

# **Creative Production in the UK Music Industries**

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by

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## **Abstract**

Creative work is thought to offer a model for the future of all work as we move into a knowledge economy. But in what sense is creative work, itself, creative? This is the central concern of this thesis. Many have argued that our ability to be creative has, ironically, decreased with the rise of creative work. Researchers have suggested that the precarious labour conditions typical of creative work along with the growing role of large corporations in the creative labour market make it all but impossible for creative workers to be experimental and innovative – that is, to be truly creative. However, marking a distinction between creatively producing something and producing something creative, I argue that organising creativity is now an important creative activity in its own right and is intimately related to various ways of representing work. Drawing on ethnographic empirical research and my own experiences as an amateur musician I describe the ways in which working helps a specific group of people to creatively make music and provide an analysis of how positive and negative images of work help to structure and inspire this creativity.

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## Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Preface .....	6
1. Introduction .....	12
2. Creative work and the production of culture .....	42
3. Method.....	78
Activities.....	116
4. Defining the art world: the two music industries.....	117
5. What does the underground make? Live music.....	157
6. What does the underground make? Recorded music.....	190
Relationships .....	213
7. Working with and without work.....	213
8. The meaning of work.....	245
9. Conclusion: creative production.....	270
10. References .....	290

## **Preface**

... or, how am I not a rock star?

It was not meant to be like this. After two years in which I applied for every research post I could find, no matter how tenuously related to my academic training, I had secured a scholarship from the University of Leicester to study for an M.Sc in Management Research and then a Ph.D. So I should have been tucked up in bed, happy that things were finally going my way, after a cold and dreary Saturday spent in the university library. But I was not. I was parked in the hard-shoulder of the motorway a hundred miles away from home. It was the middle of the night and I was stuffing my face with lukewarm pizza. My ears rang and all of a sudden I found myself thinking: what I am doing?

The immediate answer was that I was driving home from a gig. Three hours earlier I had been on stage at the Brixton Windmill performing as Fabulous Foxes. I formed the band with a violin player and drummer but I often performed our live concerts on my own. This show was one such solo performance.

The drive home from a gig is a strange journey. Usually you are excited, buzzing from your performance, but also disappointed with some aspect of the evening – the small crowd, bad sound or a band-mate who went wrong during the set. Whenever I have been driving home with bands there has been a similar pattern. The first fifteen minutes of the journey are a confused mess of jokes, gossip and evaluation. Then, suddenly, it all stops. The van or car is silent, passengers gently nod off to sleep,

cigarettes and joints are rolled, leftover beers are nursed. It is not until you get near to home that people begin to talk again. It is almost like you have travelled from one world to another. In one you are a rock star, in the other you are not – you are just you.

Whether it is true for all musicians I do not know but I always found that compared to travelling with a band the journey home is particularly depressing when you are on your own. There is no fifteen minutes of joking, no one to share the experience with, moan about the soundman or the promoters to. It is just silent from start to finish. I would always find myself concentrating on when I would get to bed rather than the road in front of me.

So it was on my drive home from the Windmill. I desperately wanted to get home. The drive was tiring enough but I had been at university for most of the day. After printing maps of Brixton and rushing home, I set out for London at 4pm. The journey was over 150 miles. Even though a friend who worked in the library at the university and also plays in a band told me how to find the Windmill the drive took around four hours. I got to the venue just before 8pm.

After hiding anything of value in the boot of my car I went looking for the entrance to the venue. The doors were locked. The bands inside were sound-checking so it took a lot of banging on the door before I got someone's attention. Once inside I found the people who had organised the concert, Adam and Rob, and asked them what was happening. Rob told me that there were five acts playing and I was on second from last. He also told me that lots of record company A & R men were coming to the show

to watch the headliners, an up-and-coming band from Leeds, and, if I stretched my set out beyond the allotted time, I could play to a few of them too.

Before the venue opened I had time to relax. I ordered a Guinness. I had no idea if anyone would come to see me. I had sent text messages to a few friends I knew in London. But none of them could make the show. So I sat with Adam and Rob talking about music, tattoos and work. I did not really know either of them. Nevertheless it was easy to talk to them. We had a lot in common. But, as I finished my Guinness and they left to open the doors of the venue, I settled in for a lonely night. The acts that played before me were uninspiring and while everyone else in the venue seemed to be having fun I sat waiting for my turn to take the stage – getting increasingly nervous.

Fast-forward five hours, my performance had gone well. It was mostly a blur but I got good feedback from the audience and Rob and Adam. Despite my fears, my car had not been stolen. I quickly loaded my guitar and effects pedals into the boot and headed home. It was an ice cold night. Before I knew it, there I was, parked on the hard shoulder of the M25 eating cold pizza thinking about the stresses, emotions and frustrations I gone through that day, trying to figure out if it was all worth it for the £80 I was paid to play. When I got home, I realised that I had a topic for my thesis: what was I doing and how was I doing it? Moreover I realised that this question was the main topic of conversation I had with most of my friends – who were, at that time, almost all musicians as well.

Well, I say that we were musicians but really none of us were. Instead we played music around our jobs. My friend Aaron, for instance, is a jazz drummer and a self-employed

painter and decorator. For Aaron decorating is a perfect job because it gives him the freedom to make the music he wants to make. He can take time off to go on tour when he needs to and can increase the amount of work he does at other times to compensate. It means that when he makes music it is because he wants to make music not because he has to. 'Find a job that helps you to play music', Aaron once told me. 'Don't worry about making music your job'. For Aaron that meant being self-employed, for many of my friends it meant working as a temp in an office or factory.

It is not only me and my friends who seem to be noticing the importance of working outside of music when it comes to making music. Jonze (2009) and Barnett (2010) both report that it is increasingly common for many creative people including well-known musicians and actors, artists and writers to organise their creative activities around a non-creative job. Jonze (2009) describes a typical scenario for a musician: 'The applause is deafening as you throw down your guitar and walk off stage. High on adrenaline, you head to the dressing room and think: "This is it, I've made it, I'm a rock star". Until 6am, that is, when your alarm goes off and you have to head off for a 10 hour shift packing frozen peas in Nuneaton'.

I had already begun reading the literature on the production of popular music before I stumbled upon this topic and what I found, when I looked in greater detail, was that academic interest in musicians like me and my friends ended with the publication of Sara Cohen's *Rock Culture* (1991a). I was not alone in making this observation. A year after Cohen's book was published Negus complains that: 'Very little attention has been paid to the vast number of amateur and semi-professional bands, performers and singers making music in Britain' (1992: 40). Indeed, since Cohen's work, in days

where interest in cultural production has given way to interest in the creative industries (Garnham, 2005), it seems that where there is not a visible industry there is not any production. But this frustrated me and flew in the face of my experiences over the previous few years – were the amateur and professional music industries really so separate? In the years that I had played music I had some contact with professionals who worked within the music industry but I was very much an amateur. Indeed even as an amateur I had played to audiences around the country, recorded music in professional studios, sold recordings and been reviewed. Occasionally I was even able to pocket a bit of money in the process. In fact, as far as I could tell, there was always money changing hands as people paid to attend gigs or buy records, badges and t-shirts. I certainly felt as though I was contributing to an industry as I paid for a rehearsal space every week, paid for studio time, paid friends to mix and master records and bought second-hand instruments. These transactions, though, mostly existed in the shadow economy. They were unrecorded and because of that they were ignored. But surely I was producing something?

Two decades ago Ruth Finnegan (1989) published her stunning account of the hidden musicians in Milton Keynes. The starting point for Finnegan's analysis is that we are wrong to ignore the music that gets made in these shadow music industries. Yet interest in the area has dried up or, at least, unlike Finnegan's work, does not speak to my experiences. I hope that this thesis will go some way towards addressing this gap. An early title for this thesis was, as a result, 'How am I not a rock star?'. In many ways that is still an appropriate title. I am still not a rock star and I hope that the thesis gives some insights into a music industry of people who are not and probably will never be stars but keep on making music, putting on shows and releasing records because they

want to make music. I hope it shows that these people are creative and innovative as they organise their own music industry – one that allow them to make music if not profit.

With this background in place I will now take a step back from this self-confessional way of writing and my position as a musician struggling to make sense of his activities and take on the pose and prose of a Ph.D. candidate trained to make sense of not just these activities but also these struggles. In this Preface I hope that I have demonstrated my own motivations for writing this thesis and acknowledged ‘myself as the *I* of the writing’ (Rhodes, 2001: xii). But now I will step back in the presentation of the research. I cannot deny that this project has a particular meaning for me but I hope by taking on an academic style of writing I can demonstrate the relevance and importance of the research for a wider audience.

## **1. Introduction**

In this thesis I am concerned with the ways that we can organise a specific creative activity – making music – in creative ways. To do this I want to make a distinction between creatively producing something and producing something creative and show that the both can be labours of love (Roderick, 2006; Freidson, 1990). Using this distinction I will show how people work to create spaces for themselves in which they can make music inside, outside and on the edge of the professional music industry (Negus, 1999). For support I will draw on a range of theorists who each share a common interest in the organisation of creative activities – notably Sennett (2008), Becker (2007; 1982; 1974; 1963) and Bourdieu (1986a; 1986b; 1983a; 19983b) – and offer empirical data that I gathered from observing, interacting and interviewing people who make music in the UK. In particular I will show how these people draw on various ways of organising and representing their working lives to support, subsidise and inspire their creative activities – becoming creative producers rather than just producers of creativity.

While this account of creativity is based around my own experiences as a musician I hope that it will not simply be an exercise in narcissism or catharsis – even though writing the thesis has been both narcissistic and cathartic. I believe that what we might call the creativity of organising is overlooked in many of the recent discussions concerning creative and cultural work. Largely researchers have focused on the creativity afforded by certain organisational arrangements rather than on the creativity involved in establishing those organisational arrangements in the first place (Gill and

Pratt, 2008; Oakley, 2004; McRobbie, 2002). From the critical organisation theorists Cooper and Burrell, though, we learn that in addition to the ‘organization of production’ there is also a ‘production of organization’ – a process in which organisations are themselves produced (1988: 106). So, while not wanting to deny the excellence of many of these current accounts of creative work, I hope my research can make a contribution by focusing on a topic that many researchers investigating the creative industries discuss in passing.

### **Why Music?**

The first question to think about by way of introducing this thesis is why study the production of music at all? My interest in this area is, of course, a reflection of my own experiences as a musician and also a reflection of the growing interest in and importance attributed to the creative work involved in cultural production (Pratt and Jeffcutt, 2009; McKinlay and Smith, 2009; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Banks, 2007; Florida, 2004; Hartley, 2004; Beck, 2002; Howkins, 2002). But it is also a reflection of the interests of the intellectual theorists whose ideas I draw on in this thesis. In particular Sennett (2008), Bourdieu (1983a) and Becker (1982; 1963; 1956) all focus their attention directly on the production of music. Indeed the production of music is often used by these writers for the same reason. They use it to demonstrate the connections and disconnections between the work we have to do and the work we want to do – irrelevant of whether either work is recognised as “creative work” or not. In short the production of music is used to illustrate the separations and links between the uncreative work that goes on in formal organisations and the creative work that happens outside of such environments and vice versa (Svendsen, 2008; Banks, 2007; Parker,

2006; Bradshaw, McDonagh, Marshall and Bradshaw, 2005; Holbrook, 2005; Finnegan, 1989; Becker, 1963).

In this regard the production of music has been described as an inherently paradoxical production process (DeFillippi, Grabher and Jones, 2007) in which people are forced to accommodate themselves in and around conflicting organisations and representations of work (Strachan, 2007). Certainly we can see these contradictions between work and music reflected in the historic role of music as a space for freedom in even the most controlled workplaces and in the ingrained images of beautiful musicians struggling against gray, faceless culture industries (Rhodes and Westwood, 2008; Gioia, 2006; Stratton, 1983; 1982; Brown, 1953). In this thesis I will argue that this paradoxical view of work – while based on caricatured binaries which valorise some activities as good and others as bad – offers a powerful resource for the organisation of creative activities. In particular I will show how a popular image of work and creativity as fundamental incompatible activities forms ‘the stakes and the motor’ for a process of creative production (Bourdieu, 1986a: 80).

### **Creativity and work**

It is fair to say that there is a general image of work as something unpleasant and uncreative (Garnham, 2005; Harney, 2002; Handy, 1989; Illich, 1973). Work is often imagined as an iron cage rather than a vocation (Weber, 1918). Parker, for instance, cites a range of pop culture references ranging from the novels of Dickens and the poetry of Larkin to films like *Bridget Jones' Diary* and *Fight Club* that show us ‘monotonous rhythms of crashing metal, or clicking keys’ gradually stamping ‘the

souls of people into the shape of workers' (2006: 3). Similarly Rhodes and Westwood claim that 'popular culture provides insightful elucidations of the cultural meanings of work in contemporary society ... these are often consonant with the critical study of management and organization' (2008: 51). They offer a range of examples to illustrate this claim including songs by Bruce Springsteen that focus on 'hard and drudgerous labour governed by the factory whistle and locked in by iron factory gates' (2008: 135).

For many of us our experience of work supports these critical images. As Csikszentmihalyi explains: 'most of the institutions that take up our time – schools, offices, factories – are organized around the assumption that serious work is grim and unpleasant. Because of this assumption, most of our time is spent doing unpleasant things' (1975: 1). Whether we clock in using electronic swipe cards or declare the contents of our bags to a superior, we know when the working day begins and when it ends (Parker, 2006). Work is a controlled environment where we do something that we would rather not do and certainly would not do unless we were getting paid. Indeed for many of us work involves performing a set role with a clearly defined job description listing our responsibilities and duties (Svendsen, 2008). The worker, Marx summarises bluntly, is 'wretched' (Tucker, 1978: 70). In fact, from Marx (Tucker, 1978) to Whyte (1956), Braverman (1974) to Illich (1973), unrewarding experiences of work are seen as an inescapable by-product of the industrial and post-industrial organisation of work. Industrial production demands that we execute fragmented activities, parts of work divided by managers and planners rather than completing a full task from start to finish (Taylor, 1911). This deskills us and encourages us to see other people as human resources not human beings (Braverman, 1974). We are as Henry Ford once put it little more than a pair of hands (Picken and Dess, 1997).

Svendsen, though, points out that etymologically work has always been meant as something that is bad for us and that negative images of work are not limited to the industrial period (2008: 5). The French word for work, *travail*, comes from the Latin word *tripalium* that refers to an instrument of torture. The German word *arbeit* originally meant hardship. Similarly the Latin *labor* means drudgery and the Greek *ponos* means sorrow. This is why we need some form of management at work – managers get people do things they do not want to do. ‘Control’, Braverman tells us, ‘has been the essential feature of management thought throughout its history’ (1974: 62).

But while these deeply-rooted assumptions offer negative images of work they also create a positive image of our time away from work (Rhodes and Westwood, 2008: 143; Parker, 2006: 5). Our time in work might be insufferable however our time away from work is invaluable, something that cannot be bought or sold, something that is ours. Indeed unlike the etymological roots of work which bring forth ideas of sorrow and torture the activities that we do in our spare time, as amateurs, have an etymological root in the Latin *amare* meaning love (Svendsen, 2008: 6). Certainly we do a lot of unpaid work outside of working hours and traditional working environments out of love – whether that takes the form of caring for our families (Finch and Groves, 1983), running a sports team (Roderick, 2006) or restoring a classic car (Sheller, 2004). There are labours we do out of love (Freidson, 1990).

It is here that notions of creativity step in. Being creative is one of the things we typically associate with our time away from the office and factory (Csikszentmihalyi,

1975). In leisure activities including art, music, drama and crafts we are able to be creative. Of course being creative is not the only thing we can do with our leisure time. We can consume. If we want to, we can do nothing at all. But when we use our leisure time to produce something we usually do so by being creative. We make things for ourselves without the need for managerial control. We develop new ideas and express ourselves for no other reason than the enjoyment of making them (Sennett, 2008). In these areas of activity we are not valued by other people on the basis of our ability to do what they want us to do but by ourselves for our ability to create something new (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Indeed the etymological root of creativity, the Latin *creāre*, refers to an almost divine power of causing something to exist. This means that creativity cannot be planned in advance or organised as an industrial process. And where creativity is surrounded by an industrial system of production, as Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) demonstrate in their analysis of the culture industries, it loses something – its very creativity.

This division between work as something that is bad and creative activities as something that are good has led, then, to a long-standing belief that creativity and work are fundamentally different (DeFillippi, Grabher and Jones, 2007). As a result people who do creative activities like making music, writing fiction or painting pictures are not supposed to work for other people – at least not when they being creative (Bourdieu, 1983a; Becker, 1963). They are supposed to be free to express themselves, to innovate and to take risks. Their activities should not be constrained by other people such as managers (Thompson, Jones and Warhurst, 2007). For this reason creative people are often encouraged and willing to sacrifice material rewards in order to guarantee their freedom to be creative (Becker, 1982). As Holbrook tells us there is a popular

assumption that a true creative ‘genius will not sacrifice his art at the altar of commerce’ (2005: 25). Otherwise they risk transforming ‘an inherently meaningful activity into a poorly paid job’ (Svendsen, 2008: 89). Rhodes and Westwood explain: ‘this discourse does not condemn “selling” per se, nor does it condemn popularity in its entirety. Rather the main issue is that to be authentic the popularity and the large sales should be a by-product of the search for, and expression of, artistic integrity rather than a goal in and of itself’ (2008: 159).

### **Putting work and creativity together**

Whether we agree that these images of work and leisure are correct or not, management theorists and practitioners have long been amazed at the ways people ‘spend their energies’ creating art and playing sports when they must often be coerced, cajoled and coaxed to put as much effort into the activities they do at work in factories, offices and classrooms (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975: 1). F.W Taylor, the founding-father of scientific management, for instance, tells us:

‘Whenever an American workman plays baseball, or an English workman plays cricket, it is safe to say that he strains every nerve to secure victory. ... The universal sentiment is so strong that any man who fails to give out all there is in him in sport is branded as a “quitter,” and treated with contempt by those who are around him. ... When the same workman returns to work on the following day, instead of using every effort to turn out the largest possible amount of work, in a majority of the cases this man deliberately plans to do as little as he safely can ... And in fact if he were to do his best to turn out his largest

possible day's work, he would be abused by his fellow-workers for so doing, even more than if he had proved himself a "quitter!" in sport' (1911: 13).

What is it, writers such as Taylor have asked, then, about activities such as baseball and cricket that makes people willing to exert themselves when they do them. As Florida puts it why do these types of activity motivate people to 'work so much?' (2004: 147).

Influenced by the work of Maslow (1970), a group of researchers including Herzberg (1968), McGregor (1960) and Csikszantmihalyi (1975) offer us a vocabulary to distinguish between activities we want to do and those we have to do. Csikszantmihalyi in particular sets out a distinction between extrinsically motivated activities and intrinsically motivating activities. Extrinsically motivated activities reward us with something other than the activity. Their 'justification is the grade or the paycheck' (Csikszantmihalyi, 1975: 3). In the context of work such activities are typically 'a means to a non-work end' (Rhodes and Westwood, 2008: 143). In contrast intrinsically motivating activities 'contain rewards within themselves' (Csikszantmihalyi, 1975: 5). Simply doing them is enough to motivate us. They offer 'rewarding experiences in the present' (Csikszantmihalyi, 1975: 9). Even when these activities involve toil, boredom and drudgery, such negatives are reinterpreted as positives. They are labours that we love (Roderick, 2006). Accordingly for motivation theorists an activity does not have to be bad just because it is work. Rather it is the organisation of work, which is typically focused exclusively on extrinsic motivations, that makes work bad. Indeed work is a slippery concept that we use to describe lots of things. It can be good and bad. This multitude of contradictory definitions of work leads Svendsen to conclude that: 'Any statement about work "in general" should

therefore be treated with some caution' (2008: 9). What makes something work, Svendsen argues, ultimately depends on the attitude of the people doing it. He explains:

'Whether or not a particular activity is work or leisure will then depend on the attitude of the person doing it: professional athletes are clearly working when they are performing their sport, but many of us do sports in our leisure time; reading books is something I usually regard as work, but counts as leisure for most people; if I were to make a bookcase it would probably be leisure, but it would be work for a carpenter. We might say that one man's work is another man's leisure' (2008: 67).

While this understanding of work – defined by motivation – has some conceptual problems it offers a logic that many people use to structure their activities. Indeed based on this understanding there has been a long tradition in management theory asking how managers can, as Foucault puts it, 'shift the energy available for useless pleasure toward compulsory labor' by making work activities more intrinsically motivating and, as a consequence, less like work (1976/1998: 120). Some solutions offered by management theorists in this regard have been aimed, broadly, at redesigning work practices to make work less boring such as job enrichment (Hackman and Oldham, 1980), empowerment (Frey, 1993; Bowen and Lawler, 1992) and process design (Hammer and Champy, 1993). Other initiatives have attempted to redesign the contexts, institutions and environments in which we do work by changing organisational cultures (Lundin, Paul and Christensen, 2002; Deal and Kennedy, 1982),

management styles (Deming, 1986; Mayo, 1947) and the spaces where we work (Dale and Burrell, 2007).

Interestingly it is not only management practitioners and theorists who follow this logic. On the left of the political spectrum, writers like Marx (Tucker, 1978), Arendt (1958), De Angelis (2007) and Hardt and Negri (2009) have also argued that we can, and should, redesign work to make it into an intrinsically motivating activity. For these writers this means pulling work out from a market managerial system rather than attempting to insert features of intrinsically motivating activities into that system. This coalition of left-wing critical theorists and management gurus is, of course, not without controversy. Notably it is a part of Adorno's dispute with Marcuse (Jay, 1973). Marcuse, influenced by Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Tucker, 1978), asserts that work allows us to realise our human essence. For Adorno such a suggestion has only one conclusion – it will 'turn the whole world into a giant workhouse' (Jay, 1973: 57, 259). Adorno argues that taking work activities outside of work organisations simply means that 'the contraband of modes of behaviour proper to the domain of work' will be 'smuggled into the realm of free time' (1977: 190). As a result our free time, which should 'stand in opposition to labour', will be 'shackled to its opposite' (1977: 187), becoming 'nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour' (1977: 194). This will transform intrinsically motivating leisure activities into 'pseudo-activities' (Adorno, 1978: 201).

## **Creative work**

Yet in spite of these fears, current evidence suggests that many people are proactively choosing to make creative labours of love into their work. The emergence of “creative work” as a unique type of work represents this move (Thompson, Jones and Warhurst, 2007; Garnham, 2005). It refers to a supposedly new type of work performed creative industries including arts and cultural sectors, architecture, design and computer programming (Florida, 2004; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999). The Department for Media, Culture and Sport, the government department responsible for these areas in the Britain, confirms that these industries are growing as a proportion of or economy. It reports that people ‘are more likely than ever to work in the creative economy’ (2007a: 5). Indeed, for Florida, we have witnessed the rise of a ‘new class’ of creative workers with occupations such as scientists and engineers, researchers, artists and programmers growing as a proportion of the workforce (2004: 8). However Florida argues that it is not just the case that creative workers are increasing as a proportion of our economies but that our economies are shifting around ‘the human creative faculty’ as the new ‘most valuable economic resource’ (2004: 37). This resource, he argues has replaced ‘land, labor and capital’ as the source of economic value (2004: 37). In this regard the creative industries provide new expressive and educational experiences that cultivate the spirit of entrepreneurialism and innovation essential for a competitive knowledge-based economy (Kerrigan, O’Reilly and vom Lehn, 2009; Jayne, 2004). They also assist urban regeneration policies and strengthen local communities by bringing together a range of stakeholders in common art projects based in the cool cultural quarters that are increasingly making use of gloomy disused industrial buildings throughout the UK (Brown, O’Connor and Cohen, 2000; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999).

Accordingly it is argued that as we move into a knowledge-based economy the way that creative work is organised is becoming a 'model' for all work (Banks, 2007: 4; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999: 13). On this point Thompson, Jones and Warhurst (2007: 626) stress that the most obvious feature of the organisation of creative work is that creative workers are 'not susceptible to organizational discipline'. Linking back to the image of the artist as someone whose creativity must stand outside of managerial control Florida explains that managing creative workers is like herding squirrels (2004: 99). He tells us that creative workers 'exhibit a strong preference for individuality and self-statement. They do not want to conform to organizational or institutional directives and resist traditional group-orientated norms' (2004: 77). Echoing this sentiment Leadbeater and Oakley confirm that creative workers predominately demonstrate an 'anti-establishment, anti-traditionalist and in respects highly individualistic' way of working (1999: 15). The result is that creative work seems 'hardly like work at all' (Banks 2007: 4). It is more 'like fun' (Dean and Jones, 2003: 530). It is intrinsically motivating, self-organised and self-managed. So, while Adorno feared that the world would turn into a giant workhouse as more areas of our lives become work, it has, many argue, turned into a giant playground. McRobbie, for example, explains that among creative workers 'there is a euphoric sense ... of bypassing tradition, pre-empting conscription into the dullness of 9-5 and evading the constraints of institutional processes' by transforming 'work into something closer to a life of enthusiasm and enjoyment' (2002: 521). Consequently as other areas of economic activity take on the organisational features of creative work the role for management and managerial control is thought to be decreasing (Touraine, 1974).

Here, though, critics have returned to Adorno's warning that a marriage between creativity and work will result in the indenture of creativity. Researchers have asked whether 'beyond the hyperbole' creative work is actually as creative as it is claimed (Banks, 2007: 4). Oakley, for instance, argues that the economic successes of the creative industries 'are often used to "mask" what are often casualized insecure working conditions for many in the "creative class"' (2004: 69). Indeed when researchers have investigated creative working conditions they have found that creative work can be as insecure, exploited and alienated as any work in modern economies (McRobbie, 2002).

In part this is a consequence of the economics of creativity. The creative industries suffer from what economist Sherwin Rosen (1981) calls the superstar phenomenon. In these industries rewards are unevenly concentrated among a small group of producers. This means that a great deal of creative work is unprofitable. Illustrating this point Leadbeater and Oakley offer us an investigation into the British creative industries. They tell us that 'most' of the creative workers they interviewed 'are prepared to earn relatively little – most people we interview were earning £10,000 to £20,000 a year – for long periods as the price of doing what they want to do' (1999: 23). Similarly, taking the example of popular music, a recent study by the Musicians' Union gives us some idea of the microeconomics, in every sense of the term, involved in creative work in the music industries. This report tells us that among musicians who earn a living from making music 80% earn less than £15,000 per year (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2007b: 51) with many earning much less than £15,000 (Barnett, 2010; Black, Fox and Kochanowski, 2007; Negus, 1992; Cohen, 1991a). Accordingly Banks asserts that one thing we can say with certainty about creative workers is that

they ‘are not “stars”, nor are they rich or even particularly successful’ (2007: 10). Instead, he continues, they tend to ‘toil in relatively anonymous enterprises, either living off the erratic incomes from “projects” or more conventionally on low or subsistence-level wages’ (2007: 10).

Many creative workers, then, have to find ways to support their creative activities by working in precisely the boring, alienated and constrained jobs that their creativity is supposed to have helped them flee (Bradshaw, McDonagh and Marshall, 2006a; 2006b). Their commitment to creative work, in other words, ultimately places them back under the control of the very organisational discipline that they are supposed to have escaped through their creative work. Towse (1992), for example, tells us that 40% of all artists in Wales survive through non-artistic work. Likewise Galloway, Lindley, Davies and Scheibl tell us that:

‘A “second job” or complementary employment was essential to the survival of many people working in the cultural sector. Some second jobs capitalised on artists’ professional knowledge and skills and links could be made with the prime “artistic” activity. Others called for technical or higher-level skills but were unrelated to the art form. Some jobs were unskilled, and taken on a casual basis as a necessary boost in earnings when other income had dried up’ (2002: 16).

A ‘core feature’ of creative work is, in this sense, its ‘embeddedness’ in uncreative activities that provide the freedom to be truly creative (Oakley, 2004: 74). This is, though, nothing new. Becker and Strauss tell us in their early contribution to the

sociology of careers that ‘some recruitment into generally undesirable jobs is from the ranks of the disaffected who care little for generally accepted values. The jazz musicians who play in Chicago’s Clark Street dives make little money, but desire the freedom to play as they could not in better-paying places’ (1956: 257). Indeed creative workers can turn to long-standing romantic images of the self-destructive artist for support as they toil in uncreative jobs (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007). Even Marx offers support here. He asserts that ‘suffering, apprehended humanly, is an enjoyment of self in man’ (Tucker, 1978: 87).

Yet there is a suspicion among writers like Oakley (2004) and McRobbie (2002) that there is something different between modern creative workers and those in previous generations. McRobbie, for instance, asserts that people ‘working in the creative sector cannot simply rely on old working patterns ... they have to find new ways of “working”’ (2002: 519). Accordingly she suggests that there is a distinction to be drawn between what she calls a first and second wave of creative work.

In the first wave of creative work creative activities were organised around extrinsically motivated uncreative work (Becker, 1963). There was a clear distinction between each activity. The threat to creativity was that, for a variety of reasons, work could squeeze the time someone had to be creative. Becker and Strauss offer us an example here. They tell us:

‘the “fine artist” may be committed to artistic ideals but seize upon whatever jobs are at hand to help him toward creative goals. When he takes a job in order to live, he thereby risks committing himself to an alternative occupational

career; and artists and writers do, indeed, get weaned away from the exercise of their art in just this way' (1956: 260).

In the second wave of creative work the danger is different. The line between work and creativity has eroded leading to a rise in pseudo-creativity. Creative workers are now 'his or her own enterprise' (McRobbie, 2002: 519). They manage portfolios of creative work and uncreative work (Handy, 1995). But the uncertainty and microeconomics of creative work mean that creative workers tend to focus on defending their freedom to experiment at the expense of experimenting (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Terranova, 2000). All their activities become subject to cost/benefit analyses. Experimentation becomes an investment. Socialising becomes networking.

So while there was a risk in the first wave of creative work that by separating out work and creative activities work could squeeze a person's time to be creative leaving only work. Now, in the second wave, the risk is that in combining creativity and work you secure your creative space by undermining it. The result is that along with a rise in the opportunities for creative work 'there is a decline' in creativity in the second wave of creative work (McRobbie, 2002: 524). Contemporary creative workers suffer to be creative but, in so doing, only make it harder for themselves to be truly creative. Their suffering does not lead to an enjoyment of the self but rather invades it.

For McRobbie these developments require 'social scientists and cultural studies academics to develop a vocabulary and a methodology' for studying creative work (2002: 523). Creativity and work are no longer specific terms. They were appropriate for analysing the first wave of creativity but not anymore. Indeed she argues that it

may be difficult for academic researchers to truly grasp the intricacies of these new arrangements of work because there is ‘a chasm of difference between middle-aged academics for whom the university sector has provided a single sourced income more or less since graduation, and young people whose portfolio careers increasingly mean not serial jobs but multi-tasking’ (2002: 524).

### **The creative process**

Perhaps, though, things are not quite so bad for creative people and perhaps academics are not so badly placed to understand the realities of creative work. Indeed this thesis is really an attempt to offer what Bourdieu calls a more “creative” interpretation for the benefit of the “creators” by showing that people can still be creative (1983b: 116). To do this let us first explore the vocabularies that we already have at our disposal. In particular let us explore a particular important word in this discussion: creativity. Many definitions of creative work focus on the creative artefact that is produced or the creative labour process but not the organisational arrangements that allow these artefacts to be produced and the labour process to occur. Yet, as we will see in this section, the process of organisation can be creative.

A great deal of research has been conducted by psychologists into the nature of creativity. They define creativity as a process that produces the ‘*new and useful*’ (Florida, 2004: 31). Ghiselin confirms that the ‘end’ of the creative process ‘is not novelty but use’ or at least ‘something very much like an intimation of usefulness’ (1952: 20). This newness and usefulness is achieved in two distinct ways – imitation and innovation – both of which anchor the new and useful to the slightly older and

slightly less useful (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Rogers, 1954). As Sigmund Freud once put it: ‘Every novelty must have its preliminaries and preconditions in something earlier’ (1939: 21). So, these writers specifically warn us against understanding creativity as an individual endeavour (Sennett, 2008; Barron, 1969). Instead they direct our attention to the organisational aspects of creativity.

If there is something we admire it can inspire us to make something similar and, in the process of imitating it, we might find that we have stumbled, unintentionally, upon something new (Sennett, 2008). Creativity is, in this sense, more accurately conceived as bad copying (Lessig, 2004; Frith, 1996). For example within popular music it has always been okay to sound a bit like someone else. When a rock band starts out they will invariably play other band’s songs and try to sound like those other bands. In the process of trying to sound like someone else, though, they can begin to find their own unique sound (Bennett, 1980; Cohen, 1991a). Sometimes, in contrast, they find their sound by recognising some way that the music they are listening to can be improved. As Ghiselin puts it, the ‘first impulse’ in making something new is usually ‘an impulse *away from*’ something that we are familiar with (1952: 17). Indeed it is often as important for a rock band that they do *not* sound like certain bands as it is for them to sound like some other bands (Reynolds, 2006). Innovation, then, is a second part of the creative process.

The classification of what we want to imitate and what we want to innovate are, of course, not certain. What was once the height of fashion can quickly become outdated and vice versa what was once unthinkable unstylish can become the hippest trend going (Becker, 1982). Drake (2003) explores this with regard to the “Madchester” music

scene. This scene offers a host of ideas and images that inspire some musicians and infuriate others. Either way, for musicians in Manchester, it forms an essential part of their creative process. It is, as Drake puts it, ‘a resource of prompts, ideas, signs or “raw materials” that can act as a catalyst’ for creativity (2003: 511).

Creativity, then, involves making distinctions between what is good and what is bad. These distinctions are value judgements and, as such, they depend on the social setting in which they are made. Illustrating this point Frith (1996) asks what it means to say that a piece of music is good. He suggests that when we say a song or artist is good we are not only making a quantitative judgement about how much we value them but a qualitative judgement about the types of value that we recognise as being valuable. Moreover we are also saying that we believe we are in a position to know what is good – that we have what Frith, influenced by Bourdieu (1984), calls the ‘popular cultural capital’ to make such a claim (1996: 9). The specific value behind this capital is particular to a social group. It is easy enough to dismiss someone’s opinion about a rock act if that person is only really a fan of hip-hop or dance music (Frith, 1996: 5). In the same way different academic researchers find very different things to value in popular music (Anand and Peterson, 2002: 274). Economists such as Throsby (2003; 2000) focus on the economic value of music – putting a price on the non-market benefits, or cultural values, that occur in the production and consumption of music. Cultural theorists, in contrast, try to establish very different cultural values of music. They look to see how important music is artistically to the people who make and listen to it.

This is not limited to consumers of music such as music fans and academic researchers (Frith, 1996). It also occurs among producers of music. There are, as Du Gay (1997) argues, different cultures of production within the production of culture that create texts in accordance with different value judgements that affect both what they make and how they make it. For example Negus observes a specific culture of production among ‘a coherent class grouping’ of executives working within British record companies (2002: 512). He argues that these executives, who were recruited into the music industry during the 1960s and 1970s, ‘represented, in condensed form, the preferences and judgements of a small, relatively elite educated, middle-class, white male faction’ (2002: 512). Drawing on their collective notion of good music they placed greater value on rock artists over pop and soul performers, albums over singles and wanted musicians to live up to romantic ideals of the bohemian, self-destructive and free-spirited artist. ‘These distinctions’, Negus summarises, ‘not only informed acquisition policies and marketing philosophies, they were hierarchically inscribed in the drawing up of contracts, and the allocation of investment to departments, genres and artists’ (2002: 512).

Indeed the idea that different social groups produce cultural texts in different ways because of different value judgements is not limited to studies of popular music. Anthropologists offer us many illustrations proving that ‘aesthetic values vary from culture to culture and are always embedded in a social framework’ (Layton, 2003: 449). For instance Fernandez (1973) reports that the Fang societies he studies value aesthetically-pleasing carvings because they bring about harmony in social relations and not because they bring any economic value to their individual creators. Likewise Becker recounts a story told by Peggy Goldie in her anthropology of a Mexican village

called Oaxaca concerning women potters who had no ‘notion of a unique and artistic connection between artist and art work’ (1976: 53). These potters did not think that they were responsible for ‘the beautiful pottery’ they had made (Becker, 1976: 53). They did not care who owned the pots they made.

If we can, then, accept a definition of creativity as a process involving ‘the reconstitution of, or generation from, something old’ (Barron, 1969: 10) and accept that different groups of producers will organise their activities around particular value judgements that form the basis for imitation and innovation, we can begin to appreciate a point that I will return to throughout this thesis: creativity does not have to be limited to a thing that is produced. Instead the process of organisation can, itself, be a creative activity. Cultural texts can, of course, be creative but they can also be the result of a creative process not just in terms of being made by creative workers but because they are produced by creative forms of organisation. Drawing on Cooper and Burrell’s (1988) concept of the production of organisation, in this thesis I call this process *creative production*.

### **Creative production: being creative with work**

Creative production involves people finding new and useful ways to be creative – it is a matter of organising material and discursive spaces in which people ‘make time and equipment available for themselves’ and support the authenticity of their creative identities (Becker, 1982: 3). At a material level Cohen provides us with an example of the creative production of physical spaces in which cultural production can occur. In her study of rock musicians in Liverpool she finds that rock musicians all face

‘economic hurdles’ (1991a: 56). They need to finance their music. A band needs ‘gear’ – instruments, vans, rehearsal spaces and so on – but these cost a ‘considerable amount of money’ (Cohen, 1991a: 49). As we have seen, such musicians rarely make profitable products. To reduce these costs musicians create their own networks and communities to share gear. They open affordable rehearsal spaces in which they can trade, borrow and occasionally steal the gear they need. In short they find creative solutions for themselves.

This process, though, is not limited to material concerns. According to Florida creative workers use uncreative work to ‘reinforce their identities as creative people’ (2004: 166). In other words they use uncreative work to produce discursive spaces where they can be authentically creative. Florida argues that creative people ‘crave creative stimulation but not escape’ (2004: 166). So they can ‘grudgingly coexist with the system’ (Florida, 2004: 203). As Florida puts it: ‘Get a job, even a haircut if you must; earn the money you need to do what you have to do, but no more’ (2004: 203). Indeed Florida, somewhat evangelically, suggests that the rise of the creative economy has marked the death knell for the ‘one-life-per-person rule’ (2004: 161). This means, in turn, that many creative producers also have to manage what Taylor and Littleton call ‘a creative identity project’ as they balance their creative and uncreative activities (2008: 276). To illustrate the mechanics of such a project Taylor and Littleton offer us a detailed study of a single creative producer, a fashion designer. This creative producer organised ‘a double life’ doing ‘creative work and work to earn money separately’ (Taylor and Littleton, 2008: 282). Materially these ‘distinct activities’ feed into each other (Taylor and Littleton, 2008: 284). But they also allow this creative producer a discursive space in which she feels free. This allows her to experiment and

innovate. It allows her to be creative. For this creative producer images of work and creativity are, in short, an essential part of her creative production.

Indeed creative production revolves around material and discursive aspects of work but it is not limited to the actual work that is performed, the labour process, but the material and discursive organisation behind that work (Becker, 1963). As Florida (2004) puts it, at a material level creative production might mean getting the right haircut so you can secure a job that allows you to be creative. By using many of the traditional and popular ideas that we hold concerning work, free time, autonomy, craft, industry and culture to structure and support their activities creative producers find ways to creatively be creative.

Drawing on this concept of creative production, in this thesis I will demonstrate how a particular group of producers use their work as a material and discursive resource. To illustrate the details of creative production I will show how their work creates the materials they need including physical spaces of production such as venues, recording studios and record labels. It also provides a discursive resource that helps to structure their activities. Much like the “Madchester” scene discussed earlier, work is both a problem and a solution in creative production. The result, I will demonstrate in this thesis, is that rather than seeing a decline in creativity, as McRobbie fears, we are seeing a rise in a different kind of creativity in which the organisation of creativity activities – whether this takes the form of ‘partying and networking’ or building a recording studio and designing a website – are seen as ‘a vital part of the work, not as something separate’ (McRobbie, 2002: 520). In short I will use an example drawn

from cultural production to show that organising creative activities is now a creative activity.

### **Exploring creative production**

It is important that such sweeping statements like the one I want to make in this thesis concerning creative production are backed up with empirical evidence. Drake points out that given the ‘problematic and diverse’ nature of creative industries research ‘it is important that empirical research focuses on specific “sub sectors”’ (2003:516). Likewise Thompson, Jones and Warhurst tell us that ‘The distinctive characteristics of creative labor are best understood within particular sector and market contexts’ (2007: 636). Accepting the advice of these researchers this thesis is based on a particular sample of creative people drawn from the UK music industries.

Frith points out that the music industry is not ‘a single industry’ (2000: 390). Instead it is a cluster of ‘recording, publishing and live performance’ industries each of which has its own unique features, structures and conventions (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007: 313). Negus (1999) takes this distinction between music industries one step further. He tells us that the music industry is fundamentally divisible into an industry made up of ‘institutional routines of commerce and trade’ and an industry made up of ‘human endeavour’ (1999: 175). In terms of this thesis, one industry produces creative products while the other is produced creatively ‘by the activity of enthusiasts’ (Negus, 1999: 171). The ‘active seeking out of records, of bringing musicians across borders, of engaging in dialogues with other enthusiasts’, for example, are all industrious activities

(Negus, 1999: 171). They take effort. But this industry is ‘far removed from the formal procedures followed in media organizations’ (Negus, 1999: 175).

I have studied a music industry that exists somewhere in between these two industries – it is situated in a ‘half in, half out’ position to the established music industry (Becker, 1982: 246). It is made of people working inside, outside and on the edge of formal music industry companies in the recording music industry, the live music industry, music retail and the music rights industry. It exists in shops and offices as well as in garages and spare rooms, under beds and in cupboards. What unites this industry is that I came across it while I was performing music.

There are three foundational texts that have also studied this type of music industry and are particularly influential in the literature on the production of music (see Strachan, 2007; Bradshaw, McDonagh and Marshall 2006b; Hesmondhalgh, 1998, 1999). First there is Bennett’s (1980) examination of how people in Colorado go from being rock music fans to being rock musicians. Bennett observes that unlike other genres of music such as classical music or jazz music there is no career path or education programme that enables you to become a rock musician. Instead Bennett finds that rock musicians “‘bootstrap” themselves in to existence’ (1980: 4). They make it up as they go along, checking out what other aspiring rock musicians are doing and examining the actions of rock stars for clues. Bennett summarises that in the context of rock music: ‘The secret of group operation is, very simply, the shared knowledge that one has to be bad before being good’ (1980: 147).

Second there is Ruth Finnegan's analysis of the various 'music worlds' that exist in Milton Keynes – from brass bands to punk rock groups (1989: 68). For Finnegan music at this local level 'does not happen automatically' (1989: 252). It is organised. 'In Milton Keynes,' she explains,

'as no doubt elsewhere, it essentially depended on the commitment of the many individuals who devoted so many hours to upholding these institutions, made possible by the existence of the well-known conventions and procedures which structured their individual actions, conventions which in turn depended on the continuing efforts of individuals' (1989: 252).

