditions of increased flexibility; in this respect, SoundCloud is particularly emblematic because it not only represents an outlet for established industry talents but also a significant reserve of musical labour and grassroots marketing.

The Post-Fordist Recording Industry and the Minimization of Risk

Pierre-Michel Menger has long ago identified the recording industry's strategy of seeking to minimize "the major part of the costs of securing pools of employable artists" by shifting costs and risk to individuals.[363] SoundCloud happens to represent a particularly efficient way of doing so: as Ross notes, such online platforms function as "sources of free, or cut-price content," which both reduce the costs of investing in new artists as well as hinder the bargaining power of all but the most successful established artists.[364] Thus, SoundCloud comes to represent an evolution of what Toynbee calls the "proto-market," a pool of unsigned musical talent that often proves difficult for the industry to effectively exploit, and which has necessitated specially skilled industry figures to evaluate the most profitable opportunities for investment.[365] In the past, this process could be simplified somewhat by major labels maintaining equity in independent

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[362] Zack O'Malley Greenburg, "Revenge Of The Record Labels: How The Majors Renewed Their Grip On Music," *Forbes*, April 15, 2015, http://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2015/04/15/revenge-of-the-record-labels-how-the-majors-renewed-their-grip-on-music/.

[363] Pierre-Michel Menger, "Artistic Labor Markets and Careers," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (August 1999): 569, doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.25.1.541.

[364] David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (London; New York: Routledge, 2011), 114–5; Andrew Ross, "Nice Work If You Can Get It: The Mercurial Career of Creative Industries Policy," in *MyCreativity Reader: A Critique of Creative Industries*, ed. Geert Lovink (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2007), 21, http://www.networkcultures.org/_uploads/32.pdf.

[365] Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 25–28; Jason Toynbee, "Fingers to the Bone or Spaced Out on Creativity? Labor Process and Ideology in the Production of Pop," in *Cultural Work: Understanding the Cultural Industries*, ed. Andrew Beck (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 52.

companies and having access to emerging artists with a quantifiable degree of success,[366] but a significant investment was still required in order to expose these independent artists to a wider audience. As Leyshon et al. suggest, online platforms increasingly come to stand in for these independent labels, "not in the development of artists but rather in the development of *business models,*" and consequently represent "research and development divisions" for the industry.[367] SoundCloud is able to fulfill a similar function in that it is increasingly used – both by major labels and artist entrepreneurs such as Snoop Dogg and Beyonce – as a means of procuring talent for further exposure.[368] However, more importantly, the platform enables industry intermediaries to identify artists who have already established a pre-existing fan base and who demonstrate the capacity for self-managed success.[369] Budi Voogt, record label co-founder, artist manager, and author of *The Soundcloud Bible* (2015), describes success on SoundCloud as increasingly essential for career aspirations, given that the recording industry is now primarily interested in

> great musicians who are proving that they're great by developing their own fanbases and getting traction…. Today, you need to cultivate your own fanbase before people will even consider working with you, and once they do pick you up, using the tools and independent marketing means at your disposal will be crucial to establishing something that lasts long-term.[370]

Thus, not only are record labels better able to assess profitable investments through measurable popularity on SoundCloud, they are also able to harness the artist's presence on the platform as

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[366] Burkart and McCourt, *Digital Music Wars*, 27.
[367] Leyshon et al., "On the Reproduction of the Musical Economy," 194 (italics in original).
[368] "Big Sean Connects with Fans through 'Beware' Freestyle Competition," *SoundCloud Blog*, August 26, 2013, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2013/08/26/big-sean-beware-soundcloud/; "IMS Ibiza 2015 - Patrick Moxey Keynote Interview," YouTube video, 13:29, from keynote interview from IMS Ibiza 2015 conference on May 20, 2015, posted by "International Music Summit," July 9, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBrjlICCtWU; "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner SevnthWonder," *SoundCloud Blog*, February 25, 2015, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/02/25/meet-premier-partner-sevnthwonder/; Horn, "How SoundCloud Changed Music Forever"; Alex Ljung, "On SoundCloud Reaches 100 Premier Partners," *SoundCloud Blog*, March 2, 2015, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/03/02/on-soundcloud-reaches-100-partners/; Rusli, Karp, and Macmillan, "SoundCloud's Valuation."
[369] Hracs, "A Creative Industry in Transition," 453–4.
[370] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 101.

an ongoing marketing channel with relatively little associated cost or risk. While music making practices have always been largely autonomous compared to labour in other cultural industries, the phenomenon I have described in fact demonstrates that the demand for autonomy (in the form of self-responsibility for success or failure in the market) placed on working musicians is in the process of increasing.[371] Consequently, the roles fulfilled by typical industry institutions, as well as their responsibilities towards artists, come to be drastically redefined in order to promote a more flexible and competitive labour market in the interest of recording industry capital.

The Changing Role of Industry Institutions

One of the primary methods through which flexibility has been cultivated in post-Fordism is in the gradual withdrawal of capital's responsibility towards labour by promoting autonomy alongside the dismantling of the structures of support that characterized the Fordist welfare state. Similarly, we may consider SoundCloud as part of a process of diminishing "socialization and mutualization" in favour of "individual access" according to the neoliberal logic which Lazzarato has described.[372] Indeed, although the recording industry has sought to exploit working musicians for profit throughout its history, the record label system did function to mutualize risk through its recording contracts. Musician and streaming media critic David Lowery has described this as a "socialistic risk sharing/revenue sharing scheme;" under this arrangement, record label advances could finance a large number of artists through the commercial success of a select few.[373] Conversely, while artists are now able to directly profit

[371] Toynbee, "Fingers to the Bone or Spaced Out on Creativity," 39.
[372] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 124.
[373] David Lowery, "Meet The New Boss, Worse Than The Old Boss?," *The Trichordist*, April 15, 2012, http://thetrichordist.com/2012/04/15/meet-the-new-boss-worse-than-the-old-boss-full-post/; Michael Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship: Music Producers

from their labour, they in turn become solely responsible for assuming the risk and expenses associated with their work; artists must either subcontract intermediaries and pay out of their own revenues[374] or assume the herculean task of performing all necessary functions themselves. Within this industry climate, SoundCloud exemplifies Lazzarato's notion of individual access: artists maintain their own profiles, take on the responsibility of their own promotion, and assume the costs associated with their musical careers.[375]

In this sense, SoundCloud functions as what Gerald Raunig has called a 'pseudo-institution,' which he describes as a nascent trend within post-Fordist cultural industries. These are counterposed to traditional institutions – among which we could include record labels, as well as musicians' unions – which are fundamentally based on a compromise with labour: while cultural producers find themselves subordinate and controlled, these institutions in turn offer them "security and… a certain degree of control over irresolvable contradictions" between capital and labour.[376] For musicians contracted to record labels, the former experience diminished autonomy and personal revenues and but also enjoy "the opportunity to focus on being creative;"[377] with regard to unions, musicians see their autonomy curtailed in exchange for a concrete means of challenging and ameliorating exploitative working conditions. Conversely, today's pseudo-institutions are "temporary," "ephemeral," and oriented towards flexibility: they foster unprecedented autonomy at the same time as they "promote precarization and insecurity"

Mobilising and Converting Bourdieu's Alternative Capitals," *Poetics* 40, no. 3 (June 2012): 244, doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2012.03.002.

[374] Lowery, "Meet The New Boss."

[375] Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 7.

[376] Gerald Raunig, "Creative Industries as Mass Deception," in *Culture and Contestation in the New Century*, ed. Marc James Léger (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2011), 97–100, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10465923.

[377] Brian J. Hracs, "Cultural Intermediaries in the Digital Age: The Case of Independent Musicians and Managers in Toronto," *Regional Studies* 49, no. 3 (March 4, 2015): 5, doi:10.1080/00343404.2012.750425.

through the removal of institutionalized guarantees.[378] The result is an emphasis on individual freedom and creativity in perfect correspondence with the neoliberal subjectivity I have previously described.[379] Accordingly, traditional institutions – despite their safeguarding functions – are disparaged as being impediments to individual creativity and freedom,[380] just as record labels are often viewed either with suspicion or derision as relics that have outlived their usefulness.[381] Under these conditions, unions and other structures of solidarity are marginalized and increasingly absent despite working conditions that would otherwise necessitate them.[382] Indeed, cultural producers view unionization as detrimental to their employability and thus their potential for individual success.[383] Yet in return, the new pseudo-institutions of the music industry fail to offer a greater chance of success, as record labels and other traditional industry institutions remain crucial for aspiring artists attempting to reach a wider audience.[384] Rather, what results is primarily a climate of individual responsibility and expanded competition under the guise of democratized musical production and expanded artist autonomy.

Web 2.0, Rhetorics of Democratization, and Flexible Labour

Like any other profit-driven cultural industry,[385] the recording industry requires a large and competitive pool of available labour from which it can select the most promising candidates.

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[378] Raunig, "Creative Industries as Mass Deception," 100.
[379] Ibid., 102.
[380] Angela McRobbie, "'Everyone Is Creative': Artists as Pioneers of the New Economy?," in *Culture and Contestation in the New Century*, ed. Marc James Léger (Bristol: Intellect Ltd., 2011), 82, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10465923.
[381] Young and Collins, "Music 2.0," 348.
[382] Gill and Pratt, "In the Social Factory?," 19–20.
[383] Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, 119–25.
[384] Sargent, "Local Musicians," 484.
[385] Bill Ryan, *Making Capital from Culture: The Corporate Form of Capitalist Cultural Production* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 48, 58, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10599461.

Musical labour must therefore be mobilized through expanded access to channels of promotion and circulation for amateur producers, and this occurs through the model of online technologies commonly known as Web 2.0. David Beer considers Web 2.0 as representative of "a large-scale shift toward a 'participatory' and 'collaborative' version of the web."[386] For Beer, Web 2.0 seeks to harness collective creativity by fostering a culture of "shared responsibility" through which users are expected to freely produce as well as consume content.[387] These platforms therefore come to be seen as the neutral architecture that simply enables autonomous sociality and cultural production.

There is consequently a pervasive "rhetoric of democratization" surrounding such technologies,[388] which suggests that they 'disrupt' inefficient or undemocratic infrastructures and replace them with non-hierarchical egalitarian alternatives.[389] A similar discourse has emerged around digital music and the MP3; the latter in particular has been portrayed as a form of "resistance" against record labels' perceived corruption and failure to innovate.[390] Such 'democratizing' technologies are therefore said to enact a process of disintermediation, whereby middlepersons are circumvented and the user experience improves.[391] In the recording industry, this means the removal of traditional industry gatekeepers, whose function is described as

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[386] David Beer, "Power through the Algorithm? Participatory Web Cultures and the Technological Unconscious," *New Media & Society* 11, no. 6 (2009): 986, doi:10.1177/1461444809336551.
[387] David Beer, "Making Friends with Jarvis Cocker: Music Culture in the Context of Web 2.0," *Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 2 (2008): 226–7, doi:10.1177/1749975508091034.
[388] Beer, "Power through the Algorithm?," 986.
[389] Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 367, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10170022; Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 140.
[390] Patrick Burkart, *Music and Cyberliberties* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 16–21, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10468468.
[391] Steve Jones, "Music That Moves: Popular Music, Distribution and Network Technologies," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 222–3, doi:10.1080/09502380110107562.