The final foundation of this area of research is Sara Cohen's (1991a) exploration of rock culture in Liverpool. Cohen asks what it means to be a rock musician in Liverpool – specifically one who makes music in the hope of securing a record contract. Cohen tells us that these rock musicians dream of 'making it' (1991a: 3). They are attracted to 'a world of record sales, tours, large audiences, fans, chart success, and media appearances' (Cohen, 1991a: 104). Following two bands in particular she explores how the frustration of these ambitions form a particular culture of production. Being a rock musician is, in this sense, an important marker of identity. It provides rock musicians 'with both a context and a focus for their relationships and thereby a measure of security in their relationships and activities' (Cohen, 1991a: 36).

A common perspective in each of these foundational texts is that in studying the production of music you cannot look exclusively from the perspective of the musician. Instead you must look to the range of other people who are involved in helping the

musician. You must look at the organisation of production and the production of organisation. Howard S. Becker, ‘perhaps the leading U.S. sociologist studying art’ (Katz, 2006: xi), calls this the art world perspective. He tells us that art, music, film and other cultural products are made by groups of people who develop conventional ways of working that make ‘editorial’ choices concerning the final form of any art work (1982: 210). The conventions that develop in an art world specify the division of labour, the materials and technologies that people can use and also the ways that people work together to make art. In so doing, art worlds develop right and wrong ways for making cultural texts that tie together economic and aesthetic values – giving some practices what Becker calls an ‘aura of “rightness”’ so that one ‘way of producing art seems moral and other ways immoral’ (1986: 71). They are cultures of production with implicit rules regulating what is good and bad – what should be imitated and what can be innovated.

To explore an art world that existed around me I employ two methods. First based on my own experiences as a performing musician I was able to conduct participant observation, keeping field notes and a diary between 2006 and 2007. Second I followed up this ethnographic work with a series of in-depth interviews with 18 creative producers. The producers who I interviewed are not meant to be representative of all creative producers but, rather, offer an exploration into the ways that people use work creatively. The sample is, accordingly, snowballed from people who I had come across when I was performing music. As I detail later, I spoke to people involved in promoting live music events, releasing independent records, running booking agencies and recording studios. The interviewees provide an insight into the nuts and bolts of creative production.

However, as Becker (1986; 1982; 1963) makes clear, when we want to understand an art world we must look not just at what people within that art world do or say they do but how they speak to us and more importantly how they speak to other people in their art world. Indeed for Becker the way that people in art worlds use language offers us a shortcut for analysing the conventions of that art world. An art world is what Fairclough calls a ‘speech community’ (1995: 27). In this regard Taylor and Littleton (2008) argue that the tools developed in discourse analysis and social psychology offer us particularly robust methods for analysing art worlds. In particular they turn to Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) idea of interpretive repertoires. Using these recent contributions to the literature on art worlds I explore how the creative producers I interviewed present work as something good and something bad that they imitate and innovate as they find ways to organise creative activities.

## **Structure**

The first section of the thesis, then, explores these methodological and theoretical issues in greater detail. I begin by reviewing Becker’s (1982; 1974) art world framework in Chapter Two. I argue that we must explore an art world as both a set of activities that a group of people do and as a set of relationships between those people, the art works they produce and other art worlds. In Chapter Three, picking up on the role of language in Becker’s (1986; 1982; 1963) own analysis of art worlds, I provide a more detailed explanation of the methodology behind my study. In this chapter I deal with both the practical aspects of my data collection, data analysis and presentation of

findings and explore the relation between Becker's work and recent developments in the study of discourse use.

In the next section I focus on the activities that people do together to produce music. In Chapter Four I draw a boundary around the art world that I have studied by comparing it to an imagined music industry through the terms 'the underground' and 'the mainstream'. Noting an awareness of sociological, psychological and philosophical research among creative producers (Becker, Faulkner and Kirshenblatt-Gimlett, 2006; Negus, 1999) in Chapter Four I both review the academic literature and my interview data concerning the distinction between professional and amateur music production. In Chapters Five and Six I set out four case studies each of which explores the material practices involved in producing music products. In Chapter Five I concentrate on the activities involved in making live music by looking at a live music promoter and a live music venue. In Chapter Six I focus on the activities around recorded music by detailing a recording studio and a record label.

In next section of the thesis I focus on the art world as a set of relationships by looking at some notable trends in the language use of the creative producers I interviewed. Specifically in Chapter Seven I focus on the issue of work and explore the ways that creative producers represent their consumption practices. I evaluate the notion of 'coproduction' as a way making sense of the activities that go into the production of live music and recorded music. The idea of coproduction, simply put, suggests that in certain areas of activity production and consumption practices are combined. I argue that while consumption does have a role, it has a specific role in preparing creative production and that we must explore the activities involved in making music as

production activities. Here I argue for the notion of a labour of love and using psychoanalytic theories of love link the structure of a labour of love with the structure of the music industries, the creative process and the paradox of creative work. This leads me in Chapter Eight to explore the ways that work is used as a discursive as well as material resource that helps creative producers to find ways of making music that match their individual circumstances. I show that creative producers present work as something good – and worthy of their love – and as something bad. I argue that these two views of work offer creative producers with two scripts that facilitate their production in spite of the contradictions of work and creativity. Finally in Chapter Nine I offer my conclusions. I turn my attention to what effect this research project has had on me personally and reflect on the weaknesses and strengths of my approach and the implications for future research.

## **2. Creative work and the production of culture**

As highlighted in the Introduction a great deal of research into creative work uses creativity as an adjective that can be applied to objects and labour processes (Florida, 2004; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999). The former includes research that analyses a particular cultural text focusing on its artistic or economic value while the latter tends to be a celebration of individualistic, anti-establishment and self-governed work environments which are assumed to be more encouraging to creativity. This approach to exploring creative work, though, largely focuses on the process of production, what Cooper and Burrell call the 'organization of production', but takes it for granted that these organisations exist in the first place (1988: 106). In contrast Cooper and Burrell argue for an organisational analysis that focuses on what they call the 'production of organization' (1988: 106). Their concern here is with the production of organisation as a concept that can be used in academic analyses. However their logic extends to the production of particular organisations as well and encourages us to look at the process through which particular organisations of production are themselves produced.

One body of literature that can be of assistance here is the sociology of cultural texts. This literature fits neatly in with the current trend in the research on creative work which, as we have seen, often focuses on the production of cultural texts (Sennett, 2008; Florida, 2004). While this adds to the valorisation of certain kinds of work and certain kinds of people at the expense of, for instance, craft based creativity, as we will see in this chapter, ideas developed within the sociology of cultural texts allow us to explore how organisational arrangements shape cultural texts and, importantly, how

organisational arrangements are produced in the first place. In particular the sociology of cultural texts, like the psychological research in to the creative process, demonstrates that cultural texts are not plucked from the imagination of an isolated artist or creative worker but are shaped by the organisational contexts in which they operate. This literature also shows us that these contexts are not static but that they constant evolve as new forms of expression emerge. As such, research into the sociology of cultural texts demonstrates that the production of organisation is also an activity which can be creative. It is, consequently, through analysing this body of literature that I hope not only to provide context for my empirical study, which focuses on a particular example of the production of cultural texts, but also to ground my contribution to research into creative work.

So in this chapter I focus on the emergence of an institutional approach to studying the sociology of cultural texts informed by the work of Peterson (1976). I then review Becker's (1982) art world framework as a way of structuring an analysis of the production of cultural texts. As I show in this chapter Becker's framework encourages us to explore the geography of a art worlds as a set of activities and relationships mediated by conventions that make some art works harder to produce and some easier. In this chapter I describe how these conventions emerge from the divisions of labour, raw materials, audience expectations and systems of distribution that form a particular art world. Finally, picking up on Becker's (1982) suggestion that some cultural producers, consumers and texts stand in a deviant position to professional art worlds, I turn back to Becker's (1963) sociology of deviance to contextualise life outside of art worlds.

### **The production of culture perspective**

Williams famously describes culture as ‘one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language’ (1983: 87). Indeed, when it comes to researching culture, there are many things we could be researching and many different ways we could research them (Peterson, 1976; Snow, 1959; Leavis, 1930). Even if we can agree on what culture is many social scientists also disagree on how it is produced in relation to society (Wright-Mills, 1957). Peterson (1976) overviews three broad approaches to solving this issue. First he suggests that we might posit ‘that culture and society are autonomous systems which evolve independently according to quite different rules’ (1976: 8). Accepting this approach we would be in a position where we could largely ignore the role of cultural texts within a society as economic-determinists suggest (Jay, 1973). Second we might contest that ‘the most potent elements defining the structure of society’ such its economic and political systems also shape cultural texts (Peterson, 1976: 9). In this case we could interpret culture ‘as a more or less accurate mirror of social structure’ (Peterson, 1976: 9). The result would be that we could look at cultural products to tell us about society and we could explain cultural texts by exploring the social demographics of their authors (Johnson, 1993). Third we might think that cultural texts play an active role in mediating the social structures that surround them. This, Peterson tells us, is an idealist position that is the basis of social interactionist sociology (1976: 9).

These three perspectives may appear to be mutually exclusive. In choosing one perspective we might think that we need to reject the others. However, rather than taking one perspective as the starting point for a sociology of culture, Peterson proposes

that can more profitably look for the common ground between them (1976: 9). For Peterson the three perspectives of culture and society actually share some important features. They all contend that culture is a ‘relatively coherent structure of symbols’ that changes only gradually, taking steps forwards or backwards without direction by any single person (Peterson, 1976: 10). Peterson argues that if we accept this as our starting point we can move the sociology of culture from an endless debate between the potentially incommensurable autonomous, materialist and idealist positions to an investigation of ‘the process of creation, manufacture, marketing, distribution, exhibiting, inculcation, evaluation, and consumption’ of culture (1976: 10). As a result Peterson influentially argues for a fourth approach – one that directs us to explore the details of how cultural texts are produced, distributed and consumed (Hirsch and Fiss, 2000).

Peterson offers two illustrations to support his suggestion. First he argues that the debate between materialist and idealist perspectives of culture are, broadly, analogous to the nature and nurture perspectives in biology (1976: 16). Peterson points out that the discovery of DNA allowed biologists to say something important about the reproduction of life but did not rely on either the nature or nurture perspectives. For Peterson cultural texts act like our DNA. They are, he tells us, ‘the code by which social structures reproduce themselves from day to day and generation to generation. In this view, culture plays the same role in sociology as genetics plays in biology’ (1976: 16). Accordingly Peterson argues that a ‘genetic perspective’ on culture should show us how culture works to reproduce itself without us needing to choose between the materialist and idealist perspectives (1976: 16). Second Peterson points to work in the sociology of science. He contends that in this area ‘progress has been made

possible by turning away from grand questions about the relationship between science and society ... and focusing instead on the contexts in which science is made and remade' (1976: 11).

In a sense Peterson's call for a genetic approach to the study of culture mirrors Wittgenstein's (1921) famous polemic against philosophy. Wittgenstein, frustrated at the seemingly endless debates among professional philosophers, asserted that in most discussions philosophy did nothing but confuse matters and, indeed, could do nothing but confuse matters because philosophy was the wrong tool for many of the tasks that philosophers set for it. His response was that philosophy should only concern itself with problems it could solve. 'What we cannot speak about', Wittgenstein tells us, 'we must pass over in silence' (1921: 89).

Peterson's (1976) argument is now some thirty years old yet echoes of his rhetoric continue to reverberate in the sociology of culture (see Becker, 2006; 2005; Straw, 2005). Hennion, for example, also tries to 'reduce the divide between culture and science' as she applies ideas developed in the sociology of science in her study of record producers (1989: 400). In addition Peterson's argument itself continues to inspire researchers – not least Peterson (2005; 1997; 1990; 1982; 1979; 1978). Indeed his work has become a cornerstone for an on-going project, known as the production of culture perspective, in which 'social scientists interested in a variety of contemporary cultural products have begun to focus attention on the immediate social processes by which popular culture is created, disseminated and consumed' (Sanders, 1982: 67). This project has concentrated on the conditions and the means of production, the 'organizational constraints which affect production activities' and 'the cooperative

social interaction' that surrounds cultural production (Sanders, 1982: 67). It is based on three assumptions about culture that, broadly speaking, are now accepted in most sociological research. First if we want to understand how cultural texts are produced we must look further than both the industrial systems that produce mass cultural texts and the individual producers who create original cultural texts (Bourdieu, 1983a; 1983b). Cultural texts are made by people working together in various professional, industrial and social settings (Becker, 1974). Second we must contextualise the role of the market in the distribution of culture – exploring how far the extrinsic motivations and intrinsic motivations affect a particular culture of production (Du Gay, 1997; Bourdieu, 1983a, 1983b, 1986a; Peterson, 1976; Peterson and Berger, 1975). Finally we must accept that the consumption of cultural texts completes their production (Becker, 2007: 59). Consumers are not passive receivers but actively construct culture (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Negus, 1999; Fiske, 1987).

In summary, then, through the genetic study of culture we see cultural texts as the products of social groups, including producers and consumers, industries, artists and social settings, each with their own understandings and ways of working. This has led to a sociology of cultural production championed by writers like Peterson (2005; 1976), Bourdieu (1986b; 1983a) and Becker (1986; 1982; 1974) that focuses on the particular structured spaces, in a physical, rhetorical and sociological sense, that surround cultural producers. Bourdieu describes these 'structured structures without a structuring subject' as the fields of cultural production (1986b: 178). In contrast Becker (1982) calls them art worlds. Indeed Becker argues that while art 'is organized in a free-wheeling way ... so as to allow a maximum of variety – or at least a great deal more than, for instance, we allow in a highly centralized thing like education' this does not

mean that there is no organisation to the production of cultural texts (1986: 36). Instead the production of cultural texts is organised around particular configurations of producers and consumers – unique worlds. Becker’s framework, ‘to his credit’, then, offers us a systematic way to explore the collective action involved in making culture (Bourdieu, 1983a: 34). In this regard he explains that both ‘the “artness” and the “worldness”’ of the art world concept ‘are problematic’ but they are stable enough at any time for art worlds to be the ‘basic unit of analysis’ in understanding the production of cultural texts (1982: 36). As Becker puts it, ‘it is not unreasonable to say that it is the art world, rather than the individual artist, which makes the work’ (1982: 194).

Without digressing into the differences between these ways of conceiving the spaces in which cultural production occurs (Frith, 1996: 36; Bourdieu, 1983a), in this thesis I will adopt Becker’s (1982) approach. In part this is because Becker’s approach explores cultural production from the perspective of work (Plummer, 2003). In this regard we might say that while Bourdieu’s (1983a) fields are structured around a multiplicity of capitals, as we will see below, Becker’s art worlds are structured around a multiplicity of labours. However I have also focused on Becker because his ideas have been drawn upon by influential writers who have investigated the production of music such as Negus (2002; 1999), Frith (1996), Finnegan (1989) and Bennett (1980). Indeed Becker’s contributions to the sociology of art cast a lengthy and influential shadow over the literature. According to Kaufman Becker must be placed among a pioneering group of American sociologists who ‘reinvigorated the formal study of culture’ (2004: 335). Likewise Katz tells us that Becker is ‘perhaps the leading U.S. sociologist studying art’ (2006: xi). Plummer, in contrast, sees Becker’s influence not just in the study of art but hails him more generally as ‘one of the foremost sociologists of the second half of the

twentieth century' (2003: 21). Put simply Becker's work has been a foundation and inspiration for much empirical and theoretical research into culture and art. Moreover within Becker's (2007; 1986) own writings many of the concepts he applied first in his studies of art have reappeared in new contexts.

### **Who makes art?**

Becker's (1982, 1974) analyses of cultural production begin with a popular explanation of art as the thing artists, and artists alone, do. In these popular explanations the artist is pictured as an autonomous spirit whose genius requires complete freedom (Stratton, 1983, 1982). Bradshaw and Holbrook tell us that such romantic clichés of the artist unconstrained by organisational concerns 'recur so stubbornly' in cultural texts (2007: 121). But Becker challenges us to think through the practical implication of this description:

'Imagine what is clearly not true, that every last detail of the work as it ultimately occurs results from someone's, presumably the artist's, conscious source, ignoring for now the many choices made by others besides the officially designated artist. Ignore, as well, the fact that the people who create art works do not deliberate over every choice. If musicians had consciously to devise scales and build instruments before they could make a new work, for instance, they would have neither time nor energy to produce work, at least not in the quantities possible if they do not make all the choices consciously' (1982: 199).

So even when a musician plays on their own in their bedroom they are reliant on many other people. They are, for example, probably using an instrument that was made by someone else. The instrument will allow the musician to produce standard notes that were defined by JS Bach (Goodall, 2002). They probably bought the instrument from a shop. Maybe they were advised on which instrument to buy by a sales assistant or by friends. After buying the instrument maybe someone taught them to play it using a standard system of notation. Or perhaps they taught themselves (Szeeman and Longhauser, 1998). But even here they will probably need someone else's help (Frith, 1996). The comedian Steve Martin (2007), for instance, reports that he learnt the banjo by slowing down records and finding which note to play by trial and error. Of course these records were played by other people, made by other people, sold by other people and often bought by other people (Du Gay and Negus, 1994). Without all manner of other people helping them, therefore, it would be very hard for a musician to play by themselves (Bennett, 1980). Accordingly Becker concludes that this popular description of an artist as an individual producing culture in isolation is a 'romantic myth' that cannot and does not work in reality (1982: 14). It is too inefficient. There is simply too much to do. Becker explains:

'For a symphony orchestra to give a concert, for instance, instruments must have been invented, manufactured and maintained, a notation must have been devised and music composed using that notation, people must have learned to play the notated notes on the instruments, times and places for rehearsal must have been provided, ads for concerts must have been placed, publicity arranged and tickets sold, and an audience capable of listening to and in some way

understanding and responding to the performance must have been recruited' (1974: 767).

This is not to say that it is impossible for one person to do all these activities on their own. But exceptions prove the rule. Becker (1982) offers Harry Partch as an illustration. Partch, a 'hobo composer', rejected the classical canon (Young, 2002: 74). In fact he rejected every aspect of western music as it was presented to him. Instead he designed and built his own instruments with evocative names including the harmonic cannon, the gourd tree and the diamond marimba. He designed a new system of notation, scales and keys for each of these new instruments. Partch (1975) even defined his own musical notes according to his theory of just intonation where he replaced the traditional twelve-note equally tempered octave with forty-three unevenly tempered notes.

Partch's problem was that each time he wrote a new piece of music he needed to create more than new notes and instruments. He also needed to create musicians who could play those notes and he needed to create a way to direct those musicians to play the notes he wanted them to, when he wanted them to and in the style he wanted them to. Yet just building the instruments was costly enough and squeezed Partch's limited financial resources. Partch's solution was to work with volunteer musicians for each project. He would train these volunteers to understand his music and play his instruments. But this meant that public performances were extremely rare, which, in turn, restricted the revenue Partch generated through his music. Summarising Partch's difficulties Marley asks:

‘Was there ever a composer who made life more difficult for himself than Harry Partch [1901-1974]? The moment he began to design and build an orchestra of microtonal instruments, some of them large and unwieldy (“about as portable as a one-man show of totem poles”, he once said), his obscurity was guaranteed. The transportation costs of the instruments were prohibitive; finding suitable storage was a major headache; and Partch was nearly always broke. Because players had to be trained by him in the use of these unfamiliar instruments wherever performances were to be staged, extensive rehearsal time was required, something that was rarely possible. The performances themselves were few and far between and often they failed to meet Partch’s exacting requirements’ (2007: 44).

Indeed not only was Partch frequently unhappy with the results of his endeavours but he struggled to find an audience ‘to boost his always meagre (and sometimes non-existent) income’ (Marley, 2007: 45). Making matters worse, on the occasions where Partch successfully trained musicians to use his instruments and understand his musical notation and was able to attract a paying audience, the audiences were confused. His unequally-tempered notes meant that musicians were playing correctly but they still sounded wrong to almost everyone who heard them other than Partch. Partch wanted musicians to play notes that had been considered out of tune for over three hundred years (Goodall, 2002). The result was that Partch’s music was simply ‘too ambitious and almost impossible to stage in the way that Partch wanted’ (Marley, 2007: 44).

As Harry Partch found out and, indeed, other eccentric composers found out too, the sustainability of cultural production limits artistic autonomy (Scotto, 2007; Becker,

1982). When an artist actually does everything involved in making art on their own we struggle to consider them artists at all. They spend so much of their time repeating uncreative logistical tasks that they rarely produce any finished art works. Sustainable and efficient cultural production relies, in short, on other people aside from the individual artist who can help them produce and consume art works. Becker concludes:

‘Artists, having made a work, need to distribute it, to find a mechanism which will give people with the taste to appreciate it access to it and simultaneously will repay the investment of time, money, and materials in the work so that more time, materials, and cooperative activity will be available with which to make more works’ (1982: 93).

Cultural production is, consequently, almost always something people must do together. ‘All artistic work’, Becker confirms, ‘like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people’ (1982: 1). The artist simply works at ‘the center of a large network of cooperating people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome’ (Becker, 1974: 769). The first step in Becker’s approach to the sociology of cultural production is, then, to shift our analytic lens from looking at artists to looking at the activities of all those involved in making art (2007: 15).

### **Making artists**

The production of culture involves ‘an extensive division of labor’ (Becker, 1982: 13). The group of people most commonly associated with cultural production are, as we

have seen, creative artists. They are the ones who paint pictures and write symphonies. Other people act as ‘support personnel’ – assistants to the ‘real work’ done by artists (Becker, 1982: 77). They get paint to the painters and musical notation to the composers. Indeed in spite of the importance of all the people involved in making art not all of the activities that are necessary to produce and consume an art work are treated equally. Becker explains:

‘Participants in an art world regard some of the activities necessary to the production of that form of art as "artistic," requiring the special gift or sensibility of an artist. The remaining activities seem to them a matter of craft, business acumen or some other ability less rare, less characteristic of art, less necessary to the success of the work, and less worthy of respect’ (1982: 768).

What, though, distinguishes an artistic task from a supportive one? Some tasks are essential but routine. The person executing these tasks affects the finished art work only by doing it or not doing it. The way in which they do it, their own aesthetics, does not make a difference. For example Becker tells us:

‘if you don’t have people running the parking lot, the opera will be different, because it will affect how easy it is for people to attend, thus who and how many attend, thus the sources and amount of revenue earned, thus how much can be spent on a production, and thus who can be hired and what can be bought’ (2007: 208).

Individual parking attendants are disposable. They are an interchangeable resource (Becker, 1982: 35). In contrast artists are never interchangeable. Yet, for Becker, there is nothing natural about this distinction between artistic and non-artistic tasks. Many tasks sit between routine supportive tasks and artistic ones. A musician performing a score composed by another creative artist – as in the Harry Partch example – is part of the support personnel for that artist. But the musician is not necessarily interchangeable with other musicians. As Rosen explains ‘hearing a succession of mediocre singers does not add up to a single outstanding performance’ (1981: 846). We can also ask whether the sound engineer, the creative director or the record company A & R person are not also creative yet supportive members in the production of music (Negus, 1992; Hennion, 1989). In short there is nothing essential or natural about the division of labour between artistic and non-artistic tasks. It is a conventional arrangement that develops among a particular group of producers and consumers – that is, within a particular art world (Becker, 1982).

### **Conventions**

Such conventions are the glue that holds art worlds together. They allow people to do things together without renegotiating how they are going to do it every time (Becker, 1982: 29). Becker explains:

‘Conventional knowledge is what makes it possible for musicians who have never seen each other to play as though they had known each other for years. It is what makes it possible for knowledgeable viewers to respond to a painting or musical work. Because you know what ought conventionally to happen, you

can be surprised by an innovation which would otherwise be meaningless. It didn't mean anything special to hear Bob Dylan play electric guitar unless you knew that he had always played an acoustic guitar. Using conventions makes it easier for people to cooperate and get the work of art done. Changing or ignoring them makes it harder and cuts down the possibility of getting others to cooperate' (1986: 69).

As this quote suggests, conventions emerge from and help to define the division of labour, technologies and raw materials, distribution system and audience expectations within a particular art world. It is worth looking at each of these factors in great detail to see how they shape conventions.

### *Labour*

As we have seen a major convention shared by all art worlds is the division of artistic and non-artistic labour. In the process of this division both artists and support personnel develop their own conventional ways of doing things and their own motivations for doing them. The romantic myth of the artist discussed earlier is just one example here. Similarly many of the tasks executed by professional groups such as lawyers and accountants become conventional as these groups 'develop specialized aesthetic, financial, and career interests which differ substantially from the artists' (Becker, 1982: 25).

These conventions can shape an art work long before a creative artist begins to make their decisions (Becker, 2006). For example Lessig (2004), a legal scholar, demonstrates how copyright law shapes what a creative artist can and cannot legally do.

Lessig reports on Jon Else, a filmmaker who was working on a documentary film about stagehands at the San Francisco Opera. While filming a performance he caught stagehands playing checkers off-stage. In the corner of the room where the stagehands were relaxing a television set showed an episode of *The Simpsons*. Else included a four and a half second image of the stagehands with the television in the final cut of his film. He checked with Matt Groening, *The Simpsons*' creator, if he could use the clip. Groening agreed and passed him to Gracie Films, the company that produced the show. They in turn agreed but passed Else on to their parent company, Fox. At this point things changed. Fox demanded \$10,000 for Else to use the clip. He did not have the money and, realising he could not recapture the spontaneity of the shot, Else claimed his use of the clip was exempt from copyright restrictions under a clause in copyright law known as fair use. He was advised by expert legal council that he had a fair use claim but that if he tried to pursue the case he would lose. The convention of the legal system was that the case 'would boil down to who had the bigger legal department and the deeper pockets' (Lessig, 2004: 98). Else knew his limitations. Chastened by the experience he removed the offending four and a half seconds. He reports to Lessig that he has, as a result, learned to avoid using other people's copyrighted material – regardless of whether his use is legal or not. Accordingly Lessig concludes: 'The consequence of this legal uncertainty, tied to these extremely high penalties, is that an extraordinary amount of creativity will either never be exercised, or never exercised in the open' (2004: 185).

### *Technology and materials*

Other conventions are built into the technologies and materials artists and support personnel can use. Specialised media are required to produce most kinds of art such as

‘oil paints in small tubes, musical instruments and their accessories, ballet shoes’ (Becker, 1982: 71). They are not usually redesigned with each new art work. Instead these materials develop over time into standard equipment. Standard equipment, though, encourages standard practices. Becker explains: ‘Whenever artists depend on others for some necessary component, they must either accept the constraints they impose or expend the time and energy necessary to provide it some other way’ (1982: 28). Many musical instruments, for example, are only capable of generating twelve-note octaves. This is why Harry Partch had to design his own instruments – the standard ones could not make the sounds he wanted them to make. Accordingly Becker tells us that: ‘Manufacturers and distributors perform an editorial choice by failing to make some materials and equipment available’ (1982: 210).

But suppliers ‘do not always constrain what artists do’ (Becker, 1982: 74). Manufacturers compete against other manufacturers. In an attempt to gain competitive advantages they often innovate ‘new kinds of equipment and materials which, when made available to artists, create new artistic opportunities’ (Becker, 1982: 74). Within the production of recorded music, for example, such technological innovations have opened up a smorgasbord of new sounds for producers. For instance the invention of the microphone led to a completely new style of singing, dismissed at the time as crooning, which was previously impossible because singers had to amplify themselves by naturally projecting their voices (Goodall, 2002). Similarly the release of CDs – often portrayed as either a successful marketing ploy or a technical revolution – affected music that was produced. It allowed musicians to redesign the concept of a record. Haring explains: ‘One immediate effect of the CD revolution was that artists began making longer albums. Where once the forty-minute album was not uncommon,

artists began adding more songs, resulting in an average ten-minute lengthening of albums since the advent of the CD' (1996: 43).

### *The audience*

Artists need money to live and money to purchase resources. One of the main ways artists make money is by selling their art works to an audience. But the audience that consumes their art can encourage artists to make art in conventional ways. The users of texts, especially 'serious and experienced audience members', develop tastes for certain kinds of texts (Becker, 1982: 48). Indeed, whether they are making art for serious or uneducated audiences, artists have to 'produce something that will reach those people in a form they will understand and approve' (Becker, 2007: 67). So, aside from the conventions that develop among support personnel and artists and those that condition the materials and technologies available in an art world, conventions also emerge from the expectations that audiences members have about the type of art that an art world will offer them. They are an invisible hand – especially to the artists working within market-based systems – nudging artists and support personnel to make things that they want (Peterson, 1976).

If the audience for classical music, say, feels that the music composed by Harry Partch sounds out of tune and, as a result, they are unwilling to pay for a two-hour avant-garde symphony there is little to convince the professional support personnel to organise a show – even if they could overcome the difficulties imposed by Partch's unique demands (Dowd, Liddle, Lupo and Borden, 2002). Indeed Koehne, formerly an Artistic Advisor to Symphony Australia, explicitly states that the demands of the classical music audience constrain what music is performed. He tells us 'that audiences

are highly likely to embrace' music that is sentimental, simple and cheerful but reject more avant-garde music (2004: 158). Consequently Koehne would have to programme music that was sentimental, simple and cheerful. Similarly jazz musicians explain to Becker (1963; 1951) that their audience wants simple and familiar songs that they can sing along with and dance to. Jazz musicians consider such music to be 'bad music' (Becker, 1963: 90). But they are forced to play what the audience wants because they need the audience to pay them – if the audience does 'not like the kind of music' they hear they will 'not pay to hear it a second time' (Becker, 1963: 89).

This pressure intensifies because there are, typically, more people who want to make art than the market for art requires (Cohen, 1991a). On this point Becker tells us that there 'will usually be an oversupply of people for the roles thought to contain some element of the "artistic"' (1982: 77). As a result most art worlds develop 'special' mechanisms to 'sort out artists from nonartists' and ensure that 'only those who really have the gift, the talent, and the skill get the position' (Becker, 1982: 16). These special mechanisms mean that some artists do not have to deal directly with their audiences. Instead they rely on a system of distribution. Yet there are 'constraining benefits of distribution' (Becker, 1982: 94) because systems of distribution 'integrate the artist into society's economy by transforming aesthetic value into economic value' (Becker, 1982: 109). Distributors might free the artist from direct demands from the audience but may replace these with more indirect ways of getting the artist to make art works that the audience wants to buy. A system of distribution may, for instance, limit which art works are presented to an audience. In this regard the gate keeper (Hirsch, 2000; 1972), or door keeper (Negus, 1999), theory of the music industry tells us that music is filtered through the industry before it reaches the market so that it reaches the audience

in a distilled form based on what the industry thinks it can sell. This criterion affects the music that is picked up, supported and developed (Negus, 1999). Music that does not fit this image is rarely offered to the audience for popular music (Anderson, 2006; Christianen, 1995). Conversely Bourdieu points out that artists pre-select themselves when they enter into relations with a distribution system. Taking the example of the production of literature, he explains that: 'The manuscripts a publisher receives are the product of a kind of pre-selection by the authors themselves according to their image of the publisher' (1983b: 133).

### **Conventions or constraints?**

So conventions make art work easier but also impose certain constraints on artists and support personnel. As Becker summarises: 'Every convention implies an aesthetic which makes what is conventional the standard of artistic beauty and effectiveness' (1982: 305). Conventions, in other words, limit the set of activities that make up an art world. In the process they define some art works as good and others as bad and, as a result, some productive activities as good and others as bad. They create a system of value (Becker, 1982: 134).

Some conventions limit the choices an artist can make even before the artist has thought of making these choices. Other conventions edit art work as the artist begins to make their aesthetic and stylistic choices. 'Taking the anticipated reactions of others into account', Becker explains, 'an artist can decide to tailor what they do to what others will likely do' (1986: 69). He continues:

‘They can decide to paint a canvas that is four by six feet because they know it will be easier to find a home for it than one twenty by thirty. In the same way, a composer might decide to write a string quartet rather than something for two ocarinas and bassoon, in part because there are many more string quartets to play his piece than two-ocarina and bassoon combinations. If artists decide not to do what others want, they pay another kind of price. Instead of giving up some of their freedom to choose, they have to give up time to do themselves what others might have done for them if they were more cooperative, train others to do it for them, or do without. In each case, the work shows the effects of their choice’ (1986: 69).

A key mechanism through which conventions constrain the participants in an art world is, in this regard, through particular system of value: money. It is not that unconventional work is impossible. It is just ‘more costly and more difficult’ (Becker, 1974: 775). There is always a price to be paid for unconventional work – whether that is in terms of ‘aesthetic value’ or ‘economic value’ (Becker, 1982: 109). One way to get round these constraints, as we saw in the Introduction, is for an artist to subsidise their art work through non-art sources – to lead a ‘double life’ (Taylor and Littleton, 2008: 282). However Becker concludes that self support ‘solves some but by no means all of the problems posed by art world distribution systems’ (1982: 99). Stepping outside of the constraints of conventional work by seeking non-artistic sources of income can be self-defeating. It can mean that an artist is ignored. People who do not sell their art work are often indistinguishable from people who cannot sell their art works – the oversupply of people who have been rejected by the special mechanisms that sort out the artistic from the non-artistic. Accordingly whether they choose not to

sell their art work or are unable to sell their art work such producers can end up being treated as amateurs, failures or dreamers. Becker explains:

‘participation in the established distribution system is one of the important signs by which art world participants distinguish serious artists from amateurs. People who use alternative systems created for those rejected by the regular system, whatever their reason, may mark themselves as non-serious’ (1982: 97).

Conventions, in other words, allow producers to make art works economically and validate the artist psychologically. But because they create a standard for what is good and bad that is based on an economic value – where what is good is art work that sells and what is good practice for producing art work are the practises that create art works that sell – conventions can become constraining (Bourdieu, 1983a). This is illustrated, as we will see, when conventional art worlds come into conflict with art works and productive practices that are motivated by different systems of value than the economic values dominant in conventional art worlds (Becker, 1974: 772). At this point it is, though, worth digressing from our exegesis of Becker’s work to reflect, briefly, upon Bourdieu’s (1986a; 1986b; 1983a; 1983b) idea of a field of cultural production. Bourdieu’s notion of a field of cultural production shares much with Becker’s art world framework – not least the spatial metaphor – as Bourdieu (1983a: 34) acknowledges. But it differs in emphasising the relationship between producers and between art worlds by showing us how these relationships are mediated through ideas of art and economics. Bourdieu defines his notion of a field as follows:

‘The field, as a field of possible forces, presents itself to each agent as a *space* of possibilities which is defined in the relationship between the structure of average chances of access to the different positions (measured by the “difficulty” of attaining them and, more precisely, by the relationship between the number of time and, more precisely, by the relationship between the number of positions and the number of competitors) and the dispositions of each agent, the subjective basis of the perception and appreciation of the objective chances’ (1983a: 64).

Put simply within a given field there are a range of possible spaces that can be occupied by particular art world. For any actor within a field their personal disposition depends on their subjective judgement of success – this will determine the position they aim for and also their experience of the field that is constructed around them. But within each field there are a series of wider struggles between those who define success in economic terms and those who define it in artistic terms (Bourdieu, 1983a: 42). Fields of cultural production are battlefields in which producers must take sides and position themselves not just in an art world but against other art worlds along economic and artistic battle lines (Bourdieu, 1983b: 138).

So Bourdieu’s (1983a) analysis emphasises the relational aspect of fields of cultural production. On the one hand fields (or constellations of art worlds) are spaces of exclusion. As he puts it ‘the field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition’ of what is artistic ‘and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the artist’ (1983a: 42). On the other hand fields are also spaces of inclusion even for

the excluded. Bourdieu explains how such exclusions and inclusions work in the context of literature in this following lengthy quote:

‘the specificity of the literary and artistic field is defined by the fact that the more autonomous it is, i.e. the more completely it fulfils its own logic as a field, the more it tends to suspend or reverse the dominant principle of hierachization; but also that, whatever its degree of independence, it continues to be affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it, those of economic and political profit. The more autonomous the field becomes, the more favourable the symbolic power balance is to the most autonomous producers and the more clear-cut is the division between the field of restricted production, in which the producers produce for other producers, and the field of large-scale production [*la grande production*], which is *symbolically* excluded and discredited (this symbolically dominant definition is the one that the historians of art and literature *unconsciously* adopt when they exclude from their object of study writers and artists who produced for the market and have often fallen into oblivion)’ (1983a: 38-39).

So fields of cultural production are defined by the disposition of a particular actor that is formed within and contributes to an on-going struggle between economic and symbolic definitions of success. These battle lines are also the axis along which various art worlds are positioned in relation to other art worlds. This battle, though, is doomed to repeat itself. Each time one side comes too close to victory the other side rallies. In the context of popular music, for example, Peterson and Berger (1975) show us that rock and roll music exploded in the mid-1950s in response to an increasing

concentration of musical production within an oligarchy of profit-driven music companies. The explosion that occurred when small music producers prised open the production chain of music led, in turn, to a later concentration of music production by the same oligarchy as large music companies shut small producers out of the market. Indeed a similar pattern, in which excessive economic success has led to a decrease in artistic innovation causing a sudden explosion of creativity that is eventually refocused on economic success, has been traced through the history of popular music (Reynolds, 2006; Azerrad, 2001; Hesmondhalgh, 1999). Whichever way we look at it, Bourdieu concludes, there is ‘a generalized game of “loser wins”’ among fields of cultural production because any producer who is successful in accumulating economic capital is inevitably less successful in accumulating symbolic capital and vice versa (1983a: 39).

### **Unconventional work**

While Bourdieu emphasises the power of fields to both contain and continue producing unconventional art work, Becker (1982) too points out that there is always resistance to dominant art worlds. Indeed the stability of an art world is under constant threat from producers ‘who’, Becker and Strauss tell us, ‘care little for generally accepted values’ and are, as a result, free to work in unconventional ways in spite of their inefficiencies (1956: 257). The stability of conventions within an art world is, then, under threat from producers who ‘make work that looks like art, or is sometimes seen to do so, but do it in the context of worlds completely separate from an art world, perhaps in a world of craft or domestic life’ (Becker, 1982: 227). Art worlds are also under threat from producers who ‘carry on their activities quite alone, supported neither by an organized art world or any other organized area of social activity’ (Becker, 1982: 227). Becker

calls these producers mavericks, folk artists and naïve artists. They keep on producing art regardless of the conventions of an art world that exists around them and the state of the battle between economic and artistic criteria for success. Sometimes an art world is forced to shift so that it can ‘incorporate’ these art works even though the artists and support personnel who produced them were ‘originally rejected’ by it (Becker, 1982: 226-7).

#### *Mavericks, folk and naïve artists*

In contrast to ‘integrated professionals’ who ‘accept almost completely the conventions of their world’ some producers, who Becker calls mavericks, are able ‘to retain some loose connection with’ a professional art world even though they ‘no longer participate in its activities directly’ (1982: 233). They are often trained within an art world and are well-versed in its conventions but they have made a decision not to ‘participate in the day-to-day interaction of the art world’ (Becker, 1982: 241). Mavericks ‘selectively’ violate conventions and ‘abide by most of them’ (Becker, 1982: 243). As Becker explains: ‘If James Joyce ignored the literary and even linguistic forms of his days, he still wrote a finished book’ (1982: 243). In this sense mavericks can be said to have a ‘half-in, half-out relation’ to professional art worlds (Becker, 1982: 246). Their unconventional art work shares much with the conventional art work produced by professionals. Indeed we can say that it is not so much the work that the maverick does than the relationship they have to the professional art world that accounts for their ‘maverickness’ (Becker, 1982: 244).

Other cultural producers exist even further away from integrated and professional art worlds than mavericks do. Folk artists, for instance, work ‘totally outside professional

art worlds' (Becker, 1982: 246). They seldom think of their work as art at all. It is simply something that they make to help them live their everyday lives. It is what people in their communities do (Becker, 1982: 247). For example their community might stitch quilts, sculpt pots or sing work songs because they want to be warm, require cookware or need to coordinate the movement of a large number of people (Gioia, 2006; Becker, 1982). Yet often the work of folk artists 'resembles conventional' art work and can be assimilated into professional art worlds. Becker explains: 'Folk artists show us how artlike work – similar in everything but the label – can be made under different auspices and how the auspices affect the doing' (1982: 270).

This is taken to its most extreme with a kind of artist 'alternatively called primitive, naive or grass-roots' – or as we might now call them, outsider artists (Becker, 1982: 158). Such artists 'work in isolation, free from the constraints of cooperation which inhibit art world participants, free to ignore conventional categories of art works, to make things which do not fit any standard genre and cannot be describes as examples of any class. Their works just *are*' (Becker, 1982: 260). Becker offers Simon Rodia, who constructed the Watts Towers, as a particularly illustrative example. Rodia's 'eccentric work' has left people asking to this day why, over thirty-three years, he made ninety-nine steel towers covered with found objects (Becker, 1982: 263). Like mavericks and folk artists these outsider artists show us that the unconventional status of unconventional work is not just a feature of the activities that went into making the work but the position of the people who make it with regards to a conventional art world (Becker, 1982: 226-7).

Becker explains that maverick, folk and outsider artists 'have different motives from integrated professionals' (1982: 241). In Bourdieu's terms, they have different 'dispositions' as well as different 'positions' within their field (1983a: 64). It is, though, the professionals' 'reasons for doing things' that are 'built into' conventional art worlds (Becker, 1982: 241). Becker explains:

'Whenever an art world exists, it defines the boundaries of acceptable art, recognizing those who produce the work it can assimilate as artists entitled to full membership, and denying membership and its benefits to those whose work it cannot assimilate. If we look at things from a commonsense point of view, we can see that such large-scale editorial choices made by the organizations of an art world exclude many people whose work closely resembles work accepted as art' (1982: 226-7).

Calling some of these artists *outsiders* is, then, apt. If conventions form a world these artists exist, to various extents, on the outside of it. We can see that an art world is, therefore, a space where certain ways of working are valued at the expense of others. By creating a consensual definition of what is good work and who is supposed to be doing it, art worlds both judge the value of art works and regulate the behaviour of people who produce them. Becker explains that 'participants invest the whole apparatus with an aura of "rightness" so that this way of producing art seems moral and other ways immoral' (1986: 71). Unconventional work is, accordingly, left outside of a professional art world because of the exceptional values of the cultural producers involved. Here Becker tells us that every 'world has its 'right ways'' of doing things, and people who don't use them take a chance with their careers and reputations' (2007:

287). Yet once complete an outsider art work, if not an artist or their methods of making art, can gain acceptance.

## **Outsiders**

Art worlds, therefore, are not only a set of activities determined by various conventions but they are also a set of relationships between the producers of art, art works and various art worlds. Here the art world framework can, I think, be informed by Becker's (1964; 1963) sociological studies of deviance in which he explores how activities and people acquire an aura of wrongness as they are pushed outside of a social group or world. The most fundamental point of Becker's (1963: 178) sociology of deviance is that something becomes deviant or wrong when a social group with economic, symbolic or political power labels it wrong. After labelling it wrong the social group then stigmatises anyone who does it (Goffman, 1968). This happens, for example, in the punishment of criminals and the insane who are housed apart from society in prisons, asylums and other institutions that limit their actions. But such punishments may also be less physical yet still marginalise people. A punishment might constrain the lifestyle of a deviant, forcing them to hide certain acts or to 'develop full-blown ideologies explaining why they are right and why those who disapprove of and punish them are wrong' (Becker, 1963: 3). As Adam Phillips explains: 'The best hideout – the cosiest one – is the one in which you can forget what you are hiding from or that you are hiding at all' (1996: 67).