"arbitrary" and therefore unfair and inefficient. While the Internet and the MP3 are seen as having brought about an initial wave of democratization, Web 2.0-based forms of music distribution expand on this through ready-made platforms that permit greater accessibility and ease of use. Overall, this discourse has fostered a perception that platforms such as SoundCloud render major record labels redundant by permitting artists to engage directly with listeners and collaborators in "flattened hierarchies."[392] SoundCloud seizes upon this perception and makes it the cornerstone of its corporate brand: in an interview given in 2013, co-founder Alex Ljung celebrated his platform's "disruption" of barriers of access between artists and listeners, as well as its ability to undermine traditional distribution practices.[393] Elsewhere, in a post commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, one SoundCloud blogger reinforced the brand's association with freedom and democracy through the pronouncement that "SoundCloud celebrates the tearing down of walls anywhere, and audio everywhere."[394]

However, while such technologies do afford certain emancipatory possibilities, they should not be taken as a given.[395] Similarly, although the growth of the MP3 may have done away with "the artificial scarcity of recorded music," Jonathan Sterne notes that "it does not guarantee a more just or democratic organization of music."[396] Sterne further stresses that such alternative distribution channels of digital music are not "automatically or necessarily more

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[392] Young and Collins, "Music 2.0," 340–345.
[393] Ondi Timoner, "Sound Advice from the Founder of SoundCloud," *PandoDaily*, September 7, 2013, http://pando.com/2013/09/07/soundcloud-started-out-as-a-way-for-musicians-to-collaborate-remotely/.
[394] "SoundCloud Celebrates the Tearing down of Walls Anywhere, and Audio Everywhere," *SoundCloud Blog*, June 27, 2014, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2014/11/07/soundcloud-celebrates-the-tearing-down-of-walls-anywhere-and-audio-everywhere/.
[395] Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 4.
[396] Sterne, *MP3*, 188.

progressive or egalitarian."[397] If anything, these platforms function in large part to serve corporate interests and are in no way inherently democratic.[398] This is not to suggest that SoundCloud and its ilk provide no benefit to emerging artists: social networking platforms can be crucial for musicians in small or remote cities that lack access to conventional industry institutions, and can in fact help obscure artists reach a wider audience.[399] Not surprisingly, aspiring musicians are often quite optimistic about new forms of distribution.[400] However, the kind of rhetoric that I have problematized above also raises unreasonable expectations for success on Web 2.0, as the disruptive potential of platforms like SoundCloud is often greatly exaggerated.[401] Indeed, these inflated expectations correspond to a perception that beginning one's path to success requires only a computer, music production software, and access to social media.[402] However, music journalist Emilie Friedlander rightly questions the potentially negative consequences of this attitude: "[T]he belief that everybody can become a well-known musician will never be anything more than an illusion, and the more people there are who cast their name in the hat, the higher the possibility that the world will be paying attention to someone else's music instead of yours."[403]

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[397] Ibid., 216–7.
[398] Rachel McLean, Paul G. Oliver, and David W. Wainwright, "The Myths of Empowerment through Information Communication Technologies: An Exploration of the Music Industries and Fan Bases," *Management Decision* 48, no. 9 (2010): 1373–4, doi:10.1108/00251741011082116.
[399] Sargent, "Local Musicians," 475.
[400] Young and Collins, "Music 2.0," 348.
[401] Jeremy Morris, "Sounds in the Cloud: Cloud Computing and the Digital Music Commodity," *First Monday* 16, no. 5 (May 2011), http://firstmonday.org/article/view/3391/2917.
[402] Toynbee, "Fingers to the Bone or Spaced Out on Creativity," 53; Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 5.
[403] Emilie Friedlander, "Social Anxiety: Should Artists Be Paying Journalists to Listen to Their Music?," *The Fader*, July 31, 2014, http://www.thefader.com/2014/07/31/social-anxiety-should-artists-be-paying-journalists-to-listen-to-their-music.

Friedlander's warning is well founded: this democratization has in effect flooded the musical labour market and rendered it infinitely more competitive.[404] Despite the ease of circulating one's music, it becomes increasingly difficult to attract attention;[405] in fact, some artists believe it is now at least as difficult as it was before the emergence of online platforms, if not more so.[406] Furthermore, musicians experience an even greater necessity to differentiate themselves in order to stand out from their peers;[407] at the same time, this demand for novelty makes it increasingly difficult to achieve anything but short-term notoriety.[408] By the same token, intense competition also has the effect of limiting solidarity and collaboration even in such highly social and interactive work.[409] Therefore, as evidenced by Angela McRobbie's analysis of trends towards easier access throughout the cultural industries, what results is a "model [of competition]" which "normalizes precariousness and uncertainty and makes irrelevant formal social relations of working life."[410] In sum, this highly competitive market demands a greater investment of time and effort on the part of the aspiring musician in order to

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[404] Leyshon, *Reformatted*, 164.
[405] Sargent, "Local Musicians," 470.
[406] Michael Gaffney and Pauline Rafferty, "Making the Long Tail Visible: Social Networking Sites and Independent Music Discovery," *Program: Electronic Library and Information Systems* 43, no. 4 (2009): 388, doi:10.1108/00330330910998039.
[407] Brian J. Hracs, Doreen Jakob, and Atle Hauge, "Standing Out in the Crowd: The Rise of Exclusivity-based Strategies to Compete in the Contemporary Marketplace for Music and Fashion," *Environment and Planning* 45, no. 5 (2013): 1158, doi:10.1068/a45229; Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 11.
[408] Leon Neyfakh, "The Next Next Level," *N+1*, Winter 2015, https://nplusonemag.com/issue-21/essays/the-next-next-level; Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 29.
[409] Hracs, Jakob, and Hauge, "Standing Out in the Crowd," 1156.
[410] Angela McRobbie, "The Los Angelesation of London: Three Short Waves of Young People's Micro-Economies of Culture and Creativity in the UK," in *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the "Creative Industries,"* ed. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig (London, UK: MayFlyBooks, 2011), 127–8, http://mayflybooks.org/?page_id=74.

make a living,[411] as well as greater flexibility in the kinds of tasks she/he is willing to perform in service of her/his career.[412]

If indeed the music industry has entered its post-Fordist phase, in what sense does musical work taking place on SoundCloud represent a form of immaterial labour? Certainly, musical production in general – both historically and today – falls under the umbrella of what Lazzarato has described as the 'classic' forms of immaterial labour (i.e. cultural work); so, too, does musical work produce the "cultural content of the commodity,"[413] or what Hardt and Negri would define as an immaterial rather than material good.[414] Yet the form of online musical labour that predominates today suggests an even greater affinity with the definition of immaterial labour which post-*Operaismo* has established. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, musical labour on SoundCloud corresponds with the theorizations of Lazzarato, Hardt and Negri, and their contemporaries in five main respects: it is highly technological and based on "analytical and symbolic tasks"[415] achieved through the fundamental use of information and communications technologies (ICTs); it is fundamentally communicative work as a form of social media; it is affective in that it requires building relationships and managing affect; it is productive in a way that confounds standard measures of value but nevertheless permits expropriation; and, in an overall sense, it is biopolitical as a form of labour based on the production of subjectivity in keeping with the profile of Foucault's entrepreneurial self. Within each of these aspects of musical immaterial labour, we may also observe what Paolo Virno calls the "emotional tonalities" or "bad sentiments" of post-Fordist work – namely opportunism and cynicism – in the

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[411] Brian J. Hracs and Deborah Leslie, "Living Under the Lights," (Working paper, Martin Prosperity Research, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, 2013), 15, http://martinprosperity.org/papers/LivingUnderLights-formatted.pdf.
[412] Ibid., 3; Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 2.
[413] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 133, 137, 142–3.
[414] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 290.
[415] Ibid., 293.

way musicians make use of scarce resources in a highly competitive marketplace. Competition and flexibility also accentuate the precarizing function of this immaterial work, as increasingly uncertain conditions of remuneration and career instability become the pervasive.

SoundCloud as Symbolic and Computerized Labour

Hardt and Negri describe one principal instance of immaterial labour as "the manipulation of symbols and information along the model of computer operation."[416] Certainly, contemporary musical labour increasingly fits this description due to the continued technologization of music making in general: it now greatly relies on software processes that are manipulated through a graphical user interface (GUI);[417] similarly, Thor Magnusson describes digital music systems as symbolic technologies in that "interaction happens primarily through a symbolic channel" without requiring knowledge of these technologies' theoretical or technical inner workings.[418] However, musical labour on SoundCloud demonstrates that computerization now exceeds production to encompass distribution and promotion as well. Thus, on SoundCloud, users navigate the interface through standard point-and-click behaviour, engage with graphical representations, type messages, and engage in any number of activities that correspond to established modes of routine computer use. In turn, these activities also begin to take on a greater place within the necessary labour of the working musician.

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[416] Ibid., 291.
[417] Matthew Duignan, James Noble, and Robert Biddle, "A Taxonomy of Sequencer User-Interfaces," *International Computer Music Conference Proceedings* (2005): 1–2, doi:10.1.1.380.7367; Matthew Duignan, James Noble, and Robert Biddle, "Abstraction and Activity in Computer-Mediated Music Production," *Computer Music Journal* 34, no. 4 (2010): 23, doi:10.1162/COMJ_a_00023.
[418] Thor Magnusson, "Of Epistemic Tools: Musical Instruments as Cognitive Extensions," *Organised Sound* 14, no. 2 (2009): 172–4, doi:10.1017/S1355771809000272.

As a consequence, there is a gradual redefinition of the skills that define a successful musician. For instance, one recording studio manager suggests that for an artist beginning a career, web design and online fan engagement have become fundamental skills.[419] Of course, musicians have in the past possessed technical expertise beyond the composer or instrumentalist's standard skill set, and these non-musical capacities have undoubtedly contributed to musical success; indeed, the multitasking musician is not a novel concept (e.g. orchestra leaders having to fulfill administrative duties)[420]. Rather, what is striking about the present situation is the degree to which these extra-musical skills have become fundamental and expected, as well as the expansion of the kinds of skills that are required to succeed. Thus, whereas in the past a musician's core technical expertise could be limited to proficiency in composition or with an instrument – thus requiring a variety of other intermediaries to fulfill other duties – SoundCloud typifies the growing exhortation that the musician take up the tools her/himself. While a growing number of musicians undoubtedly possess basic computing skills due to the ubiquity of personal computers within Western society, these should not be taken as a given; indeed, as SoundCloud comes to be seen as a fundamental tool for cultivating musical exposure and success, the question of access – be it to an up-to-date computer, a fast Internet connection, or sufficient bandwidth with which to upload music – becomes ever more pressing. Furthermore, even for those with access, a significant investment of one's time and resources may be required in order to gain the necessary technical skills needed to successfully engage with SoundCloud and its various features. This functions according to a broader neoliberal logic that requires workers to engage in constant retraining as an investment in one's entrepreneurial

[419] Leyshon, *Reformatted*, 164.
[420] Kraft, *Stage to Studio*, 99.

viability.[421] The normalization of such extra-musical abilities carries a variety of consequences: as Lazzarato suggests of cultural production in general, the amount of work performed by the user begins to exceed the criteria that determines compensation.[422]

In fact, simply engaging with the platform's most basic functions requires a degree of prior knowledge. For example, uploading to the platform requires basic experience with audio file formats when digitizing musical works so as to ensure compatibility; this is also implies an understanding of various formats and encoding settings so as to ensure optimal audio quality in the uploaded version.[423] However, SoundCloud also offers a variety of more subtle and complex features which must be mastered: during the uploading process, users can assign genres and 'tags' to their works; far from mere descriptors, this metadata is crucial to ensure uploads are visible to SoundCloud's search algorithm. Thus, for the savvy artist looking to maximize visibility, the task of uploading to the platform entails at least an implicit understanding of the principles of search engine optimization to reach the desired audience.[424] SoundCloud also offers a fairly robust set of data analysis tools in the user's 'Stats' page. At the most basic level, these include sortable quantitative measures for data like number of track plays, 'likes,' comments, tracks shared by other users, and downloads. However, users with paid Pro or Pro Unlimited accounts gain access to more detailed statistics, with the former offering information on individual listeners and their location, and the latter adding information on "traffic sources" both on and off the platform.[425] While such analysis is normalized as a valuable skill for amateur

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[421] Gina Neff, Elizabeth Wissinger, and Sharon Zukin, "Entrepreneurial Labor Among Cultural Producers: 'Cool' Jobs in 'Hot' Industries," *Social Semiotics* 15, no. 3 (2005): 318, doi:10.1080/10350330500310111.
[422] Lazzarato, "Construction of Cultural Labour Market."
[423] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 41–43.
[424] "Optimizing Your Tracks," *On SoundCloud - Creator Guide*, accessed July 2, 2015, https://on.soundcloud.com/creator-guide/tracks; Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 44.
[425] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 73.

users by its free inclusion, this differentiation between user tiers also suggests that it is fundamental to the success of more serious career-oriented artists. Thus, given that detailed data is one of the defining features of the 'Pro' account, an engagement with data analysis comes to define what musical professionalism means on the platform. In fact, SoundCloud's blog recommends that users regularly check their statistics and upload more music to increase the amount of listener data available for interpretation.[426] Similarly, in his advice to the budding SoundCloud user, Budi Voogt suggests that attending to these statistics is vital to "[improving] your brand" and "[establishing] a career in the industry."[427] SoundCloud Premier Partner GoldLink echoes Voogt's emphasis, describing the platform's statistics as its most important tools that help him to assess his "strengths and weaknesses" and make the necessary adjustments.[428] Much like Foucault's *homo oeconomicus*, who is rational and able to "[respond] systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment,"[429] the shrewd SoundCloud user is expected to be keenly aware of variations in listener behaviour and adjust her/his practices accordingly. While musical labour has always demanded a balance between art and commerce, today's working musician on SoundCloud is expected to be ever more finely attuned to the fluctuations of the market so as to her/his optimize career prospects. This is necessitated by such a highly competitive market, as musicians are increasingly required to engage with social networking platforms such as SoundCloud in order to "attract and retain [listener] attention," which requires an almost constant effort of uploading and updating.[430] Consequently,

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[426] "How to Use Your SoundCloud Stats: The Basics," *SoundCloud Blog*, March 11, 2015, https://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/03/11/how-to-use-your-soundcloud-stats/.
[427] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 72.
[428] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner GoldLink," *SoundCloud Blog*, April 1, 2015, https://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/04/01/meet-on-soundcloud-premier-partner-goldlink/.
[429] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 269–71.
[430] Hracs and Leslie, "Living Under the Lights," 15–16.

as Toynbee proposes, musical work has become increasingly "clerical" and requires "planning, research and the constant monitoring of the outcome of decisions."[431]

What results is the reformatting of the independent musician in the interest of greater flexibility: the ideal SoundCloud user writes, produces, uploads and promotes her/his own music – each task requiring its own set of competencies and experience – as an empowered musical entrepreneur of the self. However, these flexible conditions present a variety of difficulties: although engaging in multiple simultaneous projects or tasks can be stimulating, the increased workload makes acquiring specialized knowledge and developing the necessary skills increasingly difficult to manage.[432] Musicians also struggle to adequately carry out the business and management functions that would typically be handled by an industry intermediary. As such, the demands of self-management and its various accompanying tasks result in working conditions that are inefficient and render sustained success difficult to achieve; musicians consequently experience considerable difficulty in managing an expansive and diverse workload, as they effectively take on a "second job."[433] This requires an important investment of time and energy in order to fulfill these basic tasks and remain competitive, which is further exacerbated by SoundCloud's convenience: like ICTs in general,[434] its digitally networked form expands temporal and spatial flexibility so that the opportunity to fulfill one's duties is always only a click away. Of course, this culture of self-reliance also suits the recording industry's desire to reduce its own risks and costs.

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[431] Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 35, 67.
[432] Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, 158.
[433] Hracs, "Cultural Intermediaries," 6–8; Sargent, "Local Musicians," 470.
[434] Fortunati, "ICTs and Immaterial Labor," 149; Melissa Gregg, "Presence Bleed: Performing Professionalism Online," in *Theorizing Cultural Work: Labour, Continuity and Change in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, ed. Mark Banks, Rosalind Gill, and Stephanie Taylor (New York: Routledge, 2013), 133.

However, this drive towards flexibility and an increased workload can have significant psychological repercussions, typically in the form of feelings of nervousness, anxiety, vulnerability, and self-doubt.[435] These sensations are directly tied to a fear of failure amidst fierce competition and a belief that one has to always operate at maximal capacity lest she/he risk falling behind; the result is a never-ending feeling of being under threat and a difficulty in finding the time to recuperate from the psychological burden, which is exacerbated by the erosion of leisure time.[436] Electronic artist Holly Herndon, who has a SoundCloud presence but also works with various record labels, describes the overall sensation of precarity within contemporary musical labour as persistent and inextinguishable: success "requires a constant hustle – and an anxiety that unless you are consistently killing it you are falling behind and potentially jeopardizing your chances of a stable financial future in any field."[437]

SoundCloud as Communicative Labour

SoundCloud corresponds to definitions of immaterial labour through its reliance on communicative and linguistic abilities: its creators profess that they seek to "[build] a strong community on the site, with deep connections to other users."[438] Similarly, SoundCloud CEO Alex Ljung proclaims the platform was "created by musicians seeking not money or fame, but simply a way to make music collaboration easier," before adding that SoundCloud aims to

[435] Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, 122–3.
[436] Isabell Lorey, "Virtuosos of Freedom: On the Implosion of Political Virtuosity and Productive Labour," in *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the "Creative Industries,"* ed. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig (London, UK: MayFlyBooks, 2011), 87, http://mayflybooks.org/?page_id=74.
[437] Holly Herndon, "How to Fund Your Music Career," Tumblr, *Holly Herndon*, (February 4, 2015), http://hollyherndon.tumblr.com/post/110051936974/http-www-thefader-com-2015-02-03-10-ways-to-fund.
[438] "How Do I Get More Followers and Plays on SoundCloud?," *Soundcloud Community*, accessed July 2, 2015, http://help.soundcloud.com/customer/portal/articles/247859-how-do-i-get-more-followers-and-plays-on-soundcloud-.

"[harness] and [combine] the deeply social essence of music and the Internet."[439] However, this emphasis on communication within musical labour is not entirely novel. Certainly, the historically informal nature of much musical work has necessitated the ability to communicate in order to ensure one's continued employment: Menger suggests that "talent may be conceived as embodying not only artistic abilities and technical skills, but also behavioral and relational ones" which are crucial to success in a competitive and insecure labour market.[440] Nevertheless, it is the particular form, degree, and purpose of communication on SoundCloud that is noteworthy. This is because, as Marazzi suggests, the place of communication within post-Fordism itself has changed and is indicative of the emergence of a different kind of worker:

> in post-Fordism the 'ideal' work force has a high degree of adaptability, in response to changes in rhythm and function. This has to be a multi-operational work force, able to 'read' the information flows and *to work while communicating*. Post-Fordist work implies a re-association of formerly clearly distinct functions, a 'reconfiguration' of a whole series of executive roles in the person of one individual worker.[441]

Communication is therefore a means of enhancing flexibility and thus productivity within post-Fordism;[442] in this sense, it is a way of mobilizing the pure potential labour-power that Virno describes. Similarly, Lazzarato suggests that "the process of production of communication tends to become immediately the process of valorization."[443] Therefore, the communicative nature of labour on SoundCloud distinguishes itself from past forms of musical work as a quality of the flexible and entrepreneurial subjectivity that is necessitated by the post-Fordist music industry.

Communication on SoundCloud takes place in a variety of forms. First of all, users may leave short comments on each other's uploaded music, or simply 'like' or 'repost' music to demonstrate their appreciation. In an analysis of user commenting habits on SoundCloud,

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[439] Timoner, "Sound Advice."
[440] Menger, "Artistic Labor Markets and Careers," 558.
[441] Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, 24 (italics in original).
[442] Coté and Pybus, "Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0," 99.
[443] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," 144.

Ishizaki et al. determine user motivation as being driven less by an attempt to communicate but rather by the "expression of simple reactions;" as such, actual interaction was limited and often took the form of merely sharing URLs.[444] These comments often represented a self-serving means of enhancing one's own status, and thus demonstrate their utility as an essential means of engaging with both listeners and other artists for one's own self-promotion. In this sense, Voogt suggests that commenting must be a means of "adding value" – "[a]dd value, to get value," he quips – by providing feedback, which functions as a 'conversation starter' and a means of directing traffic to one's own profile. This requires a delicate approach, as one must appear "genuine" and not simply "screaming for attention" or "spamming," despite the motives behind the comment.[445] Jordanous et al. describe this communicative activity on SoundCloud as primarily functioning as a means of mutual public evaluation amongst artists, which has the direct result of generating "cultural value" on the platform.[446] It is thus to the user's benefit to comment and 'like' so as to help build a strong community so as to increase her/his likelihood of receiving comments and 'likes' from other community members.

Similarly, personal messages exchanged privately between users, potentially a source of substantial dialogue, can also be strategic and instrumental. Voogt states that "[a] good message

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[444] Hiromi Ishizaki et al., "A Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis of User Commenting Behavior on an Online Music Distribution Site," *Proceedings of Forum on Information Technology* 12, no. 3 (2013): 49–51, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260566427_A_Computer-Mediated_Discourse_Analysis_of_User_Commenting_Behavior_on_an_Online_Music_Distribution_Site.

[445] Budi Voogt, "The 13 Biggest Mistakes Artists Make on Soundcloud...," *Digital Music News*, November 19, 2013, http://www.digitalmusicnews.com/permalink/2013/11/19/biggestsoundcloudmistakes; Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 56.