This approach to the sociology of deviance is known as the labelling theory of deviance (Matza, 1969). It offers us a way to conceive of deviance as a progressive and

interactive process involving an actor and an audience (Becker, 2007; 1964; 1963). An activity only becomes deviant, according to the theory, when someone watches someone else break a social rule and labels their activity wrong (Cohen, 1965: 9). The accuser can draw on laws, science, morality or any value system that defines ‘the kinds of behavior appropriate to’ particular situations (Becker: 1963: 1). To punish these deviant acts the audience must label a person deviant and then push them away from ‘economic and political power’ into ‘circumstances which make it harder for him to continue the normal routines of everyday life’ (Becker, 1963: 179). Deviants are, consequently, forced into further “‘abnormal” actions (as when a prison record makes it harder to earn a living at a conventional occupation and so disposes its possessor to move into an illegal one)’ (Becker, 1963: 179).

In effect, then, it is the act of labelling something wrong that begins a process where a group of people are disconnected from their wider society and are pushed into a position where they are either unable to re-enter that society or create such deep-rooted justifications for their deviance that they do not want to because their deviance has become a defining characteristic of their identity. In this sense whether something is wrong is not seen as a characteristic that is inherent in the thing itself. Instead it ‘depends on how other people react to it’ (Becker, 1963: 11). Accordingly Becker summarises that deviant behaviour should not be seen as ‘something special ... depraved or in some magical way better than other kinds of behavior. We ought to see it simply as a kind of behavior some disapprove of and others value’ (1963: 176).

### **Cat and squares**

At first glance we might think it needs a conceptual leap of faith to approach the activities of art worlds through the sociology of deviance. Indeed Becker acknowledges that the labelling theory of deviance is contentious even within the sociology of deviance more generally:

‘Labelling theory analyzed “deviance” as the result of complicated, many-stage interactions involving accusers, accused, and a variety of official and unofficial organizations. Such an approach generally cast doubt on conventional assignments of praise and blame, on the allocation of actors to the Good Guys or the Bad Guys, by showing that the process of accusation and proof of guilt was a social process, not a scientific procedure. Critics appalled by such relativism, often asked something like this: “Well, what about murder? Isn’t that really deviant?” They implied that while many acts might exhibit the definitional variation that was the key insight of the approach, some acts are so heinous that no reasonable person would ever define them in a way that excused the person or persons or organizations that had committed them’ (2007: 144).

But in Becker’s (1963) influential text on deviance he offers us a case study of dance band musicians to show how deviance works even within the production of music. He suggests that dance band musicians, jazz musicians as we would probably call them now, are an archetypical deviant group along with homosexuals, marijuana users and even philosophy students (Becker and Carper, 1956). Becker explains: ‘Though their activities are formally within the law, their culture and way of life are sufficiently bizarre and unconventional for them to be labelled as outsiders by more conventional members of the community’ (1963: 79). Specifically jazz musicians are occupied in a

deviant career (Becker, 1963: 101). They are outside of an established culture industry and they are encouraged into narcissistic and hedonistic behaviour as a consequence of their work environment. They perform at night and miss the standard working day. Consequently they are not able to visit the bank, shop and doctors nor can they engage with friends and family (Bradshaw and Holbrook, 2007). As Becker summarises ‘the conditions of work – late hours, great geographic mobility, and so on – make social participation outside of the professional group difficult’ (1951: 142). As a result jazz musicians are forced to live on the outside.

Jazz musicians mediate this position through a self-justifying ideology whereby they divide the world into two groups. The first are labelled “cats”. This group includes musicians with a natural gift that allows them to truly understand music. These musicians ‘feel that the only music worth playing is jazz’ (Becker, 1963: 82) because jazz – music that ‘is produced without reference to the demands of outsiders’ (Becker, 1951: 136) – represents freedom from musical, material and social constraints. Indeed cats are obsessed with ‘maintaining freedom from control over artistic behavior’ (Becker, 1963: 102). Becker explains that cats feel that when it comes to the music they make they ‘should be free from control by outsiders who lack’ their natural gift (1963: 86). Furthermore their ‘attitude is generalized into a feeling that musicians are different from and better than other kinds of people and accordingly ought not to be subject to the control of outsiders in any branch of life, particularly in their artistic activity’ (Becker, 1963: 86).

Against cats jazz musicians define a second group that they call “squares”. Becker explains:

‘The whole system of beliefs about what musicians are and what audiences are is summed up on a word used by musicians to refer to outsiders – “square.” ... The term refers to the kind of person who is the opposite of all the musician is, or should be, and a way of thinking, feeling, and behaving (with its expression in material objects) which is the opposite of that valued by musicians’ (1951: 137).

Squares, in short, lack the understanding of music that cats have. They are the audience who demand popular dance and folk tunes. Squares are also the families and friends of musicians who do not appreciate the unconventional behaviour expected of a musician as well as the society that wants musicians to conform to conventional behaviours. Collectively they demand that cats play ‘bad music in order to be successful’ (Becker, 1963: 90) and force a cat to choose ‘between conventional success and his artistic standards’ (Becker, 1963: 83). Indeed squares force cats to face the ‘most distressing problem’ (Becker, 1963: 83) in their career: should they stop playing jazz and ‘go commercial’ or continue to suffer economic hardship as outsiders (Becker, 1963: 92).

But while the ideology of being a cat is established on the basis of independence from the square way of life is clearly dependent on the squares. To put this in terms of the labelling theory of deviance we can see that cats’ outsider ideology fundamentally depends on the squares’ insider ideology. It is constructed through it. They lean against each other. This returns us, then, to Bourdieu’s (1986b) description of the fields of cultural production as structured through a constant battle between economic and

symbolic or artistic definitions of success. ‘What is most important’, Bourdieu points out, is that these ‘two fields of production, opposed as they are, coexist’ (1983b: 128).

This begins to give us some insight into art worlds as a set of relations. Specifically we can see how the relationships on the inside of a professional art world are determined by, or at least dependent on, the relationship that participants in an art world have with others outside of it and vice versa. Indeed Becker’s sociology of deviance alerts us to three aspects to deviance that we can transfer into his account of art worlds. First whether something is right or wrong or good or bad is a matter of definition not an inherent characteristic of the thing itself. In this regard we have seen already that unconventional art work is not a function of the art work itself but of the relationship that the artist has to the professional art world around which they work. Second the basis of such a definition mixes economic and moral issues. The imperative that artists make the right art work, for instance, is based on a judgement about what art works they can sell. Finally those who have been labelled deviant, or wrong, are marginalised. In particular they are punished economically and forced to truncate their activities or develop fully-blown ideologies to justify their activities. In the context of the production of culture these ideologies, as we have seen, focus on the idea of authenticity and independence. But while groups can be divided into an inside and outside, they stay intimately related. We will pay more attention to these links between Becker’s sociology of cultural production and deviance in the rest of this thesis.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical foundations upon which this thesis is built – specifically concerning the issues of who makes culture. I have focused on Becker’s art world framework and Bourdieu’s (1983a) notion of the fields of cultural production as two compatible ways that help us to think through this issue. Accordingly a great deal of the chapter offered an exegesis of Becker’s and, to a slightly lesser extent, Bourdieu’s work. In so doing I have largely explored their ideas in a critical vacuum – although, as we have seen, these ideas are largely accepted in the study of music and cultural production.

The most obvious implication of Becker’s approach to studying cultural production, in particular, is that we must cast our analytic lens beyond the individual artist and explore the world of people who work around them, providing them with materials, teaching them to turn those materials into art, distributing that art for them and, eventually, consuming it. Indeed the idea of people doing things together lies at the heart of Becker’s sociology. A collection of Becker’s papers were, for instance, published under the title *Doing Things Together* (1986). Becker asserts that art work is coordinated through various conventions that, typically, combine into a stable unit – an art world. While Becker’s framework has proven remarkably influential, I have argued that his exploration of art worlds can be enriched by his work on the sociology of deviance. Becker understands deviance as a social process whereby certain acts and actors are labelled deviant. The activity of labelling forces a number of reactions on the people doing the labelling and the people who have been labelled. I have argued that through Becker’s writings in the sociology of deviance we can begin to understand the social processes at work in defining the set of relationships that also make an art world.

So we can see from Becker's framework that a world produces art but this world is not a static community. Art worlds are, rather, sets of activities and sets of relationships that are determined by the available technologies for producing and consuming art, the expectations of the audience, the attitude of unconventional producers and many other contextual features. Having introduced Becker's account of the art world framework I will turn, in the next chapter, to the methodological issues that we face when we use this framework to study cultural production.

### 3. Method

In the previous chapter I explored the theoretical basis of this thesis. Taking inspiration from Peterson's (1976) call for a genetic approach to the study of culture I reviewed Becker's (1982) art world framework and Bourdieu's (1983a) description of the fields of cultural production. In this chapter I will go further into the details of how I have used these ideas – in particular the art world framework – as the foundation of my empirical study of creative production. I look, in short, at my method.

'Methodology', according to Becker, 'is too important to be left to methodologists' (1970: 3). It is not merely a question of technique. Rather the methods we use to study the world betray how we think the world works. Unfortunately, Becker does not lay out a method for studying art worlds. As we will see, he (1982; 1986; 2007) offers us some scattered methodological hints among his various geographies of particular art worlds and he (1970) also offers some general guidelines in his writings on sociological method. But he never sets out a prescriptive set of procedures.

Some researchers, including Becker (1986), prefer pragmatic approaches to methods and would not see this openness as a weakness (Mills, 1959: 58-59). Indeed Becker disagrees with the 'predominately proselytizing character' of much work on methodology that, he tells us, has a 'very strong propensity ... to preach a "right way" to do things' (1970: 4). But Becker himself warns us that where there are 'no strict set of approved rules and procedures' concerning methods we generally face two options: 'don't do it or anything goes' (1970: 15). Taking the anything goes approach carries

considerable risks. It might not give us “‘wrong” answers’ but it might mean that we ‘leave out’ some important feature of an art world (Becker, 1986: 6). What we need, instead, is a method consistent with the theoretical assumptions of the art world framework that suits the contexts of this study but we will have to construct it for ourselves.

### **Exploring art worlds**

For Becker the art world framework is the ‘basic unit of analysis’ in studying cultural production and, as we saw at the start of the previous chapter, it is based on a genetic approach to culture (1982: 36). In other words Becker does not assume that culture mirrors society or vice versa. Nor does he assume that culture exists autonomously from society. Here Dawe (1970) sets out two broad traditions within sociology more generally that can help us orientate Becker’s theoretical foundations. Echoing Mills’ (1959) distinction between sociological investigations into social structures and social milieux Dawe explains that we have, on the one hand, a *social system* tradition in sociology that assumes that social structures define ‘social meanings, relationships and actions of its members. And because it is thus assigned priority over them, it must in some sense be self-generating and self-maintaining’ (1970: 208). The social actor is, on this reading, ‘on the receiving-end of the system’ (Dawe, 1970: 209). On the other hand we also have a sociological tradition exploring what Dawe calls *social action*. Dawe explains that the task of such research is ‘always and necessarily’ to demystify the social system ‘by revealing’ its ‘roots in human action’ (1970: 214). Sociologists working under this theoretical perspective explore how people actively construct the social system by interacting. However according to Mills (1959) a truly sociological

analysis needs to take account of both the social system and social action. This is precisely what Becker's art world framework encourages us to do by focusing our attention on both the constraints on action and the ways in which people innovate new structural arrangements. Becker is not only concerned with consensus and order but also conflict and action. Indeed he argues

'how culture works as a guide in organizing collective action and how it comes into being are really the same process. In both cases people pay attention to what other people are doing and, in an attempt to mesh what they do with those others, refer to what they know (or think they know) in common' (1986: 19).

In accepting Becker's framework, then, we also accept a specific answer to what Becker describes as a 'serious problem that confronts any sociological investigator who wished to study a group or community' (1970: 20). This 'is the choice of a theoretical framework with which to approach' our area of interest (Becker, 1970: 20). Indeed Becker is clear that our choice of theoretical framework must influence our methodology and vice versa. No one method is better than others in and of itself – only within a specific situation depending on a specific theoretical approach. Accordingly Becker (1970) argues for a pragmatic approach to methodology that allows us to make practical methodological decisions. These practicalities should then inform our conceptual ideas. Practical problems should make us look again at our beliefs and theoretical assumptions. As Becker asserts: 'Technical problems of research reflect the peculiarities of the social groups we study. In solving them, we simultaneously learn something about the social structure under observation and something about the methods we use' (1986: 156).

Consequently Becker advises us that the ‘best evidence’ may simply ‘be that gathered in the most unthinking fashion, when the observer has simply recorded the item although it has no place in the system of concepts and hypothesis he is working with at the time’ (1970: 36). We should, in other words, be willing to gather evidence first and build a theory around it later (Strauss, 1997; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Indeed Becker explains that when he was a performing musician he learned that ‘if you took notes on what you were doing, that was considered fieldwork’ (1986: 26). In the context of this study, though, this approach leaves unanswered the question of how, exactly, we should investigate the people who cooperate to make music and how we can expose their conventional understandings of their activities to analysis.

In fact Becker does not stringently follow his own advice here. He does set out some methodological first principles for studying art worlds. Becker emphasises that art worlds are made by people doing things together. ‘This’, Becker tells us ‘sets a distinctive agenda for our inquiry. We are to look, first, for the complete roster of kinds of people whose activity contributes to the result’ (1976: 41). He warns us, though, that before we can start any data gathering we must first find art worlds to study. Becker described this as the problem of ‘getting in’ (1970: 15). He explains:

‘A problem that afflicts almost all researchers – at the least, all those who attempt to study, by whatever method, organizations, groups, and communities in the real world – is getting in: getting permission to study the thing you want to study, getting access to the people you want to observe, interview or give questionnaires to’ (1970: 15).

Becker points out that often it is only particular groups that present themselves to us for study and this can influence our findings. For example if we want to study criminals we can find many of them in a prison but these are by definition criminals who have been caught (Becker, 1986: 140). It is entirely possible that something very important separates them from the criminals who have not been caught. ‘This sampling error’, Becker explains, ‘and it is properly called that, may have distorted many of our theories; for instance, it may contribute to the substantial predilection of social scientists for theories of consensus rather than conflict’ (1970: 17).

Once we have found an art world to study there is a further issue: where should our ‘observation post’ be (Becker, 1986: 143)? Where can we best observe what is going on? Should we stay outside of the action or get involved? If we decide to get stuck in, what role should we play with those around us? Becker tells us, for example, that if we want to study deviants we could locate ourselves ‘in those areas or places where the deviants’ we are interested in studying ‘habitually or occasionally congregate and then either simply observe them or take the opportunity to interact with them and gather information in a more direct and purposive way’ (1986: 143). But it might be impossible for us to get involved and remain impartial observers. In the course of our research we may be dragged into the very thing we are trying to study. This, of course, is not necessarily bad. Faulkner and Becker tell us that it ‘offers wonderful possibilities for data gathering not open in the same way to outsiders’ (2008: 19). In particular Becker, Faulkner and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett explain that, if you are already involved in the thing you want to study ‘[y]ou know what forms of collective activity are there to be studied, what the typical problems of participants in the activity are, what to ask

people about, what kinds of events to be on the lookout for. You've already done a pilot study' (2006: 15). But there are also some unique disadvantages to studying something you are a part of. Faulkner and Becker point out: 'Studying something you are a part of, and interviewing people who you have worked with and will work with again raises difficult questions that fieldworkers in more traditional research situations don't have to address' (2008: 19). Indeed we might be too involved. Our study might, as a result, affect the world that we want to understand and describe. Cohen (1991a; 1991b) offers us a case in point. She tells us how she got involved in the production of music in Liverpool because she was spending so much time around bands for her study. The result was that she began to have an important role in the very rock culture in Liverpool that she was studying.

Aside from finding people to study and deciding on our role in the analysis there is also the question of sample size. Becker tells us that when we are studying an art world we should speak to as many people as we can because '[d]ifferent groups of participants know different parts of the total body of conventions used by an art world, ordinarily what they need to know to facilitate the portion of the collective action in which they take part' (1982: 42). But how do we know when we have spoken to enough people? Indeed Becker also tells us that art worlds blur into each other. If we are hoping to analyse one art world, then, how do we know that we have stopped learning about that world and started learning something about another one? Unfortunately Becker does not offer us solutions to these problems. His guidance on methodology leaves us with many blanks to fill in.

## **The importance of language**

Becker (1982; 1963; 1951) has, though, given us a number of clues as to where we should turn our attention to find a method that is consistent with the theoretical perspective of the art world framework and open to the contingencies of studying art worlds. One way to find out about the conventional understandings concerning the people, activities and relationships that make up a particular art world is to explore the ways that people communicate in an art world. In particular to analyse the special vocabularies and situated language they develop to talk to and about outsiders (Becker, 1963), to describe the ‘typical situations and events’ they encounter (Becker 1986: 148) and to describe their activities (Becker, 2007: 15). Indeed Becker summarises that ‘in the study of any form of collective action’ a researcher should ‘want to pay close attention to nuances of language’ (1986: 147). Of course there are many ways we can do this. Let us begin by looking at Becker’s approach to studying language use.

Here we must return, again, to Becker’s (1963) sociology of deviance. In the last chapter I explored Becker’s study of jazz musicians. As we saw Becker explains how these musicians divide their world into cats and squares and he attributes to a specific role for language use in regulating and representing the distinction between these two groups. Put simply cats and squares speak differently. Cats in particular ‘have to talk a special language’ (Becker, 1951: 144). They speak of things being *cool* and *hip*. They combine ‘the image of French bohemian artists’ with ‘an elaborate vocabulary’ that describes ‘ignorant fans, demanding managers, varieties of drugs, and the authorities’ (Lena and Peterson, 2008: 707). This vocabulary covers words that:

‘have grown up to refer to unique professional problems and attitudes of musicians, typical of them being the term “square.” Such words enable cats to discuss problems and activities for which ordinary language provides no adequate terminology. There are, however, many words which are merely substitutes for the more common expression without adding any new meaning’ (Becker, 1951: 143-144).

Squares are unable to understand what cats talk about just as they cannot understand why cats choose to live as they do and play the music they do when they could more easily play popular tunes and make a more comfortable living. Being a cat is, therefore, enforced through the language that they speak. As Becker concludes:

‘The process of self-segregation is evident in certain symbolic expressions, particularly in the use of an occupational slang which readily identifies the man who can use it properly as someone who is not square and as quickly reveals as an outsider the person who uses it incorrectly or not at all’ (1963: 100).

Drawing on this example Becker explains that language use is an essential tool for researchers interested in exploring art worlds. He tells us: ‘Unusual terms or unusual uses of conventional words signal areas of central concern to the people under study and provide an opening analytic wedge, as the term “square” did in studying musicians’ (1986: 147). On this point we see another similarity between Becker and Bourdieu. In his essay ‘Principles for a Sociology of Cultural Works’ Bourdieu (1986b) emphasises the importance of language use. He tells us that we ‘should study the genesis of the systems of classification, names of periods, schools, genes and so forth’ that represent,

reflect and refract the structure of a field of cultural production (1986b: 180). Indeed, in his earlier essay 'The Market of Symbolic Goods' Bourdieu (1983b) offers a specific analysis of the language that surrounds cultural production. He emphasises the role of '*privileged references*' and '*privileged interlocutors*' that exist in a particular field (1983b: 138-139). Privileged references, he explains, do not just carry information but are 'landmarks circumscribing, within the common battlefield, the small network of privileged allies and adversaries proper to each category of producer' (1983b: 138-139). While privileged interlocutors are 'those revered antecedents whose thought structures' a cultural producer will have 'internalized to the point where he no longer think except in them and through them, to the point where they have become intimate adversaries determining his thinking and imposing on him both the shape and the substance of conflict' (Bourdieu, 1983b: 139).

In short, language for both Bourdieu and Becker regulates the structure of a field of cultural production and must, therefore, play a key role in our analyses. Indeed influenced by Bourdieu and Becker many researchers have investigated how musicians and the support personnel talk about making music. Bennett (1980), Finnegan (1989) and Cohen (1991a), for instance, all find that amateur musicians rely on a vocabulary of terms borrowed from business in order to make certain parts of their activities easier. They "hire" new members and "sack" old ones in an attempt to lessen the 'social rejection' of being kicked out of a band (Bennett, 1980: 32). Finnegan, though, points out that many of the 'unambiguous' terms that musicians and support personnel use, including ideas like professionals and amateurs, are actually complicated and ambiguous when they are used 'on the ground' (1989: 16). These 'distinctions', she explains, turn 'out to be a complex continuum with many different possible variations'

(1989: 14). For Finnegan, then, the contradictions between work and creativity that I discussed in the Introduction offer important distinctions that musicians use to talk about and structure their activities. Finnegan alerts us, as a consequence, to the need to explore how these ideas function in specific contexts – that is, within particular art worlds and particular fields of cultural production.

Within social psychology and discourse analysis, two research methods that explicitly focus on language use, groups like cats and squares are treated as ‘speech communities’ (Fairclough, 1995: 27). Speech communities are groups of people who share ‘background knowledge’ that helps them to understand each other (Fairclough, 1995: 28). This knowledge forms the basis of a worldview that allows people in particular speech communities to feel ‘that things are as they should be, i.e. as one would normally expect them to be’ (Fairclough, 1995: 28). Speech communities, then, also share ‘ways of seeing, or ideological norms’ that are, in turn, reflected in the ways they use language (Fairclough, 1995: 39). This might consist of a particular community drawing on particular words, developing new words or subverting the meaning of existing terms to ‘mark’ their ‘alternative social categories’ and ‘exemplify’ their ‘different world views’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 127). As Jeffcutt, Pick and Protherough explain: ‘When we say of others that “they don’t speak our language”, we mean that they use the same words but within a different framework of associations and values that embody different concepts’ (2000: 130).

So, to summarise where we are in our attempt to construct a method that is consistent with the art world framework, we have seen that Becker’s work on art worlds encourages us to look at language use as an important ‘analytic wedge’ (1986: 147).

By asking people to explain what they are doing in terms that they naturally use we learn about both the art world as a set of activities, actors and relationships. We can do this by gathering evidence in natural settings through ethnographic research. In doing this we should try to speak to as many people who cooperate together as possible until we reach the points where an art world begins to blur into other art worlds. In other words one way to explore art worlds that fits in with the theoretical foundations of the framework and is consistent with Becker's (1982; 1963) own attempts to study particular examples of cultural production is to look for speech communities and talk to them.

### **What I did: data gathering**

In this regard I have been able to exploit my position as a musician to gather data from a particular speech community. I began in 2006 by keeping various records of my activities such as tour diaries and lists of contacts and I began to speak to people about what they were doing and how they did it as I dealt with them. I began, in other words, as a participant-observer conducting ethnographic research. Here I was in good company. Sanders confirms that '[t]he most popular method used by researchers interested in the interactions and relationships which constitute the collective action of cultural production is participant observation' (1982: 70).

This means that I was very much at the centre of this study. Research that focuses on the researcher is known as auto-ethnographic research (Ellis, 2007). As a broad approach it has been accused of favouring self-rationalisation and mistaking researcher bias for insightful involvement in the object of study (Ellis, 1999). Indeed an obvious

critique of this thesis is that it is narcissistic (Rhodes, 2003). It is about me, based on interviews I conducted while trying to make sense of a dilemma that happened to me. Consequently suspicious readers might think that I am too much of a participant, that I have made up the problem, directed the interviews or misrepresented the findings as part of my identity work.

Yet bearing in mind the overarching theme of this thesis is creativity and work it is worth acknowledging that in the study of work there is a long tradition of both participant observation research and auto-ethnography – even if the authors do not always speak in such terms. Take, for instance, Sweezy's Foreword to *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (Braverman, 1974). He describes direct experiences of the labour process as 'the necessary qualifications' that are needed when discussing the organisation of work (1974: xxv). Similarly it is not unusual for researchers interested in the music industry to be or have been musicians (see Faulkner, 2006; Koehne, 2004; Elliott, 2003; Toynbee, 2000). Becker (1963; 1951), for instance, was able to study jazz musicians because he was a performing jazz musician. His work is not explicitly an auto-ethnography but his role as a musician was an important part of how and what data he was able to gather. Becker tells us:

'At the time I made the study I had played the piano professionally for several years and was active in musical circles in Chicago. ... Most of my observation was carried out on the job, and even on the stand as we played' (1963: 84).

This inbreeding of musicians and academics means that the position of the researcher is rarely neutral or objective within music research. Possibly this is because the

experiences of unsuccessful musicians are almost impossible for researchers to access through other methods (Negus, 1992). We will explore some reasons why it is hard for researchers to overcome the problem of ‘getting in’ to study amateur music in the following chapter. More generally, though, Becker argues that studying failures in any field presents serious methodological challenges precisely because of the problem of finding them – usually, you can ‘find only the failures who are caught’ (1986: 140). Auto-ethnography is a way around this problem as long as you are a failure yourself. In this regard Negus admits that he turned to academia in desperation at the state of his music careers. Negus describes how after years flirting on the edge of the music industry: ‘In desperation I became a sociologist’ (1999: 2). He explains that his research was, accordingly, driven by a desire to ‘understand what I had been through and ... to figure out why I was now sitting in a library in north London and not recording my latest album in Manhattan’ (1999: 2).

However just because other researchers studying music and culture have fore-grounded their positions in their analyses does not in itself justify the approach. It does not answer the general complaint that auto-ethnographic approaches are inevitably biased by the researcher. Here I find Becker’s (1970) essay ‘Whose Side Are We On?’ instructive. In this text Becker posits that all research is influenced by the person conducting it. So why, he asks, do we try so hard to remove researcher bias and pretend that it does not exist in our studies. As Rhodes puts it: ‘The horridness of this act is the realisation that intentions of objectivity, empathic interpretation or accurate representations are romantic illusions which achieve their effect through an avoidance of the issues of power and identity that exist between the writer, the written about, the text and the reader’ (2001: 30). Likewise Becker explains:

‘We must always look at the matter from someone’s point of view. The scientist who proposes to understand society must ... get into the situation enough to have a perspective on it. And it is likely that his perspective will be greatly affected by whatever positions are taken by any or all of the other participants in that varied situation. Even if his participation is limited to reading in the field, he will necessarily read the arguments of partisans of one or another side to a relationship and will thus be affected’ (1970: 131).

So, for Becker, rather than obsess about removing bias we should ‘make sure that, whatever point of view we take, our research meets the standards of good scientific work, that our unavoidable sympathies do not render our results invalid’ (1970: 132). In this sense there is nothing stopping auto-ethnographic approaches using robust and accepted methods to gather, analyse and present data. On this point I believe that my reading of the literature and the methods I have used, which I discuss below, are robust and scholarly irrelevant of my position in the research process. In fact my own activities as a performing musician have offered many advantages to this study. In particular it has helped to solve the problem of getting in. It provided me access to the backstage of music production that has, as I have hinted at so far, often been missing from academic research into the music industries (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007; Finnegan, 1989). Accordingly I hope that this thesis is not about me but about the people who helped me make music – about an art world. In this regard I followed my ethnographic data gathering with a series of formal research interviews with 18 participants who, in one sense or another, could be said to belong to the same art world as me. Through these interviews I was able to capture people talking about the

activities and relationships that exist in their art world. The interviews, in short, were focused on the interviewees.

While the speech community I have looked at is an art world built up, in a sense, around me I have tried, in the rest of the thesis, to step back from the analysis and foreground the voices of the people I interviewed. Throughout the thesis these interviews rather than the data that I gathered as a participant observer take centre stage. So in the next section of the thesis, for example, I offer four case studies showing how creative producers find creative ways of making music. Only one of the producers covered in a case study had direct involvement with me as a musician. Rather than get this one case to talk about what I have done with them I spoke to them as I spoke to all the people I interviewed for this project – as the centre of their own art world. I hope this is reflected in the way the cases are presented.

### **The sample**

As mentioned previously there are two main issues that need addressing in a robust exploration of an art world. First there is the issue of making sure you have spoken to enough people. Second there is the issue of making sure that you do not speak to too many people. So I needed to speak to enough people to ensure that I had an accurate idea of the activities, conventions and relations between people but not speak to too many people such that I began speaking to people who were, really, operating on the very edges or even outside of the art world I was studying. I decided that a snowballing sampling method would be a natural way to get around the first issue and find out who was working with who (Blaikie, 2010: 179). Indeed Bryman (2001: 98) points out that

Becker himself employs a snowball sampling method in his study of deviance. I started with six key participants who between them covered a range of activities that we have come to expect to find in the production of music – including people who run independent record labels and organise live music events (Finnegan, 1989). However my initial sample also included people who do things that are not typically discussed in empirical studies of the production of music such as someone who works as a music rights executive (Frith, 2000). I met all of these interviewees while I was playing music. The music rights executive, for instance, sat with me at a merchandise stall at a gig I played in London and, upon learning that I was in the band she had just heard, gave me her card and said if I was happy for her ‘to exploit’ my band then I should get in touch.

I asked each of these participants to recommend other people who they make music with for me to approach and made a note of other people that they mentioned during their interviews. This led to a further 23 contacts. I approached each of these contacts through email, asking them if they would be willing to let me interview them. I had already met some of these people but not included them in my original sample. Others were new to me. I then interviewed a further twelve participants. Two of the contacts offered to me by my original sample did not get back to me. One did get back to me but said no and six got back to me but said yes after I had closed my sample. Two interviews were not recorded. I discuss the implications of these rejections in the Conclusion.

The eighteen interviews I did conduct proved to be a rich source of data. Collectively they amounted to 195,691 words or 451 pages of typed transcript. Due to this wealth of

information I found that my original plan to conduct, transcribe and analyse three interviews a month was revised down to three every two months. In order to allow respondents to speak freely I stuck to a loose interview guide – a checklist of five conversation topics or cues. These covered the context to their music making activities, the production process involved in making music, the division of labour that they see around them, the determinants of demand and value and, finally, what they class as success and failure. This style of open-ended interviewing ultimately allowed the participants to speak through many unforeseen issues and topics and was extremely beneficial for me to explore the activities and relationships that existed between participants in their own terms even if it meant I spoke to less people than I originally planned. Wood and Kroger (2000) offer support here. They tell us that there is ‘no need to apologize’ for the small number of participants if we are interested in ‘the sample of discourse’ (2000: 80-81). As a sample of discourse I have, if anything, too much data.

To ensure that I had spoken to a sufficient number of people in these interviews I used a sampling technique often associated with snowball samples: theoretical sampling (Bryman, 2001: 99). Simply put when the additional interviews stopped telling me anything new and tended to confirm the ideas that were discussed in previous interviews and discussed the same people who I have heard spoken about in previous interviews I closed the sample (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The real complaint that I have with the sample is the number of females I was able to interview. I only interviewed two women and both of these females were part of my original sample. This suggests that either I over-estimated the role of females in the production of music

in my original sample or that the particular culture of production I was looking at is dominated by men (Groce and Cooper, 1990).

I spoke to the following people, who, at the time I interviewed them, had the following biographies:

**Matt** works for a credit referencing company and lives in Nottingham where he runs Gringo Records and Damn You!, a live music promotions group, in his spare time. I interviewed Matt in his house.

**Sophie** works as a music rights executive for a company who source music for synchronisation in adverts, films and television shows. Sophie lives in London. I interviewed Sophie in a pub in London after she finished work.

**Kirsty** is a student completing the qualification to become an Environmental Health Officer. In her spare time she runs Electrotec, a club night that organises parties and events at various venues, with her boyfriend. She lives in Leicester. I interviewed Kirsty at my house.

**Dave C.** works as a music teacher at a high school in Leicester. In his spare time he is a peripatetic brass instrument teacher who taught me trumpet. He also plays trumpet with King Size, a semi-professional ska band. He lives in Leicestershire. I interviewed Dave at his house.

**Euan** works in one of the largest drum shops in Europe. He is also an aspiring session drummer. He lives in London. Euan plays drums for Black Carrot and used to play with my band, Fabulous Foxes. I interviewed Euan on the London underground on his way to work one morning.

**Rob** works in the administration of a London university. In his spare time he runs Trash Aesthetics, a record label, and Sadder Days, a club night that promotes live music in London. He lives in London. I interviewed Rob at his house after a gig we had both attended.

This formed the start of my snowball sample and led to the following participants:

**Neil** (through Matt) works in administration for a social housing organisation in Nottingham. In his spare time he helps to organise shows for Damn You! with Matt. He also works occasionally as a soundman and driver. Neil played in Bob Tilton, a renowned hardcore punk band. I interviewed Neil at his house.

**Tom** (through Matt) is studying for a PhD. He lives in Nottingham and helps organise shows with Matt and Neil. Tom was in Hirameka Hifi – an indie band who achieved some critical acclaim during the early 2000s. I interviewed Tom at Neil's house.

**Chris S.** (through Matt) lives in Nottingham where he designs posters and artwork under the name Speeding Train. He also organises shows for Damn You!. Chris S. plays guitar for Lords and Felix. I interviewed Chris S. in his house.

**Anton** (through Neil) Anton used to work in IT for a large corporation based in Nottingham. He organised shows under the name The Night With No Name until he was made redundant and received an offer to run the Rescue Rooms, a venue in Nottingham. He has since become a director of the company that own the Rescue Rooms. I interviewed Anton in the offices of a venue called Rock City in Nottingham.

**Carl** (through Rob) Carl runs a booking agency for Heavenly Records, an independent label based in London. He also runs a record label called Fitzrovian Records with a friend in his spare time. I interviewed Carl in the offices of Heavenly Records in London.

**Alan** (through Euan) owns Cordelia Recording Studio in Leicester and works as a sound engineer in the studio. He also runs Cordelia Records, releasing his own music as part of a band called The Thurston Lava Tube. I interviewed Alan at his studio.

**Dave D.** (through Alan) works for a gas supplier and runs an independent record label based in Leicester called Sorted Records. I interviewed Dave in a pub in Leicester.

**Jay** (through Chris S.) Jay runs Dubrek Recording Studio in Derby. He organises live shows under the name Dubrek Presents and releases records by his own band, Fixit Kid, and other bands through Fight Me Records. I interviewed Jay in Dubrek Studio in Derby.

**Will** (through Rob) works at Rough Trade East in London where he is in charge of their mail order operations. Will helps put on live shows as part of Sadder Days and plays in a band called Treecreeper. I interviewed him in Rough Trade East shop in London.

**Ady** (through Matt) works in IT. He lives near Oxford. He also runs Vacuous Pop, an independent record label and promoter, in his spare time. I interviewed Ady in a pub in Oxford.

**Chris T.** (through Chris S.) runs Upset the Rhythm in London – promoting live music events and releasing records – for a living. Chris T. plays in a band called Hands on Heads. I interviewed Chris T. before a gig at the Scala in London. Chris T.'s partner, Clare, was present during the interview. Clare works as an archivist but helps Chris T. in her spare time. This interview also involved several band members from two American bands – Lucky Dragons and the Dirty Projectors – who were playing the Upset the Rhythm show that night.

**Joe** (through Neil) works as a postman in Somerset. Before this he worked for various music companies in London including a distributor, a record label and a press agent. He runs Jonson Family Records with friends in his spare time. He also plays music in a band called Hey Colossus. I interviewed him in a pub in Glastonbury.

Each interview was recorded to MP3 file on a high quality audio capture device (M-Audio Micro-Track II), transferred to a computer, backed-up and transcribed using Microsoft Media Player and Microsoft Word. I transcribed the interviews myself. Each interview was checked against the original recording twice to ensure that the

transcriptions were correct – specifically ensuring that the grammar that I had applied to the text accurately captured the flow of their speech and did not, in any immediately obvious way, distort their meaning (Truss, 2003).

### **What I did: data analysis**

At this point, then, I had a rich set of data. I had accessed a particular art world and had captured people speaking about what they do in a relatively natural conversation – producing over 450 pages of interview transcripts. I had, in other words, access to precisely the kind of sample of discourse that provided Becker with evidence of the special vocabulary he found among jazz musicians. But how we can make sense of such special vocabularies once we have recognized and understood them – as Becker advises?

Earlier I claimed that Becker's (1986) assertion that language use tells us something particularly revealing about art worlds links neatly with concerns in social psychology and discourse analysis concerning speech communities. Picking up this line of argument Potter and Wetherell (1987) explain that ethnomethodological researchers – a group who, it is fair to say, were influential to Chicago School sociologists such as Becker (O'Halloran, 2003) and broadly in keeping with their methodological approach (Gallant and Kleinman, 1983) – share a particular theoretical affinity with the foundations of many of the techniques developed in contemporary approaches to discourse analysis and social psychology. Specifically ethnomethodologists focus on what Potter and Wetherell call the 'knowledge of the organization of categories' – viewing them as the essential 'resource for producing economical and intelligible

conversation' (1987: 129). Moreover both ethnomethodological and contemporary social psychological approaches to studying language use acknowledge that speakers not only rely on their own understanding of particular terms but draw on conventional knowledge about the activities that go along with those terms. Potter and Wetherell explain: 'the ethnomethodological concern with the active *accomplishment* of social phenomena and interaction sensitized them to the possibility that categories might be more than simplifying perceptual sunglasses but deliberate constructions fitted for many tasks' (1987: 126). In other words both ethnomethodologists, like discourse analysts and social psychologists, look to the analysis language use not only to demonstrate the shared knowledge particular groups have but also the knowledge they have about particular activities and particular ways of organising. The use of certain kinds of language in certain contexts, then, becomes less about constructing the boundaries of groups and more about the possibilities for action. Ways of speaking, in short, help people to do things.

In this regard Oswick, Keenoy, Beverungen, Ellis, Sabelis and Ybema (2007) emphasise that the analysis of language use can facilitate social science research that focuses on both social structures and social actions. Fairclough describes this as the 'dialectic relation' between discourse, agency and structure (1995: 73). He explains:

'discourse is shaped by structures, but also contributes to shaping and reshaping them, to reproducing and transforming them. These structures are most immediately of a discursual/ideological nature – orders of discourse, codes and their elements such as vocabularies or turn-taking conventions – but they also include in a mediated form political and economic structures, relationship in the

market, gender relations, relations within the state and within the institutions of civil society such as education' (1995: 73).

Language use, in other words, does not just reflect the world. It also plays a part in constructing a specific world in which specific types of action can occur. Echoing Bourdieu (1983b) on privileged references and interlocutors, Potter and Wetherell explain: 'When a group makes sense of its world, that world will be constructed by, and in terms of, social representations' (1987: 141). For this reason many discourse analysts reject 'the assumption that there is a world (internal or external) that can be known separately from its construction in discourse' (Wood and Kroger, 2000: 28). 'Talk', Wood and Kroger tell us, 'creates the social world in a continuous ongoing way (2000: 4). It does not simply reflect what is assumed to be already there'. Consequently 'the task of discourse analysis is not to apply categories to participants' talk, but rather to identify the ways in which participants themselves actively construct and employ categories in their talk' as this allows us to see how language use constructs their world (Wood and Kroger, 2000: 29).

Interestingly Becker (2007) acknowledges that this understanding of knowledge, representation and action lies behind the art world framework. The art world framework, he tells us, 'implies a relativistic view of knowledge' (2007: 28). This is not to suggest that there is no 'ultimate reality' and that all facts are social constructions (Becker, 2007: 13). 'I can say the moon is made of green cheese', Becker tells us, 'but the moon will have to cooperate, exhibiting those characteristics that other people will recognize as green cheese' (2007: 12). So, for Becker, our ideas about the world must have some relationship to the world but the social nature of our engagement with the

world means that many of our ideas are supported by socially constructed realities as well as an ultimate physical reality. The moon, as Becker points out, not only has to be made of cheese and people recognize it as such but people have to care enough to find out.

Here Potter and Wetherell (1987) turn to the concept of the interpretative repertoire as a particularly fruitful method for analysing the ways that people draw on specific terms and use language in specific ways that are conditioned by social groups and condition those social groups by opening up the possibility of certain kinds of action. Interpretative repertoires can be defined as

‘recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena. A repertoire ... is constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions. Often a repertoire will be organized around specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes)’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 149).

For illustration of the way interpretative repertoires represent and structure action Potter and Wetherell offer us Gilbert and Mulkey’s (1984) analysis of scientists. Gilbert and Mulkey argue that two interpretative repertoires help scientists to make sense of the vicissitudes of scientific discoveries. Asked why some scientific discoveries that were later proved conclusively to be true were initially resisted by the scientific community the scientists Gilbert and Mulkey study explain that research that is classed as true must be mediated by social actors who can inhibit the progress of some scientific facts. The same scientists, though, also explain the movement of science as a progressive,

enlightened project where new facts are accepted not because of social actors but because they are true. In other words they used one repertoire to describe truth as a characteristic applied by the scientific community and another to describe truth as a characteristic inherent in some research results. Using these two repertoires scientists would explain their successes in promoting their discoveries as the undefeatable march of truth and their failures in terms of the personal influence of self-interested gatekeepers.

So interpretative repertoires can be thought of as a kind of discursive script that people can draw on in particular contexts in order to make sense of their activities, facilitate action and to explain, implicitly, how and why they are doing things by drawing on certain discourses and social groups associated with them for support. Interpretative repertoires, in short, open up space for action. Importantly, as in Gilbert and Mulkay's study of scientists, the interpretative repertoires that speech communities use do not have to be consistent with each other. Rather a particular repertoire will offer a tool for a speaker in a particular context. Different contexts will require different tools. Exploring how repertoires fit together and exploring the discrepancies between them can tell us something very important about the messy realities of organised life – a messiness that some other social science tools can smooth away (Rhodes, 2001). They also help us, then, to see the 'interpretative procedures' that people draw on as they create their worlds (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 146).

Reviewing speech for 'a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 138) – that is for interpretative repertoires – allows us, then, to see how 'contrasting sets of terms'

can be ‘used in different ways’ to anchor and orientate activities and speakers within speech communities (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 153). Interpretative repertoires are a method that allows us to see how speech opens up a space for action and this, as we saw in the Introduction, is a key part creative production. They also link back to Finnegan’s work studying the production of music in which she argues that different ‘distinctions’ such as the ideas of professionals and amateurs actually offer a continuum of possibilities that show us the distinguishing features of the structure of particular art worlds (1989: 14).

However this is not to say that interpretative repertoires are a methodological panacea. Potter and Wetherell point out that interpretative repertoires ‘solve problems, but they also generate difficulties of their own’ (1987: 155). Not least is the issue of illustrating how repertoires work. Potter and Wetherell point out that it is not ‘sufficient for analysis to simply identify these different forms of language in the abstract. We need to know, first the uses and functions of different repertoires, and second, the problems thrown up by their existence’ (1987: 149). In this regard Taylor and Littleton (2008) offer us a recent example of research that draws directly on both Becker’s work on art worlds and the concept of the interpretative repertoire as an analytic tool. Reviewing their work can help to clarify how interpretative repertoires can be used within cultural production.