[446] Anna Jordanous, Daniel Allington, and Byron Dueck, "Using Online Networks to Analyse the Value of Electronic Music" (paper presented at the International Conference on Computational Creativity, Ljubljana, Slovenia, June 10-13, 2014), 2, http://kar.kent.ac.uk/42391/1/7.3_Jordanous.pdf.

is one that provokes response" and "creates a dialog," and he even goes as far as to offer a cynical template of 'messaging etiquette' so as to ensure that one receives the desired reply.[447] Voogt's cynicism is surely an extreme example, and insincere self-serving relationships are hardly a novelty in the recording industry; however, it reveals that communication is now a key resource within an ultra-competitive labour market given that social relations are a direct source of cultural (and thus, possibly financial) capital to an unprecedented degree. Consequently, even the collaborative impulse is tinged by opportunism as a means of bolstering one's human capital. For instance, Hypeddit.com, a service that describes itself as "rocket fuel for your SoundCloud profile" and purports to help boost followers and likes, suggests seeking out collaboration as a means of gaining fans: this is not only because one easily gains access to another user's listeners but also because collaboration represents a way of taking one's own music "to the next level."[448] Likewise, SoundCloud Premier Partner, composer, and instrumentalist Oliver Sadie describes SoundCloud's community as a vital resource for his own professional career. For Sadie, sharing and collaboration on the platform are crucial in that they enable users to learn and acquire skills:

> Do it together, collaborate, because the result is always far greater than the sum of its parts. You're not losing out by not having full credit for the music, you're gaining reach, learning skills, multiplying your talents and opening opportunities that simply would not exist otherwise. SoundCloud has been and always will be a game changer for the talented home musician to truly shine on a world stage. Embrace it and you will write your own musical future.[449]

While Sadie attempts to explain his experiences through a language of community – individuals creating something that exceeds their own contributions – his rhetoric quickly devolves into a description of individual benefits. Embracing SoundCloud for Sadie means above all embracing

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[447] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 59–60.
[448] "Get More Fans on Soundcloud by Collaborating," *Hypeddit*, December 13, 2014, http://hypeddit.com/news/get-more-fans-collaborating-soundcloud/; "The Art of Getting More Listens on Soundcloud: What Are the Differences Between Organic Listens and Fake Listens?," *Hypeddit*, November 5, 2014, http://hypeddit.com/news/get-soundcloud-listens/.
[449] "Creating Sound for Video: Connections That Lead to Opportunities," *SoundCloud Blog*, September 20, 2013, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2013/09/20/sound-video-connections/.

it as a means of communication, and he links this directly to personal betterment and career growth.

So too can simply engaging with other artists and their music represent a means of career advancement: electronic music duo and SoundCloud Premier Partners Boombox Cartel (Jorge Medina and Americo Garcia) praise SoundCloud for exposing them to new and interesting music. However, for Medina and Garcia, "inspiration is everywhere," and "any song or sound you hear is pretty much an excuse to gain inspiration to create something new."[450] Similarly, SoundCloud Premier Partner duo Daytrip describe SoundCloud as a community through which they have "made discoveries, got excited, and got jealous" and approached the work of others as a means of stimulating self-improvement.[451] Even selectively associating with other artists serves an instrumental purpose to personal growth; in building relationships on the platform, fellow Premier Partner Blackbear (Matt Musto) states: "i like 2 just put myself all around ppl w/ intentions of always progressing [sic]!"[452] Overall, these artist testimonials speak to the place of communication within cultural production in general, which Sargent describes in terms of "uncertain norms of trust reciprocity" and interactions defined by "[i]nstrumental, hierarchical relationships of exchange and status."[453] Indeed, Pasquinelli regards cooperation among creative workers as "structurally difficult" because creative markets function according to individual prestige and thus necessarily bring individuals into conflict and competition.[454] Under these

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[450] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Boombox Cartel," *SoundCloud Blog*, February 17, 2015, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/02/17/meet-premier-partner-boombox-cartel/.
[451] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Daytrip," *SoundCloud Blog*, February 9, 2015, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/02/09/meet-premier-partner-daytrip/.
[452] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Blackbear," *SoundCloud Blog*, February 23, 2015, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/02/23/meet-premier-partner-blackbear/.
[453] Sargent, "Local Musicians Building Global Audiences," 484.
[454] Matteo Pasquinelli, "ICW – Immaterial Civil War: Prototypes of Conflict Within Cognitive Capitalism," in *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the "Creative*

conditions, individual cultural producers must in fact "tacitly convert… others' social, cultural, and symbolic capital into a latent form of exchange-value for the self;" particularly within collaborative production, the resultant "symbolic capital" opens up further opportunities from which additional capital can be generated.[455] As these various strategies demonstrate, users can be said to "construct their subjectivities via promotional logic" by maximizing their notoriety through interaction with other users; in their analysis of similar techniques among MySpace users, Coté and Pybus propose that "this helps to extend one's social network… which leads to more friends, more popularity and ultimately more recognition."[456] Thus, while SoundCloud encourages communication, collaboration, and sharing, it does so within a neoliberal biopolitical regime that is skewed towards the realization of individual 'musical futures' and success.

Furthermore, much as in the previous case of statistical analysis, these communicative tasks can even begin to overwhelm the kinds of work traditionally associated with musicianship through the ease with which they can be carried out. For example, through their study of independent musicians in Toronto, Hracs and Leslie have demonstrated that this is increasingly common: one artist describes music as "a full-time job, but only about 10% actually involves music," with the remainder of their time devoted to self-marketing; another explains, "I spend a lot of time making sure that I'm present in people's minds and I'm on people's phone lists... There's a ton of that and it's constant."[457] Rather than simply replacing the work of composing, recording, or performing, these extra-musical tasks end up spilling over into the artist's non-working hours. However, as I will discuss further, this communicative labour is not simply cold

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Industries," ed. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig (London: MayFlyBooks, 2011), 80, http://mayflybooks.org/?page_id=74.

[455] Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship," 246–7.

[456] Coté and Pybus, "Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0," 96.

[457] Hracs and Leslie, "Living Under the Lights," 13.

or utilitarian but indeed profoundly affective, which opens up a host of new challenges in terms of differentiating work and play, as well as friendship and exchange.

SoundCloud as Affective Labour

While Hardt and Negri's deployment of affective labour is problematic in its tendency to collapse differences between forms of work, it remains a crucial tool for analyzing musical work. According to their theorization, such labour entails both work based on "human contact" – which extends from the communicative and linguistic dimension of immaterial labour – as well as the "manipulation of affect."[458] As I will demonstrate, both are fundamental features of the musical work that takes place on SoundCloud. However, it must be acknowledged that the affective dimension of musical labour is not a new phenomenon: as Hracs and Leslie note, making music has always required "forging emotional connections with audiences."[459] What differentiates SoundCloud from past instances of affective musical work is the proliferation of opportunities for connection as well as the normalization of this kind of labour as a key marker of distinction within a highly competitive field. As a result, working musicians struggle to fulfill these tasks.

First of all, the cultivation and exploitation of human contact often takes the form of networking, which is a common practice within the cultural industries in general and a crucial means of maintaining employability in a given field.[460] McRobbie considers the considerable importance of this activity of building "social contacts" in light of the "deregulated" nature of the cultural industries:[461] the lack of formal institutions results in fluid and uncertain conditions of employment which must be shrewdly navigated and compensated for through a never-ending

[458] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 292–3.
[459] Hracs and Leslie, "Living Under the Lights," 9.
[460] Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin, "Entrepreneurial Labor Among Cultural Producers," 322.
[461] McRobbie, "'Everyone Is Creative,'" 87.

process of forging relationships that may pay off in the future. Of course, even the dominant institutions of the recording industry have been informal to some degree and have required networking to seek out new career opportunities. However, even at their most informal, record labels nevertheless entailed explicit contractual agreements and concrete forms of compensation. Now, whereas networking once represented a means of gaining access to these institutions, it has become a central component of musical work itself and one that is crucial to maintaining any kind of career whatsoever. Given that interacting with others on SoundCloud to build up a demonstrably robust fan base or peer group allows one to stand out from the millions of potential rivals, a failure to network sufficiently can be disastrous. Thus, in the labour of networking, the emphasis is always on *more*, and as Hesmondhalgh and Baker suggest, one is "never off."[462]

Voogt describes a variety of ways in which SoundCloud enables these practices, and he offers his own unique strategies for how best to employ them. One method is the productive use of 'following' other users; in this sense, the most basic function of any social networking site – much like 'friending' on Facebook or 'following' on Twitter – is mobilized as one of the easiest means of networking and building relationships. This is achieved through a method that generally prizes the quantity of these connections over their quality, as Voogt suggests adding users daily in the hope that they will return the interest and 'follow back.' Of course, not everyone will reciprocate; Voogt subsequently proposes that the work of making connections on SoundCloud must necessarily be accompanied by the 'un-following' of any user who has not 'followed back' so as to make room for new followers. However, this should not be done blindly: "carefully selecting who you follow, scanning their accounts for musical compatibility, good uploads, professional branding and a following count below the [thousands]" can improve the

[462] Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, 155.

"conversion" rate.[463] Voogt proposes a similar tactic for using SoundCloud's 'like' function, through which a legitimate appreciation of another user's music can build relationships and possibly boost one's own statistics. In sum, Voogt asserts that one's natural affective engagement with music on the platform can have an appreciable benefit: the user is able to enjoy a wealth of new music, while also "[bringing] in listeners as you're actually following, liking and commenting on the stuff that you love."[464] So too do the more direct networking practices of messaging and commenting entail a significant affective engagement on the part of the SoundCloud user. In fact, success requires that this engagement be as genuine as possible in order to build lasting relationships and avoid giving the outward impression of callous self-interest.[465] Voogt offers this advice to the affective labourer of SoundCloud:

> Do not directly or immediately talk about business. Develop a relationship first. Business comes later. You have to be confident enough to mix your artist activities with your personal activities. Only if you have the confidence to do so will it be convincing enough to someone else…. Talk about them, not about you. Ask questions. Be interested. Listening to what people have to say is the best way to get to know them. Once you get to know them, you can figure out what they want and need.[466]

Thus, the key to success is not simply pretending to be enthusiastic but actually harnessing one's legitimate enthusiasm in the most authentic and engaging way possible. He describes this in terms of "adding value" in relationships, through which one seeks to gain an equal or greater amount of value in return.[467] This takes on an even more perverse tone in the context of what Voogt calls 'traffic exchange communities,' through which SoundCloud users sign up to listen to each other's tracks in mutual self-promotion. On a community such as Cloudkillers, users are able to "earn credits by mandatorily listening to full tracks and by placing insightful and constructive comments on them;" these credits can subsequently be spent to keep one's own

[463] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 49–51.
[464] Ibid., 54.
[465] Ibid., 56.
[466] Ibid., 118.
[467] Ibid., 26.

music at the top of the community 'queue' of available music, ensuring the widest possible audience.[468] Cloudkillers dispenses with these credits according to users' affective engagement as listeners, requiring comments that are "at least [two] full detailed, constructive sentences so the system can tell that the commenter actually listened to the track." The site urges users to "[b]e kind and constructive" to ensure that they receive the same treatment in return.[469] While this activity takes place off of the SoundCloud platform itself, it illustrates that affording one's care and attention to another's work can function as a kind of affective investment from which one hopes to benefit; this benefit is also quantifiable, thanks to the SoundCloud metrics which help define popularity and success on the platform. Yet despite Voogt and Cloudkillers' plainspoken language of self-interest, the above-mentioned practices demonstrate the profound ambivalence of the affective implication that is increasingly required of the musical labourer: networking and exchanging feedback may very well be genuinely pleasurable experiences.[470] Nevertheless, the importance of these activities to working artists means that a significant amount of time and effort end up devoted to them, and they can become routinized.