As we have seen in the Introduction Taylor and Littleton (2008) offer us an analysis of two interviews they conducted with the same creative producer – a fashion designer. The first interview takes place when the designer is still a student. The second when she has taken on a job teaching design. They draw on the art world framework as a

way to orientate the ‘multiple possibilities’ (Taylor and Littleton, 2008: 279) that this particular creative producer draws on to manage her ‘creative identity project’ (Taylor and Littleton, 2008: 276). In particular they highlight two contradictory repertoires that this creative producer uses to deal with the challenges of making art and the problem of maintaining a consistent self-image as an artist in the contradictory fields of cultural production. The first they call ‘art-versus-money’ (2008: 281). The second they call ‘money as validation’ (2008: 281). Art-versus-money is, they tell us, evident when the creative producer they interview attempts to distance herself and her art work from the profit motive – here ‘the failure to make money can even be taken as a marker of artistic success’ (2008: 280). In contrast the money-as-validation repertoire is evident when the creative producer presents earning money from her creative activities both as a way she can earn a living and as a confirmation of the value of her art and her value as an artist. This was demonstrated when the creative producer ‘spoke as if “good” art would logically carry a high monetary value’ (Taylor and Littleton, 2008: 280).

Taylor and Littleton use interpretative repertoires, then, as an analytic tool that can highlight and explain the importance of ‘recognisable, even clichéd resources’ that ‘make available certain positionings which can be taken up or resisted’ by creative producers (2008: 281). Like Finnegan (1989) they show how contradictory repertoires are put to work in various practical ways such as the career path and personal relationships that the creative producer they interview has arranged. Moreover they use the art world framework as a way to orientate these repertoires within a conceptual understanding that integrates both the social structure and social action perspectives.

A similar approach is also used by Strachan (2007) – although he does not draw as directly on either Becker’s art world framework or the notion of interpretative repertoires. Strachan explores ‘the common discursive constructions that affect and justify aesthetic and industrial practice’ within the UK music industries by investigating employees in small-scale record labels (2007: 247). Like Taylor and Littleton (2008) he finds that people working within these record labels draw on ‘well-worn tropes’ relating to art and commerce (2007: 247). ‘These discursive formations,’ Strachan explains, ‘are used by micro-label owners to explain and justify why they are involved in small-scale cultural production, what rewards they gain from such involvement and ultimately what they hope to achieve through it’ (2007: 250). Specifically such tropes, while ambiguous, help employees in small-scale record companies ‘to position themselves against the “music industry” and thus against the inherently insidious nature of “business”’ (Strachan, 2007: 250).

Both Taylor and Littleton (2008) and Strachan (2007), in sum, show us how particular repertoires that gravitate around the images of work and creativity discussed in the Introduction provide a way of speaking that facilitates action. In these two examples we see recent empirical research that approaches the sociology of cultural texts through the study of language use and the art world framework. In so doing they do not rely on a prescriptive methodology. But they show us that it is possible to use methods that are consistent with the theoretical foundations of the art world framework. Drawing on these contributions I felt it was appropriate for me to also analyse the data my interviews generated for interpretative repertoires to explore how particular repertoires open up spaces for action – in between seemingly ‘unambiguous’ images, tropes and metaphors (Finnegan, 1989: 16) – in which creative producers could find new and

useful ways of organising their creativity. Indeed, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, Becker (1963) and Bourdieu (1983a) both highlight that art worlds are structured according to economic and artistic values that produce contradictions and inconsistencies. As the Gilbert and Mulkay example illustrates, interpretative repertoires are particularly useful for highlighting how such contradictions can be incorporated into practice. In using interpretative repertoires as the basis of my analysis, though, as I specify below, I do not offer a strict linguistic discourse analysis but rather pick up on one of the tools of discourse analysis as a method for sociological research.

#### **What I did: discourse analysis**

My task, then, was to identify the ways in which interviewees construct and employ interpretative repertoires. To do this I had to find a way of organising the sample of discourse that I had gathered. Here I used Nvivo, a computer programme that allows you to categorise a large amount of interview data.

My first attempt at analysing the data I had gathered did not work. I constructed a list of twenty-five codes informed by the previous studies conducted by Bennett (1980), Finnegan (1989) and Cohen (1991a) that I reviewed in the Introduction. These codes did not work when I applied them to the first interview I completed. Many codes failed to capture the intended meanings of the interviewee and many others were so general that I ended up putting almost all of the interview data into them. So I started again, this time looking for emergent categories following a broadly grounded theory approach (Strauss, 1997; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Indeed Bryman (1988: 117) points

out that a grounded theory approach to data analysis is essential when a research is employing a theoretical sampling method. I read through the first interview I conducted and picked out five broad themes. As as I went through subsequent interviews I added five more themes. These themes are listed below in order of popularity:

<b>Code</b>	<b>Numbers of interviews in which the code was references</b>	<b>Total references in all interviews</b>
Making Things	18	410
The Idea of Work	18	393
Profits and Rewards	18	375
Business and Professionalism	18	330
Insides and Outsides	18	329
Community	17	297
Ownership and Identity	18	209
Consumption	15	88
Art and Aesthetics	14	85
Awareness of Language Use	12	60

*Table 1. Emergent Codes*

Using Nvivo software I was able to apply these codes to each interview as I completed them. Each code generated an average of 292 references, the most popular code, *Making Things*, had 410 references and the least popular, *Awareness of Language Use*, had 60 references. A reference could, though, be a single word, phrase or even an episode of text running for several pages. Where I have referenced an episode in the thesis I have included lengthy quotes, including my own input into the conversation to give the reader an idea of the context of the episode. Where I have referenced to a word or phrase used by a participant I have included it in the main body of the text

without indentation, italics or grounding the word or phrase in the context of the interview in with it took place.

These ten codes acted as parents that I could assign any references that seemed remotely relevant. I then recoded each of these parent codes into a number of children and grandchildren as follows:

***Making Things*** led to three children: *Making Instruments, Bands and Music; Making Live Music; Making Recorded Music.*

***The Idea of Work*** led to eight children with a total of eight grandchildren: *A Description of What They Do* (led to *A Description of Work; Hard Work, Jobs and Chores; It Worked and It Did Not Work; This is How It Works*); *A Relationship They Have; Prospects for Employment; Their Job; A Description of Free Time; Separation of Work and Free Time; Links Between Work and Free Time* (led to *Crossovers; Description of What They Do; Employment in Music; Separation*); and, finally, *Something They Do.*

***Profits and Rewards*** led to five children: *The Importance of Aesthetic Inspiration; It's Just a Hobby That Fills Time; The Importance of Being Involved in Music; The Importance of Making Something*; and, finally, *The Importance of Popularity and Sales.*

***Business and Professionalism*** led to the six children codes: *Descriptions of Accounting; Attitudes towards Competitiveness; The Importance of Contacts and*

*Networking; The Role of Marketing and Market Research; A Description of Operational Concerns and Administration* and, finally, *Ideas of Professionalism*.

***Insides and Outsides*** led to three children with a total of five grandchildren: *Image of the Inside* (led to *A Description of Any Industry; A Description of Music Consumers; Description of the Music Industry*); *Image of the Outside* (led to two grandchildren: *Geographic Explanation; The Name of the Outside*); and, finally, *Description of the Relationship between the Inside and Outside*.

***Community*** led to five children with a total of four grandchildren: *The Role of Family and Friends; Constructing Identity Through Music; The Importance of Relationships; Limits to Support; Ways that Community Helps* (this led to four grandchildren: *Assistance; Information; Inspiration; Interest*).

***Ownership and Identity*** led to four children: *The Role of Community; Concepts of Ownership; The Importance of Control; Projects of the Self and Identity Construction*.

***Consumption*** led to two children with a total of two grandchildren: *Description of Their Own Consumption; Description of Other People's Consumption* (this code then led to two grandchildren: *Insider's Consumption; Outsider's Consumption*).

***Art and Aesthetics*** led to no children

***Awareness of Language Use*** led to no children.

In total, then, I coded the data into 65 codes (ten parent codes, thirty-six children and nineteen grandchildren). The parent codes represented, in broad terms, key themes or topics that were covered in the interviews, the children, in turn, represented various trends within these themes and the grandchildren represented further topics and trends. To understand how the parent, children and grandchildren codes related to each other let us look at the parent code *Consumption*. Having coded all instances where interviewees discussed consumption it was clear that they spoke about consumption as something they did and as something other people did. This led to the two children under consumption: *Description of Their Own Consumption* and *Description of Other People's Consumption*. Under the latter, two other trends emerged. When interviewees spoke about the way other people consume they noted a distinction between other people who are inside their art world and other people who are not. This led, consequently, to the two grandchildren under *Description of Other People's Consumption: Insider's Consumption* and *Outsider's Consumption*.

In terms of the importance of these topics and trends in the interviews that I conducted it is clear from the table below, which shows the distribution of codes and references for each participant, that a majority of participants made references to a majority of topics and trends:

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Grand children</b>	<b>Total codes</b>	<b>References</b>
Ady	10	27	15	52	526
Alan	10	20	9	39	226
Anton	9	27	11	47	307
Carl	10	28	14	52	321
Chris S.	10	28	14	52	501

Chris T.	10	28	12	50	289
Dave C.	6	14	8	28	148
Dave D.	9	22	13	44	257
Euan	9	15	9	33	101
Jay	8	27	11	46	290
Joe	10	27	10	47	359
Kirsty	9	20	8	37	269
Matt	10	27	16	53	427
Neil	10	20	8	38	197
Rob	10	27	13	50	227
Sophie	9	17	7	33	178
Tom	10	24	7	41	242
Will	6	15	8	27	189

*Table 2. Distribution of codes among participants*

This table shows that, as a sample of discourse, my research interviews provide a rich source of data and that the codes that emerged from this data were spread quite evenly across all the research interviews I conducted. From these codes a number of interesting themes emerged some of which relate to Becker's art world framework such as the importance of community in producing music. Other codes seem closely linked to the research theme set out in the Introduction – specifically they relate to ideas of work such as the idea of professionalism and business and notions of freedom.

These codes, though, are not interpretative repertoires. Rather they allowed me to organise and explore the repertoires that were used across each of the significant aspects of creative production that emerged in my interviews. In this regard I have interpreted these codes into two series of dichotomous interpretative repertoires that both structure the language use of the creative producers that I interviewed and, interestingly, reflect the ideas concerning the production of culture developed by

Peterson (1976), Becker (1982) and Bourdieu (1983a) that I discussed in the previous chapter.

The first dichotomy of repertoires reflects the differences between materialist and idealist ways of understanding culture set out by Peterson (1976). It concerns the construction of distinct art worlds as either a reflection of a material aspect such as the contractual status of a music producer or a relational judgement whereby an outside art world is created by constructing an inside (Becker, 1963). These repertoires are the focus of the following *Activities* section of the thesis. In this part I focus on the boundaries that creative producers draw around their art world and the ways in which they make music in their art world. The second dichotomy concerns discussions of work and creativity. It reflects Becker's (1982) ideas concerning the relationships between professional art worlds and outsider art worlds and Bourdieu's (1983a) description of the fields of cultural production as being structured along economic and artistic lines as well as Finnegan (1989) description of these distinctions as continuums of possibility. This repertoire is reflected in two ways of representing work – one of which presents work as something good and the other as something bad. This is the focus of the *Relationships* section of the thesis.

Within each of these dichotomies I identify constitutive repertoires – made up of frequently used images, tropes and metaphors – that are used to contribute to each side of the dichotomy. In keeping with the potential for repertoires to stand in contradiction, to negate each other and themselves I show how these constitutive repertoires are used in particular contexts within each of the two series of dichotomous repertoires rather

than standing in a fixed hierarchy. In order to relate these to the codes that my data analysis generated the below table shows where each code is discussed in the thesis.

<b>Code</b>	<b>Analysed in chapter</b>
Making Things	5, 6
The Idea of Work	4, 7, 8
Profits and Rewards	4, 7, 8
Business and Professionalism	4, 8
Insides and Outsides	4
Community	4, 5, 6
Ownership and Identity	4, 5, 6, 8
Consumption	7
Art and Aesthetics	4, 7
Awareness of Language Use	9

*Table 1. Discussion of Codes*

These repertoires are, then, my own constructions and much of the thesis can be seen as an attempt to both set out these repertoires and offer supporting evidence to show their validity. In this sense I have shown instances where interviewees draw on these repertoires overtly as well as showing how these repertoires work implicitly in much of their language use. But these repertoires are also supported by current research into the production of music and also by images in popular culture itself (Rhodes and Westwood, 2008; Parker, 2006). So throughout the thesis I attempt to locate these repertoires not only in the speech gathered through my interviews but also the evidence gathered through my field research as a participant observer, the wider academic literature and popular culture references. This bricolage style allows me to emphasise the inter-textuality of the discourse that I analyse and is supported by the findings of Negus (1999), Joyce (2006) and Becker, Faulkner and Kirchenblatt-Gimblett (2006)

who tell us that creative people are not only aware of academic theory and terminology but use these theories and terminologies – often mediated through popular culture – when explaining what they do.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have explored the methodological issues at work behind Becker's art world framework and his sociological perspective more generally. I have linked Becker's ideas to contemporary trends in discourse analysis and social psychology. I have also set out the practicalities of my study. I used two qualitative ethnographic methods to gather my data: participant observations and semi-structured interviews. I analysed the data that I captured during my research interviews for patterns in language use focusing on the level of interpretative repertoires. Following grounded theory and with the assistance of computer software I allowed the repertoires to emerge from my data. In the process the ambiguity of the concept of work and creativity emerged as a key issue not only in terms of the discourses that the creative producers I interviewed spoke about but also in terms of structuring their activities. Even though some interviewees did not want to think in terms of their activities as work, the problem of defining their activities in relation to some definition of work, of orienting themselves to a concept of work, was a key material and discursive problem that all of them had to deal with. Accordingly in the remainder of the thesis I will focus on exploring this issue and offer supporting evidence to illustrate the role that the interpretative repertoires I have highlighted play in the production of music.

## Activities

#### **4. Defining the art world: the two music industries**

As we have seen the art world framework helps us to research the production of cultural texts. But an art world is not an exact replica of the realities of cultural production. It is something we construct in the course of our analyses. Indeed the first step in analysing a site of cultural production through the art world framework is to mark out some tentative boundaries of the art world that we want to study – to specify what makes it unique from other art worlds (Becker, 1982). But while these barriers may seem artificial, distinguishing between art worlds is something we routinely do when we produce and consume art (Joyce, 2006; Becker, Faulkner and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 2006). We compare art house cinema to Hollywood productions, serious literature to trashy pulps or conceptual high art to IKEA prints. Indeed the whole notion of an avant-garde rests on such distinctions (Frith, 1996). In the context of music we compare major and minor record labels, signed musicians and unsigned ones, professionals and amateurs (Strachan, 2007; Azerrad, 2001; Lee, 1995; Finnegan, 1989). When we make such distinctions – based not just in terms of taste or style but in terms of how art is made and consumed – whether we know it or not, we are distinguishing between art worlds.

The art world framework, in other words, is used by people who make and consume art to structure their own activities. In this regard Negus observes that it is not unusual for cultural producers to use academic constructs in their day-to-day activities. He tells us that people working in the music industries ‘draw upon ideas from cultural studies, sociology, musicology, linguistics, semiotics (often mediated through journalism or

courses in media and cultural studies) when speaking about artists, recordings, videos and aspects of production and distribution' (1999: 12). 'These are not', Negus concludes, 'simply "academic" theories, but explanations that are also offered by people working within music and media companies' (1999: 33). Similarly, as we will see in this chapter, the people I have interviewed often speak about their 'world' as something distinct from other cultures of production. They explain that their activities, as Finnegan puts it, are 'neither formless nor, as we might suppose, just the product of individual endeavour' but are 'structured according to a series of cultural conventions and organised practices' (1989: 10). In particular we will see that their activities are structured as an unconventional *underground* world that is set against a professional *mainstream* world. This division is based on a notion of independence between these worlds that allows creative producers to represent their activities as authentic, creative and untouched by the negative images of extrinsically motivated work, which, as we have seen, forms an essential part in a creative producer's identity (Rhodes and Westwood, 2008; Strachan, 2007; Peterson, 1997).

There are many criteria that the creative producers I interviewed people use to represent this distinction. It is based on the geographic location of the worlds (Cluley, 2009a; Arvidsson, 2008; Straw, 2005; Drake, 2003) and the type of music that they produce (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007; Negus, 1999; Frith, 1996; Finnegan, 1989). So in the first section of the chapter I explore how they construct the mainstream in greater detail. I show how the creative producers I interviewed picture the mainstream as a fully integrated art world and, in the process, open a space for a range of unconventional worlds. In the second section of the chapter I explore what the academic literature has had to say about these spaces of unconventional music

production and allow my participants to define the distinguishing features of their own particular art world. To do this I introduce two interpretative repertoires that interviewees use to justify the separation of the mainstream and the underground art worlds. I show how these repertoires reflect the materialist and idealist approaches to the production of cultural texts described by Peterson (1976). Then in the final section of the chapter I show how these repertoires help to define the particular underground world that I will explore in further detail in the rest of this thesis.

### **The mainstream**

Even though many people and organisations are involved in the production of music when people talk about the music industry in policy, in research and in everyday life they are often referring to a small part of the music industry – what Peterson and Berger (1975) describe as an oligarchy of multinational corporations. In industry research, for instance, we hear statements such as: ‘There have always been a few large record companies that dominated the production and distribution of records’ (Bernstein, Sekine and Weissman 2007: 7) and ‘The music industry is increasingly globalised and concentrated, currently dominated by five multinational companies based in a few of the world’s capital cities – Tokyo, LA, New York and London’ (Brown, O’Connor and Cohen, 2000: 438). When we talk about the music industry, then, we often really mean a particular art world that exists around large-scale, multinational corporate organisations and ignore many other music industries (Frith, 2000; Negus, 1999). Indeed ‘most academic studies of the popular music industries ... privilege the recording industry as being the music industry’ (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007: 312). We have not, Williamson and Cloonan point out, seen ‘a detailed academic analysis of

live music as an industry, artist management, of music publishing and so on' (2007: 313).

In this regard writers including Bishop (2005), Harker (1997) and Williamson and Cloonan (2007: 305-6) argue that this art world 'is an inappropriate model for understanding and analysing the economics and politics surrounding music'. Williamson and Cloonan in particular highlight a number of distortions to our understanding of the production of music that are caused by thinking that an art world dominated by a small number of large, corporate music producers accounts for all music production. They claim that it 'over-privileges ... a particular business structure based on multinational operations' (2007: 315) by presenting the issues faced by corporate record companies as the key 'issues affecting the music industry as a whole' (2007: 308). Harker is also critical of our ability to see past this art world. He contends:

'Serious students of popular music and song are rightly curious about the workings of the music business; but when we try to find out about how the industry works, even in terms of economics, we find that virtually all the empirical data comes from internal sources, from the International Federation of Phonographic Industries (IFPI), or from affiliates such as the British Phonographic Industries (BPI) and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). In other words, we get only those statistics and "facts" which this most secretive of industries wishes us to have; so we will look in vain for detailed production figures, or for sales of individual recordings (unless they are outstandingly successful), or for hard numbers relating to what IFPI called

“piracy” (let alone the information on which the published numbers and projections are based)’ (1997: 45).

Indeed Negus explains that ‘major entertainment companies rarely expose their internal problems to public scrutiny’ because they fear that their ‘share prices will fall, or that investors will get cold feet’ (1997: 84). ‘Only occasionally’, Negus confirms, ‘do we catch glimpses of things going wrong or not working quite as smoothly as the company’s management and directors would like’ (1997: 84). Usually we are offered data that ‘is not only highly mediated, but often patchy, intermittent or even contradictory’ (Harker, 1997: 45) and full of ‘suspiciously round numbers’ tailored to impress institutional investors (Harker, 1997: 52). For Harker, as for Williamson and Cloonan, then, a particular ‘music business common sense’ is written into this data and has come to exercise ‘an osmotic influence on the critical awareness of academics’ (1997: 47). He tells us that thanks to the biases in the data ‘huge conglomerates, implicitly, are assumed to be an immobile fact of life, which may or may not be admired, but which have to be taken as a critical and a political given’ (1997: 84). Harker explains: ‘even a serious-minded and generally thoughtful writer can be seduced by industry rhetoric, and by the ideology of the alleged inevitability of capitalist social relations which binds it together’ (1997: 47).

But in spite of these problems with the notion of a single music industry even critics like Williamson and Cloonan (2007) and Harker (1997) acknowledge that it is important because it is used by many academics, shareholders, politicians, musicians, industry personnel and consumers to structure their activities. It is, in short, a model that does something. For instance when Cohen (1991a) followed rock musicians in

Liverpool she found that they were obsessed by the idea of signing a recording contract with a large record company and, as a result, they would structure their activities towards achieving this goal. Cohen tells us that the glittering prize of fame and fortune distract musicians from the frustrations and failures involved in their music making activities. She explains: ‘The struggle and hardship at the grass roots of the record industry were overshadowed by huge profits and glamour at the top which enticed thousands of bands and conditioned much of their music-making activities’ (1991a: 103). Indeed Cohen describes how the need to make it ‘affected and preoccupied’ all of the rock musicians she spoke to (1991a: 103). One musician in particular told her: ‘I don’t want to die before I get signed’ (1991a: 104). Similarly Levitt and Dubner observe that particular images of success inspire ‘swarms of bright young people’ to ‘throw themselves at grunt jobs that pay poorly and demand unstinting devotion’ in the hope that one day they will become superstars (2005: 96).

So even though the notion of a single music industry made up exclusively of multinational record companies is an “inappropriate model” for understanding the production of music any account of the production of music must take account of this model precisely because it plays an important role in the production of music. It provides a particular image of success and a particular understanding of where music is made that, as we will see, provides a marker of difference for other art worlds (Strachan, 2007; Stratton, 1983; 1982). It provides an image of a fully integrated professional art world. In this regard, there are some general characteristics that have been attributed to this inside music industry – which I will call the mainstream music industry – in academic literature, popular representations (Strachan, 2007; Harron, 1988) and, as we will see, among the people I have interviewed. Indeed from here on

in I will include interview quotations alongside evidence from academic researchers and popular representations of the music industries to explore the characteristics that are attributed to the mainstream in greater detail.

### *Images of the Mainstream*

First the mainstream music industry is often imagined to be conservative offering homogeneous products made through standardised production techniques (Wheeldon, 2009; Groce and Cooper, 1990; Denisoff and Bridges, 1982; Peterson and Berger, 1975). To overcome market uncertainties mainstream music corporations produce a large range of products but expect only a small proportion of these products to achieve success (Anderson, 2005; Rosen, 1981). In this regard industry folklore tells us that a mere one out of every twenty records makes a profit (Negus, 1999; Haring, 1996). As a consequence when mainstream companies stumble on to something popular they focus on it at the expense of other musicians, styles and genres (Haring, 2005). Haring summarises the strategy: ‘record companies can’t afford to nurture – they must have hits’ (2005: 96). As a result of this strategy, though, the mainstream music industry is also pictured as unnecessarily entrepreneurial and wasteful (Peterson and Berger, 1971). On this point Alan, a studio owner I interviewed, describes the unique decadence he attributes to the mainstream music industry: ‘the fastest I’ve ever recorded anything is I’ve recorded three songs completed and mixed in two hours. There’s an example I read of the opposite, I think it was in *Sound on Sound*, probably, that when they were recording the Manic Street Preachers album they spent the first three days deciding which room to record the drums in!’.

Second the mainstream music industry is often characterised as an exploitative industry (Banks, 2007). Tremlett (1991), for instance, charts the exploitation of successful musicians that was uncovered when several superstar musicians audited their record companies and management teams and found systematic accounting errors in their royalty payments while Haring quotes a music lawyer who tells him that the mainstream music industry is 'built on unpaid talent' (1996: 213). In this regard Bishop explains that exploitation is built into the very structure of the mainstream music industry. Large record companies, he tells us, have 'the power to have the best of both worlds as they fashion anaemic artist contracts to obtain low-cost content, then sell that content to music buyers at inflated retail prices in the market, which it controls' (2005: 445). As a result there are very few medium sized enterprises bridging the gaps between large and small music producers. According to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport the music industries are structured like an 'hourglass' (2006: 22). There are a small number of large firms and a large number of small firms but not very much in the 'missing middle' (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999: 12). Unsuccessful producers, as a result, get very little reward and often they get nothing at all (Cohen, 1991a). Record producer Steve Albini provides a fruity metaphor illustrating this aspect of the mainstream music industry in his essay 'The Problem with Music':

'Whenever I talk to a band who are about to sign with a major label, I always end up thinking of them in a particular context. I imagine a trench, about four feet wide and five feet deep, maybe sixty yards long, filled with runny, decaying shit. I imagine these people, some of them good friends, some of them barely acquaintances, at one end of this trench. I also imagine a faceless industry lackey at the other end holding a fountain pen and a contract waiting to be

signed. Nobody can see what's printed on the contract. It's too far away, and besides, the shit stench is making everybody's eyes water. The lackey shouts to everybody that the first one to swim the trench gets to sign the contract. Everybody dives in the trench and they struggle furiously to get to the other end. Two people arrive simultaneously and begin wrestling furiously, clawing each other and dunking each other under the shit. Eventually, one of them capitulates, and there's only one contestant left. He reaches for the pen, but the Lackey says "Actually, I think you need a little more development. Swim again, please. Backstroke". And he does of course'.

This sort of attitude is reflected in my research interviews. For instance Chris S., a designer, musician and live music promoter, explains that he did not apply for a position in a highly respected record company because 'it'd just mean more fucking struggle, like moving down to London and on a shit wage'. While Matt, who runs a record label himself and also promotes live music concerts, succinctly confirms that mainstream companies 'pay fucking peanuts'.

Third the mainstream music industry is thought to be organised on an industrial scale and as an industrial process. In this regard Negus (1999) explores the business practices of music corporations. He finds that like many other large organisations multinational record companies use strategic management tools and detailed management accounting techniques to tame uncertainty in their business environments. These tools mean that 'the ability to think like an accountant' is the most important factor contributing to success for a musician (Haring, 1996: 23). Accordingly the

mainstream music industry is also pictured to be bureaucratic and profit-oriented – a hit factory that treats music as a raw material. As Tremlett puts it:

‘The music industry is nothing more than that: an industry that makes money out of music, dealing and trading in this commodity with as much refinement as the second-hand car trade, or the knacker’s yard, knowing the price of its goods but seldom their intrinsic value’ (1990: 175).

This view of the mainstream was often expressed in the interviews I conducted for this research project. For example Joe, a musician who runs his own record label, draws on his experiences of working on the edges of the mainstream to confirm that it is an industrial machine. Joe was employed by a record distributor for five years, a record label for a year and a radio plugger for a year. He explains that from this position within the mainstream music industry he had ‘seen like the...what’s the word, the machinations. And it’s horrible. Honestly it is, it’s like proper chew ‘em spit ‘em walking on type, it’s really, it’s an industry. It is’. Echoing this sentiment Carl, a booking agent working for a small record label, explains: ‘It is quite disingenuous, I mean, the music industry as a whole can be like an industry, any sort of industry, you know, it’s, it’s you know, it’s very big and it’s competitive’.

As a result of being so bureaucratic the mainstream industry is also thought to be unresponsive to the latest trends (Peterson and Berger, 1975). Large corporations are often ‘defined as uncreative and bureaucratic, stifling the innovating energies of the “creative workers”’ (Garnham 2005: 25). So it is with large music companies. Record companies ‘take months to plan, construct, and record an album’ (Haring, 1996: 180).

Indeed Hesmondhalgh (1996) cautions against thinking of the record industry as a flexible, responsive and decentralized industry. While changes in the market structure of the record industry suggest that the largest producers have become more responsive organisations, Hesmondhalgh (2007) argues that they have simply outsourced the dirty work of producing a physical product by shifting their manufacturing operations to low-wage developing countries. This is a feature of the mainstream that Joe experienced when his old band was approached by a happening label:

The whole process took months and it really made us think after it that this wasn't for us. ... that totally burnt us on the idea of signing to someone cause it just took so long! When they first got in contact we were alright. But by the time they'd finished with us we were awful.

Finally the mainstream music industry is also imagined to be both international in scope and imperial in intent. In particular mainstream companies use copyright laws to export certain ways of working on music producers and certain ways of consuming music on music consumers throughout the world (Bishop, 2005). For example Power and Hallencreutz demonstrate that cultural and economic growth of the local music industries in Jamaica and Stockholm is dependent 'not only the quality of the creative milieux ... but also the links between the local production system and international circuits of capital, distribution, and effective property rights' (2002: 1833). Indeed, like any imperial power, the mainstream industry has redrawn the world map to overemphasise its importance (Bishop, 2005). Harker explores the annual International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) *World Music* reports, asking, 'what, precisely, IFPI's "world" looks like' (1997: 51). He finds that it is a world without

Luxembourg, a country continually omitted from IFPI data (1997: 52). A world where all that counts are transactions made by 'commodity shoppers moving in an orderly, even rhythmic fashion' (Harker, 1997: 60). The IFPI's world is one in which the ways people listen to music and the reasons why they listen to music are irrelevant. The IFPI, Harker observes, has 'little interest in what the punters do' with their music once they have bought it. In fact it is completely irrelevant whether people listen to music at all as long as they buy it in preferred formats from preferred distribution outlets that support international intellectual property rights (Harker, 1997: 58). The IFPI's world is, then, a very peculiar one and not necessarily one many people would recognise. It is, though, the world of the mainstream music industry.

The ability of this culture industry to make the world look a certain way was observed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) in their critical study of the enlightenment project and by Adorno (1982) in his critique of regressive listening. For Adorno and Horkheimer something fundamental about culture changes as soon as industrial organisations take over the production and reproduction of cultural texts. Cultural texts start to be mass produced like any other standardised consumer good. Their production requires huge capital investment and is, consequently, funded by large-scale industrial concerns linked to oil, finance and electronics firms. The result, Adorno and Horkheimer tell us, is that culture is made to work for these industrial concerns like any other product. We might think it is different because it is artistic and expressive but it is not different to any other consumer good. It is exploited for profit.

What makes cultural texts different, for Adorno and Horkheimer, is that they shape how we look at our world. As Adorno and Horkheimer explain the 'whole world is made to

pass through the filter of the culture industry' (1944: 126). The products of the culture industry, in other words, come to shape the way we look at our own lives. They encourage us to live our life as if it was a Hollywood film complete with its own soundtrack. As Adorno and Horkheimer put it: 'Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies' (1944: 126). What we want to listen to and what we are offered by the mainstream music industry are, then, encouraged to look very similar to each other. Here Adorno argues that the music consumer needs and demands 'what has been palmed off on them' (1982: 48).

There are, then, two ways to interpret this characterisation of the mainstream. We can view it as an inappropriate model promoted by a dominant art world (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007). But we can also see it as an important model that helps to structure the ways people make, analyse and consume music both within and outside of large music corporations (Strachan, 2007; Stratton, 1982, 1983). This means that as well as question this inappropriate model for studying the production of music we must also recognise that the idea of the mainstream has real effects on the way people structure the production and consumption of music. Indeed the mainstream music industry may be much maligned but many people want to be part of it and, as we shall see, even those who do not want to be part of it use it to structure their activities (Cohen, 1991a). In addition we must also accept that despite being conservative and wasteful, despite exploiting people and treating music as a commodity, the mainstream has given us some great music (Harron, 1988). It has always been willing to give people what they want (Negus, 1992). Race, sex and class issues have been swept under the carpet when there has been profit at stake (Blecha, 2004; Cloonan and Garofalo, 2003; Dowd and Blyler, 2002; Harron, 1988).

### **Other music industries**

There are, as I observed at the very start of this thesis, people who make music outside of large-scale, multinational record companies (Cohen, 1991a; Finnegan, 1989; Bennett, 1980). Many of them are hidden by the politically and economically loaded presentation of the music industry as a single industry that has dominated academic research (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007). They are left out of industry figures and trade reports. Their production does not count. As Finnegan puts it:

‘It is easy to underestimate these grass-roots musical activities given the accepted emphasis in academic and political circles on great musical masterpieces, professional music, or famed national achievement. But for the great majority of people it is the local amateur scene that forms the setting for their active musical experiences’ (1989: xii).

In other words there is precisely the same sampling error in the investigation of the production of music that Becker (1986) observes in much social science research. By assuming ‘that music-making is the monopoly of full-time specialists’ (Finnegan, 1989: 9) working in the mainstream we ignore the failures that have not been caught (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007). As Negus puts it, the ‘experiences of these potential starts of tomorrow’ go ‘largely unrecorded, unless they are successful in which case their story is retrospectively accommodated to the ascending take of struggles, discovery and success found in popular biographies’ (1992: 41).

In contrast, though, when we do look beyond the mainstream industry at ‘what people actually do on the ground’ we see a huge amount of industry that goes on outside of the mainstream (Finnegan, 1989: 7). Finnegan provides a neat summary of this range of unconventional music making from her study of musicians in Milton Keynes:

‘The local pubs and clubs and the groups who played there can be seen as the counterpart, at the local and amateur level, of the professionals who have “made it” and play in public entertainment venues in the national context. But local pub and club playing is more than just a pale reflection of those well-known groups which to some scholars and admirers have seemed more “real” because picked out by the limelight of the national mass media. Bands in the local pubs and social clubs have an essential role in feeding the national scene, both directly in the groups that come up through local circuits, and indirectly or enhanced at the local level. These local venues, furthermore, and the musical performances that take place there, have their own reality too: not just the foundation for or reflection of commercially successful groups, but a locally expressed and tangible manifestation of music in its own right’ (1989: 235).

So while these other music industries – these other art worlds – are distinct from the mainstream they are not totally separate from it (Lena and Peterson, 2008). Structurally the mainstream and other music worlds are related (Power and Hallencreutz, 2002). The most obvious manifestation of this relationship is that unconventional worlds offer ‘a place to be bad’ (Bennett, 1980: 97) where musicians can ‘hone and develop their craft’ (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2007b: 71) before moving on to achieve national and international fame and fortune (Power and Hallencreutz, 2002;

Negus 1999). Haring summarises this relationship in the context of major and minor record labels:

‘The thinking goes like this: The majors really can’t concentrate on the type of new, innovative music that will likely sell in small amount during the first years of existence. Hence, independent labels will spring up to take advantage of the gap in the market, in turn creating new creative hotbeds that will grow and thrive’ (1996: 182).

While this model is, itself, open to criticism – Negus (1999: 114), for instance, describes ‘the possibility of building an audience through the “grass roots”’ as ‘an idea that is spoken of but rarely put into practice’ – it reflects the webs (Negus, 1992) and chains (Cluley, 2009a) that link all music producers (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2007b). Indeed we have already seen the the image of the mainstream is important in defining the idea of success both inside and outside of the mainstream. On this point Cohen confirms that ‘Whether bands conformed to commercial categories and labels or reacted against them, they still used them as a reference point and were generally unable to seclude their music-making from commercial considerations’ (1991a: 181). The mainstream, then, forces all music producers to take sides. If they set themselves against it and the commercial considerations dominant in it they must justify this position. In this regard Strachan finds that the mainstream plays precisely this role among support personnel working in what he calls micro-record labels. They use the mainstream in order to justify their more authentic production. Strachan explains:

'In order to position themselves against the “music industry” and thus against the inherently insidious nature of “business”, micro-label owners commonly use a number of strategies which serve to legitimate their activities in differing ways. They may discuss their activities as being grounded within a particular more of “political” standpoint. Small-scale industrial production is reconceptualised as being part of a collective project, grounded within a network that eschews the primary aims and practices of the recording industry. Third, the small-scale cultural producer is often recast primarily as a fan whose primary rewards are gained from a sense of personal satisfaction and engagement' (2007: 250).

We will explore many of these aspects of the production of music outside of the mainstream later. For now, though, we can simply recognise that the people I interviewed also use a notion of the mainstream as a way to define the authenticity of their own activities and to define their underground art world. They speak in terms of ‘our world’ as ‘an independent music world’ that is ‘different from everyone else’ but they use the characteristics of the mainstream described above to mark this distinction. It is, for example, by describing the mainstream industry as multinational that a space for difference opens up for local producers. Likewise by describing the mainstream as large-scale and bureaucratic another space for difference opens up.

But these distinctions, while necessary in creating an image of authentic production, are not structural. Rather the distinction of the mainstream from other music worlds constructs a separation much like the ‘self-segregation’ that we saw cats perform in the *Method* chapter (Becker, 1963: 100). This becomes clear when we look at how the

people I interviewed describe the distinction between their art world and the mainstream. Indeed below we will see how they draw on the materialist and idealist approaches to culture described by Peterson (1976) as the basis for two repertoires that allow them to present their production as authentic creativity and not extrinsically motivated work. I call these repertoires *absolute independence* and *relational independence*.

### *Absolute Independence*

The absolute justification for the separation of an unconventional world from the mainstream is based on the idea that there is a clear and undeniable distinction between the two worlds supported by a material distinction between them (Finnegan, 1989). The primary feature of this repertoire addresses ownership. An unconventional world is different because it is not tangled in the contractual obligations and professional administration provided by non-artistic support personnel with their own sets of values typical of the mainstream. Hesmondhalgh tells us that this view ‘emerged from a hard-headed network of post-punk companies’ who were interested in escaping the drudgery of bureaucratic, clerical and industrial work during the late 1970s and early 1980s (1998: 35). These producers wanted to work with their friends and promote a particular set of political beliefs rather than maximise their profits. Their approach to making music, Hesmondhalgh observes, ‘made significant challenges to the commercial organization of cultural production favoured by the major record companies’ (1998: 35). Independence became not just a political motif but also ‘a protective shield, whereby corporate finance and corporate culture are kept at “arm’s length” distance’ (Hesmondhalgh, 1999: 44).

Behind this repertoire are a series of assumptions about the constraints of the industrial organisation and production of culture noted by Adorno and Horkheimer (1944). It does not present underground music worlds as being free from constraint but present the constraints as different. The constraints of the mainstream inhibit creativity, community and innovation whereas the constraints of the underground encourage them.

Absolute independence has, though, become a problematic repertoire for people in unconventional worlds – in part because many people working outside of the mainstream want to be part of it and also because there are a range of material problems for those who want to maintain an independent model of production (Hesmondhalgh, 1999; 1998; Lee, 1995; Harron, 1988). Hesmondhalgh (1999), for instance, argues that institutional barriers and a desire to expand their audience as far as possible led the independent producers he studied into closer and closer alliances with large corporate music producers until eventually the independent producers were sucked into the mainstream. Indeed where other independent producers have made a genuine impact they often find their successes co-opted by the very producers they oppose (Ross, 2005; Dowd, 2004; Lopes, 1992; Peterson and Berger, 1975). Negus confirms that ‘the absorption of independent labels has been a feature of the music business throughout the twentieth century and has become increasingly institutionalized through a series of joint ventures, production, licensing, marketing and distribution deals which have led to the blurring of “indie”/“major” organizational distinctions and belief systems’ (1999: 35). Accordingly Hesmondhalgh concludes that it has ‘proved impossible to reconcile being “outside” the music industry with producing a new mainstream’ (1999: 57).

Indeed it is telling that the people I interviewed agreed that independence often refers to a style of music produced by the mainstream music industry. When discussing a particular 'indie label', for example, Chris S. explains:

**Chris S.:** That's an independent label that's just operating the same as a major label. Like they're plugging things to people. They make videos. They do this and they do that and they have showcases and stuff and that's fine - like taking on the big boys at their own game. But that's not really independent. It's not independent of anything. It's with it, isn't it?

**RC:** Yeah.

**Chris S.:** It's against it but only against it economically.

As a result the repertoire of absolute independence based economic ownership is not a powerful description of the market structure of the music. Yet it is still an important repertoire that music producers outside of the mainstream use to structure their activities (Strachan, 2007; Stratton, 1983). Ironically, though, as we shall see below, the repertoire is often used by the creative producers that I interviewed to highlight the links between the mainstream and underground worlds rather than the separation between them and, as a consequence, it is used to open up a space for another way of supporting the authenticity of their activities by representing the independence of their art world from the mainstream.

### *Relational Independence*

Interviewees use the absolute repertoire as the basis of another more interactionist definition of independence in which independence is based on a subjective judgements rather than an objective criteria such as economic ownership (Peterson, 1997). We see, for instance, in the following lengthy extract how Matt, who runs a record label and organises live music events, explains a concept of independence that is more useful to him by contrasting it with the absolute repertoire:

**Matt:** The popular definition of independence is you're not a, that you're not one of the, you're separate, that you, well the, the, the main definition that gets knocked around is that you are fifty-one percent owned independently - no more than forty-nine percent owned by one of the major record labels. But it's not really a definition I like very much.

**RC:** What would you prefer?

**Matt:** Erm, I mean, I think if you an independent record label you're, I, you can, I mean that's the thing, you can never totally be outside of corporations, you know. I send my releases, or my releases get sent, to the NME, which is owned by a very big company, I probably couldn't even tell you down the line who exactly it is who owns it, other than I know it's a very big company. It could be fucking owned by someone completely heinous, probably is, erm, even things like some of the pressing plants are owned by major record labels. Er, I'm less and less bothered about stuff like that. I seem, like, ahh, it just doesn't seem relevant at all...

**RC:** Why is that something you were bothered about?

**Matt:** Probably more so cause at the start you try and define yourself, maybe you define yourself more as being against something, erm, against something which is the enemy in some way. And when you get old, you sort of try and define yourself in positive terms. So, ahh, yeah, it just, it all boils down to the way you treat people ... That's essentially it. You can get on with anybody if they're decent, if they're, that's it, that's it. I would say independent is if you're a decent person. (Laughter) ... There's a misconception that if a label is independent that it treats bands better and more honestly than a major record label. And I don't think that's true really. It comes down to whether the person who runs the record label is, erm, honest or if they're a lying bastard. But quite, there are plenty of record labels run by lying bastards, erm, that are independent. It doesn't make them any better than, you know, a big corporation in my book. So that, that's how, I want to run an honest record label.

So, for Matt, what makes his production 'separate' is not that it is not majority owned by a mainstream company. He acknowledges that 'you can never be totally outside of corporations' and goes on to say that this materialist definition, as a result, 'doesn't seem relevant'. He explains that he started out defining himself 'against something' but now he wants to define himself in 'positive terms'. Accordingly the concept of independence has moved on for Matt from an absolute distinction to a category that marks 'decent people'. It has become something that emerges from interacting with people. Many independent labels are 'run by lying bastards'. They are 'no better' than mainstream music corporations. Independence is, on this reading, is the result of social

interaction and not a function of economic status or contractual obligation. It is about how you do things and why you do things in comparison to what other people are doing. This means that what is independent to some people is not to others.

In this regard Anton, who manages a live music venue, explains that independence depends on context. He observes that within his hometown, where his company owns a number of successful venues, he is considered to be part of mainstream. But in the national and international contexts he thinks of himself as being unconventional, underground and independent:

Within Nottingham we're big guys. Globally we're up against Live Nation. Live Nation are the biggest, erm, live music company in the world. They are just about to merge with Ticket Master which is the biggest ticket company in the world. They own five, six arenas, thirty theatres in the UK. You know, sometimes people are talking, going to me, 'Sell out, corporate'. It's like fuck off! You know (Pause) or AEG own the O2 and various other theatres and Golden Voice owns the Coachella festival, Live Nation own all the big festivals now, including Glastonbury, you know. Mmm, it's you put it in a national or international context and we're still very much a small, you know, there's only a handful of people and we're still very much independent.