Beyond networking with musical peers, the social nature of SoundCloud also means that artists are encouraged to engage with their listeners. There is a certainly positive aspect to this: fans feel closer to musicians they admire, and musicians are able to demonstrate their appreciation and communicate with listeners with greater ease. So too can contact with and feedback from listeners provide valuable support to artists whose work can be solitary and

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[468] Ibid., 120.
[469] "Frequently Asked Questions," *Cloudkillers*, accessed July 3, 2015, http://www.cloudkillers.com/faq_ext.php.
[470] Gill and Pratt, "In the Social Factory?," 18.

isolated.[471] That being said, listener interaction can also be crucial to an artist's career prospects, as a saturated music market increasingly demands new ways of standing out;[472] thus, forging relationships with listeners helps to establish a kind of "brand loyalty."[473] In this respect, Voogt considers careful attention to one's listeners to be a priority for cultivating personal success. This includes identifying which users have played an artist's music most and then directing particular attention towards them: "Tell them how much you appreciate them listening to your music…. Being generous and getting personal is magnificent for building commitment."[474] SoundCloud Premier Partner Christopher Chu of the Brooklyn-based band POP ETC shares a similar approach to fan appreciation, although he avoids Voogt's self-serving rhetoric. Chu and his bandmates are "really happy" to have received so much support – the band have over 46,000 followers on the platform – and he considers this a source of motivation which contributes to a feeling of being fortunate to have achieved success doing something he enjoys. The band therefore makes an effort to reward their most devoted fans: "We do check our stats and comments, as we like to see who the most dedicated fans are, so we can follow them back or message them to tell them how much we appreciate their support – I think that's really important."[475] It is impossible to say whether Chu believes that this practice is also a contributor to the band's success, but it is certainly evident that he considers it a crucial task within his workload as a musician with burgeoning success on SoundCloud.

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[471] Nancy Baym, "Fans or Friends?" (paper presented at International Communication Association Annual Conference, Boston, Massachusetts, May 28, 2011), 10, http://www.onlinefandom.com/2011BaymFansorFriends.pdf.
[472] Hracs and Leslie, "Living Under the Lights," 10–12.
[473] Ibid., 16.
[474] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 75.
[475] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner POP ETC," *SoundCloud Blog*, January 5, 2015, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/01/05/meet-premier-partner-popetc/.

Another significant strategy that Voogt recommends is responding to listener comments. However, this duty must be handled delicately: one must not respond by rote but rather personalize comments to demonstrate care and attention to individual listeners.[476] Again, while Voogt's emphasis is oriented towards cultivating success, others employ similar techniques out of what appears to be a genuine sense of gratitude: singer-songwriter and Premier Partner Cyra Morgan describes her recent popularity on the platform as a "second chance" at achieving the musical success which had previously been unattainable. She consequently expresses a heartfelt gratitude towards her listeners, which she strives to demonstrate through interaction by way of her own unique responses to their comments: "The comments [are] a feature that I use constantly, [and] responding to listeners is something I try to do regularly, [because] showing my appreciation to those who take the time to listen is really important to me."[477] Morgan's most recent upload, a song called "Innocence," has received 74 comments, 33 of which are Morgan herself responding with a personalized expression of thanks, and in some cases an additional comment when the listener offers more specific feedback or appears to be personally familiar with the artist.[478] Meanwhile, her most commented-upon song, "If We Stay," features 933 comments (including Morgan's) in the approximately three years since it was uploaded; incredibly, she herself is responsible for 399 replies and appears to have personally responded to upwards of three-quarters of listener comments (the deletion of certain commenter accounts and the inclusion of 'spam' comments makes it difficult to quantify her diligence precisely). In one response to a comment by user @axisdreamer, Morgan offers her appreciation along with an

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[476] Voogt, "13 Biggest Mistakes."
[477] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Cyra Morgan," *SoundCloud Blog*, December 12, 2014, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2014/12/12/meet-on-soundcloud-premier-partner-cyra-morgan/.
[478] Cyra Morgan, "Innocence," *SoundCloud*, accessed July 3, 2015, https://soundcloud.com/cyramorgan/innocence-1.

apology: "[I am a] bit behind on my replies here but I truly appreciate [your compliment], thank you!"[479] Based on the content of Morgan's messages and her devotion to the task, one can reasonably assume that she is truly appreciative of her listeners and devotes a tremendous amount of time to acknowledging them; her apology also indicates that as her career has progressed – she now boasts over 27,000 followers – she has struggled to keep up with the task.

As this case indicates, there is a significant risk in the demonstration of genuine appreciation becoming normalized as a kind of 'best practice' for artists, who then struggle to sufficiently mobilize their affect to authentically and/or productively engage with their audience, particularly as that audience grows. Thus, such affective work adds to the artist's workload in a significant way,[480] and the work of cultivating the appropriate online presence becomes both "time-consuming" and "demanding."[481] This also necessitates the affective labour of what McRobbie describes as the "ironing out of 'bad affect,'" which seeks to minimize any unappealing emotional qualities so as to project a facade of positivity and thereby increase opportunities for professional success.[482] The user must therefore engage in a "performance of professionalism" which seeks to always present "an affable online persona" and thus "maintain pleasantries and employability in a competitive… market."[483] Similarly, Voogt suggests "[o]ne must strive to generate goodwill."[484] Managing one's emotional profile promotes the success of networking and relationship building so as to offer a healthy return on one's own affective investment.

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[479] Cyra Morgan, "If We Stay," *SoundCloud*, accessed July 3, 2015, https://soundcloud.com/cyramorgan/if-we-stay.
[480] Hracs and Leslie, "Living Under the Lights," 16.
[481] Young and Collins, "Music 2.0," 352.
[482] McRobbie, "Is Passionate Work a Neoliberal Delusion?".
[483] Gregg, "Presence Bleed," 131–2.
[484] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 26.

However, some artists simply do not feel comfortable with this affective work and would prefer not to do it. It would be overly simplistic to consider this a form of arrogance, in which musicians cannot be bothered to engage with fans, or unwillingness to do what it takes to sustain a musical career. On the contrary, there are a variety of reasons that legitimate these concerns: for some artists, this can be a matter of wishing to preserve a degree of privacy; others prefer to maintain a certain mystique around their persona for artistic reasons.[485] In the case of female musicians, creating an engaging online presence also runs the risk of drawing negative attention in the form of "stalker fans;"[486] in this sense, performing this affective labour can render the artist vulnerable, although the risks of such vulnerabilities are evidently differentially experienced. Above all, concerns with the affective nature of contemporary musical work seem to stem from the inherent difficulty of negotiating boundaries when trying to maintain a personal relationship with a group of strangers.[487] It should not be taken for granted that every artist is able to negotiate these boundaries successfully or even feels comfortable doing so.

SoundCloud as Work Beyond Measure: Network Value and Technological Rent

As theorists of immaterial labour have suggested, the latter has the tendency to confound conventional means of determining the value of work; however, as we have seen, value is nevertheless still established in order to enable its expropriation. As a distinct form of immaterial labour, the musical work which takes place on SoundCloud functions in an equivalent fashion, specifically in the way value is established on the platform and the kinds of alternative capital which are mobilized by artists through their work; yet a parallel form, which remains uncoupled

[485] Baym, "Fans or Friends?," 20.
[486] Hracs and Leslie, "Living Under the Lights," 16–17.
[487] Baym, "Fans or Friends?," 24.

from the kind accorded to users, is also perceptible in the network value which is expropriated through rent and which has rendered SoundCloud an economic venture worthy of investment.

We may understand this process of determining value on SoundCloud according to Scott's understanding of Bourdieu's alternative forms of capital – cultural, social, and symbolic – and their conversion. As Scott suggests, given that economic capital is not the immediate form of compensation on SoundCloud and similar music-sharing platforms, these alternative capitals must be 'converted' into economic capital in order to sustain a career.[488] Similarly, Young and Collins propose that listenership primarily affords artists "capital in the form of exposure and referral" which must then be converted into tangible returns such as record or ticket sales.[489] However, the fluid nature of these alternative capitals and the contingent nature of their conversion[490] render this increasingly difficult: the work of capital conversion requires a great deal of time that goes uncompensated.[491] Consequently, forms of capital available to musicians on SoundCloud can never function as an adequate means of compensating them for the immaterial musical labour that goes into promoting and circulating music on the platform, to say nothing of the long hours of work that went into producing the music in the first place. Thus, as Toynbee suggests, the impossibility of the musician being "paid in full" is essential to the process of creation and appropriation of surplus value on the part of capital.[492]

The labour of accumulating value on SoundCloud therefore comes to resemble the 'work for exposure' paradigm within the cultural industries in general and the recording industry in

[488] Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship," 238.
[489] Young and Collins, "Music 2.0," 351.
[490] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 49.
[491] Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship," 250.
[492] Toynbee, *Making Popular Music*, 14.

particular.[493] Under this arrangement, artists are expected to work without immediate compensation, with the promise of reaching a wider audience representing the primary reward. This corresponds to Andrew Ross' theorization of the 'cultural discount:' adopted from Bastian Kreidler, it describes the history of cultural producers regularly accepting non-monetary rewards for their work. Whereas Kreidler believes this has a moral value, Ross rightly criticizes it as a way of perpetuating the exploitation of cultural producers through their internalization of self-destructive beliefs about the necessity of sacrifice and toil.[494] According to the Precarious Workers Brigade and Carrot Workers Collective, this also serves as "a disciplinary device" and "a tool of governance and production of surplus value" which functions by mobilizing biopolitical labour-power through the continually deferred promise of compensation.[495] In the process, the internalization of such attitudes helps to obscure the exploitative conditions of cultural work.

The specific mode through which such exploitation occurs conforms to my analysis of immaterial labour in that it represents a form of rent. The most obvious means through which SoundCloud collects rent is its paid account services: the Pro and Pro Unlimited packages offer a larger feature set, including advanced statistics, and greater upload space for $6 and $9.99 a

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[493] Precarious Workers Brigade and Carrot Workers Collective, "Free Labour Syndrome: Volunteer Work and Unpaid Overtime in the Creative and Cultural Sector," in *Joy Forever: The Political Economy of Social Creativity*, ed. Michal Kozlowski et al. (London, UK: MayFlyBooks, 2014), 215–6, http://mayflybooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/9781906948191-web.pdf; Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship," 238; Young and Collins, "Music 2.0," 351–2.

[494] John Kreidler, "Leverage Lost: The Nonprofit Arts in the Post-Ford Era," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 26, no. 2 (1996): 79–100, doi:10.1080/10632921.1996.9942956; Andrew Ross, *Low Pay, High Profile: The Global Push for Fair Labor* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 199–200.

[495] Precarious Workers Brigade and Carrot Workers Collective, "Free Labour Syndrome," 215–216.

month respectively (Canadian funds), with the latter boasting unlimited storage.[496] Both key features – statistics and storage – render these paid tiers desirable to aspiring musicians who regularly SoundCloud; Voogt describes these features' "essential" and "added value," and claims that the perception of professionalism that accompanies Pro user status carries benefits in and of itself.[497] Thus, as of 2013, approximately 5% of SoundCloud's 38 million registered users were paying customers,[498] and one can only presume this number has increased along with the platform's continued success. Yet at the same time, the notion of paying for specialized access clearly undermines the rhetoric of democratized of cultural production. It becomes a matter of paying for an added advantage within a highly competitive market; this is of course an advantage that not every user can justify given the uncertain and unequal nature of musical success.

However, given that the limited amount of rent that can be extracted through paid subscriptions, it becomes necessary to pursue other means of value expropriation. These function according to Pasquinelli's concepts of technological rent and network value, which proliferate in free online networks of collaboration and consumption and which actualize the potential of labour-power. In a concrete sense, for a platform to be marketable, it must demonstrate its popularity through an active content-producing community of users;[499] consequently, there is a strong correlation between the size and activity of a platform's user base and its ability to profit from favourable advertising rates.[500] While users are encouraged to share as a means of reaching new audiences, finding new collaborators, and exploring new career opportunities, each act of

[496] "Go Pro on SoundCloud," *SoundCloud*, accessed July 7, 2015, https://soundcloud.com/pro?ref=t099.
[497] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 76.
[498] Ryan Mac, "Upload And Share Music -- Or Any Noise: The Beauty Of SoundCloud," *Forbes*, May 6, 2013, http://www.forbes.com/sites/ryanmac/2013/04/17/upload-and-share-music-or-any-noise-the-beauty-of-soundcloud/.
[499] Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 4.
[500] Christian Fuchs, "An Alternative View of Privacy on Facebook," *Information* 2, no. 4 (2011): 153, doi:10.3390/info2010140.

sharing and interaction is also a form a value production: it demonstrates the vitality of a user community in concrete and quantifiable ways. This in turn renders SoundCloud more appealing to its 'brand partners,' who are assured of a large pool of potential customers to whom they can market products or services. Again, this does not preclude the possibility of meaningful interaction on SoundCloud, but rather demonstrates that all user activity is permeated by market relations regardless of individual intentions; community functions as a source of value first and foremost, and its status as a common good or resource for personal development merely ensures that users actively produce and consume content on the platform. As a result, we may consider SoundCloud's network value to be the primary driver of the company's market value: given that its valuation continues to rise despite continued losses and limited revenues,[501] investors' persistence would appear to be primarily driven by the immense stores of network value which the platform continues to accumulate as its user base expands. Consequently, the continued growth of the company must be ensured through the proliferation and acceleration of network value production, which is achieved by promoting platform use and enhancing users' experiences to ensure their productivity; SoundCloud has thus worked tirelessly to create an environment which its users will value.[502] Terranova refers to this practice as one of 'securing the social,' which functions by "maximizing circulation, minimizing error or loss and ensuring an overall expansive stability" on social networking sites.[503] That SoundCloud it is now valued at over $1 billion demonstrates both the success of their efforts as well as the undeniable importance of

[501] Sisario, "SoundCloud Signs Licensing Deal."
[502] Horn, "How SoundCloud Changed Music Forever."
[503] Tiziana Terranova, "Securing the Social: Foucault and Social Networks," in *Foucault and the History of Our Present*, ed. Yari Lanci, Martina Tazzioli, and Sophie Fuggle (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 124, http://www.palgraveconnect.com/doifinder/10.1057/9781137385925.

network relations in generating value. SoundCloud CEO Alex Ljung has tacitly acknowledged this state of affairs by conceding that users "fuel the growth of [the platform]."[504]

As a means of recognizing this and continuing to promote the platform's use, Ljung and SoundCloud have introduced monetization features in the form of the 'On SoundCloud' program and its Premier plan, which allows artists to monetize their uploaded work through advertising revenue. This also reveals the importance of network value on SoundCloud in an increasingly tangible way. While these Premier plans have the same features as Pro Unlimited accounts as well a host of other added perks, the former is free while the latter is paid. The Premier plan is also presently available by invitation only and permits the chosen user to enjoy the benefits of SoundCloud's new monetization features, which are driven by advertising revenue.[505] It is these characteristics – free and invite-only – that are illustrative in this case: SoundCloud seeks to secure its own profitability by at the same time making its service attractive to aspiring artists and facilitating an influx of advertising revenues. This is achieved primarily by selecting artists who represent actionable reserves of network value in their relations on the platform – what Pasquinelli calls elsewhere the "measure value in terms of *number of links per node*"[506] – in hopes that these relations will result in more track plays, greater audience exposure to advertisements, and thus advertising revenue growth. It is also crucial that SoundCloud chose to invite artists who are not on major record labels and who do not boast established industry success: they are thus presumably amenable to monetization rates which are advantageous to SoundCloud and which an artist or label with greater bargaining power would have the right to

[504] Ljung, "Introducing On SoundCloud."
[505] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 80.
[506] Pasquinelli, "Italian Operaismo," 63–64 (italics in original).

refuse[507] – ironically, Premier Partner Oliver Sadie suggests SoundCloud's monetization revenues "will never pay [his] rent"[508] – which thus allows for the platform to extract this technological rent at higher rates. Indeed, in the first six months of the program, SoundCloud has only paid $1 million, a figure which is easily dwarfed by the meagre income it already earns through paid accounts; for that matter, this was not even paid solely to musicians, but also to various labels and "audio partners."[509] If anything, the primary gains by artists who become Premier Partners appear to be yet another form of alternative capital in increased exposure and the added legitimacy of this privileged status: user SevnthWonder calls his inclusion within the Partner program "extremely motivational and humbling" and states that it has resulted in "phenomenal" opportunities;[510] meanwhile, fellow Premier Partner Stick Figure describes his experience as "a huge honour."[511]

Overall, SoundCloud's efforts at monetization through the 'On SoundCloud' program simultaneously betray the urgency to demonstrate the platform's profitability so as to ensure further growth, as well as the company's ability to readjust its strategies in a relatively comfortable way without major concessions to users that might adequately recognize their crucial value-producing status. While it remains to be seen how this program will develop in the future and whether users will demand compensation outside of this invitation-only model, it seems likely that whatever model of valuation SoundCloud proposes will struggle to remunerate

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[507] "Sony Has Started Pulling Its Catalog from SoundCloud," *FACT Magazine*, May 6, 2015, http://www.factmag.com/2015/05/06/sony-has-started-pulling-its-catalog-from-soundcloud/.
[508] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Oliver Sadie," *SoundCloud Blog*, March 6, 2015, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2015/03/06/meet-on-soundcloud-premier-partner-oliver-sadie/.
[509] Ljung, "On SoundCloud Reaches 100 Premier Partners."
[510] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner SevnthWonder."
[511] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Stick Figure," *SoundCloud Blog*, December 1, 2014, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2014/12/01/meet-on-soundcloud-premier-partner-stick-figure/.

users' immaterial labour and the significant economic weight of their network value, lest it severely damage the platform's own financial viability in the process.

SoundCloud as Biopolitical Production

These immaterial qualities of SoundCloud which I have just outlined – as computer-aided symbol-manipulation, as communicative, and as affective – share a common basis in that they demonstrate the increasingly biopolitical nature of musical labour on this social network. In every sense that I have outlined above, SoundCloud is about the production of and through subjectivity, and it proposes a form of musical productivity within which an ever-greater subjective investment is required in order to be competitive. As such, it should come as no surprise that the subjective profile of the SoundCloud user corresponds with Foucault's entrepreneur of the self, which is now prevalent throughout contemporary cultural production and musical work.[512] As McRobbie suggests, this constitutes a departure from conventional "anti-commercial" conceptions of art, as cultural producers actively seek out material success more than ever, and must therefore become increasingly opportunistic through "skills of networking and selling the self."[513] Cultural producers have undoubtedly had to employ a variety of strategies to seek compensation for their work under market conditions in the past, but this represents a widespread change in which they have become increasingly oriented towards and harmonized with the market at the subjective level.

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[512] Chapman, "The 'One-man Band,'" 452; Angela McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies: Notes on the Decline of Political Culture in Speeded up Creative Worlds," *Cultural Studies* 16, no. 4 (2002): 520, doi:10.1080/09502380210139098; Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 1–7; Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin, "Entrepreneurial Labor Among Cultural Producers," 331; Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship," 238–41.
[513] McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies," 521.

In the case of musicianship, the uncertain and highly competitive nature of the recording industry has meant that this entrepreneurial profile has become more common; as Mylonas suggests, entrepreneurial subjectivity within post-Fordism represents "a strategy of survival in a precarious social terrain."[514] In keeping with this understanding, Leyshon describes the intermediary role of record labels has having been greatly reduced, meaning "emerging artists" require skills in asset management and greater resourcefulness given that "the burdens of entrepreneurialism and management have fallen upon them."[515] Accordingly, bands are considered as small businesses and require the necessary "organizational capability and planning."[516] For the self-sufficient individual artist, she/he must become "autonomous and flexible, [and] capable of shifting deftly between multiple competencies." The solo artist therefore represents a "powerful distillation of ideas of self-sufficiency, economic thrift and multi-competence" which correspond to neoliberal ideals and the dictates of the post-Fordist organization of labour.[517]

This biopolitical production of entrepreneurial subjectivity subsequently proliferates through the social networks of Web 2.0, wherein "users' attention, imagination, time, identity and socialization is succumbed in reflexively controlled digital environments, sustained by 'fun,' individualistic aspirations, and the deferred possibility of succeeding in the acquisition of cultural, social and economic capital."[518] In this particular case, SoundCloud represents a platform through which these existing subjectivities are mobilized and amplified in a kind of sublimated free market competition cloaked in community. In keeping with other social networking sites, it functions above all as a space of self-valorization for users as human

[514] Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 3.
[515] Leyshon, *Reformatted*, 167.
[516] Ibid., 164–5.
[517] Chapman, "The 'One-man Band,'" 461, 467.
[518] Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 4.

capital.[519] In practice, Lazzarato proposes that this capitalization is achieved "by managing all its relationships, choices, behaviours according to the logic of a costs/investment ratio and in line with the law of supply and demand."[520] This in turn necessitates a personal comportment that is "instrumentalist, efficient, cost-benefit calculative, purpose-driven, utilitarian and above all competitive."[521] SoundCloud makes this easier for the working musician by rendering actions quantifiable through its statistics; while these do not directly yield concrete profit, they become what Michael Scott calls "a template for comparing, valuing and ordering music producers" and function as "proxies for popularity" and "market potential;"[522] these statistics consequently help the user to better calculate and demonstrate success.[523] Therefore, such statistics on SoundCloud serve as markers of status and attest to the optimization of one's own capital. For music writer Emilie Friedlander, this promotes a culture in which amateur users adopt a professional success-driven orientation as soon as they first engage with the platform.[524]

This begins with the user's approach to her/his SoundCloud profile. Voogt emphasizes that the profile "should be perfected to the point of excellence" in order to portray the best possible image to prospective listeners. This requires cultivating a profile that demonstrates an artist's level of success, productivity, organizational skills, personal style, and cultural capital, which is increasingly vital as the user begins to employ her/his SoundCloud profile as a promotional tool. She/he must tailor it so that it demonstrates to industry professionals that she/he possesses not only "musical talent" but organizational skills as well, and therefore

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[519] Coté and Pybus, "Learning to Immaterial Labour 2.0," 94–95.
[520] Lazzarato, "Misfortunes of the 'Artistic Critique,'" 47.
[521] Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 4.
[522] Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship," 248.
[523] Marco Deseriis, "The General, the Watchman, and the Engineer of Control: The Relationship Between Cooperation, Communication, and Command in the Society of Control," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 35, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 391, doi:10.1177/0196859911415677.
[524] Friedlander, "Social Anxiety."

represents a "reasonable business [investment]."[525] Thus, the more time and effort one invests in projecting an image of professional credibility, the greater the possibility of earning a return on that investment through greater success both on and off the platform. However, this also extends beyond the profile to an all-encompassing attitude under which every variable must be tweaked and optimized to maximize output. This approach to self-promotion and optimizing potential is above all about establishing the user as a "subject of value" and signaling her/his marketability as well her/his willingness to mobilize that value within market relations.[526]