So for Anton the division between the underground and the mainstream is dependent on context. Following Bourdieu's (1983a) description of fields of cultural production structured as battlegrounds between economic and artistic criteria of success in which

hostilities intensify whenever either side appears to be gaining an advantage Anton highlights that this context can be related to material factors such as geographic location as well as the context of the field of cultural production. This is particularly clear when Anton reflects on the vicissitudes of the relationship between the mainstream and the underground in the following lengthy quote:

**Anton:** As soon as anything gets too corporate there's a new punk thing that comes along and upsets it.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** You know, whether it's punk itself in 1976, whether it's dance music in the 90s, where they came along and did their own thing.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** And set up their own raves in fields or whatever. And, you know, some of those people, there's always a constant follow of people will do that and then they'll get accepted into the mainstream, and maybe the mainstream is, if you like, the mainstream in the music industry has a tendency to move more and more corporate.

**RC:** Mmm.

**Anton:** And what will happen, and I think this will keep happening, it'll go more and more corporate until there's a gap. Some new thing, whether it's grime, whether it's dance, whether it's punk, whatever, pops up in there. That carries on and realises, actually, there's some of the things the music industry does that quite useful and then it, the people then migrate into the mainstream of the music industry and they pull it back more.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** Away from being just completely the O2 whatever ... And given the music business is, music industry tends to be, my kind of model of it, some of those people, they might be the CEOs now but they still know about independence and doing it themselves. ... And then the process repeats, you know. And, I think you've seen that from punk, in that the people who were punks are now CEOs. Erm, and the people now, the people who were organising the illegal raves are getting to be the CEOs and it just repeats you know. There may be some overall trends and, in general, that's how it happens.

In this extract Anton clearly describes a model of the music industry that he relies on to make sense of his experiences. He tells us that 'as soon as anything gets too corporate' a space opens for 'a new punk thing'. This new culture of production then affects the mainstream. It gets 'accepted into the mainstream' and becomes 'more and more corporate'. In turn this opens up space for a new unconventional world. This interpretation presents independence, then, not as something fixed that particular producers possess but as something dynamic.

Independence, accordingly, is not valued in itself but only gains value within a context – within a particular art world. It is about finding a way of doing things differently compared to an idea of the mainstream that has to be defined before the boundaries of an underground world can be set up (Strachan, 2007). Chris S., a musician, live music promoter and graphic designer, explains:

**Chris S.:** There's no badge in, like, there's no good thing to have in, there's no good sort of thing to, good badge to wear about being independent just for the sake of being on an independent. Labels, for example, we were talking about Transgressive, the record label for Foals. Well, that's an independent label that's just operating the same as a major label. Like they're plugging things to people. They make videos. They do this and they do that and they have showcases and stuff and that's fine – like taking on the big boys at their own game. But that's not really independent. It's not independent of anything. It's with it, isn't it? It's against it but only against it economically. It's only trying to, like, sell more records than a major label. It isn't trying to operate differently to it?

**RC:** Yeah, so trying to beat them at their own game.

**Chris S.:** Yeah, exactly. And that's fine. That's a different thing though. That's not, that's not independence because they're still dictated to by the way those things work. I wouldn't make a video for a band that I was in unless I thought there was something worthwhile visually putting across like for that video ... And that's not independent of anything. You might get a great independent film maker to make the video but that's just getting into a whole realm of bollocks. That's like 'he's really raw' (Laughter). (Pause) And you don't (Pause) it's not like your sort of voting into an independent music world you just are independent (Pause) just that's the only way that we could do things.

Much like the self-segregation that cats employ in Becker's (1963) study Chris S. goes on to explain that the relational nature of independence means that it is necessary for people to police the borders of their underground art world by identifying a producer's disposition and perspective of the field of cultural production through interacting with them rather than uncovering a material clue that reveals their intentions. As Chris S. explains:

**RC:** Do you value independence?

**Chris S.:** Yes. Yeah, yeah... yeah.

**RC:** And what do you mean by like what does independence mean to you cause it seems to me...

**Chris S.:** It's like the freedom thing isn't it? It's not necessarily to do with, like you say, I mean 'independent' it's like a catchall term for tastes that you might have. I mean surely doing this I'm not totally independent cause I'm not independent of the government yet cause I'm still fucking having to get benefits to pay my rent. But I'm independent of work and that's good. ... And in terms of making music I'm independent of constraints placed on me in terms of finances apart from the ones placed on me by myself. So I can't go and tour America cause I can't afford it but I'm not being told that I can't put something out cause it won't make enough money or, you know... luckily. So that's the independence thing. ... In it's nature it's against stuff ... But you feel, you sort of, I can't remember who it was who said to me "you meet people and you know whether or not they're a lifer or not, you know whether or not they're in it for the duration or whether or not it's

something they're involved in cause that's something young people do and it's cool". Like you play music cause it's cool. And in a while I'll get a proper job. And there's a load of people I know who are like that. And there's a load of people I know who aren't. And I just think that there's not that many people who are sort of in it for the long run. ... So it's kind of to do with, it's to do with that, isn't it? It's to do with the, it's independence from people using the thing that you really like, which is, basically, without getting too emotional about it, like the great power of good mu- good music viewed live. Like the great moment, of the great moments that can happen, using that as a way to cash in on things.

There is, then, a second repertoire at work in structuring the distinction between the mainstream and underground art worlds. While the absolute notion of independence was based on a materialist approach to culture the relational repertoire is based on interaction. It involves testing a producer's honesty and authenticity. That is, it involves testing their commitment to the magic of music. But because independence is described as a characteristic that others apply to a particular producer through their interactions the features of independence can be found anywhere. As Anton explains it is when the mainstream gets 'too corporate' that a space for another independent world opens up.

### **The underground**

There are some features of the mainstream industry that – while fluid themselves – are used to police the borders of the world. Of course producing a certain kind of music is

important here (Frith, 1996). But, as we have seen, of equal importance is producing music a certain way. And, as we will further see in this section, this certain way is only defined in comparison to particular features of the mainstream that are often used to mark something negative about the production of music that the underground avoids.

### *London calling*

First among the various factors that help identify whether someone is part of the underground art world that I studied is a subtle relationship with London. There is a suggestion that in London things are much easier even for independent producers. As a sprawling metropolis it has unique economies of scale for music producers. Clare, who organises live music concerts in London, explains: ‘in London there’s always, usually always an audience for what we want to do but as you go out of London it becomes much, much more precarious putting on shows really is a massive gamble for people’.

There is also a feeling that people who make music in London are, somehow, less authentic than people elsewhere in the country because that is where the mainstream music industry is and where people who are attracted to it go. Moving to London is, in a sense, a physical move to the mainstream (Power and Hallencreutz, 2002). It is where you go to make it (Cohen, 1991a). So there is a suspicion that if you are in London you are not really independent – you are using independence to move on to something bigger. On this point Carl, a booking agent based in London, explains, ‘we’re not grassroots really. We’re based in London, which is always a negative in that respect’. The other side of this is that if you do not move to London, if you resist the pull of the

mainstream, your position in the underground is secure. As Jay, who runs a recording studio in Derby, explains the move to London marked a distinct career choice for him:

**Jay:** I've recorded several bands from London and they've all said to me, "You should come down here and do it, do what you're doing because you'd probably make quite a bit of money and you could also make probably a bit of a name for yourself".

**RC:** Yeah?

**Jay:** And, er, instantly, I've thought of that it makes me feel quite noxious. I don't, I, when I've dealt with bands that have been part of the industry and I've spent time in London with them dealing with industry people, because I have, run Mercury and I've kind of met all the guys from Sony.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Jay:** And I've met all these management guys and we've been out having beers and they're going, "Yeah man, we love your recordings, we're going to send you a band, we're going to send you Towers of London, you can record them".

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Jay:** And I've just come away thinking, "God, I just hate all these people". Honestly. Just the most un-genuine, shallow, fucked up, ridiculous people you could ever want to meet. You would not want to spend any time with them. They're just horrible.

**RC:** Mmmm.

**Jay:** Horrible people just trying to, they're just trying to make their own way so hard that nothing else really matters.

So London represents somewhere that the musicians and support personnel I interviewed both want to go to for the opportunities it offers but resist because it marks a move from one art world to another. Moving to London marks a physical movement towards the mainstream even for underground producers so that even though an underground producer might be more successful in economic terms in London they are less successful in artistic terms (Bourdieu, 1983a). This is not to say that people in London cannot be part of the underground – the borders around London are not, simply, geographic – but that creative producers who are located in London must rely on other aspects of mainstream to establish their outsider position.

*There is no success like failure*

The scope of production offers another way to define the underground – the smaller the scope of your activities, the better. Indeed the Department for Culture, Media and Sport reports that many creative producers operating in the music industries set up businesses “by accident”, as there is no intention of building intrinsic value in the business itself (2006: 34). However much like the relationship with London the scope of production is full of potential contradictions. Small-scale production can mean that the producers are not very good. They are small because the mechanisms which sort out the talented from those lacking talent have made a negative judgement about them and left them in the place where musicians are bad (Becker, 1982).

There are, though, many people who have never been rejected by the mainstream because they have never been seen by it. Christianen conceives the music industries as an iceberg. He explains that the mainstream is the visible ‘tip of the iceberg’ (1995: 56). Below this there is an unknown quantity of producers. The ‘artists signed by record companies’, Negus confirms, ‘are not in any straightforward way a reflection of the talent that is available’ (1999: 32). Indeed small-scale production can serve local demand that exists away from the mainstream (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2007b).

We can see this desire to stay small presented as a marker of difference and authenticity in this extract from my interview with Joe. He describes how he sees his record label, which he organises in his spare time with friends, as something that has limited ambition. He explains that he is, as a result, happy for the bands whose records he produces to move on to other ‘bigger labels’ if they feel that his label no longer matches their ambition:

**Joe:** When you’re playing with bands you get to know, to realise they’re not absolute arseholes, you realise they’re thinking the kind of thing you are. Often, often people have got more ambition than we have, just most of the bands we’ve done, far amount of bands we’ve done, have moved onto a bigger label.

**RC:** Yeah

**Joe:** So they’ve obviously got more ambition than us. But I quite like the idea that we’re doing that. It doesn’t really lose us anything if they

go on or they'll go on and completely fail but it doesn't matter if they've been able to do what they wanted to do and we've not held them back.

**RC:** Yeah

**Joe:** I don't want, I don't ever want to be on, sign a contract we want to do five albums.

**RC:** (Laughter) You're going nowhere!

**Joe:** Yeah, look at this, you're already on top of the world! What are you doing! Yeah so (Pause) as I've said a couple of times already, I think you can burn out quite easily if you're constantly chasing some unattainable dream cause often your bands not good enough.

**RC:** Yeah, yeah

**Joe:** Like let's face it often your band is rubbish!

**RC:** Yeah

**Joe:** But if you believe in it and want to do a record then do it! ... I think there is an ambition to doing it yourself. So you're not lacking ambition there's certain sort of stubbornness that I quite like.

Interestingly in this extract Joe emphasises the importance of interaction when judging success and failure. He explains that it is through 'playing with bands' that he gets to 'realise they're thinking the kind of thing you are'. In other words, by interacting with bands he gets to know whether they judge small-scale production as an authentic success or as a starting point to something bigger and better. This is particularly salient considering an earlier extract from my interview with Joe where he described his former position inside the machinations of mainstream music industry in London. Joe, then, had to rely on a different distinction than the *London Calling* element of the

relational repertoire. So we can see from this extract that a second way in which the underground is defined is through the scope of production. Small scale production, which some might judge as unsuccessful, is seen as successful in the underground.

### *Types of music and types of people*

Continuing this theme of interaction the underground world is presented as being different from the mainstream in terms of working practices that are informed by different values. Strachan concludes his analysis of employees of small-scale record labels in the UK by telling us: 'This enclosed world is distinguished not just in terms of channels of small-scale commerce and communication, but also by a perception that indie practitioners have a different motivation and mindset' (2007: 252). In this regard we saw earlier in an extract from my interview with Matt that it is honesty that he uses to mark the separation of the underground from the mainstream. Likewise other participants told me that they favour honesty over ambition, commitment over economic success and collaboration over competition. For example I asked Rob why he had not tried to build on the success he had had in scouting new bands in the past and devote more attention to the record label he runs in his spare time. He explains that attempting to build his record label as a business 'has flicked through my mind a few times'. But he pointed out that this would mean:

dealing with a lot of people that have got a very high opinion of themselves. And that's the only thing that stopped me really pushing it – cause I wouldn't want to work with those people cause they're not trustworthy. And I'm not saying that about specific people, just generally they're very snipey, nasty people.

Likewise Carl, who works as a booking agent and runs a record label in his spare time, offers us the following description of the type of people who succeed in the mainstream music industry: ‘I mean the people who are really, really successful, I think it’s safe to say are very, very ... well, I think the nicest thing I could probably say is they’re very driven!’. Here, then, we can see how an underground producer who is located in London can use other aspects of the mainstream in order to position themselves on the outside just as we saw Joe use the idea of small-scale production in the previous section. Carl might be in London but he is not someone driven to be ‘really, really successful’.

Conversely while London represents a symbolic rather than physical border of the underground that allows Jay, who owns a studio outside of Derby, to justify his position in the underground it also allows him the freedom to be ambitious and greedy but remain in the underground. He points out that the underground allows for greed and ambition – as long as it is contained within certain parameters:

**Jay:** So you have to make money, you know, and that’s a given. I think anyone who tries to run something like this and, erm, you know, there’s got to be an element of greed I think to be good...

**RC:** (Laughter) Yeah

**Jay:** ...you know, and survive. And you’ve got to want to make money and be a bit ambitious on whatever level your business is. You’ve got to.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Jay:** Otherwise you just won't last. But the music industry really is a massive group of people who, I don't know, kind of shift units and you know... basically major companies and, as the name suggests, it's an industry where they have a commodity to sell. And they've various ways of selling it and, but for us ... we're all completely outside of that but still exist doing stuff and have been for a long time.

Jay needs to be greedy and ambitious because he is running a business. This is, for other producers in the underground, justification for his inclusion in the mainstream. But Jay is still in the underground. He is able to make a distinction between his greed and ambition and that of the 'un-genuine, shallow, fucked up, ridiculous people' he has met in London, who are 'just trying to make their own way so hard that nothing else really matters'. Unlike them, Jay has a limit. That is why he is still working in Derby rather than moving to London. Jay explains:

I can't really see me becoming like one of those guys cause, like, the stuff I do is just too, like, grass roots and I'm not connected into the industry. And these guys are, they've gone down the route that we've described about moving to somewhere like London.

We can see, then, how a particular space of difference is constructed around the mainstream that is not related to market structure or contractual obligations but rather producing music in a certain way. We have also seen how the relational repertoire of independence allows different creative producers to draw on different aspects of the mainstream in order to create an underground that includes them. Accordingly

identifying whether someone is really part of the underground or merely passing through on their way to the mainstream is a key task for cultural producers in the underground I studied. On this point Chris S. explains that:

It's not a case of, you're not independent as a solitary person, you're, you're independent as a group of people who have decide to do something for a long period of time from the rest of the people that don't do it like that. And part of it's a process of like weeding out the people who don't do it like that.

In other interviews I saw evidence of how this process of 'weeding out' actually happens. As in Becker's (1963) analysis of cats and square it is a process of self-segregation enacted through language use. Two particularly illustrative examples of this come from conversations with Tom and Matt. When Tom, who organises live music events, discusses why he did not enjoy organising shows that involved 'big music business types', it was, he explains, because they 'may have well been speaking Venutian! It's just two completely different worlds'. In short he could not understand their interests or intentions. He could not understand their worldview because he belonged to a different speech community. Likewise during my interview with Matt, who also organises live music event and also runs his own small record label, I asked Matt how he judged success. He explains that it depends not just on the quality of the music that he produces but on whether he feels he has matched the expectations of the bands that he works with. Matt picks up clues regarding these expectations from the ways bands approach him, what they say they want to achieve and what they want from him. With some bands, Matt observes, 'it seems like they are on a different wavelength

to me'. Indeed Matt explains that he gets 'letters from bands saying they are looking to get signed and that's something that immediately, err, no I'm not, I'm immediately, it just completely turns me off, even if I was to like them I wouldn't probably'.

So we can begin to see how language works to help police the borders of the underground. The ways people talk are just as important as the things they talk about. They betray someone's disposition to artistic and economic success and betray their position in the field of cultural production. Moreover in the underground it is important that you talk the right way – demonstrating you are from the right 'world' as Tom puts it. In the mainstream, in contrast, it is more important that people are talking about you. Indeed Sophie, who works for a music licensing company in London and considers herself closer to the mainstream, points out the importance of 'word of mouth' in the mainstream music industry when she described the progression of her career. Sophie emphasises the importance of being talked about by a particular group of people rather than speaking a certain way. She explains: 'it's quite a fickle business in a way, in that it's literally all word of mouth'.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have shown that the very idea that we can divide the music industry in half helps to structure the activities of people producing music. The two industries that are produced by this division are not comparable to each other – they are, as Finnegan (1989) emphasises, unique. But between these seemingly unambiguous terms there are spaces of possibility that make these terms useful to people making music even though they are inappropriate for academics analysing the music industries. Moreover, these

worlds are not static or mutually exclusive. I have argued that two repertoires help people to position themselves against the mainstream music industry. In particular a relational repertoire of independence offers a fluid way for people to create and police the borders of the underground by setting it against them mainstream. If you live in the wrong place or work for the wrong company that might be enough to exclude you but it is more likely to be based on the way you approach music-making and, as we have seen, your commitment to the idea of independence.

This relational repertoire is, though, full of ambiguities. The idea of London, for instance, is something that attracts people and also repels them. So when people use one element to define their underground world they leave other elements to one side. Thus Jay can admit his greed but justify his position by comparing his greed to that of people in London. These tropes, which contribute to a particular instantiation of the relational repertoire among the creative producers I have interviewed, can, therefore, stand in contradictory positions to each other. Indeed we have already seen that repertoires are often contradictory.

The underground art world is, then, not just explainable just through the market structure but as an approach to producing music, to dealing with other people and as a particular view of and reaction to the mainstream. One way in which these relational boundaries are constructed and policed is through the use of language – in the same way that the cats that Becker's (1963) studied developed a vocabulary to manage their self-segregation. Indeed in the final section of this chapter we have seen how language works to weed out people who do not belong in the underground world. We have seen the importance of interactions between creative producers in defining an art world.

Having identified these boundaries of the underground art world in this chapter, in the next two chapters I will explore how production is organised within this underground world. In the next chapter I offer two case studies concerning live music and, in the final chapter in this part, I offer two case studies from recorded music.

## **5. What does the underground make? Live music**

We have seen that the art world framework focuses our attention on understanding the production of cultural texts through sets of activities and sets of relationships. In the last chapter I examined how creative producers who make music can position their activities within a specific field of cultural production by defining a relationship between the mainstream and the underground music industries. In this chapter I will investigate one set of activities that go on in this underground world. I will look in particular at how live music products are made by working through two case studies. The first examines the role of the promoter in the production of live music. We will see how the promoter operates in between musicians, venues and audience members. The second case study focuses on a music venue. We will see how a professional music venue can sit precariously between the mainstream and the underground. Throughout the chapter we will see how the two repertoires of independence that are used to define the underground world from the mainstream are used by people as they find creative and authentic ways to make live music. We will see, in short, how these repertoires are used to help people overcome problems and cope with successes – how they help people to make live music.

In this chapter, then, we will pick up the production of live music at a point when a band or musician has started to make what they consider to be good music and have turned to an ‘entrepreneur’ to help them make their music into a product – specifically a live music product (Bennett, 1980: 178). According to Finnegan there are three features that link all live music events. First there must be an audience ‘wider than the

performers themselves' (Finnegan, 1989: 143). Second the performances must be set apart from other activities 'in socially recognised ways' (Finnegan, 1989: 144). Finally the performances must be 'worked up to through a set of prior activities' (Finnegan, 1989: 144). Indeed both Finnegan (1989) and Cohen (1991a) outline a general framework for the organisation of live music. They tell us that a band member, booking agent or manager will contact either a venue or promoters concerning the availability of their acts. After selling an act to the venue or promoter they specify terms and fees for a performance. Ticket sales along with revenue generated from bars, amenities and merchandise stalls cover the costs of organising the event. Locally-based support acts are often packaged with star attractions to ensure a minimum level of ticket sales to their captive audience of friends, family members and local fans. Other attendees are attracted to events via word of mouth, posters and fliers, gig listings and press previews. This marks the standard process for producing live music. As we will see, in the underground creative producers often combine many of these roles (Cluley, 2009b).

### **Case study one: the promoter**

The promoter plays a key role in the live music production chain. Indeed Arvidsson asserts that promoters have replaced rock stars and DJs as the 'most influential characters' in the production of music (2008: 333). Promoters choose which bands will play at a venue on a certain night, ensure that the technical support is in place to facilitate a live performance and recruit the audience for the event. They work to engineer great moments that transcend the realities of making live music by producing live music as both an aesthetic product shaped by their artistic, musical and political

standards and a social product that allows individual promoters to attain a favourable position within their communities (Cluley, 2009b).

Promoters are, on occasion, employed by a specific venue or booking agency. Sometimes they represent a record label. In the underground, though, it is common for promoters to work separately from venues, agencies and labels even if these promoters also run labels and work for venues or booking agents. In this regard promoters usually assume a new name. This allows them to create a separate identity in the same way that musicians get ‘a mark of unity and shared purpose for both themselves and outsiders’ when they choose a band name (Finnegan, 1989: 265). Underground promoters interviewed for this study use names like: The Wolf Party, Damn You!, Chaos Chaos, Miles of Smiles, Remtek, Electrotec, Upset Rhythm, Vacuous Pop and Magic Teapot. These new identities are not discrete entities. Creative producers can promote under many different names and they can be involved, momentarily, in the production of gigs by any number of promoters. Indeed it is rare for promoters to organise shows completely on their own. As one promoter who I interviewed notes: ‘I totally wouldn’t know where to start putting on gigs on my own. It’s way too hard on your own’.

### ***Damn You!***

Damn You! was initially the name of a fanzine that Tom and Matt made when they lived in Colchester during the 1990s. Tom and Matt moved to Nottingham in 2000 and shared a house with Neil and Chris S. They began promoting shows together and took Damn You! as the name for their collective activities. Since 2000 Damn You! has

expanded to include ten people with new members recruited from friends, band mates, girlfriends and housemates of the original four members.

Damn You! currently includes males and females aged between twenty-five and thirty-five years old. No member of the group is employed within the mainstream music industry. Instead the employment background of the group ranges from bar and office jobs to full-time education and self-employment. Members of the group also play in several bands, run independent record labels and write fanzines. Perhaps the best introduction to Damn You! is provided by the group's own website:

‘Damn You! are a group of young (ish) people who promote music of a certain spirit in Nottingham. The idea is to put on music we like and to use a variety of different venues - pubs, bars, houses, community halls, practice rooms, warehouses. We pick a line up designed to make the evening enjoyable and try to keep the price as cheap as possible. How much you pay on the door is a reflection of how much money the band is asking for and how much our other costs are. If we fluke it and come away at the end of the night with some money (always at the behest of the band) then that cash is recycled back into Damn You! to pay for future stinkers, improve our p.a. or to buy us a shitload of cheap foreign booze’ (Damn You!, 2009).

In spite of this wilful amateurism since 2000 Damn You! has promoted over 175 shows. They even keep detailed records of their activities which they were kind enough to give me access to. They provided me with spreadsheets containing

information on 4,000 tickets they had sold for the 54 shows they had organised between 2005 and 2007.

### *Engineering great moments*

Members of the group are integrated in an international art world of booking agents, managers and bands who they see as friends and contemporaries. It is largely from this network of contacts that the members of Damn You! select bands to play the live music events they organise. Indeed many of these friends will directly ask members of Damn You! to organise a show for them. As Matt explains: 'there's pretty much a network of the same people who put on the bands'.

Once a booking agent or band has contacted a member of Damn You! the group must decide whether they want to book the band as a headline act on the dates offered to them. A headline act is the main attraction for a concert, they play last, receive preferential treatment and are listed first on press and advertising. Up to 2007 roughly 70% of Damn You!'s shows have been for American headlining acts compared with 20% for UK bands and 10% for bands from the rest of the world. The possible negative effects of this American dominance is a cause of some concern among the group. Tom, for instance, comments:

I think for American bands, England seems a bit of a cash cow. It's seen as somewhere where you go to make money, you don't have that good a time, you're going to Europe for the tour and England's just the cash machine before you go or when you come back.

Behind this explanation we see a further example of the geographic distinction of independence, as discussed in the last chapter. In this instance, though, it is not London but America that is the focus of attention (Frith, 2004; 1991). As we can see, Tom fears that these American bands are inauthentic. They appear to be insiders coming into the outside when it suits them to make more money.

The decision to book a headline act is based on three factors: aesthetics, demand and cost. First the group decides whether they want to work with a band. If they do they then estimate the level of local demand for an act based on the past popularity of the band, the state of the band's career and the level of press attention and advertising the band currently receives. They then judge how much money they are willing to pay the band to perform. This figure is known as a *guarantee* as it is a fixed cost guaranteed to the band irrespective of ticket sales. Guarantees paid by Damn You! between 2005 and 2007 ranged from £60 to £1,200 per headlining band. A guarantee is set in negotiation with the band or their booking agent. Even if the band and members of Damn You! are friends Damn You! will try to minimise the guarantee as this helps them to minimise their financial risk and offers them more freedom to organise shows in a way that will be most enjoyable for them and, they believe, most beneficial for bands. Similarly bands and booking agents will try to inflate the figure. Negotiations, though, are rarely competitive. They are not about one party winning or losing but about making the show happen. Indeed on occasion members of Damn You! are willing to risk large guarantees irrespective of the estimated level of demand because they are keen to work with a band or want to impress a booking agent.

The guarantees offered to bands have exposed Damn You! to the profit-hungry machinations of the mainstream music industry as we discussed in the previous chapter. The increased importance of live music as a source of revenue has led to increased demands for larger guarantees (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2007b). Tom explains:

Obviously there's this whole thing with, now the music industry as a whole has woken up to the fact that they're not going to make money off records anymore. They're going to make it off touring bands. And that's starting to filter down to the so-called underground ... bands are going to want more money, cause that's where they're making their money.

In this extract Tom draws on a notion of the mainstream music industry as something notably different to the underground but he also acknowledges the limitations of the underground as a space that is unconnected and unaffected by changes in the mainstream – for Tom it is a ‘so-called underground’. Indeed while bands in the mainstream want more money this is, according to Tom, reflected in bands demanding more money from the underground. The separation between these two worlds ultimately, then, highlights the links between them.

In addition an increasing number of bands are travelling without equipment in order to cut the costs of touring. Consequently a burden is placed on Damn You! to supply anything from drum kits to amps, guitars and even musicians. For example Thanksgiving, a solo performer that Damn You! promoted in 2005 and 2006, toured

Europe using only public transport, performing each show with a different backing band of local musicians and equipment. Thanksgiving explained to me at a Damn You! show that we played together: ‘You don’t need to take equipment, there’s drums kits and guitars everywhere!’. Indeed at this show I ended up drumming for Thanksgiving as well.

Finally before committing to organise a show the members of Damn You! discuss the location of the performance. The group operates independently of established music venues so they are dependent on the availability of a suitable venue and often have to pay a fee. This also means they have no claim on additional revenue generated at the show such as bar takings. In some cases this also means Damn You! has to provide equipment and a sound engineer at additional cost. However these costs have benefits. They provide the members of the group with the freedom to book a range of locations in accordance with their aesthetic desires such as tea rooms, church halls, a boat club and a community centre. Indeed for Damn You! the choice of location is very much an artistic decision. Members of the group consider practicalities such as the hire charge, ease of access, the audience capacity, the size of the stage, the equipment the venue provides, past relationships they have had with the venue and the guarantee they have promised the band or their booking agent. But behind each of these considerations is a desire to find unusual venues – that is, for finding spaces outside of the mainstream music industry represented by ‘popular local venues’. As this extract from my interview with Matt demonstrates the members of Damn You! prefer these unusual venues because they offer them something unconventional:

**RC:** Is there anything which is like a big constraint to you in what you're doing?

**Matt:** There are always constraints. Erm, so like with Damn You! it's like having places you want to do stuff, like actual nice places. I mean with Damn You!, especially, we really like doing stuff in odd places if we can or that un-non-conventional ... I was going to say unconventional ... but like the best gigs that I can think of, the ones that are most memorable, are ones that aren't in the same old venues. So it's sort of like finding those spaces and not killing them which is really difficult.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Matt:** And, erm, or approaching it that this is a one-off and not getting too attached to them. That's sort that's the hardest thing. So, it's just keeping making things seem fresh is quite hard when you ... at, erm, putting gigs on and part of the best way of making things fresh is doing things in a new place.

Yet while promoters like Damn You! might be in the words of Chris S. 'independent of shitty venues' this does not mean that they are in competition with those venues. This would just make them economically independent from them not authentically independent. Indeed Chris S. describes his desire to prove that a even 'shitty venue' can host a great show – as long as the show is organised in the right way:

**Chris S.:** I kind of like the idea of stepping up a little bit and maybe going back to using some of those bigger venues.

**RC:** Yeah?

**Chris S.:** Because I quite like the idea that the ultimate thing that we could do with Damn You! would be to make [an established music venue in Nottingham], a pleasant gig environment.

**RC:** Yeah?

**Chris S.:** I think it'd be amazing to say that we do things so good that this is a good gig in this place, you know. It'd be really amazing I think but that's not really shared by anybody else so ... we'd actually be helping them, bring money in for them and stuff. We wouldn't, we'd be trying to show that the way that we do things is better and, not that it really matters, not that that kind of competition really matters.

Here we see Chris S. make a distinction between the underground and mainstream in terms of size but he acknowledges that even in 'bigger venues' it is possible to create a 'pleasant gig environment'. This depends on arranging a show in 'the way' Damn You! do, which Chris S. contests, 'is better' even though 'that kind of competition' with the mainstream does not 'really' matter. But Chris S. also points out that his plans to help a mainstream venue by bringing 'money in for them' is 'not really shared by anybody else' in the group. Other members of Damn You! prefer to stay away from these venues altogether. They want to remain independent by not interacting with them.

After the members of Damn You! agree on these matters they can calculate the total costs for a show. The group divides the estimated level of demand into this cost to provide the ticket price for the show. This price is based on a break-even point. Damn

You! does not seek to maximise profit when setting the ticket price. Although on occasion a band or booking agent will force a specific ticket price on them. The table below summarises the costs accrued by Damn You! between 2005-2007.

	<b>Total paid to bands (£)</b>	<b>Room hire paid (£)</b>	<b>PA hire paid (£)</b>	<b>Other costs (£)</b>	<b>Total costs (£)</b>	<b>Average cost per show (£)</b>
2005	4,050	845	330	411	5,156	737
2006	8,587	550	1,225	815	11,045	425
2007	7,658	455	1,020	739	9,590	480

*Table 1. Damn You!'s costs (2005-2007)*

One reason why they try to keep ticket prices low is that they have found that changing the prices is interpreted by their audiences as a step away from the underground and into the mainstream in accordance with the criterion discussed in the previous chapter.

Tom explains:

The ticket price, you know, we're not kind of taking any money for ourselves but still, bands are asking for bigger guarantees. This is a developing bugbear. Bands are asking for bigger guarantees and they're increasingly touring without equipment. So they'll ask kind of to use gear and ask for a lot of money. So you have to think, well their touring costs are surely going down cause they're not renting gear! So why are the guarantees going up? And I think that's a problem with England and again I think for American bands, England seems a bit of a cash cow. But, erm, yeah money is kind of increasingly becoming an issue, I think. Just, I think we are having to put prices up. And people think we're, people complain! It's making a rod for your own back. If you try and

keep prices cheap when everything else is going up, then if you add a pound on to ... you know a popular local venue ... now routinely charges like fifteen, sixteen quid for a gig! And if we put the prices up from like six quid to seven quid people kick up a stink you know because it's like, 'You've always been so cheap before' – well yeah that because it was kind of a false low.

In this extract we can see Tom performing exactly the kind of separation that highlights links between the mainstream and underground as we discussed in the previous chapter. In this instance he is on the receiving end of other people's judgements about his authenticity. He points out that members of Damn You! 'are not taking any money' for themselves but they are still being forced to increase the price of tickets by mainstream bands, particularly American ones, who see England as 'a bit of a cash cow'. In this regard it is the relational aspect of independence that is causing problems. Having to increase ticket prices when their audiences are used to them charging on a 'kind of false low' means that members of the group give the appearance of seeking to maximise their profits when this is not the case.

The final steps of the before the show process involve approaching suitable support acts. Sometimes the headlining band or booking agent will specify the support bands but more regularly Damn You! are free to choose. Damn You! prefers to book one local band and one band from elsewhere in the UK. The opportunity to play a show with the headline act is taken as a form of payment for both support acts. For this reason support acts receive inferior guarantees in comparison to headline acts. The

table below summarises the guarantees paid to bands by Damn You! between 2005-2007.

	<b>Total paid to headline acts (£)</b>	<b>Min (£)</b>	<b>Max (£)</b>	<b>Total profit shared with headline acts (£)</b>	<b>Total paid to support bands (£)</b>	<b>Min (£)</b>	<b>Max (£)</b>
2005	3,165	130	900	480	405	15	60
2006	6,914	60	1,000	131	1,542	15	60
2007	6,446	60	1,200	282	930	10	150

*Table 2. Payments to bands by Damn You! (2005-2007)*

Local bands are selected in part because they are likely to ensure that some tickets will be sold to their friends and family. Without this safety net organising gigs becomes a greater financial risk. Also the group tries to support up and coming bands, helping them to build an audience so that they can go on to be headliners at a later date (Arvidsson, 2008). As a result booking agents who force bands on promoters are often viewed negatively. Indeed Neil explains that such booking agents are

just idiots. They don't know how stuff like that operates. I mean they don't! They kind of ask you for loads of money and then they have this band from Ireland supporting that no one's heard of and they're the tour support! They're just doing someone a favour. Someone's had a word in their ear and said, "You know it'd be really nice for these guys to go" and the person that's booking the tour thinks, "Oh I'm doing that person a favour, I'll fuck over these twenty people that I'm booking the tour with". So you've got a band in the middle of your thing that no one's heard of, no one's going to go and see. And then they ask for like, on

top of asking for more, more for the headline bands, then they say, “And by the way we want you to pay for an advert in the NME or contribute towards it and we want you to give the support band a hundred and fifty quid”! A hundred and fifty quid? For what?!?

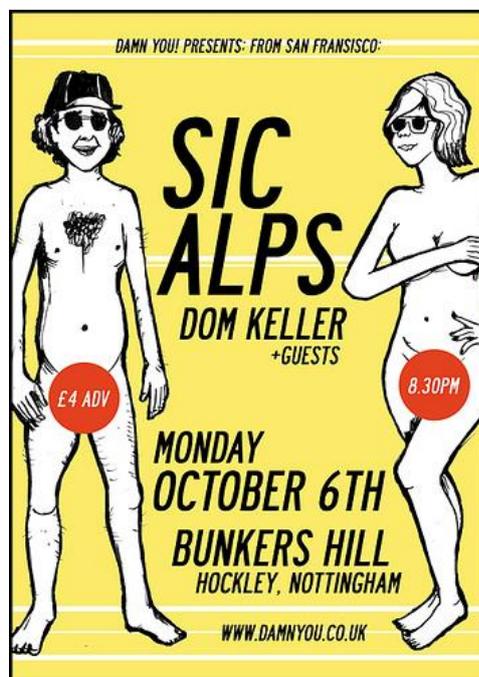
In this extract we see how Neil constructs a distinction between the mainstream and underground art worlds even as they work together to promote an event. We saw in the last chapter how the mainstream can be defined as a profit-orientated art world that relies on word of mouth among a select group of producers. Likewise in this extract we see Neil complain that booking agents want ‘loads of money’ and help their friends who have ‘had a word in their ear’. They are, then, not honest, not authentic. Instead they are willing to ‘fuck over’ people. Accordingly Neil concludes that this approach to producing live music is idiotic – primarily because it does not recognise the realities of producing live music in the underground.

Once the bands and venue have been booked the members of Damn You! begin to market the event. They print tickets for advanced sale through their own website, third-party websites, the venue and local record shops. The table below demonstrates the proportion of advance ticket sales and on the day sales between 2005-2007.

	<b>On the day sales (£)</b>	<b>Advance ticket sales (£)</b>	<b>Total revenue (£)</b>	<b>Average revenue per show (£)</b>
2005	964	2,959	3,923	560
2006	5,911	3,915	9,826	378
2007	5,085	4,789	9,874	494

*Table 3. Revenue generated by Damn You! (2005-2007)*

Damn You! advertise their gigs on their own website with all relevant information, including a detailed description and history of each band, map to the venue and the location of ticket vendors. They have learned through experience which features of a band's biography to emphasise to generate the most interest – often highlighting links to more popular bands in terms of comparing their style of music or highlighting band members who play in more popular bands. They also post this information on internet message boards, send out emails to their mailing-list and submit details to national and local press. In addition they design distinctive posters for each show and distribute them around Nottingham and neighbouring cities. The posters are usually designed by Chris S., who earns his living designing posters and art work for bands, venues and record labels. He explains that he spends 'five hours doing a poster and then three hours taking the posters and putting them up around town. That's quite a lot of time to have spent for a gig'.



*A poster for a Damn You! show designed by Chris S.*

These alternative points of purchase and promotion have created a large market for Damn You! shows. While the group always expects fans from the wider East Midland region to travel to Nottingham for their shows in recent years fans regularly travel much further. Damn You!'s current record is held by fans of Lightning Bolt who travelled nearly 300 miles from Scotland for a Damn You! show (that was, unfortunately for them, cancelled after they arrived in Nottingham).

### *The night*

Members of Damn You! approach the day of a show with excitement and apprehension. Several important tasks must be performed and there is the constant fear that no one will turn up because, Chris S. explains, 'someone forgot to put the posters up or, you know, someone forgot to do something they should have done'. The headlining band must be met and their gear, be it provided, begged or borrowed, must be "loaded in" the venue. This relatively straightforward activity is usually scheduled for the late afternoon – when most members of Damn You! are at work – so it requires a lot of planning and coordination. Indeed Bennett tells us that in the context of live music more physical energy is typically 'consumed by transportation than by performing' (1980: 71).

Once the bands and their equipment are in the venue the equipment must be set up and sound-checked. After the headlining band is happy with their set-up the process is repeated for the support bands. All of the bands are then fed. Eventually doors are opened and the audience is allowed to enter. Bennett explains that the 'door is an important economic parameter' of concerts (1980: 91). Members of Damn You! usually "do the door" themselves. They check entrants have advanced tickets and

charge those without tickets an entrance fee. This is 'quite stressful' according to Tom.

He explains that it

involves, not just taking the tickets, you've got to handle the money, you've got to keep account of all the different types of tickets so you can break down for the band, you know. How many pre-sold tickets? How many electronic tickets? How many guestlist? Erm, how many advanced tickets? Cause they want to know. Potentially, they want to know stuff like that and the tour manager may well kind of say, "Well we're supposed to be paid a guarantee and a door split" and they may well ask to see the door split receipts. Yeah and also you get drunks! So the other night I was on the door and just had this drunken guy, who was a bit obstreperous, arguing with me to let him in half price cause he only had like four pounds. And he was just being a complete pain to other kind of paying customers. And that's kind of my responsibility, to add to my overall stress levels.

Members of Damn You! also work with the venue staff to ensure that the event runs smoothly. They monitor the sound and wait to fix the equipment failures that routinely occur. They divide these tasks informally although one person will take the lead – it will be "their gig". Often this is the person who was first contacted by the band or booking agent. Ultimately, though, once the night has started the opportunity to affect the aesthetics of the event has been passed over to the bands and venue staff. The promoter must concentrate on logistics and account for money.

After the performances have ended, with bar staff eager to go home, the band and promoter must “load out” their equipment, calculate costs and settle accounts. The profit for promoters is usually reduced because booking agents specify a 100% or 80-20% split on surplus ticket sales in favour of the band. A successful show can, therefore, yield the same financial return for a promoter as a less successful event even though it may involve more stress and more organisation. We can see this demonstrated in the below table which summarises the attendance at Damn You! shows and the profit and losses generated between 2005 and 2007. In this table we can see that Damn You! lost money in the years with the lowest and highest average attendances.

	<b>Number of gigs</b>	<b>Total Attendance</b>	<b>Average Attendance</b>	<b>Total Profit (£)</b>	<b>Average Profit (£)</b>
2005	7	693	99	-1,233	-176
2006	26	1,840	71	-1,219	-49
2007	20	1,647	82	284	14

*Table 4. Attendance and Profit for Damn You! concerts (2005-2007)*

For the promoter the event does not end when the doors of the venue are locked. It is their responsibility to ensure that the band has somewhere to stay for the night. In the case of Damn You! a member of the group will usually offer the bands a floor, sofa bed or spare mattress. Squeezing bands and their crew into a terrace town house or city-centre flat, where most of the member’s of Damn You! live, requires logistical skill. Yet in some cases it was reported that bands would end up staying for several days after a gig.

Inviting a band into their house allows promoters to bond with a band on a social level. It was described as one of the main advantages accrued from promoting shows. There are, however, two negative sides to such bonding. First entertaining a band into the night usually carries over to the next day. As many members of Damn You! hold full-time jobs, regularly missing work the day after a gig can cause problems. Second there is an issue of trust. Allowing bands to stay in their homes exposes promoters to risks such as theft. Bands and promoters are sometimes strangers who have only met a few hours previously. Tom explains:

If you've got a nine-to-five job, and having someone come round your house at five in the afternoon, probably going to bed at two in the morning and you've got to leave them your keys and, you know, trust them not to burn your house down and stuff like that – I'd say that's a pretty big role.

Moreover promoters rarely live alone. So the risks involved with inviting bands to stay over carries over to other occupants. Neil, for example, describes how his parents would have to 'work around' bands he let stay when he lived with his parents:

I think my parents were quite supportive and, you know, it never felt weird to bring bands back and sort of get in at one o'clock in the morning and tell everyone where they're sleeping. They'd just be sleeping in like the lounge and the dining room and my parents would just work around them, be pretty quiet and then go to work! (Laughter)

Finally it is not only bands that intrude into a promoter's home. Equipment can be as hard to accommodate as performers and often it becomes a permanent feature of a promoter's house. Upon visiting the house shared by Neil, Matt and Tom, for example, you are met by an assortment of amplifiers, speakers, cables and instruments stored in almost every conceivable space. Once bands have left and equipment is stored away a show is finished although promoters continue to receive feedback from their local community for some time after (Cluley, 2009b).

So from this case study we can begin see how promoters act as intermediaries between bands, venues, audiences and agents and how underground promoters also mediate between their underground world and the mainstream (Negus, 2002; Bourdieu, 1984). But we can see as well how the activity of promoting must be situated within a promoter's life. It spills out into their working day, into their homes and affects their friends, parents and partners. Promoting live music is, in short, not a self-contained activity within an underground art world or everyday life.

### **Case study two: the venue**

A live music event not only needs promoters to organise it, it also needs a somewhere for it to happen. It needs a venue. Indeed while Damn You! do not typically use established music venues, as we have seen, the presence of this option forces them to consider the possibility. In this second case study we will explore how a venue operates. In particular we will see how an independent promoter can progress into a position within an established music venue – supporting this position with exactly the same repertoires of independence that we have seen the members of Damn You! use to

structure their position outside of the mainstream while occupying a different position in the art world and field of cultural production.

### ***The Rescue Rooms***

The Rescue Rooms is a live music venue located in Nottingham. It opened in 2003 as part of a larger company called DHP that owns several other venues in the UK. I was able to interview a director of this company called Anton. Alongside his role as a director Anton also manages the Rescue Rooms on a day to day basis. Like the members of Damn You! Anton started his career producing live music as an independent promoter in Nottingham who organised concerts in his spare time. However, unlike them, he has gone on to make a career within the live music industry.

Although Anton was extremely open and helpful in his interview I was unable to obtain detailed accounting information about the shows that happen at the Rescue Rooms. Anton did tell me, though, that they keep such information. He makes this clear in the following lengthy extract from my interview with him in which Anton overviews his working practices:

**RC:** Could you just talk me through what you do on a kind of day to day basis Anton?

**Anton:** Erm

**RC:** Is that an easy thing to do?

**Anton:** Email mostly – like I just did! (Laughter) So, you know, that’s the day-to-day thing. It’s generally endless emails about how about we do this, is it a ten pound ticket, you know, will seven hundred and fifty

quid work for you, here's a costing, that kind of thing. I mean I do a bunch of other stuff. I'm the director of the company now. I'm also talking about staff issues. We get a P/L in from every venue every day that says, erm, you know, "Oh well there was just the bar, no one turned up, so we shut at 9 o'clock, cause nothing was happening". I mean what normally happens is someone will come along and they'll say ... I'm trying to think who I'm working on at the moment – typical band I'm actually making an offer on at the moment. Erm, oh I haven't got an obvious one. I don't know. I'll get an email saying, "Do you want to do a show in May?"

**RC:** Hmm.

**Anton:** Erm, and I'll go, "Yeah it'll probably do two-fifty, let's do it in the Rescue Rooms". And then I'll email the agent back going, "Yeah let's do a Rescue Rooms. What are we looking at £9 ticket?" and he might come back and say, "We're going to do a ten". And I'm might go, "Er, nine-fifty" or... something like that. And then we'll get down to saying, "Okay, I'll guarantee you..." and this is where I go "Hmm I think they'll do two-hundred people or whatever".

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** "I'll guarantee you five hundred quid" or whatever it is and they'll, er, and fifty for the support band, fifty quid for the ads that go in the NME...

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** Cause we have to contribute to that as well. And, you know, a couple of hundred quid for catering and then he'll come back and go,

“Yeah but we’re on Later with Jools in two weeks and the album’s coming out, we’re going to get five star review in NME and ten out of ten in this”. And I’ll go, “Yeah still only five hundred quid”. And he’ll go, “Oh a thousand”. And I’ll go “Alright, I’ll give you seven fifty then” ... It’s like that’s, what you do, you put the work in on small things and, generally, it’s a bit of a pyramid that you’ll work on ten small bands and two of them will get big. But when it’s the small bands you generally lose money on or break even, when it’s the big bands you generally make some money back. ... You’ve got to keep it at the end of the day. It’s that relationship and that’s why the relationship with the agents with the bands whatever is so important because that’s the payback that you get for taking a risk on something in the early days.

From this long extract, in which Anton offers a neat overview of the workings of the live music supply chain, we can see some similarities and differences between Anton’s approach to organising live music and that of Damn You!. In terms of the similarities, while Anton keeps more formal ‘P/L’ information – that is profit and loss information – about events at the Rescue Rooms and the other venues his company owns than Damn You! we have already seen that Damn You! keeps detailed accounting information. Likewise Anton explains that he has similar discussions concerning the location and ticket price for an event with his colleagues that we have already seen take place among the members of Damn You!. We can also see that Anton divides tasks between himself and members of staff just as we have already seen how members of Damn You! divide the task they need to complete for a successful show.

The main contrast between them is where they each draw the line between the mainstream and the underground. For example we have seen that Neil describes some booking agents as ‘idiots’. Anton is more understanding. He does not complain about the need to contribute to advertising or about negotiating with profit-hungry booking agents. The point at which Anton presents a distinction is when booking agents do not appreciate ‘the relationship’ he has with them by taking successful bands out of their ‘pyramid’ scheme and offering them to other venues. If Anton has taken a ‘risk’ supporting the band ‘in the early days’ he relies on these ‘big bands to make some money back’. We can see that, on the surface, this appears to be a different concern to the members of Damn You!. Tom, for example, observes:

**Tom:** I guess if a band wants to do that then that’s what concerns them and maybe we wouldn’t want to put them on anyway, I guess.

**RC:** Hmm, but do you feel, like I’ve heard Matt say before like you “lose a band” in that situation...

**Tom:** Hmm.

**RC:** ...it’s quite an interesting way to look at it.

**Tom:** Yeah I think that’s kind of true and it’s kind of upsetting.

**RC:** But then do you feel a possession of certain bands? Do you feel like there are Damn You! bands?

**Tom:** I think it’s more, it’s more how you imagine those bands do things is what you model what you do on. So when they say actually and this is so rare this is not a common thing...

**RC:** Yeah.

**Tom:** When they say, rarely, ‘Okay, we’re going with local popular venue instead because, erm, they’re offering us more money’. It’s okay, are we just deluded? Cause we thought you weren’t like that and we sort of acted how we thought you’d act!

The main difference behind these two explanations of a band moving to work with someone else is that Anton is concerned with the investment he loses and Tom with having to exclude someone from the underground because they are not authentic. Yet, at heart, both the members of Damn You! and Anton have a similar response when a band that is getting more successful switches to another promoter. They take it as a sign that the band members or their booking agent are not honest – which, as we saw in the last chapter, is an important distinction between the mainstream and the underground. Whereas members of Damn You! can subsidise any loss with income from their jobs outside of music, Anton is in a position where the economic consequences cannot be absorbed or subsidised by him personally. His business takes the hit. So while Tom and other members of Damn You! might react to a band leaving them for a promoter who offers more money with resignation, Anton is more likely to punish an agent who prematurely takes a band out of the pyramid. Anton explains:

**Anton:** That will be the point you’ll ring up and go like “Why have you given this to Live Nation? This is our thing. We’ve worked on this and tell you what, that email you’ve sent me saying ‘Can you help me out on these other three small bands?’ You can bollocks cause you know. You’ve fucked me over”. You have that conversation.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** Which you have to do.

In this regard Anton acknowledges that there are practical differences between running a venue for a living and promoting shows independently as a ‘hobby’ around his ‘day job’ even if he does not position himself in the mainstream. He explains:

**Anton:** I, when we were doing it DIY, you know, I literally did everything from, erm, printing the tickets out and cutting them out and hand numbering them...

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** ...to going to Sainbury’s and buying all the beers for the bands, taking money on the door, you know, I was stage security as well.

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Anton:** I was stood on stage next to them cause I was booting the stage-divers off! ... if you’re doing it for a business you’ve got to make money. There, we need to make money.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** You do have to be aware of that. That doesn’t mean you can’t look after the bands and er make it a good experience. Plus this side of it, having the resources of a company behind you, you know, you can make sure, you know, it’s a lot easier to make sure you do look after them and they’re fed and watered properly than when you’re running round on your own. Mmm, it’s just a different thing. ... I mean it’s changed a bit in that I’m now, erm, because we’re doing stuff in Bristol, stuff round the county...

**RC:** Yeah.

**Anton:** ...I'm off round the country lots of time. I'm probably not sat on the front door at as many gigs and seeing those people as often.

Indeed Anton explains that running a venue professionally does involve constraints that he did not have to consider as an independent promoter. In part these are financial constraints. Venues are, Anton explains, not just in the music industry but also in the 'booze-selling industry'. So Anton has a responsibility to ensure that his venue makes money as well as organising events that meet his personal tastes. Even here, though, Anton draws on a definition of the underground to support his perception of his activities as authentic creativity. In the following quote he brackets out the motive of making money to emphasise how he can still enjoy putting on shows he does not find appealing because this helps him to stay inspired. Anton explains:

**RC:** So how has you're putting on live music changed since it's become...

**Anton:** Well...

**RC:**...not just a hobby anymore, you know, you need to have people come in I suppose?

**Anton:** Well there's that, I suppose, and you sometimes put on bands that you're not that bothered about. But then you still have the buzz of it being successful or not. And it's quite exciting to put on bands that you would never dream of doing. ... And that's the other thing, for me this is more me talking personally, I'm always up for doing different shows.

In this regard earlier on we saw how members of Damn You! deal with the problem of ‘killing’ their enthusiasm. For them finding unusual venues to host their shows is the way that they can avoid becoming too conventional. In the above extract we see that Anton also recognises this problem but finds a different solution. He works with unpredictable bands. In part this is because he is relatively fixed in terms of location but also because this approach fits in with his need to make money.

There are also other constraints on Anton aside from economic ones that have emerged now that live music is his career. For instance he is now more aware of health and safety issues. He explains:

It wasn't that long ago, as I say I was putting Mudhoney on at the Boat Club and there was no SIA approved security guards, crowd barriers and all that kind of thing. It was me going "Get the fuck off the stage!" Which is fine but if someone, and particularly now because people are much more up for doing that, if someone had stage dived and hurt themselves and decided to claim, you know, I didn't have public liability insurance or stuff like that. I would have been in prison probably and that is a lot harder now and not that I'm, I totally support health and safety and think that's a good thing ... but it also does put an extra onus of responsibility and cost that makes it, does make it more difficult to break into it.

In spite of these differences and in spite of the resistance we have already seen that members of Damn You! express towards established venues like the Rescue Rooms,

Anton and the members of Damn You! know each other and often work closely together. Anton explains that in the past there has been ‘some kind of message board chatter and people were trying to make out that somehow Damn You! and I were at logger heads!’. But, he points out,

Neil from Damn You! is one of my best friends, one of the few people who came to my wedding lunch, you know. And I’m friends with Matt as well and you know if they’re in the shit and they need some help for you know their PAs broken and they need some help with something to borrow, they’ll ring me up. Similarly I’ll sometimes get offered a show and I’ll think well they can do it better or I need a support band what do you think and it’s – working together with people.

Anton explains that this image of conflict between him and the members of Damn You! developed when he started to work at the Rescue Rooms and stopped promoting live music as an independent promoter. For many this was seen as a sign of Anton moving into the mainstream. Indeed in the last chapter we saw Anton argue that the distinction between the mainstream and underground depends on context. He explained that for many music fans in Nottingham he seems like a manager of a large music corporation – that is, he seems firmly ensconced in the mainstream. Yet Anton pointed out that when considered in a national or international context his organisation is very much underground in terms of scope, geography and working practices. More importantly he is still honest. He still respects relationships. He is still an underground creative producer.

In this regard Anton describes how he made the move from being an independent promoter to managing a venue not as a worldview-changing event but a natural progression. Anton explains that after promoting live music independently for ten years and after he was made redundant he received an offer to manage a local venue. He explains the move:

**RC:** Was it a difficult decision for you to make?

**Anton:** No.

**RC:** To go, or was it a dream decision?

**Anton:** It was neither. I was unemployed!

**RC:** Okay.

**Anton:** It was a like, well put yourself in my position. You'd been working for a company for a number of years. Erm, they've just kicked you out, you're, like I got a bit of redundancy but ... and then someone says, "You know that hobby that you've had for the last ten years that you didn't really make any money out of? Do you want to come and do that for a job and we'll pay you". Doesn't take a lot of thought to decided yes on that really does it! (Laughter)

Here we can begin to see how the repertoire of relative independence offers creative producers a range of ways to make music outside of the mainstream music industry. We can begin to see how it allows people to be creative – to find ways of making music that take account of the realities of their situations especially where those realities fall outside of the simple discourse of work set against creativity. For Anton, for example, he was put in a 'position' where he both had the skills and experience to attract an offer

switch careers – making his hobby into his job – and he was put in a ‘position’ where he needed to find a job. Even though it felt like he had no decision to make we have seen that the plasticity of the underground aided Anton as he started to make music for a living to not change his ‘relation to the activity itself’ (Svendsen, 2008: 89).

So the repertoires of independence discussed in the previous chapter allow Anton and the members of Damn You! to find solutions to the challenges they face as they both try to make music within the constraints of their individual circumstances – as Chris S. put it because ‘that’s the only way that we could do things’. Although the solutions they come up with seem very different they developed through a similar process. They both reacted to the different ‘positions’ in the field of cultural production that they each found themselves making their decisions in (Bourdieu, 1983a: 30). Anton, for instance, does not position himself in the mainstream. He has, simply, found a way of dealing with the realities of his life and his desire to be involved in the production of music. He continues:

It wasn’t a hard decision whatsoever and to be fair most, not all, but most of the people, certainly, in the live music industry that I know, came in to it through a similar kind of way. ... There’s two ways really. Either they were at university and then became university Ents Sec and carried on once they’d finished or they someone like Johnny Dunne at Live Nation, who promotes you know the Arcade Fire and people like that. He did the exact same thing. He started doing gigs in the back room of a pub and it went from there. So it’s not an uncommon kind of

way of doing it. I suppose for me, I was in a corporate job for longer than a lot of the other people which accounts for me being old!

Here, then, Anton indicates that his route into the underground has much in common with many other music producers – even those who no longer consider themselves included in the underground art world according to the absolute repertoire. This route involves positioning yourself in the field of cultural production such that you have a decision to make regarding which art world you are in. Circumstances might dictate when, where and whether these decisions ever arise but the producer can be proactive. They can, for instance, put themselves forward to become entertainment secretary of their student union or start promoting live music events independently. In this second case study, then, we can begin to see how the distinction between the mainstream and the underground can be used as part of the management of a professional career – in contrast in the first case study we saw how it can be used to maintain an authentic amateur position. Indeed while we have seen some differences between these two case studies we have also seen that they share many practices and ways of structuring their work as they produce music.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have explored the activities that go on in making live music – highlighting how a promoter puts on a show and the relationship between promoters and venues. Many of the activities involved in putting on a live music event are shared by independent promoters and live music venues. Venues, though, unlike promoters are usually profit-driven businesses. They need to make money and this forces people

who work in venues to put on music that they might not like. For this reason venues are often associated with the mainstream. Even venues like the Rescue Rooms which is economically independent from the mainstream music industry are seen as part of the mainstream because they, too, are dictated by profit not art.

Nevertheless, at the end of the chapter, we have seen that the inconsistencies in the relative repertoire of independence open up a space where people can make decisions that suit them either politically, financially, aesthetically or for a range of other reasons. Just because someone has moved closer to the mainstream they can still be concerned about independence and have a limit where they will pull back from the need to maximise profits at the expense of their artistic and expressive desires (Bourdieu, 1983b: 138). So rather than abide by either economic or artistic criteria at the expense of the realities of their situation, the relative repertoire allows creative producers to maintain their authenticity as creative artists and not workers.

We can begin to see, in sum, how the material and discursive aspects of organising a creative activity can, themselves, be creative as people find new ways of making music that are not restricted to simple economic or artistic logics that define the fields of cultural production around particular art worlds. Having seen how music is made by people who find creative ways of organising their own production and, in the process, construct physical and material spaces where they and others can make music in the context of live music in the next chapter we will explore production in the context of recorded music.

## **6. What does the underground make? Recorded music**

The process of making a record begins when a band has written some songs and decided to record them or when a local label, spotting a hot new band, decides to pay for a band to record their songs (Bennett, 1980). On occasion mainstream record labels and development companies may fund an unknown band as well (Lena and Peterson, 2008). Whichever route led them there, the moment when making a record begins as a distinct activity is when a band comes into contact with a recording studio and the process ends when a record label has manufactured, distributed, promoted and, hopefully, sold the records (Hennion, 1989). It is this process that I examine in this chapter through two case studies that focus on the production of recorded music. The first looks at Dubrek Studio, a rehearsal and recording facility in Derby. Using this case I detail how a recording studio opens and operates to show how these particular spaces are organised for musicians to use. After a recording has been made at a studio like Dubrek it may be manufactured into a physical product and this involves record labels. In the second case, therefore, I explore Jonson Family, a record label based in Somerset. I detail how a record label starts as well as how it makes and sells records. As in the last chapter throughout these cases I will emphasise the role that images of the mainstream and the underground play in structuring and representing the activities that go into making recorded music among the creative producers in the art world I have studied.

### **Case study three: the recording studio**

The first step in the production of recorded music involves recording the music. For this to happen there must be recording facilities and equipment available along with people trained to use them. Increasingly it is possible for bands to record their music at home on personal computers (Haring, 2005). Nevertheless a number of recording studios still exist throughout the country servicing the needs of underground bands and musicians. They have some distinct advantages when compared with recording at home. There is no risk of annoying the neighbours and within a recording studio bands have access to the skills, the equipment and the physical space needed to make high quality recordings. There is also a degree of romance to being in a recording studio. They are places where magic happens (Hennion, 1989).

#### ***Dubrek***

To illustrate how a studio opens and operates in the following case I explore Dubrek – a recording studio and rehearsal facility that opened commercially in Derby during 2002. The studio is located on the edge of Derby among commercial and industrial units. It is owned by Jay, who is, perhaps, as talkative and open an interviewee as a researcher could hope to meet. I had never been to Dubrek before I visited to interview Jay but I knew several musicians who had recorded there and I have heard many recordings that have been made there. The studio is well known for its polished sound.

Jay talked me through the history of the studio, which is, really, his own history. Indeed when I visited other studios for this project it quickly became apparent that when people talk about their recording studios they are really talking about a part of themselves. As with promoters the new name they give the studio helps them to create

a separate identity for it but ultimately the studio is always related to the creative producer who organises it. Accordingly to explore how Dubrek started it will be necessary to explore Jay's personal history. Luckily Jay was only too happy to talk me through his biography.

### *Opening a studio*

Jay started recording bands when he was 16 years old. He explains that most people around him who were 'into records' bought 'a guitar and ended up being in a band'. In contrast Jay was interested in 'electronics and building gadgets and stuff' and music. He continues:

So instead of going out and buying a guitar I went out and bought a port-a-studio. And I used to go round recording my mates' bands with, like, cheap Tandy mics on to a cassette. And, erm, did that for a while and it just kind of grew where I'd end up if a band was going to do a proper demo and if they went to a studio they'd end up taking me along with them.

Through his friends' bands, then, Jay was allowed to enter a real recording studio. He began, after this, to spend a lot of time at a particular not-for-profit co-operative studio in nearby Rugby. Although he was able to learn about recording techniques in this studio the organisation of the studio as a business was a mystery. He knew that this studio had funding from the Arts Council but he did not know how anyone could earn a living from running a studio.

Fast forward a couple of years, Jay's connections as both a musician and sound engineer helped him get a job promoting live music for a local venue in Derby. During this time Jay began building up a range of equipment and had 'built a studio in my bedroom and I'd take that out and I'd record bands and sometimes I would charge them'. After moving to work for another venue Jay convinced his new boss to let him renovate an old stables building that was behind the venue's premises. As Jay explains

I gutted them, soundproofed them, put proper floors in, erm, got, had like had mains electricity fitted in there, and, basically, set up a control room with my recording gear and a live room which doubled as a rehearsal room. And it was, it was tiny, you know, probably a fourteen-foot by fourteen-foot room. And, erm, told, and obviously because I'd been working as a promoter I knew most of the bands round Derby.

As a result of knowing so many local bands Jay's studio was 'saturated within a few months' to the point where Jay 'literally couldn't get any more people in. And I was actually earning, like, reasonable amount of money from it'. Jay points out that he had 'toyed with the idea of setting up my own recording studio ever since the days of going to Rugby' but it was only at this point in his career that the dream began to become a reality. Jay explains that he began to realise that he could 'make money from doing something that I really love'.

The stables that he was working in were, though, too small. Jay drew up a business plan and 'managed to get some money together' including a loan from the Prince's Trust. He then began looking for a location among the many unused industrial

buildings scattered around Derby. Echoing Becker's (1963) claim that musicians are treated as a deviant group, the first barrier he had to overcome was convincing landlords to rent property to him for a recording studio. Jay explains:

As soon as I told the landlords what I wanted to use it for they'd be quite negative about it. You know, they had an impression that musicians were just scumbags and there'd be, like, noise and people like taking drugs.

He eventually found a location above a tattoo parlour but within a couple of months 'it was saturated' as well. The Prince's Trust provided Jay with a business mentor who suggested that he find a larger facility. Luckily his landlord had the perfect place and offered to let Jay use the property for three months rent-free so that he could install the studio, connect electricity, water, put in toilets and, generally, make the place habitable. Jay explains:

It was just a shell. But I saw it and, cause it's, like, so open up to the ceilings and cause it's got, like, hard wood ceilings in, I just thought it'd sound amazing putting a live room in there ... And I thought I can obviously get a lot of rooms in and I said to him like, "How much do you want for me to have this?" and he was like, "We'll call it three hundred quid a week".

By this point, though, Jay had ran out of capital. He set the builders on anyway hoping to finance them by remortgaging his house. But, Jay explains:

A few weeks down the line my mortgage company refused to give me my, er, re-mortgage. They wouldn't do it. And I was like, "Shit". Thinking, you know, how am I going to, how am I going to do this? So I was like, "Right, I'm going to just try and do it out of the funds coming in for the studio". So went along for a period of time like, you know, I'd give this builder, like, you know, a couple of grand. And his guys would work for a bit and then I'd run out of money and then he'd take them off the job and send them somewhere else and wait for me to get some more money together. And then he'd bring them back. Then it got to the point where when I did have them in here I'd wander up here to see what they were doing and they'd be like playing football or they'd just be not doing anything. We ended up having a row. I sacked the builder!

This left Jay with 'four half-built rehearsal rooms and a toilet'. However Jay's Prince's Trust mentor was also mentoring a builder and was able to arrange for the work to be completed at a discounted rate. Jay believed his problems were solved. He was wrong. The builders finished part of the job, completing the rehearsal rooms, kitchen space and control room. But then they sent Jay 'a bill of twenty odd thousand quid'. Jay did not have the money. Eventually Jay sold a house that he had renovated during his time away from the studio and 'made fifty grand profit on it which basically paid everyone off'. As he explains, 'That day was amazing!'

Shortly we will see the effects of these experiences on Jay's working habits and image of the underground. But for the time being we can see in Jay's story a clear example of

the material side of creative production. Echoing Chris S. earlier comment that Damn You! make live music in the form they do because it is ‘the only way that we could do things’, we can see that Jay’s perseverance and, for want of a better word, devotion to making music has led him to innovate and imitate a physical space for his studio within his own changing personal circumstances.

### *Running a studio*

Since these trials Jay has developed his business. He has expanded and taken on a part-time employee, Ollie, to help him. In spite of his growing business Jay explains that one of the most important pieces of equipment for running his studio effectively is still his tattered paper diary. It is his managerial tool. He explains:

I keep a financial record in terms of my diary because everything here revolves around the diary ... all the rehearsal bookings, recording booking, pa hire, everything is written down ... erm, so everything revolves around that book and every costing get written down in that. And that ends up on Excel, basically, on the PC ... and then at a certain point that’ll go to my accountant.

Dubrekk works to a breakeven point of ‘about eight hundred quid a week’. Jay explains ‘I’ve got to find my wages, Ollie’s wages, rent, tax, erm, maintenance bills for gear up here, you know ... So I have to turn over a certain amount each week for it to break even’. The scars caused as Jay struggled to open Dubrek cut deep. He told me that he ‘religiously’ checks the health of the business: ‘I go over what we’re making constantly

– religiously – I’ll see if there’s been, like, an upturn in, like, work we’re doing. And if things look slack then I’ll be thinking of ways of getting more business in’.

The main way Jay gets “business in” is through word of mouth. The way he affects word of mouth is through ‘doing a good job and it getting out there’. Indeed when it comes to marketing Jay is clear:

I’ll tell you now that for starts we do not advertise. Erm, when I first started I tried advertising and I don’t consider it to work ... word of mouth is the best advertising. It, that goes for a lot of businesses and the word of mouth is good enough here now that I don’t have to worry about it. I’m always booked up six to eight weeks in advance for recording – constantly.

The rehearsal facilities Jay offers bring in business for the studio as well. Promoting live music also helps the studio. Jay explains:

**Jay:** And this is part of why the gig thing happens. It, that kind of interlocks a bit with the studio cause I might get a band in here get on really well with them and then I’ll probably get them back up here to do a gig.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Jay:** And then we’ll end up, it becomes more of a social thing then. It’s happened the other way round as well. Like, I’ve put gigs on, like, I had a band from Scotland come down called Manatees and they played a gig

for me and they crashed out up here and while they were here they were looking round the studio. And they really loved it and they ended up coming back to record a record. So, you know, it works both ways, you know, one feeds the other. Erm, and again, you know, they've become quite like friendly.

After getting a band into his studio the recording process itself presents issues concerning work and creativity that a studio owner must address. Jay explains that 'I try not, I try to be, if it's a band that come in and I don't know them I think you try to be part of their band for the time that they're here'. This does not always work. 'On the odd occasion', Jay points out, 'you get a band in and you don't kind of click with them ... and that's kind of weird when that happens. It, it makes it hard work'. But becoming friends with a band can make it hard to complete a financial transaction – it mixes the economic and the artistic, the professional and the personal. In the following episode Jay explains how the experience of opening his studio helps him to overcome this problem:

**RC:** Is it something that you find the bands and people you deal with, are they happy to talk to you about money?

**Jay:** Yeah. Well, first of all I'll tell you from my own perspective. When I started doing this in my old premises, especially when I was recording bands I really struggled to ask for money. I really, I couldn't get my head round it.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Jay:** It felt weird because and part of it was, erm, obviously I enjoyed what I was doing and I just I felt like I was some kind of con-man or something.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Jay:** Okay. Yeah, erm, I just felt like a bit odd, like a bit of a fraud. It felt weird. I felt like I shouldn't charging people. Erm, the rehearsal thing, I didn't mind charging someone about that cause obviously people are getting something tangible for their money.

**RC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Jay:** They're getting a space for a certain amount of time. But the recording thing, I really had issues with that. I mean when I first started recording I'd only charge like ten pounds an hour. And then, like, and a lot of it was my mates coming in doing stuff at that point. So it's harder also cause it's my mates but to be honest after all the money problems I've described...

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Jay:** I've got way past that! (Laughter)

In this extract we can see how Jay can draw on the relational foundation of the underground. Early in his career he felt like a 'con-man' because he was asking people to pay him for something he enjoyed doing. He 'struggled' to ask people to pay him for his work because it did not feel like work. But his subsequent business struggles have forced him to become focused on making money. This shift has not led to him re-evaluating his activities as part of the mainstream. Indeed, as we saw in the previous

chapter, Jay draws on the *London Calling* repertoire as a way to maintain his authenticity. It helps him to focus on making money and stay in the underground.

The records that are made at a studio like Dubrek tend to be financed by the bands that record them. Although the finished recordings may end up being released by a label often this is not arranged when the band make their recording. So, with their finished record in hand, the band must think about how to get it made. They must, in other words, start to think about record labels. They might send them to major record labels but more often bands stay within the underground art world.

#### **Case study four: running a label**

Like the promoters discussed in the previous chapter and recording studios discussed above record labels take on their own identity aside from the people who run them. It is common to find a record label being run by a single person yet they still take the opportunity to give their label a separate identity. The labels I interviewed as part of this research have done this by taking on names such as Trash Aesthetics, Gringo Records, Jonson Family, Cordelia, Fight Me, Vacuous Pop and Sorted Records. Such names are meant to say something about the identity of the label. They might come from an in-joke among the people who organise the label or be related to other music making activities that the people who run the label are involved in. Other names are cultural references. But, just as opening a recording studio can take over your identity, starting a record label also affects the identity of the people who run them. Matt, who runs Gringo Records, for instance, is no longer simply 'Matt' to people in the underground. He is 'Matt Gringo'.

### *Jonson Family*

Jonson Family, a label based in Somerset, is the focus of this final case study. The name of this label was taken from a William Burroughs book, as Joe, one of the four founders of the label explains:

The Jonson family, the Jonsons, and they were a family who'd just go round and if people were on fire, they'd pull them out of a car and stuff and it was just their job in life – the Jonson family. And I quite like the, there's like a medical company called Johnson and all their adverts are "Johnson: a family company" and I quite like that. It's free advertising!

Indeed a well chosen name is worth its weight in gold. Take, for instance, Pickled Egg Records. The label earns several hundred pounds a year from a link on its website to the website of Egg – a credit card company. Although Nigel, who runs this label, admitted to me during my participant observation data-gathering that he does not understand how or why, this link makes the label more money than many records and actually helps to subsidise some of the cost of making records.

### *Learning the ropes*

After deciding they want to start a record label and deciding on a name there is one major problem that all labels have to overcome. They all need to find out how you actually get a record made. Ady, who runs Vacuous Pop, for instance, tells me that it took him over a year after he nominally started his record label for him to find out how to get a recording made into a product that can be sold in shops. In this regard all the

people involved with labels explain that other labels are an invaluable source of information, although, as Rob of Trash Aesthetics puts it:

No one would tell me how to do it flat out. They wouldn't walk me through it. So, erm, they'd give you bits of advice and then you go, "How, erm, do you make any money on this?". And you start getting dodgy answers, people avoiding the issue.

An important resource for both Rob and Ady, in this respect, was a "DIY factsheet" on the Jonson Family website. 'Try a few labels', the factsheet advises, but if '[n]o label has bitten. Don't worry. DO IT YOURSELF. It's this easy', it continues. The factsheet then walks through each step of the production process for making a record, from getting it pressed, to selling it and getting reviews.

Jonson Family, themselves, began eleven years ago when the four members of a band called Stanton decided to put out their own record. According to Joe the label came about almost by accident. The first release, Stanton's Four Walls, was recorded cheaply and the band 'weren't too sure what to do with it'. They presumed that they would release a cassette 'like everyone else used to'. They 'hadn't really tried anyone else to put it out cause we probably either didn't think we were good enough' and somewhere along the line they decided that they should do it themselves because they wanted to make a record. Joe explains:

It wasn't going to be a label initially. And if you're a complete nerd about it you can see that the catalogue number's completely different to

all the rest on the first one, on the run-out groove ... if you're a complete loser like I am, you can look. We weren't thinking of starting a label, we just did it and we pressed five hundred or something crazy and we weren't even playing that much or anything like that but it was like bollocks let's go and do it!

With each of the four members of Stanton contributing to the costs of production they could easily fund the release through their part-time jobs. Joe found a pressing plant in Leeds that talked him through the process of how a record gets made. He explains:

I just phoned them and said, "Look how does it work?". And they told me all the costs and stuff and we got the records back and, cause we weren't computer literate or anything like that all the records are, they're all plain white stickers and we stamped them. We made stamps and made our own sleeves and bought the plastic, like probably the same as all the other labels you've spoke to, exactly the same story.

At this point Jonson Family discovered the second problem that all record labels face, namely, what do you do with the records you have made? Joe explains that they took their records 'into Rough Trade and they sold fifty copies!'. This success of making and selling copies of this initial release spurred them to release more records not only for their own band but also for other people's bands too. Jonson Family has now released 31 records. Indeed even though Stanton have now spilt up the four founders of Jonson Family still release music on the label.

### *Getting music*

When a record label makes the move into releasing records of other people's music a new set of problems emerge. There is the problem of deciding which music to release and, also, convincing the people who made it to let you release it. The founders of Jonson Family have been friends with every band they have worked with. Indeed, returning to the geographic aspect of the repertoire of relational independence, Joe explains that there is 'almost like a certain regional thing' working behind this. He continues:

All the ones we've put any time or put into albums, we've known from our area. Like Charlotlefield and Cove are all south east. Reigns, I've known for years from other bands and the past. Yeah and it's almost like, I've spoke to Matt Gringo a couple of times about how we're like the south east and the south a bit and they're more like midlands and the north.

Of course just knowing a band and living in the same region is not all that goes into the decision. Joe points out that 'it's never what you think is going to sell. Like with, there's certain things we just never would have done but you don't want to lose vast sums of cash!'. Joe explains that 'the ultimate aim' for Jonson Family 'is always to break-even in my opinion, like to not lose loads of money'. In part this is a simple fact of the economics of an underground art world. Indeed in the following extract Joe explains the economics of making records in a small-scale underground world – drawing a direct contrast with what happens in the mainstream:

There's things like seven inches, you can't make any money from them ... So if you put out a 7 inch it's cause you like it. And you like the record and you like the sleeve and all that kind of stuff because you can't, I don't know what everyone else has said, but you can't make money from 7 inches like unless, unless you're like the Arctic Monkeys and you're making a hundred thousand and you sell them at a fiver.

So unlike Jay, who wants to earn a living doing something he loves, the founders of Jonson Family had no such ambitions. They just want to do the thing they love. Of course some labels are started in the hope that they will lead to a full-time job in the mainstream music industry. But for many the opposite is true. Starting an independent record label is simply the only way for the record to get made. As Chris S. put it in our earlier case study of Damn You! 'just that's the only way that we could do things'. Likewise Joe explains:

**Joe:** I think it's great. I'd recommend anyone do it. I think it prolongs your love for doing music stuff, as I've said a couple of times already, I think you can burn out quite easily if you're constantly chasing some unattainable dream cause often your band's not good enough.

**RC:** Yeah, yeah

**Joe:** Like let's face it often your band is rubbish!

**RC:** Yeah

**Joe:** But if you believe in it and want to do a record then do it!

Joe describes a particular example of a record that Jonson Family produced that he made for the pleasure of seeing the finished product. This release was a hand-lathed, clear vinyl produced by an artisan craftsman in New Zealand. 'It's nice looking if nothing else', Joe observes, 'I guess that's one of the reasons I'm so keen on doing it is to make stuff like that stuff which looks so nice'. Indeed even though Joe produced only 100 copies of this release it took four months to make. He explains 'you'd have to phone [the artisan craftsman] at like two in the morning here cause he's just getting up and he hasn't got like internet ... you can only phone him before he goes to work!'. It is, then, more than simply liking a band or liking their record that motivates people like Joe to release records. They also like the record as a product.

That said, Joe qualifies his decisions by pointing out that he is keen not to get 'burnt' by releasing a record for a band who will not promote the record sufficiently. When a band splits up or stops gigging there is not much that Jonson Family can do to promote a record. Consequently Joe explains: 'you just get stuck with these things!'. He cautions that 'I would choose a band with gigs having being burnt occasionally with bands that don't. And I would also make sure you're into it massively cause if it fails at least you know you did the right thing'. Here, then, we see further use of the relational independence repertoire. Joe observes that it is possible to still 'know you did the right thing' even if a record 'fails'.

Another problem that emerges when a label begins to release recordings of other people's music is the question of ownership. Harking back to the problems we observed with the absolute notion of independence, Jonson Family, like a majority of underground labels, does not sign contracts with bands. In fact on the one occasion

when they have done so the contract was broken – the band was signed by another, larger label who re-released the recording Jonson Family owned ‘and didn’t pay a penny!’. As we have also seen not signing a contract makes it easy for bands to leave the label. Joe explains:

They can do what they want. I do think like, I like it when they’re successful ... But I always think of them as a Jonson ... A lot of the bands, like Lovvers as well, did their three 7 inches and went to Witchta and again I was up for them going to it cause we couldn’t support their ambition.

In this short extract we can also see evidence of another aspect of the relational foundation of the underground. Joe is happy for some bands to leave his label, even if they go on to achieve success, because they have more ‘ambition’ than Joe can ‘support’. In short they demonstrate that they belong in a different art world.

### *Manufacture*

Once they have decided to produce a record Jonson Family can begin their work. Joe emphasises that if you are planning a release ‘you’ve got to do it properly ... cause otherwise you’re going to let the band down and yourself, cause you’re not going to sell any’. The first step in the manufacturing process is deciding which format to use: vinyl and CDs are the two most popular. Some labels produce more than one format, although Jonson Family ‘can’t afford it or see the real need for it’. They would rather let another label handle a different format if they want to. After agreeing formats with the band the label can organise the record to be pressed. Joe explains that ‘we used to

get our records pressed by GZ, which was the record press place in the Czech Republic which most people use and we used to go direct to them but we stopped that now. There's lots of brokers in this country. So you can use them. It makes it a lot easier'. Brokers handle the manufacturing of the records. They charge a fee but, as Matt of Gringo Records points out, they save a lot of 'headaches and stress'. The lead time for manufacturing is around three weeks.

After they have a physical product Jonson Family uses a separate company called Cargo to distribute their records physically and digitally. Cargo sends the records to record shops and coordinates with online retailers to upload digital versions of the records on services such as I-Tunes. They need copies of a record six to eight weeks in advance of the release date to do this work. Joe explains that this means that you have to 'set a release date for two or three month's time, if you're going to do them officially through shops'. Joe points out that 'you don't have to do that' but this can affect the press coverage a record receives 'cause you can't send a record to a press person and say it's out yesterday, can you review it? Cause they won't review it'. There are, inevitably, ways to play the system. Some labels use professional PR agencies to promote their records and secure reviews. However Joe is unsure of the effectiveness of this:

**RC:** Well, how do you do the press and radio, what do you...

**Joe:** Well it depends on what it is, well, we'll just send them to people...

**RC:** Oh okay but you don't go through like a...

**Joe:** No, no.

**RC:** ...professional?

**Joe:** No, I've worked for one of those before so I know that it doesn't necessarily pay off. It can do but it's not guaranteed.

**RC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Joe:** So you can end up spending lots of money on it.

**RC:** Would you advise other labels against doing that?

**Joe:** No, if they want, I don't care. It can work out. So you can't blanket-ly say it won't work out but if you go and pay for a press agent or radio plugger and they're how much would they charge, cheapest I've heard is usually about £250 quid and then plus about a pound for every one they send out.

**RC:** Yeah

**Joe:** And so you've given them about a hundred and fifty copies, so you're looking at two, about four hundred pound to do radio plugging. And then if you go and send them a Trencher record! Really you could do that yourself. You could hit the three people that are likely to play that record! (Laughter) ... If you're going to pay for that you need to pay for the press, you need to pay for the adverts and the band need to be play live. You need to hit everything at once.

Not using these professional support personnel means that a record costs Jonson Family between £800-1000 to produce into a physical artefact depending on the quantity and format. Jonson Family usually produce between 300-500 records on either vinyl or CD. They give copies to the band as payment and give copies away to press for reviews. Other labels I interviewed and observed spend up to £1000 more than Jonson Family to promote their records through professional PR and pluggers. However none

of the labels I spoke to keep full formal accounts of these activities. This is not to say that they have no accounting in place. Instead most have developed some kind of informal financial management system much like the spreadsheets that Damn You! produce. For instance Jonson Family 'have one bank account that was actually my brother's when he was about twelve. You know, you open a bank account you get a free pig? But yeah that's how we know how much money we've spent, if we've got any or not!'

Regardless of their ambition one motivation that seems to link all independent labels is a desire to be involved in the production of music. Joe explains that 'I love it ... we somehow feel that we're involved in it really closely'. But there are times when creative producers want to stop. This is difficult. Once you have started a record label you can, as Joe puts it, 'get trapped in this thing where I'm doing it, I'm doing it arggh and I can't get out! ... You can't say "Oh we want to take a break for a year"'. On this point Dave D. explains that he 'can't just put a stop to' his label, Sorted Records, 'cause all the stuff is on I-tunes so it's always going to be there, available, generating 18 quid a month or what ... So it's still like an on-going thing'. People who run labels can, then, only slow down. They cannot stop. Indeed Joe is hoping to wind down his commitment to Jonson Family. He is encouraging the bands he works with to move to other labels. Joe's band, Hey Colossus, for example, has moved to another label. Joe explains the reasons why: 'we wanted to sort of carry on doing it but not like feel we had to do it on the label'.

**Summary: creative production in the music industries**

In this and the previous chapter I have explored the activities that go on in the underground, emphasising the tasks that must be completed for the underground to make live music products and recorded music products. In keeping with the art world framework we have seen that promoters, venue owners, studio owners and people who run record labels rely on a range of other people to supply equipment and help them manufacture products. We have also seen how important other people are in helping creative producers learn how to make live music and recorded music. Whether it is Neil's parents carefully treading around a band as they get ready for work in the morning with the band crashed out in their lounge, sleeping off the previous night's gig, or the person on the end of the phone line when Joe called a manufacturing plant in Leeds asking how he could get a record made other people are clearly essential in the underground. Rather than do-it-yourself people in the underground do-it-together.

We have also seen how creative producers who make music for a living such as Jay and Anton relate to those who make music in their spare time such as the members of Damn You! and Joe. Drawing on Finnegan's (1989) suggestion that between seemingly unambiguous terms like 'professional' and 'amateur' there exists spaces of possibility, I have argued that there is a particular space opened up called the underground around a particular image of a conventional art world called the mainstream. The underground is supported materially by the work of creative producers like Joe, Jay, Anton and the members of Damn You! and discursively by a relational repertoire of independence that allows creative producers to accommodate the changing circumstances of their lives. For example after Jay has experienced such hardships in setting up his business he now has no problem speaking frankly about money even though he acknowledges that before he struggled to do so. This change does not, however, signify that Jay has

moved into the mainstream precisely because the mainstream is constructed through the relational repertoire that allows for him to make money yet stay authentic. Similarly we have seen Anton offer a particularly fluid account of the underground that allows people to move from the underground into or around the edges of the mainstream but stay, fundamentally, underground people. They continue to work in a certain way even though their relationships to the economics of making music have changed. As we have seen, though, in each of the case studies creative producers, whether they earn a living from their activities or not, are committed to making music. For them, there is something compelling about creative production. It is, as Roderick (2006) tells us about semi-professional footballers, a labour of love. How this labour of love is organised is the topic of the next section of the thesis.

## **Relationships**

### **7. Working with and without work**

In the last section we saw how live music and recorded music get made in an underground music world by creative producers who organise material and discursive spaces in which music can be made. By following four case studies I explored in detail how particular material spaces are organised including a live music concert and a recording studio. Likewise I demonstrated how creative producers construct an image of a conventional art world in order to create a space of difference for their own art world by using the structural contradictions between amateurs and professionals, art and commerce, freedom and constraint encapsulated in images of work and creativity to facilitate their activities.