Furthermore, the logic of human capital also impacts the very way artists share music on the platform, as the logic of supply and demand becomes a direct and calculable influence on user behaviour. Whereas the obvious utility of SoundCloud would be the ease of sharing music whenever one so desires, aspiring artists anxious to achieve and maintain success must carefully control their output. For Voogt, careful attention to the music one shares, particularly when in an unfinished state, is essential in order to "[p]roactively curate your audience's impression of you."[527] Sharing a piece of music which is not finely tuned to capture listener interest risks not only falling on deaf ears but also actively undermining the popularity a user has struggle to accrue. Moreover, Voogt employs an economistic language to describe user output and even uses product life cycle graphs to illustrate the logic by which they should maintain and optimize exposure. This means finding the right balance so as not to saturate one's audience while also remaining consistent enough to maintain their attention; Voogt proposes a monthly sharing schedule in order to "[r]emind people that you're there."[528] Scott Woodruff, a musician and SoundCloud Premier Partner who performs under the name Stick Figure, implies a similar ethos

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[525] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 34.
[526] Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship," 239, 250.
[527] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 83.
[528] Ibid., 31–33.

in his own approach: "Staying consistent with output has been the biggest factor in my growth. The new music allows for fans to be built organically, without any gimmicks."[529] Likewise, Matt Musto of Blackbear describes his success as having begun when he "started out dropping a song a week for about a year in 2012. [E]very week more and more listeners got involved…"[530] At the same time this output cannot become mechanical: to fully capitalize on listener attention, the astute user must remain attentive to the life cycle of their uploaded music. This requires being able to predict a track's "fall-off" when listener attention finally begins to wane in order to "put out another great track" as soon as possible and sustain growth.[531] Of course, this model of growth is predicated on an inexhaustible resource of musical imagination and productivity and posits a stream of releases in which tracks either meet or exceed the popularity of those that preceded them. Neither of these notions have any basis in reality, as musical production and listener habits are contingent and unpredictable.

Furthermore, making the necessary subjective investment means musicians have difficulty keeping their working and non-working lives separate.[532] Premier Partner Christopher Chu describes a similar experience in which he and his bandmates work entirely from their homes, making use of consumer-level recording equipment to produce their music and employing SoundCloud for promotion and fan interaction. Chu declares: "Pretty much everything we work on starts and ends at home…. It's really a blessing to have a home setup because we like to work every day." He also adds that working from home is key to the band being able to make a sufficient affective investment in the music they make – what Chu describes as "[feeling] like it's true to what [the band] wanted to express" – presumably due to

[529] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Stick Figure."
[530] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Blackbear."
[531] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 32–33.
[532] Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, 149–150; Hracs and Leslie, "Living Under the Lights," 14.

the comfort level in those surroundings and the ability to devote the necessary amount of time to producing music the limitations of studio schedules.[533] While Chu speaks enthusiastically as an empowered musician able to take control of his career from the comfort of his own home, his situation illustrates the blurred distinction between work and non-work that contributes to the confusion of these two conflicting temporalities. Neff et al. describe this scenario as "[a] fluid boundary between work-time and playtime" in which the latter "is no longer a release from work-time; it is a required supplement to work-time, and relies on constant self-promotion."[534] The overall result of this this subjective over-investment is the risk of self-exploitation that results from losing the ability to disconnect and distance oneself from the time and activities of work.[535] Therefore, as Sharma proposes, the user must "recalibrate" her/himself in accordance with the temporal flow of the network. This is in fact a fundamental feature of post-Fordist work and its biopolitical imperative to actualize potential labour-power, as such "deliberative recalibration is the expectation of all responsible self-governing citizens within late capitalism."[536]

This process of self-governing necessitates reflexivity,[537] which for McRobbie entails habits of "endless self-monitoring and an ethos of working harder and harder."[538] One way in which this occurs is through an internalization of a logic of individual self-realization, which is readily identifiable in the rhetoric many SoundCloud users employ. Cyra Morgan describes SoundCloud as the key to realizing her previously untapped potential: fearing that she "had missed the chance to live this dream," Morgan describes her experience on the platform as

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[533] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner POP ETC."
[534] Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin, "Entrepreneurial Labor Among Cultural Producers," 321–2.
[535] Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, 227.
[536] Sharma, "Biopolitical Economy of Time," 442.
[537] McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies," 522.
[538] McRobbie, "'Everyone Is Creative': Artists as Pioneers of the New Economy?," 88.

having produced "a metamorphosis, like [she] had been sleeping, for years, and then woke up and learned what it feels like to fly."[539] In this sense, it is not Morgan's musical activity that had been dormant – she describes "singing and writing for as long as [she] can remember"[540] – but rather her undeveloped potential as musical human capital. SoundCloud thus permitted the optimal mobilization of such potential through her ability to gain wider exposure and recognition as a legitimate artist. It should come as no surprise that SoundCloud also frequently employs this rhetorical strategy when attempting to position its brand as constitutive of self-realization and thus as an asset to users: one SoundCloud blogger encourages user feedback by stressing that the corporation "love[s] hearing about [user] stories of growth and success" which it has helped to foster.[541] Moreover, McRobbie's aforementioned 'hard work' can be observed in user discourse in ways that border on self-exploitation. For example, SoundCloud user and freelance composer Jonathan Ochmann describes a never-ending desire to better discipline himself and improve his work habits through the relationships he builds with peers:

> I'm always looking for people who work harder than myself, who are smarter and more creative and most importantly more critical of my own work than I could ever be… Obviously it becomes increasingly [hard] to find these people when you keep pushing yourself and try to work 15 hours every day but when you do it's really rewarding.[542]

For Ochmann, who also works as a filmmaker, these gruelling work habits are undoubtedly necessitated in part by working as a cultural producer in two highly competitive markets; however, his valorization of toil betrays the degree to which he has internalized this personal responsibility, whereby his success is solely dependent on pushing himself to give everything he has. Thus Ochmann, like other users, completely accepts that a high degree of hard work must

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[539] "Meet On SoundCloud Premier Partner Cyra Morgan."
[540] Ibid.
[541] "Hans Zimmer Searches for the Next Composer on SoundCloud," *SoundCloud Blog*, January 22, 2014, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2014/01/22/hans-zimmer-soundcloud-contest/.
[542] "Creating Sound for Video: Creating as a Composer and Filmmaker," *SoundCloud Blog*, September 26, 2013, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2013/09/26/sound-video-composer/.

accompany his career goals, which subsequently legitimizes otherwise "exceptional conditions" which must be endured in order to achieve success.[543] However, despite working more, Hracs notes that independent musicians are in fact earning less money in the process.[544] This amounts to what Isabell Lorey refers to as self-precarization, or the experience of precarity in which the individual perceives such exploitative yet autonomous working conditions as having been freely chosen and thus worth enduring.[545]

This is further exacerbated by the way in which entrepreneurial subjectivity promotes the individualization of risk, through which capital seeks to shed its responsibilities to labour in exchange for greater autonomy.[546] While this risk can be managed by established musicians with a pre-existing fan base – which is typically the result of conventional industry promotion – emerging artists face a greater amount of uncertainty which they must confront largely in isolation,[547] despite the systemic causes of these conditions and their shared experience.[548] Furthermore, the erosion of the traditional institutions of the creative industries means that cultural work must be self-financed with the expectation of later returns, which necessitates additional instances of typically precarious work to provide an income in the interim.[549] This is certainly the case for musicians, who must cover the costs of launching their careers, be it in purchasing necessary equipment or financing necessary rehearsal or production time.[550] Despite these seemingly desperate circumstances, cultural producers and musicians find themselves compelled to continue based on a perception of the opportunity for eventual success – what

[543] Mylonas, "Amateur Creation and Entrepreneurialism," 6.
[544] Hracs, "A Creative Industry in Transition," 458.
[545] Lorey, "Virtuosos of Freedom," 84.
[546] McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies," 518; Menger, "Artistic Labor Markets and Careers," 568.
[547] Young and Collins, "Music 2.0," 347.
[548] Gregg, "Presence Bleed," 129.
[549] Lorey, "Virtuosos of Freedom," 86–87; Scott, "Cultural Entrepreneurs, Cultural Entrepreneurship," 251.
[550] Toynbee, "Fingers to the Bone or Spaced Out on Creativity," 52.

McRobbie calls the 'one big hit' – which will have made such precarious conditions worthwhile.[551] This perception is further amplified by Web 2.0 platforms such as SoundCloud: these seemingly render the 'big hit' that much more obtainable,[552] and this perception is further validated by the success stories of young artists who have risen to success thanks to their web presence (e.g. musicians such as Lorde on SoundCloud and Justin Bieber on YouTube).[553] As McRobbie explains, the notion of the 'one big hit' is seen as "[having] a transformative effect" which suddenly ends the necessity of working under precarious conditions. However, this belief in an eventual payoff also constitutes a form of self-discipline in service of a total mobilization of one's human capital; as McRobbie cautions, it "requires an inflated degree of self-belief that is surely unsustainable."[554] What results is the emergence of what Andrew Ross calls a "lottery climate" of everyone banking on the 'one big hit,' which can only stand to accentuate precarity and further polarize the market between the successful few and an increasingly insecure majority.[555]

Moreover, these notions of self-realization, hard work, and deserved returns on investment become a double-edged sword, and can promote what Lovink and Rossiter call a

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[551] McRobbie, "The Los Angelesation of London," 125–6; Menger, "Artistic Labor Markets and Careers," 567–8; Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin, "Entrepreneurial Labor Among Cultural Producers," 319.
[552] Mark Deuze and Nicky Lewis, "Professional Identity and Media Work," in *Theorizing Cultural Work: Labour, Continuity and Change in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, ed. Mark Banks, Rosalind Gill, and Stephanie Taylor (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 168.
[553] Caitlin Dewey, "YouTube at 10: How an Online Video Site Ate the Pop Culture Machine," *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2015, http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2015/02/15/youtube-at-10-how-an-online-video-site-ate-the-pop-culture-machine/; Brenna Ehrlich, "Lorde's 'Song Of The Year' Was A Slow Burn To The Top," *MTV News*, December 13, 2013, http://www.mtv.com/news/1719073/lorde-royals-best-song-of-2013-slow-start/.
[554] McRobbie, "The Los Angelesation of London," 126.
[555] Ross, "Nice Work If You Can Get It," 38.