But while these people might be creative are they producers or, as much of the literature on creative industries has it, are they workers? There are two immediate reasons why we might think that they are not workers. First as we have seen in the Introduction work is often imagined to be controlled, managed and extrinsically motivated and, ultimately, antithetical to creativity. ‘The bulk of the literature on occupations’, Roderick tells us, ‘has been concerned with the fact that when people do have work, it is characteristically unsatisfying’ (2006: 32). Indeed when the creative people I interviewed are asked to define work, in keeping with popular representations of work discussed in the Introduction, they describe it as an uncreative activity. In

contrast we have already seen that these same creative producers see making music as an enjoyable and free activity and that they use particular repertoires to maintain their identity as authentic, independent and creative people. Svendsen (2008: 89) explains that: 'Getting paid is central to our idea of work. We will often distinguish between work and a hobby because one of them is paid and the other is not, even though they can take the same amount of physical and mental effort'. On this point we have already seen that many of the people in the underground do not get paid for their activities and even professionals struggle to earn a comfortable living. For these two reasons, then, we might think that work is an appropriate term to describe these activities.

On this point Strachan, as we saw in the Chapter 4, tells us that one way of creating discursive space for an underground art world is to present the activities involved in producing music as consumption. He explains that 'the small-scale cultural producer is often recast primarily as a fan whose primary rewards are gained from a sense of personal satisfaction and engagement' (2007: 250). Similarly within the interviews I conducted interviewees often spoke about their consumption of music as a part of their experiences of producing music. Anton, from our earlier case study, for example, points out that making music is for a living is different to other jobs because 'I'm a music fan'. This fits with an explanation of cultural production as an activity in which the boundaries between production and consumption do not exist. Indeed in many academic disciplines cultural production has been, consequently, relabelled as coproduction (Kerrigan, O'Reilly and vom Lehn, 2009, Gill and Pratt, 2008, Bradshaw and Shankar, 2008)

However in this chapter I will present a specific repertoire of consumption and argue that the idea of coproduction does not match on to the realities of music making (Negus, 2002). Drawing on both Becker's (2007; 1982) and Bourdieu's (1986a; 1983a) frameworks of cultural production I will argue that production and consumption activities are separate. Returning to McRobbie's (2002) argument that we need a new vocabulary to understand creative work that can help us overcome the contradictions in our understanding of creativity and work I will close the chapter by arguing for the concept of a labour of love which, I conclude, best describes the creative production activities that go on in the underground.

### **Difficulties in definition**

A stand-out feature of the interviews I conducted for this research was that the creative producers I spoke to have real difficulties in defining their activities as either work or leisure. They hold on to a division between these terms, as outlined in the Introduction, but this division frequently collapses when it is used. Take Matt, a key member of Damn You! who also runs Gringo Records. Matt was the first person I interviewed for this research project. We discussed the activities that Matt performs in making live music and releasing recorded music during a two and a half hour interview. This culminated in the following episode where I directly asked Matt to consider whether the activities that were involved with running his record label are work:

**RC:** Is what you do with Gringo work?

**Matt:** Is it work?

**RC:** Yes.

**Matt:** Erm, hmm, I suppose it totally depends on what your definition of work is, doesn't it? (Pause) Erm. (Pause) Hmmm, is it work? Is it work? (Pause) Work's not really, doesn't have to be a negative thing, so I'd say it's work, yeah. I'm work, I putting a certain amount of effort into something so, erm, hmm, yeah. I don't know if I have a definition of work. For me like ... erm, it's def, obviously it's not a job but I'm not sure, I'm not sure really how to answer it.

**RC:** Cause say if you did get a job or fulltime paid employment as, working for a record label...

**Matt:** Yeah.

**RC:** ...and you'd be doing all the same things that you do, or a lot of the same, similar things, at least some similar things...

**Matt:** Yeah.

**RC:** ...maybe even with some similar people that you do at the minute for Gringo. Would that then become, would it be work then?

**Matt:** I think, er, probably by dint of the fact that it's, you're getting paid for it and you're not (Pause) you're not, like, the master of your own destiny would make it work. Yeah. So, a lot, a lot of things that I do are task based but, yeah, I probably wouldn't consider it to be work really. I find it too enjoyable. Erm (Pause) so no I'm going to say it's not work.

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Matt:** (Laughter) After all that!

As we can see Matt has a problem in defining work. As he puts it he is ‘not really sure how to answer’ the question because the answer depends on ‘what your definition of work is’ and he does not have a definition. Matt then asserts that making music is work. He explains that work ‘doesn’t have to be a negative thing’. Yet Matt then goes on to characterise work in purely negative terms: as something that you are paid for, where your activities and ability to succeed are controlled by someone else and something that is unenjoyable. As a consequence Matt finally concludes that making music is not work despite his initial assertion because he is not paid for it, is ‘master’ of his own destiny and enjoys it too much.

After this initial interview I made a point of asking other interviewees whether they consider their music making activities to be work. Regardless of whether they earned a living from making music or not they all followed the pattern that Matt set – claiming first that it was work then switching their position or vice versa. For instance Jay, whose studio and rehearsal facility was the basis of our earlier case study, also struggles to define a concept of work:

**RC:** Do you think of all this stuff as being a job, as work?

**Jay:** Erm (Laughter) yes and no.

**RC:** Okay, could you explain that?

**Jay:** Erm, it’s not a, like, it’s not a job in terms of when you come in and doing a session and it’s fun and you’re doing something creative. It’s not. That is just not a job because it’s just too enjoyable. I, ahh, the way I’d describe a job is something you go to and you toil over it and, you, to make some money. And when we do this it doesn’t feel like a money-

making exercise. Even though it is, it does feel that way. Erm the times when it does feel like a job is if I'm having to chew over money issues, paperwork stuff or landlord issues you know what I mean? Or if I've got problems with people. You know, sometimes I have problems with rehearsing bands, er, something might have gone on or getting loads of stuff broken and having to get it sorted, you know. All sort that kind of thing that makes it a job but you know you just deal with it cause, you know, the plus side far outweighs the negative side.

In this extract we see Jay define a job as a 'money-making exercise' that is not enjoyable or creative and is full of problems caused by other people. Making music is too enjoyable and creative to be a job. But Jay's definition of a job both contrasts with his music-making activities and also includes them. For Jay music making is not a job because it does not 'feel like a money-making exercise' even though it is. As a result making music can become a job for Jay but he can 'deal with it' because 'the plus side' of making music, even when it becomes like a job, 'far outweighs the negative side'.

Other interviewees also maintain that work and making music are very different things but, as they begin to talk through the distinction between work and making music, this distinction unravels. For example Neil, a member of Damn You!, asserts that work and making music are 'obviously very different things'. Neil has a job in the offices of a social housing organisation. Reflecting Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivations Neil explains the difference between his job and making music as being about the distinction between internal and external compulsion:

he has to work and wants to make music. Yet when Neil continues with this explanation the distinction between work and making music begins to collapse:

**RC:** I'm interested to know how you feel about your job, where it's work that you're having to do for somebody else and the things that you do outside of your job, so like the Damn You! stuff?

**Neil:** Stuff?

**RC:** If that is also...

**Neil:** It can be.

**RC:** In a way it is very similar but maybe it's not?

**Neil:** It's blatantly not because the difference is, as I said earlier, sorry I'm not saying this to (Pause) you like just turned the lights on.

**RC:** No, go for it.

**Neil:** It's obviously very different things.

**RC:** In what way?

**Neil:** Well I would never want to do, which is maybe why I've never thought of myself as a musician, cause it's putting a title, you know. It's like making it more like being at work. But I wouldn't want to do or it would have to be very specific and it would have to sort of edge round all the things that make me not want to cross the line. So whilst they're both work, one of them, I couldn't imagine not working actually in some way. ... Yeah there is a massive difference between work hours and outside of work. Although you could say they're both work and there's times when the thing that you're slaving away at can turn round and be worse than the thing that you're doing in the day. What's the

difference? Maybe that would have been an easy question to answer a few years ago. But what's the difference? I don't know if I could identify that very easily.

Here Neil begins by highlighting a blatant difference between working and making music – clearly locating work as formal employment – only to acknowledge that they are both work. He then reasserts the 'massive difference' between them only to finally change his mind and say that 'slaving away' making music can be worse than his job. Later on in our interview, however, Neil specifies earning a living is something he can do 'robotically' whereas his music making activities are not. He describes his job as a necessity, as 'something, you know, I'd find it quite difficult to get by if I didn't, so that's something that I do almost robotically, but I wouldn't want the later things, the evening and weekends to become robotic'.

Chris S., who is also a member of Damn You!, represents a mirror image of Neil on this point. As well as putting on shows with Damn You! and playing music, Chris S. is a graphic designer specialising in live music posters and record art work. When I asked Chris S. whether these activities are work he asserted that they were: 'It's obviously working isn't it, if I'm doing like graphic design for people, it's actually quite high pressure doing things'. However he then corrected himself, pointing out that: 'It's working but it's not really'.

As these example demonstrate, and this is true for all the other creative producers I interviewed, it is difficult to define the production of music as work but they also find it difficult to categorically say that it is not work. It does not depend simply on whether

they earn their living by doing it. Instead the distinction between work and leisure depends on their attitude. This clearly links back to Svendsen's argument that whether a particular activity is work or leisure depends 'on the attitude of the person doing it' (2007: 250). Indeed uprooted from the anchor of a formal definition of work as the thing you do to earn a living features of work can be found in any activity just as features of non-work can be found in work. As Svendsen summarises: 'We might say that one man's work is another man's leisure' (2008: 67).

In part, though, the realities of making music affect this attitude. In this regard Dave C., who teaches music, explains that 'if you do anything repetitively to earn money' it will feel like work. Here Anton of the Rescue Rooms illustrates how the enjoyable activities involved in making music can easily become unenjoyable and start to seem like work. He describes a trip to an international music festival that involved 'boozing and watching bands'. Anton points out that although this was a lot of fun 'by the end of it you never want to have another drink, talk to another music industry person or, erm, watch another band ever again'. Indeed during the participant observation field work I spoke with one musician who explained that being on tour with his band 'is not creative, it's work' because he has to play the same music, repetitively, every night. 'There's a limit to how many times you can play the same thing differently', he continued, 'and I'm way past it'.

The problem of defining work is, then, more than a matter of linguistic precision. Work is not only a concept that is hard for the creative producers I interviewed to define but when they do define work it is hard to apply it in a strict way to their activities of making music. We might conclude, therefore, that work is an

inappropriate tool for conceptualising the activities that go into making music – as Chris S. put it, ‘It’s working but it’s not really’. We might, consequently, question whether creative workers are, strictly speaking, part of a production process at all. Indeed drawing on the circuits of culture perspective (Du Gay, 1997; Johnson, 1986), developments in cultural studies concerning the active role played by the audiences of cultural texts (Negus, 1996; Fiske, 1989; 1987; Barthes, 1977) and a range of empirical studies (Cluley, 2009b; Arvidsson, 2008; Taylor and Littleton, 2008; Bradshaw, McDonagh, Marshall and Bradshaw, 2005), a growing body of academic literature (Kerrigan, O’Reilly and vom Lehn, 2009; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Bradshaw and Shankar, 2008; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008; Becker, 2007) suggests that when people make cultural texts like music they move between producing the texts and consuming both them and the ‘cultural meanings’ that surround them (Taylor, Demont-Heinrich, Broadfoot, Dodge and Jian, 2002: 617). It is argued, as a result, that it is all but impossible for us to define what cultural producers are doing as either production or consumption. Instead it is increasingly popular for researchers to reconceive the production and consumption of cultural texts as a simultaneous activity – coproduction or prosumption (Cova and Dailli, 2009; Humphreys and Grayson, 2008).

### **Consuming Your Own Produce**

In this regard we have already seen that research concerning amateur musicians suggests that people collectively make music that they want to consume themselves. Cohen (1991a), for instance, tells us that amateur musicians do not listen to music for enjoyment but for clues signalling what they should be doing. It is consumed as part of the ‘preparation’ for production (Stebbins, 1982: 117). It is not enjoyed for pleasure

but investigated for information. Marking this difference Bennett tells us that musicians listen to 'The Music' rather than music (1980: 113). Bennett explains that musicians 'copy The Music' and 'the means of production of The Music as well' (1980: 181). This unique consumption is illustrated for Bennett in the ways that musicians listen to their own music as they make it. He describes musicians literally moving into the position of the audience when their bands were setting up before a live concert in order to hear their band as the audience would hear them – making constant comparison between their own music and The Music. As Bennett points out, though, such consumption is fundamentally different from the way that consumers will hear the band. For a start the sound of a band changes drastically between an empty room and a room full of people and, by stepping off the stage, the musician instantly changes the appearance of the band.

Within the study of the professional production of music too we find evidence of coproduction practices. Drawing on the notion of cultural intermediaries Hennion argues that record producers are 'interposed representatives' of public taste behind the closed doors of the recording studio (1989: 402). She tells us that record producers organise 'a complete production-consumption cycle' on a 'local scale' (1989: 400). Drawing on marketing information, experience and intuition they consume sounds in the studio, demanding changes and insisting on alterations in performance and fidelity. Accordingly for Hennion we should not look for a 'frontier, a moment when production and its techniques are abandoned for the great unknown: the public and its tastes' (1989: 402). Instead we must look at the production and consumption of recorded music as an unfolding process that begins with the singer and the record producer in a

studio and ends in a popular music market that ‘has been incorporated in many forms from the very beginning’ (Hennion, 1989: 400).

Yet for Negus the role of such cultural intermediaries in the process of cultural production actually maintains the distinction between producers and consumers of cultural texts precisely because these intermediaries act as a buffer between them. As he puts it: ‘Cultural intermediaries reproduce rather than bridge the distance between production and consumption’ (2002: 509). In particular Negus indicates that while the record producers Hennion studied might represent the market for musicians within a recording studio they will be less vocal representatives of record company accountants and even less vocal representatives of the globally divided workers who will actually produce the physical music product. He explains:

‘The “creative” impulse breeds a certain distaste for, denial of and even contempt for the day-to-day realities of manufacturing labour and warehouse work. Cultural intermediaries are in significant ways prone to encourage the establishment of a distance between themselves and industrial manufacturing, storage and shipment of the symbolic items that they have a stake in “mediating”’ (2002: 507).

In contrast to the idea of coproduction Becker (2007) and Bourdieu (1983a) characterise the relationship between producers and consumers of cultural texts through an overlapping division of labour between what Becker in particular calls the makers and users of texts. Becker argues that all representations of society, including cultural texts, are engaged in four kinds of reductive ‘work’: selection, translation, arrangement

and interpretation (2007: 30). Importantly these reductions are done by both the makers and users of texts. He tells us that ‘the users of representations play a crucial role. No matter what the makers of representations do, if the users don’t do their part, the story doesn’t get told, or doesn’t get told as the story the makers intended’ (2007: 286). So users of texts do some making – consumers some production. Conversely, there is also as Bourdieu puts it a certain amount of ‘production-for-producers’ (1983a: 46). There is an amount of ‘restricted production’ that creates products for other producers to consume and is not concerned with the ‘large-scale’ market (Bourdieu, 1983a: 39). There is, therefore, some consumption that is unique for producers along with the production that is unique to consumers.

Becker (2007) characterises texts where makers do the most work as *arguments* and those where a greater amount of work is left to users as *files*. An *argument* is an attempt to inscribe a specific interpretation whereas a *file* is simply a container of information that can be used in a number of ways. The precise nature of a particular division of labour surrounding a cultural text is a convention specific to an art world. Becker offers the production and consumption of a map as an illustrative example. He explains that maps are produced in their specific form because of ‘all the cartographers, geography departments, pilots, ship captains, drivers, and pedestrians whose cooperation makes us a world of maps’ (2007: 16).

For both Becker and Bourdieu, then, the consumption done by producers is indivisible from the production process and, likewise, the production done by consumers of texts is indivisible from the consumption process. However the exact nature of this division of labour depends on the particular text and art world that produces it. The question for

understanding production and consumption in an art world, as a result, becomes sorting out what makes the consumption that takes place in production unique and, likewise, what makes the production that takes place in consumption unique within that art world. As Negus puts it the task is to ‘interrogate the gaps or spaces between production and consumption’ (2007: 16).

The people I interviewed for this research explicitly stated that their role as producers means they are no longer simply consumers or users of music. For example Sophie, who works in the music rights industry, describes how difficult it is for her to step out from her role producing music and simply listen to music for enjoyment. She explains:

**Sophie:** The music sync people – we all have the same I-tunes, I think, playlists. So it just becomes obvious, like I can sit in a pub and go Radox, you know? ... Just because it becomes a bit stereotypical

**RC:** Yeah

**Sophie:** Just like, “That sounds a bit Colgate”.

**RC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Sophie:** It’s ruined life for me, I can’t just listen to music! (Laughter)

Sophie also points out that as she spends more time making music she has less freedom to consume music without relating that consumption to a production activity:

I kind of, it’s really difficult because we’re sent so much stuff and you’re supposed to be on top of your game at all times. But there’s so much music out that, that it’s just impossible. But like my homework is

taking a bunch of CDs home that I've got, who have I got today, the Kills and Portishead ... So that's like the hardest part of like my job itself is listening to music.

Similarly other respondents point out the difficulties they experience when they try to listen to music without seeking inspiration or investigating it as a model. Tom, a member of Damn You!, for example, explains how he went to watch a band that he had promoted in a different city hoping that he would be able to relax and enjoy the show. He 'had a much better time just because I didn't have to worry about anything!'. But he could not just enjoy this band. He had to compare his event to the one he attended, looking for confirmation of his success. Other live music promoters confirm this point. Chris T. and his partner Clare, who organise shows together in London, explain that they also criticise other people's shows when they go to them instead of enjoying the music.

This problem of consuming music without grounding it in production activities is especially obvious when a producer tries to consume music products that they have produced. For example Rob, who runs an independent record label, explains:

**Rob:** I find it hard to listen to anything I've released. Erm, you have to have a ...

**RC:** Why's that?

**Rob:** Cause it's got a, I start thinking about the business-side of it and I can't get away from that and just enjoy the music.

We can see, then, that creative producers in the underground acknowledge that they are not consumers music but consume music as part of their production activities. While the activities that go into making music in the underground do not exactly fit an image of work as an extrinsically motivated, alienated and boring activity, it is clear that they do not exactly match with an image of consumption either.

### **Consumption as a repertoire**

However, much like the people working for micro records labels who Strachan (2007) interviewed, the people I interviewed do rely on consumption activities as a way of defining their production as authentic, independent and creative. Consumption offers them another repertoire that they use to describe and structure their activities as outsiders. Among the creative producers that I spoke to there were clear ways in which they present consumption practices as part of production. Below I review four key roles for consumption in the production of music that interviewees discussed that make up a repertoire of independence based on consumption.

#### *A kick-start*

Many participants spoke about their consumption of music when I asked them how they began producing music. For instance Ady explains his motivation for starting his record label: ‘It’s just like kind of like being a music fan over the years since I was a kid I guess I was always interested in it and I always wanted to work in it’. Similarly Joe, who runs Jonson Family, explains: ‘I think the reason we started doing was probably because we were into American stuff like, don’t know, Dischord and labels like that I guess’. Indeed we can see from the following extract how quickly this shift

from the topic of production to consumption occurs in the interviews I conducted. In this extract Anton, who manages the Rescue Rooms, explains how he began producing music by shifting instantly into a story about his consumption habits:

**RC:** So could you tell me how you got into promoting live music events?

**Anton:** How I got into promoting?

**RC:** Like the very first thing you did?

**Anton:** Well, always been a music fan and came to Nottingham and part of the reason I chose university was cause of Rock City.

Linking back to the earlier definition of creativity that I offered in the Introduction the music products that creative producers consume can inspire them to produce music. Some products do this by encouraging imitation while other products inspire consumers to innovate something new. Indeed several interviewees explain that at the same time as they were pulled by the products they were consuming they were also pushed into producing by the products they were not able to consume. For instance Anton continues his explanation of how he started promoting live music events by highlighting the importance of a local venue that ‘changed what they were doing’ such that they ‘were no longer playing music we wanted to listen to’. He states:

I never kind of sat there when I was 20 going, “I want to be a promoter”  
(Pause) I just was here’s something that’s not happening, I’m not going to sit (Pause) and that’s the thing that really pisses me off actually, about, some people will sit there and go, “Why, why isn’t this and why

is this ticket price like this” and well if you can do better do it! Make it happen! Do it, you, know don’t whine about it. Do it.

The experience of wanting to consume something that was not available is common among participants. For example, Chris T., a live music promoter in London, describes how his desire to see an American band who were touring in Europe led him and a group of friends to club together enough money to pay for the band to travel to London. He explains that he ‘really wanted to see them but for some reason we thought it would be much easier and much cheaper to erm just do a show in London and sort out all this money for flights than to just go over to see them play in Paris’. From this initial show, Chris T. and his friends began promoting regular concerts. Likewise Kirsty, a DJ, also describes how she began to organise music events because she and her boyfriend were fans of a type of music that was not on offer in their local town. She explains:

**RC:** How did your music events start?

**Kirsty:** Okay, well basically, erm, my boyfriend, wanted to, erm, set-up a new night which was, erm, cause he’s well into the electro scene. Well, we both are. And about eighteen months ago there was nowhere in Leicester playing reasonable music. It was all sort of lame indie music and there was nowhere playing cutting edge music.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Kirsty:** So, basically, he started to research the music a little bit more and start to download the music. Erm, and then we contacted [the owner of a local venue] and asked if we could just have the upstairs room for a couple of Saturdays.

So consumption is discussed as kick-starting the production process by both pulling and pushing people to make music by inspiring and frustrating them. In the Introduction I argued that creativity can be defined through two processes. I observed that when people try to imitate something that they are inspired by they can end up developing something new and useful. We have now seen that through consuming music products people find things they want to imitate. In the Introduction I also observed that creativity happens when people highlight something that is deficient in some way. We have seen in this section that when people highlight products are not available for them to consume they can also begin a creative process of making those products themselves. Consuming is, in short, presented as the first step in creative production.

#### *Getting blown away*

Despite consumption playing this key role in kick-starting creative production once creative producers begin to make music they meet new dilemmas. One significant issue is how to overcome the inevitable frustrations and failures that Finnegan (1989) tells us typifies the production of music. For the people that I interviewed such failures are often cast in terms of their consumption practices and personal taste. For example Matt from Damn You!, and Gringo Records explains: ‘I think you can lose your enthusiasm for it a bit or there’s the potential to if you’re not putting stuff on you really like’. In other words for Matt, losing enthusiasm for producing music is caused by making music that he has no interest in consuming. The initial inspiration of consumption that kick-started him becoming a producer is described as having has worn off. But, Matt explains, it is through consuming music that he finds further inspiration:

If I have got fed up with doing it that feeling has passed really quickly. Erm, so like I'll have seen something, whether that be a band that I want to put something out by or I'll see a band I know and really like, but, you know. Like, there's always been a few bands that if I got to see them I'll just be like "Woah! That's amazing", you know, you'll be like "Fuck!". This is kind of, you remember why you do what you do and it doesn't have to be a band that I've put something out by. It could be someone else. ... I'd see and I go "Fucking hell that's amazing".

It is interesting, in this regard, that several interviewees describe music that continued to inspire them as 'blowing them away'. For example Ady, who also runs an independent record label and promotes live music events, explains how, after he was beginning to lose his commitment to making music, he was 'blown away' by a demo he received from a new band. Describing how this band made him feel, he told me:

Whatever it is, they've fucking got it! And I played it back and back and I was like, I started to just feel really inspired and it was just, everything came back to me and it was really, really nice moment. They've inspired me to actually realise what I'm doing, what I had been doing for seven, well for six years, six and a half years.

In this instance consuming music is presented by Ady as a way to reignite his passion for making music. Consumption, put another way, is discussed as a practice that helps to keep on inspiring him even when the realities of making music in the underground

challenge his commitment to independence and authenticity. Ady's use of language in this instance is especially interesting. Csikszentmihalyi, whose definition of extrinsically motivated and intrinsically motivating activities we explored in the Introduction, argues that intrinsically motivating activities share four common features. One of these is what Csikszentmihalyi calls 'the feeling of egolessness' (1975: 46). Quoting Maslow, he explains that this can be described as a "loss of ego," "self-forgetfulness," "loss of self-consciousness," and even "transcendence of individuality" and "fusion with the world" (1975: 42). Consumption, it seems, can play an important part in this process self-forgetting – it can almost feel as if it physically blows you away.

#### *Entry into an art world*

Consumption is also described as a way into an art world (Straw, 2005). Consuming music invariably means getting to know other people – whether that is through meeting them at live shows, trading records or discussing music online (Cluley, 2009b, Salganik, Dodds and Watts, 2006; Negus, 1999). This social side of consumption has practical benefits that can help people to begin making music. For example Chris S. states that after meeting the other founder members of Damn You! at a concert he became friends with them and decided to make live music with them. Likewise Ady, who organises Vacuous Pop, explains that people began to recognise him at live music concerts because he went to so many shows. He recalls how, as he started to talk to the people who organised those shows, he found himself repeatedly asked the same question: did he have 'any idea' who organised concerts in his local town and, if not, had he considered doing it himself? Eventually he decided that he should do it himself. Ady explains that this was because he and a friend 'both liked' a band that needed a gig

in his town ‘so much and just thought, “Oh fuck it, shall we put it on ourselves then, try and find a venue, and let’s put it on ourselves”’.

So consumption is presented as a ticket into an art world. It lets consumers step inside the products they are consuming. As Anton from the Rescue Rooms makes clear, organising live music events allows him to literally become part of the products he consumes. He explains: ‘For me putting on Mudhoney, whatever year that was, was like the greatest live band in the world and putting a show on in a ridiculously small venue where I’m stood on stage next to them you know!’. Likewise Matt from Damn You! describes the ‘magic’ of being part of an art world:

But it just feels nice to be part of it, erm, in some way. The fact that you’re involved in, I don’t like using the word scene cause it always, it’s such a bad word, but a community. If you’re involved in that same community, that if you’re somehow linked to them and part of the magic rubs off.

The social side of consumption is also presented as a key reason why creative producers make music. It helps to kick-start production as well. For example Carl explains how he began to make music after he ‘started working in a record shop ... and hence started buying loads of records cause I worked in a shop and you get them all really cheap! Which is why I started DJing’. He continues:

**Carl:** And, of course, I was surrounded by all these other people as well who, you know, as much as I was into music I wasn't the sort of kid who was as obsessive as a teenager.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Carl:** I got into music quite late, er, working with a load of people like ten, twelve, thirteen other people in the shop who were all music obsessives. Becomes quite, becomes quite, er, what do you want to call it? Isn't it? It's sort of quite, it's quite not addictive...

**RC:** Infectious?

**Carl:** Infectious! So, erm, but they're quite flakey dudes as well though, as you'd expect. And I'm not a flakey dude, I don't like to think I am anyway. So I was quite get-up-and-go. I was like, "Why don't we start a night?" and they were like, "Yeah, that's a good idea. We tried doing that before but we never got round to it". So, like, we did.

Related to this aspect of consumption several respondents pointed out that seeing other people consume music that they had produced helps to keep them inspired (Cluley, 2009b). Seeing other people in their art world consume music helps to blow them away. Anton, in particular, points out that since moving from being an independent promoter to becoming the manager of an established venue he has had to put bands on even though he does not like their music. However he is able to get a 'buzz' off seeing other people enjoy a gig. Anton explains:

It's quite exciting to put on bands that you would never dream of doing ... I did a stadium with 8000 people and they had a good time! And do a

show at the Arena with 8000 people – that’s still, whether you’re bothered about the band or not, that’s still like, “Fucking Hell I did a stadium with 8000 people and they had a good time!”

So consumption is also discussed as a social activity that offers practical and moral assistance for a creative producer. In this regard we have seen Chris S. explain how meeting other members of Damn You! at a concert led to him making music. Consumption is also described as a way in which producers are encouraged to enter an art world. Ady, for instance, explained how other promoters convinced him to begin making music. In short we can see consuming music as presented through a particular repertoire that emphasises the role of consumption in preparing authentic production motivated by more than economic value.

#### *Consumption as a template*

Finally consuming music is also described as the basis upon which producers can judge the quality of their own products. As we have seen, the way that The Music is produced provides a benchmark for musicians (Bennett, 1980: 181). Consumption helps to shape what they think is good (Salganik, Dodds and Watts, 2006). Indeed returning to the definition of creativity that I have used throughout this thesis consuming is also presented as a way of finding out what to innovate. As Dave D., who runs an independent record label, explains that the way he consumes music encourages him to do things differently to other producers. He points out that when setting the price of his records, a decision that we may expect would involve financial calculations, he bases it upon his own consumption habits:

I mean you can set your own price for distribution but I never wanted to make the records expensive in shops because I know I would go to [a local record shop] and flick through the seven inch singles. And I'd buy stuff that looked interesting. So a lot of the time I was buying stuff that I'd not heard. So price was actually a factor in determining whether to buy the record or not because if something is £1.99 then you think, you know, but if it was £2.99 then you think well I don't know what this is going to be like and so much of the stuff when you do that is crap anyway that if it's more expensive you're less likely to buy it. So I'd always try to keep the prices down.

Other interviewees also offer their consumption habits as a way of explaining the ways they make music. Joe, for instance, reflects on the choice of a distribution channel for the records he makes as Jonson Family. He explains that he is happy to outsource digital distribution because he does not like to consume music digitally himself:

**Joe:** That's what Cargo do, they put all of our stuff on I-Tunes and all the other online-y things but the thing is, is that Bob and I, that's not what we like. Neither of us buy music like that I don't want to go and buy one song on my computer. I think like they say that it's the death of the album and all this sort of stuff and it could be, I don't know, but not for me it's not! (Laughter). And I don't get it. I don't fully get it and I know that when we first, when I first moved down here there was a kid who was like 18 or whatever and we used to chat a lot and he was saying

that his friends all really liked music but none of them buy CDs, none of them buy records.

**RC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Joe:** They buy like three songs off an album, two songs off an album and a mass you know and probably don't buy that much. Probably get it in their cunning way for free! And I can't really get behind that massively. And I don't I like, I don't mind music getting round the place but I don't maybe it's just cause I'm an old bastard but I don't fully understand it. I don't get it! (Laughter)

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Joe:** And don't agree with it! (Laughter) I don't trust it. I can't see it! No I still like record shops and I do buy stuff online but it'll be records you know like there's no record shops nowadays so you have to I do the mail order via whoever.

But it is not only their own consumption that helps creative producers to decide what music they should make. Other people's consumption also plays a role. An art world, in this sense, offers not only knowledge and expertise on how to produce music but informal market research for what music to produce. For example Ady, who runs an independent record label and promotes live music events, explains the importance of his friends' opinions in helping him to decide what music he should make. He points out that: 'I was like always keen to show friends what I'm doing and bands I'm discovering and I felt quite a buzz from them. So it's good to get a mate see what he thought as well ... that was always my sort of gauge if I'd release something'.

So, to summarise, we can see that consumption practices are presented as playing an important part in the production of music in the underground even though the creative producers I interviewed also acknowledge that these consumption practices are not the same as those of people who do not make music. In this regard we have seen how creative producers in the underground use their consumption of music as a way of describing their initial inspiration, as an activity that provides them with material and moral support as they begin producing and an activity that offers them a template that they can craft their music products from. Consumption, in short, provides a specific repertoire that is used to support the authenticity of creative production. This interpretation follows Becker's (2007) framework for analysing the production of cultural texts as a production activity that includes some consumption practices. It also lends support to Bourdieu's (1983a) argument that a certain section of cultural production exists for producers to consume. The question, then, becomes assessing what kind of production practice it is.

### **The Labour of Love**

Making music in the underground can be said to be a production activity – one that is both enjoyable and unenjoyable, does not always involve payment and involves a unique type of consumption that helps people to prepare to make music. Freidson (1990) and Roderick (2006) conceive of such activities as labours of love. These are labour 'to which people are irresistibly committed' and would participate in 'voluntarily' (Roderick, 2006: 31). Roderick (2006) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) assert that the labour of love offers a positive model for the organisation of all work.

As Roderick puts it: ‘What could be better than to be paid (sometimes a great deal of money) to do something that you love?’ (2006: 32).

As we saw earlier Svendsen (2008) points out that the etymological root of amateurism is the Latin *amare*, meaning love. Indeed Finnegan finds that many amateur musicians are motivated by a ‘love’ for making music – its intrinsic motivation (1989: 13). Strachan too observes that ‘[o]ne of the most important reasons given for being involved in record production was that active participation in producing and releasing music was seen as being worthwhile in itself’ (2007: 255). Likewise we have seen that many people I interviewed speak, like Neil from Damn You!, about being ‘compelled’ to make music. In this regard we have seen Jay explain that just before opening his studios he realised that he could earn a living doing something he loves. Similarly Ady explains his motivation for making music by drawing on an idea of passion: ‘I don’t know it’s just like a passion really, I guess, it’s just sort of like, it just seems the right thing to do you know’.

In closing this chapter, though, I want to raise some issues concerning the love part of a labour of love before, in the next chapter, going on to focusing on the labour part of a labour of love. Love is an area of our social life that we do not know much about (Fromm, 1957). We do not know a great deal about the mechanics of love nor do we have much understanding of love as a social process. We do not know whether one person’s love is equivalent to another person’s (Barthes, 1978). As Phillips puts it:

‘More has been written about how relationships don’t work, than about how they do. We have virtually no language, other than banality, to describe the couple who have been happy together for a very long time’ (1996: 74).

Indeed love is often imagined to be something too private and too personal for us to make sweeping sociological conclusion about it (Becker, 1986: 21). There is, in other words, a suspicion that when we talk in terms of love we actually hide more than we reveal. ‘Love’, Billig points out, ‘can make us blind’ (2008: 837). As social scientists, we can ‘fall in love with our technical vocabularies’ and end up losing sight of the things we are using those vocabularies to explain (Billig, 2008: 837). So while it is useful to keep love as an explanatory rubbish bin in which we can dump social processes we do not really understand, the result is that the concept of a labour of love risks being a way of saying that something is different to another kind of labour – one that we do not love – without ever defining what such love involves.

Adam Phillips, a British psychoanalyst, offers us a way to think through the structural aspect of love in his analysis of monogamy. He asserts that monogamy is an essential third component for a romantic couple. ‘Two’s company,’ he tells us, ‘but three’s a couple’ (1996: 94). Monogamous love, in short, relies on a notion of containment. It involves creating spaces of freedom and constraint. Phillips explains:

‘If it is the forbidden that is exciting – if desire is fundamentally transgressive – the monogamous are like the very rich. They have to find their poverty. They have to starve themselves enough. In other words, they have to work, if only to keep what is always too available sufficiently illicit to be interesting ...

Unfortunately, it is easier to fake obstacles – to simulate the forbidden – than to fake desire’ (1996: 94).

Phillips’ psychoanalytic approach might provide an overly romantic description for our current discussion but I think his point actually reveals something about the structure of a labour of love – at least in the context of music making in the underground. From his work we can infer that the inconsistencies between production and consumption, work and creativity, art and commerce are actually productive. In order to love the labour involved in the production of music creative producers have to find a space in which they can keep this labour sufficiently illicit to be interesting. We can see this happening when people in the underground define their art world. They need to keep a distance from the mainstream – a space in which the labour of making music does not involve love but a desire for fame and fortune – in order to make a space in which these activities are authentic. Indeed we have seen how people do this materially and discursively in the underground in the previous section of the thesis. On this point Joe from Jonson Family explains that running his own record label is not only caused by a love of music but actually contributes to it. He explains ‘I think it’s great. I’d recommend anyone do it. I think it prolongs your love for doing music stuff’.

In the following chapter we will see how people in the underground can prolong their love for the labour of making music through the notion of labour itself. We will see that by keeping music activities, either materially or discursive, as ‘the other woman’ in their working lives creative producers in the underground strengthen their love of a labour of love (Cohen, 1991a: 121). For the time being, though, it is worth noting that this description of a labour of love is remarkably similar to our earlier characterisation

of creativity as a process that depends on people making judgements about what is good and what is bad. To be creative, I argued, people attempt to imitate what they think is good and innovate what they think is bad. In Phillips' words we see that love is also structured around judgements of what is good and what is bad. Such judgements play the role of 'fake obstacles' (Phillips, 1996: 11). The bad offers us a poverty of experience that allows us not only to appreciate what is good but also to long for what is good, to desire it – to love it. So we can say that the labour of love is a creative activity.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have evaluated what kinds of activities and relationships go on in the underground. I opened the chapter by highlighting that interviewees struggle to define their music making activities as work. I then considered alternative concepts for thinking through these activities. Specifically I focused on the idea of coproduction. Drawing on Negus' (2002) criticisms of the coproduction idea I turned to Becker's (2007) and Bourdieu's (1986a; 1983a) conception the production of cultural texts as a distinct production activity that involves some unique consumption practices.

Analysing examples of the ways that consumption practices are drawn on to facilitate authentic creative production I turned to the notion of a labour of love as a way to define the production activities that go on in the underground. I argued, though, that love often hides more than it reveals. In this regard I focused on understanding love as a space structured through what Phillips calls 'fake obstacles' (1996: 11). I suggested that the material and discursive spaces created by the underground, as examined in the

previous section of the thesis, allow people a space for a labour they love as well as a space where they can find creative ways to make music. In other words I have argued that the structure of the field of cultural production that surrounds the underground matches the structural characteristics of a labour of love – both are split by seemingly unambiguous terms that contain a range of possibilities between them (Finnegan, 1989). In the following chapter I will pay more attention to the way that labour itself helps to create a labour of love.

## 8. The meaning of work

We have seen that creative producers struggle to define music making as work and that they also struggle to define it as not being work. As a result, in the last chapter, I considered whether we should describe music making activities as a consumption practice or even coproduction practice instead of a production practice. I highlighted a particular way in which the creative producers I have interviewed speak about their consumption as a way of maintaining the authenticity of creativity and I suggested that the concept of the labour of love might best describe the activities involved in making music in the underground. Drawing on Phillips' (1996) presentation of the structure of love I argued that the material and discursive ways people create the underground might help them to love their labour of love.

In this chapter I would like to pay some attention to the labour that goes on in this labour of love. In particular I will focus on the idea of work to show how it, for want of a better word, works to support a labour of love. I will argue that when people in the underground use work they do so in a distinct way. In particular I will show that they draw on two interpretative repertoires concerning what work is and what work can be. On the one hand they present work as an obstacle to their creative production – that is, something that is bad. On the other hand they present work as something that includes creative production – that is, something that is good. Accordingly I highlight two repertoires – *Work is Bad* and *Work is Good* – that lay behind the ways the creative producers I interviewed use work to structure their activities. I will argue that these two repertoires are an essential component of a labour of love that helps people to deal

with the contradictions of cultural production and the structural ambiguities of the underground art world. They need work to be good and bad in order for them to be monogamous to their labour of love.

### **The importance of work**

We have already seen that work plays an important role in creative production (Becker, 1963: 102). Work has, more often than not, been something that people have had to structure their creative activities around. As we saw in the Introduction, it has traditionally been an obstacle to being creative (McRobbie, 2002). Florida (2004), though, argues that creative people are now finding a new way around the problem of work by turning creative activities into their work. Indeed we have seen in the previous case studies how creative people in the underground create spaces for their music making activities around and through their work such as members of Damn You! subsidising shows that lose money from their salaries and Jay persevering to build his recording studio. But in the last chapter we saw that creative producers struggle to define the activities involved in making music as work because it is often organised around and outside of work and that they also struggle to define these activities as not being work because it often involves toil and relies on material support from activities that are classified as work. In other words the creative people I interviewed recognise that work can be enjoyable and unenjoyable and the making music can be both authentic creativity and a slavish chore. As I suggested in the previous chapter these contradictions actually help creative people to love their labour of love. Love depends on an obstacle. So, in the rest of this chapter, I want to I show how the creative producers I interviewed use contrasting images of work and music making at various

times in our interviews in order to support their labour of love as something that is ‘sufficiently illicit to be interesting’ (Phillips, 1996: 11).

### **Work is bad**

Among the interviews I conducted there is certainly an image of work as something bad. All of the creative producers I interviewed in-depth share a common negative image of work. This is encapsulated in the idea of a ‘boring job’ for Will, ‘an office job’ for Sophie, ‘a proper job’ for Chris S., and ‘a nine-to-five job’ for Tom. These terms are representative of all the bad things about work that participants hope to escape in music making and, undoubtedly, accounts for some of the distancing of work and music making. As Dave C. put it, such work is: ‘Mind numbing – just a means to an end’. Here Chris S. describes his experiences of the world of work: ‘You divide your day up into blocks based on coffee breaks and you take a shit that lasts forty-five minutes and you try to push the boundaries of what you do each time’. This sort of work is associated with specific work organisations – white collar, office work in corporate or bureaucratic organisations reminiscent of the organisations described by Whyte (1956). In this regard Anton, from our earlier case study, explains that at work ‘you’re either doing a kind of like “Do you want fries with that” type thing or you’re working in some department where it’s like “Yeah I’m doing this and maybe in five years time someone on the board will take notice and maybe something will happen”’.

These negative images of work are also supported by many representations of working life in popular culture (Rhodes and Westwood, 2008; Roderick, 2006). In this regard Parker argues that images of work, as opposed to the actual work we do, help us to

make sense of our work. We come to view our own work activities, in other words, through the filter of cultural texts that use work as either a setting or plot device.

Parker explains:

‘in block-busters such as *Bridget Jones’ Diary*, *American Beauty* and *Fight Club* we have plots that are organised around the idea of authenticity outside work. In countless other films, the organisation is the problem, populated by heartless bureaucrats or hungry careerists (or even vampires). Redemption is to be found in telling your boss to stick it, or placing a stake through his heart, and then walking out of the door to freedom, the beloved, the child, or the dog’ (2006: 4).

Work, then, is often imagined to be at odds with creativity which, as we have seen, is pictured happening in environments that promote freedom, flexibility and autonomy.

Indeed Alan, who owns his own recording studio, explains:

**Alan:** I don’t, I wouldn’t see myself as an entrepreneur or, I, er, I hate all that kind of stuff really, any business-y kind of things.

**Interviewer:** But presumably you have to deal with those kinds of things?

**Alan:** I do up to a point, yeah, but as little as possible. I’d rather, I can turn up when I like for work and cross what I like off my booking sheet and I can wear what I like. So I’ve avoided a lot of office, I’ve often wondered what life would have been like if I’d behaved completely

differently but I'm not interested in that in that kind of ambition that you're talking about. I'm not interested in that at all.

There is, then, a clear set of images, references and tropes based on a negative image of work. There is an interpretative repertoire that we can summarise as *Work is Bad* that provides people in the underground with a distinct idea of work as something unrewarding, controlling and controlled, regulated, routine and uncreative. This work gets in the way of their ability to be creative and must, ultimately, be avoided wherever and whenever possible. It is an activity that takes place in bureaucratic environments. In contrast the activities involved in producing music take place outside of work environments and, therefore, outside of the controls, constraints and alienation of work. In this regard Carl, who now works for booking bands, describes his old job selling advertising space as 'soul destroying ... the most laughable thing I ever did'. It was something he had 'to escape'. This work is also characteristic of the creative work that goes on in the mainstream music industry. For example Chris T. explains how good he felt when he was able to quit his job in the mainstream music industry and devote his time to promoting live music:

**RC:** Do you and Chris work as well?

**Clare:** I do. Chris does this fulltime now

**RC:** Oh wow.

**Clare:** He's done it full time for about two years erm. Yeah Chris has been doing this full time for...

**Chris T.:** ...round a year and a half.

**Clare:** Year and half two years.

**Chris T.:** Two years in August.

**Clare:** Oh is it?

**Chris T.:** Yeah which I remember really quickly cause I got to quit my other job! So it's like in August...

**RC:** Yeah (Laughter)

**Clare:** He still celebrates!

**Chris T.:** ...in August I try and pat myself on the back just a little bit harder!

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Chris T.:** I don't know I guess yeah it's bizarre it's something that pretty much me and Clare had to do after work or on our weekends...