"culture of self-valorisation" and "auto-denigration."[556] In this sense, disavowal of the highly competitive nature of contemporary musical labour means a lack of success can only be perceived as a personal failing resulting from poor management of one's human capital. Indeed, some users regard SoundCloud's capacity to foster success deterministically, as if popularity was simply a matter of making the right choices and sensible investments. For example, Voogt asserts that not achieving the desired amount of exposure results from not having optimized one's online presence, which betrays a personal failure in not having taken the necessary steps to cultivate success.[557] Similarly, Daniel Suett, the young winner of the 'Hans Zimmer Wants You' contest for emerging composers on SoundCloud, celebrates the site's "tools and flexibility" and states that "[t]hanks to SoundCloud, I now think there is no excuse for anyone who makes music to say that they don't know how to reach an audience."[558] However, while one conceivably has the ability to reach an enormous audience on SoundCloud, it is quite another matter to be able to gain and hold their interest, or even turn this attention into a stable career. For that matter, it should not be overlooked that Suett also boasts a specialized musical education and a musician parent.[559] Suett's views on personal responsibility and the ideology they represent demonstrate an inattention towards the material conditions of contemporary musical labour which can have harmful repercussions: as McRobbie suggests, the prevalence of "[s]elf blame" serves capitalism by ignoring structural issues and "ensuring the absence of social critique."[560]

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[556] Geert Lovink and Ned Rossiter, "Proposals for Creative Research: Introduction to the MyCreativity Reader," in *MyCreativity Reader: A Critique of Creative Industries*, ed. Geert Lovink (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2007), 14, http://www.networkcultures.org/_uploads/32.pdf.
[557] Voogt, *Soundcloud Bible*, 14–15.
[558] "Meet the Hans Zimmer Wants You!! Contest Finalists," *SoundCloud Blog*, April 15, 2014, http://blog.soundcloud.com/2014/04/15/meet-hans-zimmer-contest-finalists/.
[559] Ibid.; "Daniel Suett," *LinkedIn*, accessed July 4, 2015, https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/daniel-suett/63/8b1/27b.
[560] McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies," 521.

This individualized notion of risk and success also has a negative impact on diversity and the experiences of cultural producers who do not conform to normative subjective profiles (typically white, heterosexual, male, and relatively young)[561] due to the lack of formal institutions with which to manage structural inequality.[562] Indeed, the obfuscation of such inequality has the effect of "[reproducing] older patterns of marginalization (of women and people from different ethnic backgrounds), while also disallowing any space or time for such issues to reach articulation."[563] For women in cultural production, the demands of highly flexible and precarious work mean that one must choose between family life and professional aspirations given that the two begin to appear mutually exclusive;[564] even then, working opportunities and the quality of work available for women within the cultural industries remain largely limited.[565] These same demands for flexibility and tolerance for risk also make it difficult for aging cultural producers to maintain careers.[566] Consequently, the emphasis on self-reliance and associated conditions of unequal access continue to favour those with greater economic and social capital,[567] and successful musicians are increasingly likely to come from relatively affluent backgrounds. As forging a musical career increasingly becomes a matter of withstanding precarity long enough to garner the 'big hit,' Leyshon notes that musicians who "come from backgrounds where there are plentiful reserves of social, cultural, *and* financial capital" are far

[561] Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin, "Entrepreneurial Labor Among Cultural Producers," 331.
[562] McRobbie, "The Los Angelesation of London," 124–5.
[563] McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies," 523.
[564] McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies," 521.
[565] Sarah B. Proctor-Thompson, "Feminist Futures of Cultural Work? Creativity, Gender and Difference in the Digital Media Sector," in *Theorizing Cultural Work: Labour, Continuity and Change in the Cultural and Creative Industries*, ed. Mark Banks, Rosalind Gill, and Stephanie Taylor (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 138–9.
[566] McRobbie, "'Everyone Is Creative,'" 87.
[567] Ibid.

more likely persevere, whereas less privileged artists are more likely to suffer from the erosion of the socialized risk that the recording industry once afforded.[568]

These conditions of precarity and individualization have the overall effect of limiting the possibility of political engagement and collective action; indeed, as McRobbie suggests, within the highly flexible, competitive, and insecure conditions of cultural production, "[s]peed and risk negate ethics, community and politics."[569] However, rather than merely a cause for despair, this scenario makes plain the need for collective struggle and alternative institutions in order to confront conditions of exploitation and precarity head on.

[568] Leyshon, *Reformatted*, 167–71.
[569] McRobbie, "Clubs to Companies," 523.

Conclusion

As I have demonstrated, the nature of musical work has drastically shifted since its origins in pre-capitalist times, but vulnerability to precarious conditions has remained a constant. In the twentieth century, important union gains and the protections of an ostensibly Fordist industry system meant that such precarity could be mitigated to a degree; however, as the industry has grown increasingly susceptible to flagging profits and the threat posted by new technologies, what few protections existed have been cast aside in favour of a post-Fordist emphasis on autonomy and flexibility. Under these conditions, SoundCloud as a site of musical work stands as a key example of immaterial labour: as symbolic, communicative, affective, productive of network value and, above all, biopolitical; this is further evidenced by a tendency towards flexibility, self-optimization of the user as human capital, and a capacity to bear risk individually, all of which correspond to the profile of the entrepreneur of the self. However, as I have stressed, these working conditions are highly exploitative: value is insufficiently attributed to immaterial musical work in light of the proliferation of new unremunerated tasks which go into establishing a career. Instead, it is expropriated by SoundCloud as network value. The user is thus left to subsist on alternative forms of capital that she/he hopes to eventually actualize into economic gains; in the meantime, she/he is left vulnerable to precarious conditions due to a highly unstable and competitive market and a demand to bear any concomitant risks alone. As I have discussed, this increased workload and an experience of constant vulnerability can result in significant psychological strain. This dispiriting depiction of musical labour on SoundCloud – as well as its implications for contemporary musical production in general – renders ever more pressing the need for collective responses to what are ideologically constructed as individual

problems.[570] Indeed, as Lazzarato suggests, this "[generalized neoliberal] logic of the market intensifies the need for social and political integration, since competition is a destructive rather than a unifying principle, systematically undoing the cohesion that society constructs."[571] For working musicians, who face limited prospects for success without access to alternate institutions,[572] a collective response to the negative implications of platforms such as SoundCloud is urgent in order to prevent the further deterioration of working conditions.

However, the possibility of collective action remains uncertain. Beyond the systemic limits to solidarity inherent to post-Fordism, there is a lack of what Brophy calls a 'memory of struggle' among immaterial labourers. For Brophy, an awareness of the history of labour militancy within a given field is vital for the articulation of contemporary struggles due to labour groups "having performed and refined [collective struggles] in the past." The lack of such a memory stems in large part from a "sustained ideological attack" against workplace unionization and widespread depoliticization amongst immaterial labourers; however, it is exacerbated by a lack of historical knowledge of and experience in collective organizing within particular industries, as well as an attitude that unions are of limited use outside of industrial labour.[573] This notion is particularly relevant in terms of musical work: much as early twentieth century musicians endured precarious working conditions until they recognized themselves as labourers and responded collectively, contemporary artists – much like immaterial labourers in general – often disregard their efforts as work because of their subjective investment and the legitimate pleasure they derive from it. In this sense, there appears to be a lack of any memory or awareness of the struggles that bettered the working conditions of their predecessors. Therefore the

[570] Deuze and Lewis, "Professional Identity and Media Work," 173; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, *Creative Labour*, 222; Menger, "Artistic Labor Markets and Careers," 566–7.
[571] Lazzarato, "Neoliberalism in Action," 130.
[572] Young and Collins, "Music 2.0," 349.
[573] Brophy, "Organizations of Immaterial Labour," 267–8.

possibility of any future collective action among musicians requires a project of jogging this collective memory, perhaps by re-articulating the history of organized musical labour that I have briefly surveyed previously. However, it also requires careful attention to new forms of collectivity so as not to simply repeat the tactics of a bygone age: as Brophy notes, this memory of struggle is not limited to unionized action and can in fact encompass an array of collective strategies which might inspire novel approaches.[574]

Consequently, activist strategies represent key means of articulating this memory of struggle, particularly with a lack of formal institutions upon which to rely. For Lorey, an activism centred on precarity is one possible approach within conditions of highly individualized labour, given that "[precarity] always exists in relation to others and is thus constantly linked to social and political possibilities of action."[575] While there have yet to be any measures proposed that are specific to musical labour and SoundCloud, there are a number of possibilities that have been explored throughout the literature of post-*Operaismo*, cultural production, and precarity. Numerous theorists have in fact proposed precarity as a focal point for countering rampant de-politicization and individualization and for collectively organizing around struggles without over-simplifying diverse experiences of precariousness.[576] Precarity thus serves as what Brophy calls "a powerful rallying cry and compelling aggregator" for new struggles.[577] There are many examples of such precarity activism at work across various fields that fall under the banner of immaterial labour, including New York's Freelancers Union, *Associazione Consulenti Terziario Avanzato* (a Milan-based freelance worker association), and the American group W.A.G.E.

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[574] Ibid., 270–271.
[575] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 100.
[576] Conti et al., "Anamorphosis of Living Labour," 83; Gill and Pratt, "In the Social Factory?," 12; Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 6.
[577] Brophy, "Organizations of Immaterial Labour," 276.

(Working Artists and the Greater Economy).[578] In this sense, the precarious nature of contemporary musical labour on SoundCloud can perhaps serve as a means of opening dialogue among musicians from diverse musical and socioeconomic backgrounds so as to reveal the dire need for an organized response to these pervasive conditions. It can become a way of, as Lorey proposes, "[opening] up a space for communicating with others about how one wants to live and to work, about what is needed for safeguarding and for mutual protection."[579]

One broad form of precarity activism centres on demands for a guaranteed basic income.[580] Particularly in keeping with post-*Operaisti* theories of immaterial labour and value, a 'social wage' becomes a way of recognizing and compensating the productive nature of activities throughout the social factory that confound conventional definitions of work.[581] There are of course a number of caveats: for a basic income to function, it would need to be non-discriminatory, lacking requirements for formal employment, and generally unconditional in nature.[582] Furthermore, as Gorz cautions, a basic income does not contradict productivist conceptions of labour,[583] and therefore does not preclude the possibility of exploitation, particularly as self-exploitation is rampant amongst immaterial workers. Above all, despite growing demands for policies of the sort, the institution of a basic income remains a distant political reality for most. That being said, it would certainly alleviate some of the burden of highly demanding work that results in limited – if any – financial compensation, and should thus

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[578] Greig de Peuter, "Beyond the Model Worker: Surveying a Creative Precariat," *Culture Unbound* 6 (2014): 268, 271, http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v6/cul14v6_capitalism.pdf#page=251.
[579] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 105–6.
[580] Brophy, "Organizations of Immaterial Labour," 278.
[581] de Peuter, "Beyond the Model Worker," 273; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 403.
[582] Fumagalli and Lucarelli, "A Model of Cognitive Capitalism," 12; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 403.
[583] Gorz, *The Immaterial*, 27–28.

not be discounted by musicians and cultural producers as they seek novel strategies in uncertain times.

Overall, just as musicians in the early twentieth century only recognized their collective power by acknowledging the conditions they shared with other workers, so too must any activism based on precarity or a project for basic income hinge on its articulation as a collective demand amongst a multiplicity of precarious voices – both as a source of strength for the movement and out of an ethical necessity that any cultural producer defining her/his working conditions as precarious also acknowledge the disparity of lived experiences within this category. This of courses poses significant challenges: Lorey cautions that "[t]he precarious cannot be unified or represented, their interests are so disparate that classical forms of corporate organizing are not effective;" however, she suggests that this is not solely a hindrance but also represents an opportunity for new forms of political action.[584] Such forms are not intended to disregard different experiences or establish hierarchies but rather establish a new collective strength.[585] Regardless of the inherent difficulties of organizing such a movement, some form of collective response to precarity is essential. It is vital to reaffirm mutual solidarity against the individualizing forces of post-Fordism and the exploitative conditions of immaterial musical labour so that future platforms in the mould of SoundCloud may be lauded for their ability to foster genuine community and shared prosperity rather than distrusted for their tendency to further isolate and exploit an already precarious workforce.

[584] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 9.
[585] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 108, 111.

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