**Clare:** Er still do!

**Chris T.:** ...and it became like just a little bit too much really

In this extract we see Clare, Chris T.'s partner, start with the idea that work is the thing you do as a full time job. She states that she works and Chris T. does not. What she means is that she has a job in a large organisation whereas Chris T. is self-employed and earns a living by promoting shows. Later Chris T. subtly corrects her by pointing out that he quit his 'other job' – implying that promoting music is also a job. But, as Chris T.'s yearly celebrations make clear, it is a better kind of work.

Associated with the *Work is Bad* repertoire there is also a contention that non-work is good (Parker, 2006). This based on some common ideas about the corrupting influence of commerce that we have already seen lying behind the distinction between the underground and the mainstream (Banks, 2007; Becker, 1963). If you need to earn a

living from making music you will, inevitably, be put in a position where you must compromise and do what other people want you to do. But if an activity is your hobby, if it costs you money, you must be in control. In this regard in the interviews I conducted several respondents explicitly describe their music making activities as a “hobby” that costs them money. In this extract from my interview with Rob, who runs Trash Aesthetic Records, for instance, we see him incorporate the *Work is Bad* repertoire concerning the hobby to justify both the money he spends running his label and also his decision not to expand his interest in the label:

**RC:** Why don't you make more records – like make a thousand copies of the record then?

**Rob:** Cause if you make a thousand and you can only sell five hundred (Pause) If you sell five hundred records!

**RC:** Hmm.

**Rob:** Erm yeah, it is possible to breakeven. It is kind of difficult. I've never really done a balance sheet of anything like that.

**RC:** How do you account for things? Do you keep a record?

**Rob:** I'm trying to keep records more now but it's never really mattered because there's never been any money for anyone. Erm, so, erm, yeah I think at best I can lose two hundred pounds. At worst I've lost, on one single release, I've lost fifteen hundred pounds.

**RC:** Ouch!

**Rob:** Yeah but this is how I justify it: if I was into, erm, if I was into rock climbing in Devon...

**RC:** Yeah.

**Rob:** ... and I would go rock climbing in Devon ten times a year and I had to go down there and I had to stay in a B&B and I had to pay to go out with groups to go rock climbing, get the equipment ...

**RC:** Hmmhum.

**Rob:** ... then I would probably spend equal to what I lose on running a record label. And the benefits of running a record label aren't financial, it's, erm, social and it's, erm, it's the reward of having done something. So that's why you do it.

Joe also explains his reasons for starting Jonson Family, the basis of an earlier case study, by using the idea of a hobby:

**RC:** So really the main thing I'm interested to get from you is just how did you get into doing the label, you know? Why did you start doing it? How did, you know, how did you figure out how to do it?

**Joe:** The label we started, er, in '98, so like eleven years ago. And for us that was before the internet. Although I'm sure the internet was about but we didn't have it til 2000, 2002 maybe. So it was, but the reason we did it was cause we had our own band ... we hadn't really tried anyone else to put it out ... I think the main thing is if you try to be successful and try to sign to EMI by the time you're twenty you won't play music ever again.

**RC:** Yeah, yeah

**Joe:** But if you just take it steady and just do it as a hobby or whatever, like if you're a fisherman you'll happily spend loads of money fishing.

And you could do it forever and I think it's the same with doing music. That's why I'm still doing it. I know I'm older a bit and I still like doing it and do it yourself is a good way for that. So that's why we started.

Not getting paid, though, does introduce some problems to making music. For example Matt from Damn You! and Gringo Records explains that having to earn a living away from making music is a limit to the amount of music he can make. Work gets in his way and in the way of people he makes music with. Matt explains:

**RC:** How many do you think you could release in a year?

**Matt:** Phew. (Pause) Hmmm, I don't know how much I could cope with really.

**RC:** Because of financial pressures or any other pressures?

**Matt:** I-i-it does take up an extraordinary amount of time, you know. Cause you think, you go to work nine-to-five that doesn't leave a lot of hours in the day to do stuff. So, erm, once you've eaten your dinner and had a chat with someone (Laughter) that doesn't leave a lot of time to do anything. So I don't know if I could, I couldn't cope with having like probably many more bands than I have now. Erm I don't know if I could, unless I had more people helping me anyway, which I've tried to sort of get people involved. But really, phew, people have got other things they'd rather be doing so ... they're not getting paid to do it.

Indeed later in this interview Matt explains that if he tried to earn a living from his music making activities 'it would inevitably change the way I approach things. Erm, if

you're trying to make money off what you put out, inevitably, your choices are going to be financially motivated. Not so much "Can I afford to do this?" but "Is this going to make me money?". Work is bad, in this sense, not only because it is unenjoyable, controlled and extrinsically motivated but also because it gets in the way of making music and can apply pressure to conform to the economic logic that structure part of the field of cultural production (Becker, 1982; Bourdieu, 1983a).

In this regard Joe from Jonson Family observes that some musicians demonstrate that they are making music 'for the right reasons' by making a conscious decision to keep their work and music separate. He explains that such musicians 'want to carry on with their lives ... are quite happy to go to work and in the evening do this thing'. On this point Rob, who runs Trash Aesthetic Records, explains why he turned down the opportunity to turn his record label into his work after his early releases sold out and the bands went on to international success. He explains: 'as it's not business-driven and I've got no real pressure on me to do anything. I can just do it as I want'.

These creative producers, then, maintain a discursive space between their working lives and their music lives even if, as we have seen in the four case studies, these divisions often betray dependence between work and non-work activities. Indeed as we saw in the previous chapter such stark divisions between work as something bad and music as something good do not capture the true experience of either work or making music. Making music can be bad and can start to become a little bit too much like work. For instance when I asked Ady, who releases records and promotes live music shows under the name Vacuous Pop, if he had ever thought about stopping his label and promoting live concerts he told me that he had because he increasingly seemed 'to be putting my

life, spare time into slogging away trying to put records out and book bands for gigs that no one comes to you know!'. In fact the idea that making music is an activity involving toil is a consistent theme in all the interviews. For example Chris S. describes making music as 'a logical nightmare. It's not an easy thing to do'. Work, in short, does not stop when people in the underground leave their work organisation nor does it stop when they start making music even if people draw on a repertoire that suggests it does (Parker, 2006).

### **Work is good**

Just as making music can be bad, work can also be good (McRobbie, 2002). Moreover just as popular culture presents us with many negative images of work it also presents us with many positive images. Even the negative images of work can betray a positive potential for work. When work is presented negatively in the background there is often an assumption that work should be, and can be, better. As Rhodes and Westwood put it popular culture offers us 'dys/utopian images of organized work' (2008: 134). They analyse Bruce Springsteen's lyrics, in this regard, finding that these songs often present critical accounts of the realities of working life and, as a consequence, also present work 'as something that should be good and righteous' (2008: 138).

One way in which work is experienced positively for the creative producers I interview, or at least one way in which they present work positively, is that work can support music making. Music making is embedded in it. For example Euan, who works in a drum shop, explains the benefits he gets from his job:

**Euan:** Well, erm, as I would see it – to pay my rent – I work ... I know some people where it's become a chore, but for me I really don't think so. I've been able to separate, I've always felt, been able to separate work, you know, even if it's in a music shop or a drum shop and, erm, the, you know, the creative side of what I do.

**RC:** Yeah.

**Euan:** To me there's an ocean between the two of them.

**RC:** Really?

**Euan:** Absolutely, although they're, one can, erm, inform the other in terms of its playing or getting some free gear. In my mind they feel completely separate.

**RC:** And does the drum shop support, like, the other things that you want it to do? Does it, has this new place, like, led to some connections or have you met people through it, that it's...

**Euan:** I think...

**RC:** ...that it's doing its job, other than any retail job?

**Euan:** I think, so far, erm, well the main thing it's, erm, forming is technique. I'm watching incredible players in the shop.

Even the dreaded day job that does not involve music can have, as Matt from Damn You! and Gringo Records puts it, 'benefits' for making music. Those who earn a living outside of the music industry can use their employer's resources such as free photocopying, checking emails at work or using work laptops (the generous photocopying facilities afford to me by the University of Leicester, for instance, have been a great assistance in promoting live music shows over the course of completing

this thesis). Earning a living away from making music also helps to cover the costs that are involved in producing music (Finnegan, 1989). Dave D., who runs Sorted Records and has released over fifty records, explains that it costs him ‘something like 40 hours overtime to get enough money to release a single’. Work also provides financial stability that translates into a sense of psychological stability, in short freedom, which creative producers crave even more than stimulation (Florida, 2004; McRobbie, 2002; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999; Finnegan, 1989). We can see how these ideas interplay in the following extract from my interview with Rob from Trash Aesthetics Records:

**RC:** Have you never been tempted to try and make the record label bigger or more? Develop it to make it more...

**Rob:** Yes. Erm, it has flicked through my mind a few times. And it’s essentially, er, as a business it’s very difficult as, er, when you’re involved in something at a business-level you don’t get the same enjoyment you do out of something when you’re just buying it or participating in it.

**RC:** Hmmhum.

**Rob:** So, when you’re doing the business stuff it’s a job. And I don’t think I want to be self-employed. I want to work nine-to-five and then shut off and not have to worry about just keeping things going or I’m not going to make any money. It’s a very difficult business to make money in and I need a bit of stability. I need to be able to buy my cigars.  
(Laughter)

**RC:** (Laughter) You need to keep the caviar cool in the fridge.

**Rob:** I’ve got the gym membership!

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Rob:** Got to keep that up.

Rob, then, wants to keep his music making activities separate from his job because he ‘needs a bit of stability’ as well as a space for authentic creative production. Clare echoes this point. She explains that one of the reason why she continues working in a ‘day job’ when her partner, Chris T., has quit his job in the music industry is because ‘I actually quite like my day job’. Likewise Joe from Jonson Family explains: ‘I quite like being a postman! It’s healthier’.

So earning a living away from making music has the benefit of protecting their labour of love from the negative connotations, if not the negative experiences, of the *Work is Bad* repertoire. But this does not mean that it is not work. Instead ‘real work’ is making music. Chris S. explains that

‘I just think I was thinking to myself “If I’m putting so much work into things like that, that’s real work but going to an office and finding ways of wasting eight hours a day” ... and you just thinking after a while “I’m going to be dead quite soon relatively speaking, historically speaking, you know, I’m going to be dead – fuck. This is mental”’.

Indeed other creative producers I spoke to drew on *Work is Bad* as a way to distinguish between the ways they earn a living and the ‘real work’ they do to make music – confirming that while making music can be work it is a ‘better’ type of work than the *Work is Bad* repertoire suggests. For example Carl, a booking agent who runs his own

small record label, describes going to gigs as ‘kind of work but I mean it’s not hard work is it?’. Likewise Dave C. describes his ‘work’ teaching music:

It doesn’t seem like work because it’s, it’s relatively pleasant. The thing is: whoever said you’re not allowed to enjoy your job? Most people don’t, so, you know, why? People would say it’s like work, but I enjoy it so, therefore, it can’t be work. Well, you know, most of the time I enjoy what I do, so that’s quite lucky really. But it’s still work, because it’s what I do to earn money but it doesn’t seem like a, you know, a hard job.

In this regard Anton explains how making music for a living, while still work and still involving some boring tasks, does not fit in with the *Work is Bad* repertoire:

I’m sure it is, it is still work. Sometimes it’s a lot of fun. It’s probably a better job than working at McDonalds or whatever ... sometimes it’s less sometimes you’re like ‘Oh I’ve been out five nights in a row. I really, really don’t want to go and see this band but I know the agents coming. I know the managers coming. I’ve got to go and show my face’. ... But, yeah, still it’s more fun than a lot of other jobs I suppose.

Moreover all the creative producers who earn their living outside of the music industries explain that in an ideal world they would earn their living from music. They want to make music into their work. For instance Ady of Vacuous Pop states that working ‘in music’ is ‘what I’ve always wanted to do’. But despite this ideal, as we

have seen in the four case studies, many people involved in underground music are not full-time professionals. The ideal cannot, in short, become a reality for everyone (Becker, 1982).

This is an aspect of life in the underground that all interviewees discussed in our interviews. It is, according to Clare from Upset the Rhythm, ‘a sort of crucial reality about’ making music. As Alan, who does earn his living from making music in his recording studio, explains: ‘It’s practically impossible to make a living doing this ... It is very difficult’. Likewise Tom, a member of Damn You!, explains that ‘I think if any of us tried to do it as a living it wouldn’t be possible’. As a result of this reality of making music, Matt from Damn You! and Gringo Records observes that rather than make his own record label the source of his work he would like his work to benefit his label – to help him be a creative producer. ‘I would like to work in music’, Matt explains,

I would like to do something which somehow benefited Gringo without doing Gringo as a living ... I’d just like to have a job within music somehow, like, er, whether that be, erm, (Pause) just working for like a pressing plant or working for, which doesn’t sound very ambitious but you know just doing something which, that in, somehow I would benefit Gringo in that maybe I’d get something a bit cheaper on the back of it or I’d meet people who’d help.

So the creative people I interviewed use a second repertoire, one that contradicts the first image of work, to structure and make sense of what they are doing. This repertoire

allows them to describe the work involved in making music as something positive and worthy of their love. This repertoire helps them to justify the work they want to do. To put this in terms of the fake obstacles Phillips (1996) discusses, we can think of the *Work is Bad* repertoire as an obstacle, something creative producers must get around, and the *Work is Good* repertoire is something that lies beyond the obstacle, something worth working for.

### **Repertoires in action**

We have seen how repertoires of independence – supporting ideas of authenticity – help creative producers to create a space where they can make music. With these two extra repertoires concerning work at our disposal we can now clarify some of the contradictory descriptions that creative producers use when describing their activities.

#### *Hard work*

First let us look at the issue of hard work. When an activity is described as hard work it is usually because it is not enjoyable. Hard work, in short, draws on the *Work is Bad* repertoire. In this regard Ady, who runs Vacuous Pop, uses a notion of hard work as a way to distinguish between activities he enjoys and those he does not. He compares his ‘love’ of putting out records with his dislike of putting on live shows, which he described as ‘a lot of hard work’. In the following extract he explains why he considers live music to be hard work:

**RC:** What is it you like about doing the records and the gigs?

**Ady:** I don't know, it's just like I'm not particularly enjoying gigs that much to be honest...

**RC:** Oh really why not?

**Ady:** It's just really hard work (Pause) It's like so much time erm and again losing money as well cause you've got to try and convince people to come and see these bands that they haven't heard of. And so it becomes a bit of a bore when you're just like end up putting so much effort into something to get a little reaction you know and little, like I say I'm not in it to make money but to cover your costs would be nice.

Hard work can be based on exhaustion. As Tom from Damn You! explains, it was hard work when he 'was working a nine-to-five job just coming home from work and being wiped out and then just, er, running around. Even just going out, you know, let alone going out and doing the door and kind of packing up all the equipment and stuff afterwards!'. As Ady makes clear above, though, an activity can be hard work not just because it is exhausting but because it does not offer a sufficient reward. Indeed Neil, explains that when working as a soundman it is hard work because 'you don't really speak to anyone' and 'generally people don't really thank you'. Similarly Dave D. explains that many of the things he does to make records for Sort Records are 'just basically a slog that erm unfortunately you have to do. It's a thankless task and again that's, that's another one of the reasons why I've not been doing it so much recently cause you do all that and then nothing happens, you know'.

Hard work can also refer to the boring administrative tasks and manual chores that creative producers try to avoid. In the context of live music this might be walking

posters and fliers that advertise concerts around town. In the context of recorded music it includes completing forms and registering copyrights. Many creative producers deal with such hard work by ignoring it or getting other people to do it. Jay from Dubrek, the recording studio and rehearsal facility we explored in an earlier case study, for instance, has hired an assistant and uses an accountant. Ady, who runs Vacuous Pop, is not quite so fortunate. So he postpones doing this hard work. He explains: 'there's always so much to do in actually just getting stuff pressed up, so much to do like licensing forms shit like that. All the boring admin stuff which, there's still loads of that'. Similarly Ady puts off listening to demos – that is, consuming music – because they are a 'chore'. Indeed when I asked Ady what tips he would have for someone starting a label he answered: 'Erm be aware of how much work's involved and how fucking hard it is. I think just be prepared for a lot of work and a lot of activity and a lot of sleepless nights ... just be prepared for a hard slog I think'. In this regard other creative producers in the underground describe such hard work as 'a real chore', 'a pain in the arse', 'really hard work', 'graft', 'a pain in the neck' and 'leg work'.

But hard work is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact when creative producers describe something as hard work, especially if it is an activity involved in producing music, they often do so using the *Work is Good* repertoire. For example Ady from Vacuous Pop explains that making music is 'hard work but hopefully ultimately worth it. I feel it is'. Similarly Joe describes his activities as part of Jonson Family records as: 'a real pain in the arse but it's well worth it'. Here Tom from Damn You! explains how the hard work he invests in organising a live music event is actually what makes it worth doing. Tom describes one show Damn You! promoted for a musician who 'was kind of a pain in the arse to deal with and, erm, yeah the gig was a bit of a struggle. But what redeemed it

was kind of the effort of putting it on, if that makes sense'. Indeed in the following extract we can see Alan, who owns a recording studio, position hard work as something good:

**RC:** Have there been times when you've been tempted to do something else or to...?

**Alan:** No not really.

**RC:** Why not?

**Alan:** Erm, because I genuinely enjoy it.

**RC:** Even when it's hard work?

**Alan:** Hard work's alright! I don't mind it being hard work!

Hard work is, in short, not only something bad. It is also something intrinsically rewarding. When used as part of the *Work is Bad* repertoire hard work is portrayed as a chore, as toil and as something generally unpleasant. However when the notion of hard work is used in the context of the *Work is Good* repertoire chores and toil are reinterpreted as inherently rewarding activities – as labours of love. Moreover hard work is not only inherently rewarding it is a necessary part of authentic creativity (Cohen, 1991a). As Carl, a booking agent who runs his own label, explains: 'You really do need to put in the hard work'.

### *Just a job*

We can also see these two repertoires concerning work at play when creative producers speak about their activities as a job. Creative producers used the idea of the job to represent the bad things about work. Specifically, as we have seen, they use ideas like

the ‘day job’, ‘nine-to-five job’, ‘boring job’ and the ‘McJob’ to represent having to do something that they are not intrinsically motivated to do. These types of jobs are motivated only by the prospect of earning a living. As a result when making music is unenjoyable it can be presented as being “like a job”. For example Alan, who runs a recording studio, explains that sometimes when he is recording a band, particularly if the recording session is not going well, ‘it just feels like a job’. Likewise Sophie, who works in music licensing, explains how difficult it can be to match a song to an uninspiring advertisement. In such instances her work becomes ‘a job’. She explains:

There’s a lot, I won’t name any clients, but, er, you can see it on telly. There’s so many ads which you just think why did that ever get made? Pointless! Erm, but then one, then it becomes a job. You just have to do, it’s not like, “I don’t like that. I don’t want to work on it”.

Yet there is more to the idea of the job than the *Work is Bad* repertoire. At other times the idea of the job is used as part of the *Work is Good* repertoire. As we have seen many people in the underground want to make music into their job and, even if they do not want to make music into a job they still ‘want to have a job’ as Anton from the Rescue Rooms puts it. In addition creative producers are keen to do a good job. For instance Alan explains that he is also ‘motivated to do a good job’ even when a recording session is not going well and has begun to feel ‘like a job’ because doing a good job, he explains, is ‘the secret of eternal happiness really’. Similarly Matt explains how he would delegate ‘jobs’ among the members of the Damn You! collective with the result, he tells me, being that ‘we do a pretty decent job of putting the gigs on’. Tom, another member of Damn You!, confirms that the group prides

themselves on doing ‘a much better job’ than other promoters. A job is, then, both term that expresses success or failure.

Here a job draws on notions of professionalism. Being professional is not simply about earning a living from making music. As Finnegan tells us:

‘The term “professional” ... at first appears unambiguous. A “professional” musician earns his or her living by working full time in some musical role, in contrast to the “amateur”, who does it “for love” and whose source of livelihood lies elsewhere. But complications arise as soon as one tries to apply this to actual cases on the ground’ (1989: 13).

Consequently Finnegan explains that ‘the emotional claim – or accusation – of being either “amateur” or “professional” can become a political statement rather than an indicator of economic status’ (1989: 16). Being professional in the context of the *Work is Bad* repertoire means that you make money from making music but professionalism is also a reference to quality. In this sense being professional fits into the *Work is Good* repertoire. For instance Chris S. explains that he switched to printing posters in more expensive full colour rather than black and white because ‘people might think it’s a bit more of a professional set up’. In fact being professional in the context of the *Work is Good* repertoire often means that you do not make money. As Matt describes himself: ‘I am an entrepreneur - who doesn’t make any money’.

However Chris S. shows us that structuring music making activities into jobs and evaluating success in terms being ‘professional’ and doing a ‘better job’ can return a

creative producer to the *Work is Bad* repertoire. He describes the activities that go into a gig as taking ‘an eight hour working day’ and argues that, by doing a good job, the bands and audiences he interacts with as a member of Damn You! have started approaching him as though organising live music is his ‘job’. As a result Chris S. explains that bands

make demands, they don’t realise that you’re doing it as an appreciator of their music, you know. You not, you want to be treated like a human being. You want to be treat like someone who’s a peer of theirs, again. You want them to say, “How’s it going?”. If five of them turn up and say, “Right this is what we need, you need to do this, we need to sound check at this time” and stuff, that’s professional. I’m completely alright with that. But the lack of communication in sending a tour manager to come and talk to people implies that you’re doing it as a job, and you run the venue. And a lot of American bands are really bad for that. They don’t tend to, they don’t tend to get too personal with the people who are putting the gig on. And to me, as someone who plays music, that’s the first thing I do - is I want to know, if I’m playing a gig, I want to know who’s putting it on.

The notion of a job, then, is used in different ways at different times by the creative producers I spoke to in order to think through their activities. When something is unenjoyable it becomes a job. In such instances people draw on the *Work is Bad* repertoire. However creative producers still want to do a good job. They take personal pride in their ability to produce something professional. Doing a good job, in this

sense, draws on the *Work is Good* repertoire. But as we have just seen the risk is that if you do a good job the people you are working with will treat you in a different way – thinking that making music is a job, that is an extrinsically motivated activity, and that you are part of the mainstream and not the underground.

We can see, therefore, how notions of work and creativity, which as Finnegan points out appear ‘unambiguous’ are used in very different ways by creative producers in the course of making music (1989: 13). This is not simply a matter of linguistic imprecision. Rather the way that words like ‘work’, ‘professional’ and ‘job’ draw on two distinct repertoires that link back to the structure of a labour of love which, influenced by Phillips (1996), I argue depends on a fake obstacle that marks out something good and bad.

### **Summary**

In the last chapter I argued that the activities that go on in the underground must be analysed as production practices and, in particular, understood as labours of love involving fake obstacles. In this chapter we have seen that two repertoires addressing work allow the concept of labour, itself, to help people to love their labour of love. These repertoires allow making music to be good – and worthy of love – and help people to make sense of the times when making music is not good by allowing them to position it in a structure with fake obstacles where the bad is seen as a foundation that supports the good. It helps them to integrate the realities of making music with their hopes and dreams – their expectations of the field of cultural production and their experiences of it. Indeed we have seen in this chapter that while work is not a category

that can be applied consistently it is still a category that helps creative producers to make sense of the contradictions, frustrations and failures involved in making music. We can, in closing, also link this role for work back to the original conception of creativity that I defined in the Introduction. The creative process, as I explained in the Introduction, is dependent on categories of good and bad. In the Introduction we also saw that the creative process involves certain 'social resources' that people can draw on for inspiration. Some of these resources are good and people want to imitate them. Others are bad and people want to innovate them. In this chapter I have shown how the concept of work acts as a social resource in a creative labour of love.

## **9. Conclusion: creative production**

I began this thesis by asking whether creative work can be said to be either creative or work. As I suggested in the Introduction there is a growing recognition of the importance of creative work as a distinct activity that is done by an increasingly important creative class working within the creative industries. I pointed out that this new type of work is economically, socially and politically important and is thought to offer the future template for the organisation of all work. Yet it has been argued that because of an inherent contradiction between creativity and work – the paradox of creative work – alongside the rise in creative work there has been a decrease in our ability to be creative.

In contrast I have argued that work and creativity are not mutually exclusive. I have demonstrated how work, in particular, is an intimate part of being creative in an activity I call creative production. In this regard I have argued that the organisation of creativity is itself a creative activity. I have illustrated this through four case studies focusing on people who make music in the UK. In these case studies I have been able to put forward empirical data on what Finnegan (1989) calls the hidden world of music – the music industries that exist under people's beds, in their garages and in the back rooms of pubs. I explored how these people find ways to make music on the edges of professional music industries in spite of the inevitable frustrations and failures that making music involves. Indeed we have seen that the production of music is embedded within a series of wider contexts which support material spaces where creativity can occur. It also involves consumption and leisure, work and non-work, professionals and

amateurs and that in between these seemingly unambiguous terms there is a range of discursive spaces – structured by the repertoires that I have highlighted throughout the thesis – that allow people to find creative ways to make music.

In the *Activities* section of the thesis I examined how people in a particular art world create material spaces in which they can make music, whether that is a recording studio or venue, and also discursive spaces by constructing their own underground art world in opposition to a mainstream that represents a particular image of the music industry. Then, in the *Relationships* section, I explored whether these activities can be said to be not only creative but also work. I argued that while consumption practices have a role in making music it is limited. In contrast I demonstrated that work is always related to the production of music. I concluded that this creative production is best understood as a labour of love.

A labour of love reflects a production process involving both positive and negative images and experiences of work that mirror the inherent paradox of creative work. I have argued that this paradox is, then, a resource that can support and facilitate creativity. It is productive. Accordingly I have explored how people use competing images of work as interpretative repertoires that help them to make sense of their activities and facilitate creative production. In short I have shown how people use work creatively to find ways to make music. From this analysis we have seen beyond the contradictions of creative work to explore how a creative activity like music is organised creatively. Returning to the importance of creative work economically, socially and politically, this expanded understanding of creative processes may suggest new directions for public policies that can encourage and facilitate creativity. However

we have seen that creative production involves both perseverance and people working through their personal circumstances. This suggests that creative producers will not wait around for policy-makers to catch-up with them as they find ways to be creative just as we have seen underground producers do not wait for mainstream music companies to sanction or facilitate their activities.

### **Returning to creative work**

By exploring the production of music as an example of creativity in action through the sociology of cultural texts I have focused on the production of organisation. I have argued that this production process is itself a creativity activity – that I have called *creative production* – in which material and discursive spaces for further creative work are produced. This understanding of the creative production of organisations allows us, I believe, to answer the criticism made by researchers such as Oakley (2004) and McRobbie (2002) who suggest that with the rise of creative work there has been a decrease in creativity. For these researchers the rise of creative work has stripped many creative activities of their creativity. McRobbie (2002) in particular posits that we are currently experiencing a second wave of creative work in which creative workers struggle to maintain their independence and authenticity at the expense of being independent and producing authentic creative products. As she explains, there is a growing tendency for creativity workers to view all the tasks involved in their creative endeavours as business processes, socializing has become networking, experimentation an investment. The consequence of this shift has been that creative activities have lost the very characteristics that made them creative in the first place. Simply put, they have become work.

Such criticisms of creative work, though, are based on two assumptions which I have questioned in this thesis. First they suppose that creativity and work are clearly defined terms. Second they assume that the organisations in which creative work occurs exist separately to creative work and are not, themselves, produced through creative processes. In contrast to the first assumption I have argued that our ideas of work and creativity, while shaped and supported by popular images of what is work and what is creative, are ultimately subjective and relational. That is to say that, on the one hand, what is work for one person is not necessarily work for another person and, on the other hand, what is classed as work and creativity are defined in opposition to something that is taken to be not work and not creative. In short I have argued that it is only by setting up what we consider to be uncreative work that we can set up creative work. Here popular images of work and creativity offer people scripts to make sense of their activities and facilitate action. Through the use of interpretative repertoires, in particular, then, I have been able to demonstrate how these scripts operate for a particular group of creative producers.

In place of the second assumption, that creative work processes and the objects they produce are the only things that are creative about creative work, I have drawn on Cooper and Burrell's distinction between the 'organization of production' and the 'production of organization' to demonstrate how the organisations in which creative work occurs are themselves produced creatively (1988: 106). To do this I have turned to psychological literature for a definition of creativity – in which creativity is defined as a process that results in something new and useful inspired by and innovated from something slightly older and less useful – and to the sociology of cultural texts, in

particular Becker's (1982) idea of the art world, as a way of exploring how organisations in which creative work occurs are created. From this account I have emphasised that cultural texts are not simply the result of an individual artist or creative worker but are shaped by the organisations in which that artist or creative worker is operating. I have also shown how these organisations themselves are produced through conventional and unconventional activities which, like ideas of work and creativity, are defined relationally through what Bourdieu (1983a) describes as artistic and economic logics.

Through this account I have demonstrated how work rather than being a corrupting category that is opposed to creativity is an essential part of creativity – in particular the creative production of organisations. One side of this covers the work involved in creating physical and material spaces in which creativity activities such as making music can occur. But it also involves using work to define discursive spaces of independence from the corrupting influence of commerce. I have shown how this discursive work draws on caricatured binaries including ideas of amateurs and professionals, the mainstream and the underground, work and creativity between which there exist continuums of possibility that creative people can use to find new and useful ways of being creative (Finnegan, 1989: 14).

This analysis shows us both the importance of discursive work in creative work and the importance of uncreative work in creative work. In addition it shows us that before there is creative work there is often some form of creative production of organisation. While this does not directly counter McRobbie's (2002) suggestion that there has been a decrease in creativity, it does suggest that we might find creativity in other areas than

those which have often been the focus of creative work research. Indeed as a result of the analysis performed in this thesis we have seen that in precisely the uncreative activities that McRobbie bases her claim on there is a great deal of creativity at work. I hope, therefore, that this account of creative production has opened up a new area for researchers examining contemporary creative work to explore. Such investigations may draw on industrial sociology and the literature on craft production as both of these areas of research show us how people create authentic spaces of independence from managerial and commercial control within supposedly uncreative work (Sennett, 2008; Braverman, 1974). Alternatively future research might draw on the notion of creative production to further illustrate how creative workers adapt and adopt work to produce authentic material and discursive organisations. In this thesis I have done this in relation to the production of music – indeed I have followed a trend in creative work research to equate creative work with cultural work – however future research might look at how the creative production process operates within other supposedly creative activities ranging from academia to architecture, entrepreneurship to engineering (Florida, 2004).

### **Reflections on my method**

Having got to the end of my analysis it is worth looking at some of the strengths and limitations with my method. Based on my reading of Becker (1982; 1963) and Bourdieu (1986b; 1983a) I put forward the idea that a particular group of producers, an art world, will share a specialised way of using language that will not only help them work together but also represents what they do, how they do it and why they do it. I also argued that my position as an insider in the specific art world I was studying would

afford me access to the inner workings of a particular example of creative production. In Chapter 3 I introduced some of the academic debates surrounding these kinds of claims. However, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the issues discussed in these academic debates are not just part of the academic literature. Indeed during the interviews I conducted with creative producers there were both implicit and explicit references to the issue of language use and my role as both a participant and observer. In twelve out of the eighteen interviews I conducted these themes were discussed. In closing I would like to reflect on this data.

### *Being inside*

I hoped that my position inside the art world I was studying would make it easier for interviewees to speak to me. In my interview with Matt, which, as discussed already, was the first in-depth interview I conducted for this project, we were able to discuss this very point. Matt confirmed that he felt my position in the underground helped him speak to me freely. But Matt suggested that it was less my insider knowledge than my insider position, as someone he trusted and understood, that made it easier for him to speak to me than other people who have interviewed him about his music making activities in the past. Matt explains:

**RC:** Did you find it hard to talk about this?

**Matt:** No, not really. It's a lot easier to talk to you than it is to talk to, erm, some of the other people I've spoken to.

**RC:** In what way?

**Matt:** Erm, I guess, erm, I probably know you a little bit better and, erm, sometimes you'd get asked questions where, you, I know you asked me

some pretty basic questions but none-the-less I sort of feel like, yeah, you're asking not out of ignorance. (Laughter) Some people ask ignorant questions.

Yet in spite of my insider position during some interviews I found that I was asking people to speak about things in a way that did not make sense to them. Alan, for instance, was especially troubled when I tried to get him to talk through the organisation of his recording studio as a business. Alan was uncomfortable representing his creative activities in economic terms. Similarly Neil from Damn You! commented when I asked him why he organised shows: 'I don't know what you want. I don't know what you mean. I'd love to be able to answer. What do you mean?'

Indeed Neil later explained that he assumed that I wanted answers to questions other than the ones that I had asked. We can see this suspicion at play in the following extract from our interview in which Neil states that he feels like he is not 'providing' the information that I am 'looking for':

**Neil:** There's not too much to say about it. I don't, you're still looking for something.

**RC:** No I'm not looking for anything.

**Neil:** And I feel like I'm not providing it and that's making me feel bad.

However in these instances I think it was a case that both Alan and Neil were uncomfortable being interviewed and confused as to why I would want to interview them. Neil, for example, was the hardest participant to arrange an interview with. I

had several conversations with Neil before the interview in which he would tell me he was happy for me to interview him and even discussed the issues that I wanted to speak about in the interview lucidly and informatively. But he also admitted with equal lucidity that he was worried that he would not be interesting for me to speak to. It was these worries, he later admitted, that were the reason why he cancelled our interview four times. Even during his interview he acknowledged his uneasiness at being questioned. Neil stressed: 'I don't know, I've never, I've never, I guess I've been quite lucky really, I've never had people question why I do things apart from now!'

In this regard it is worth noting that I also provisionally arranged nine interviews that have not been included in the study. Two interviews were not recorded. Six could not be scheduled at a mutually convenient time before I closed my sample. The remaining interview, however, did not happen, I suspect, for the same reason that Neil cancelled our interview four times. This interview would have been with a studio owner and sound engineer who I had worked with and who I had spoken to about the sorts of issues discussed in the thesis at some length. He was in the process of moving careers into band management and insisted that I emailed him the questions I wanted to ask in advance. When I explained that I hoped that the interview would be more informal and conversational and that I did not have set questions to email him he asked me to type up a paragraph describing what I wanted to speak to him about and email that to him. At this point the whole idea stalled. He did not want to talk to me unless he could see what I was going to ask him – perhaps, like Neil, suspicious of someone questioning what he was doing.

In short the interviewees explained that my position as an insider helped us conduct the interview. It allowed me some insider knowledge and understanding. But for some participants such as Neil and Alan my position within the art world made it odd for me to ask questions of them when they were, simply, doing what they did, being themselves and producing music in a way that they were comfortable with. Perhaps, though, this is to be expected as I was talking to them not as a true insider, someone they were making music with, but as a researcher and, vice versa, not a true researcher but an insider as well.

### *Limitations of interviews*

Other interviewees also pointed out that they were uncomfortable with the formality of a research interview. They acknowledged that the interview settings affected what they were saying and how they were saying it. As Chris S. from Damn You! put it there was a worry that what he said was ‘going to sound really stupid’. Other interviewees were also conscious that what they said might be ‘boring’, as Carl put it, and some openly edited their answers in an attempt to cut out uninteresting information. Chris S., for instance, added this disclaimer to his discussion of the way he makes posters: ‘I won’t use up loads of your time on it talking about it’. Others were aware that I would be listening back to what they said. Ady from Vacuous Pop, for example, noted that: ‘this probably sounds bullshit when you listen back on it!’. Indeed Ady openly edited himself early on in our conversation, noting: ‘It’s weird I’m using “sphere” too much!’.

Some interviewees also worried that I was interviewing them for a purpose even if they did not know exactly what that purpose was and, as a result, made some efforts to get me to direct the conversation away from potentially boring chat and spurious detail.

Ady, for instance, told me: ‘you can direct this more if you need to!’. Whereas Alan implored me: ‘You should argue with me cause you’ll get more interesting things if you do! If you disagree with anything I’m saying you’ll probably find out more that way – if you’ll tell me’. However going back to Neil’s feelings that I wanted answers to different questions, by the end of our interview Neil was openly and playfully commenting that my ‘playing dumb’ questions were less about extracting information than tormenting him:

**Neil:** Do you know what I mean?

**RC:** No.

**Neil:** Do you not understand what I mean? You do, you’re just being difficult (Laughter).

These interviewees, I think, recognised that our conversations were being used for something and they were aware that I would listen back to the conversation. Consequently they demonstrated that this had some effect on the way they were speaking to me. They edited what they were saying, tried to guess what I wanted them to say and attempted to coax me into directing the conversation when they thought I was letting them go off topic. One limit to language use as a tool for exploring art worlds is, then, the reason why they were speaking about certain topics in, at times, unusual ways and circumstances. Likewise some respondents also pointed out the effects of the physical environment in which their interview took place. I made a point of checking that each participant felt comfortable in the interview environment and let each of them choose where we conducted the interview – be it in a pub, their home, venue, restaurant, place of work or, in the case of Euan, on his way to work one

morning. Some aspects of the environment, though, continued to have an effect. Euan, for example, pointed out: ‘God, I can’t get my brain working this morning!’.

### *The limits of vocabulary*

There was also evidence that some participants struggled to find the words that they needed to answer my questions. When explaining the idea of independence, for instance, Chris S. from Damn You! broke off midway through a sentence, saying, ‘the... I’m not very good, I wish that I knew more words’ and, later in our interview, Chris S. acknowledged: ‘I can’t explain, it’s not easy’. Similarly other participants expressed their inability to express themselves. Matt, for example, explained that at times he could not make himself clear to me because ‘it’s more my head’. Indeed, when Matt was describing the different expectations that he recognised among bands he added:

Erm, I don’t know if I’m describing it very well really. It’s just if they fit in with what I do. It is kind of, it is quite vague. I don’t know if I can pin it down anymore or you’d have to ask me another question to pin me down more (Laughter).

Likewise Neil reflected on the difficulties he was experiencing in expressing himself during our interview:

The point I was trying to make is, erm, yeah I really, I’m really not, I’m really not finding a way of saying it which is a shame. It’s a shame (Pause) I don’t really know. I don’t know. I think about things too

much I think and don't talk about them obviously cause I'm really struggling to. I'm really struggling to say what I want to say and it's making want to bang my head against a table!

If the first limitation to language is the respondent's ability to express themselves within the interview setting, the second limit that interviewees discussed is, therefore, that they could not express themselves in a way that truly got their point across because, in contrast to the cats that Becker (1963) studied, they did not have a fully developed, unique vocabulary, specific to their art world. Even though they knew what they wanted to say they did not always have a way to say it.

Consequently they had to pick up on bits of vocabulary, images and metaphors from other areas of activity to help them express themselves. But there were limits to their ability to do this as there were also limits to the extent that these borrowed vocabularies could truly represent what they intended. This limit to their language use may, then, be caused by the 'half-in, half out' position of the underground art world that I studied (Becker, 1982: 246). Matt, for instance, drew on a business discourse when discussing his arrangements with distributors but was aware of his limitations: 'Negative equity, yeah, I don't if that's the right word but, yeah, you would no longer be in credit'. Neil also acknowledged that some of the ways he spoke during our interview sounded 'business-like'. For example when he described the variety of music at the live shows he helps to organise he used the word 'dynamic' and immediately commented 'that's a business word isn't it?'. Neil also explained that this business vocabulary did not really capture what he meant. It sounds 'quite cold and business-like but I don't think in general it works like that at all'. In much the same way, Tom expressed concern with

the idea of ownership – describing it as ‘probably the wrong word’ but then admitting that he did not know what ‘the right term’ was. Indeed elsewhere in his interview Tom showed that he was aware of the evocative implications of his language use. When discussing ‘the underground network’, Tom added ‘that makes it sound a lot more exciting and dramatic than it is!’.

### *Dealing with limits*

Interviewees employed three strategies to get over their inability to appropriately express themselves. Specifically they would express themselves in a corny, clichéd or cynical way and then reflect back on their language use. To illustrate how these strategies worked I will focus on three examples.

Ady provides an example of a participant feeling that their responses were too corny. As noted above, early in our conversation Ady commented: ‘this probably sounds bullshit when you listen back on it!’. Later in his interview he repeated the sentiment this time when discussing a letter he received from a band who wanted his advice that inspired him not only to want to work with the band but also fall in love with his label again at a time when he was beginning to lose faith. Ady observed: ‘It was just like, again this is going to sound total bullshit listening back to it, but it was just like erm I realised that, you know, fuck it I am doing the right thing!’. And a little later he again made a self-conscious reference to his feelings: ‘So that, that’s one of the things that has really been so good about persevering with it and you know things have just come right. They will come right eventually. Just, don’t know, I’m going to sound like an old hippie!’.

In contrast when I asked Rob, who runs a label, what he considered success he turned his clichéd feelings into a joke (inferring he was a paedophile, in case the humour does not translate!):

**Rob:** Erm, a response from people, like the fact that people will get to hear it and it's reaching some people cause there's no point in putting something out (Pause) I'd love to put something out and have three people tell me – it is such a cliché – “I love ...”

**RC:** If I can just change one person! (Laughter)

**Rob:** Yeah, if I can just change one person's life! (Laughter) Yeah, I just want to touch someone!

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Rob:** If I could just touch one kid! (Laughter) Just one! (Laughter)

**RC:** (Laughter)

**Rob:** I just want to touch a kid! (Laughter)

**RC:** That quote's definitely going in the thesis! (Laughter)

**Rob:** Yeah, if I could just touch one child with my music! (Laughter)

The important thing here, I think, is that even though Rob made a joke out of his feelings the joke still encapsulated some truth. Jokes tell us something about the joker's feelings towards the thing they are joking about and they tell us something about their acceptance of those feelings (Freud, 1905). It is, in other words, precisely the homophobe's uneasiness with their own homosexual instincts that leads them to make jokes about homosexual activities. Similarly, although clearly less extreme, I think Rob's joke about touching a kid with his music shows us that Rob wants to

engage an audience emotionally with the music he puts out but he is unable to express this in a way that does not sound corny to him.

In contrast Neil from Damn You! reflected that during our interview he sounded ‘cynical’. When he compared his early experiences of making music with his current experiences he was worried that he sounded ‘like a Granddad’. Neil was the participant in my study who had been involved in music for the longest. He was aware that he was facing unique issues because of his age and was also worried about looking back through rose-tinted glasses. He did not want to fall back on a ‘things were better in my day’ logic – even though that is really what he wanted to say. For instance Neil commented:

‘I guess what I mean is just recently, I feel, maybe it is getting slightly older, but I’m noticing differences in people’s behaviour. Not looking down on it or... but I notice that it is different’.

Later he expanded what he meant by ‘different’, indicating that he meant worse but he that he did not want to say that explicitly because it would sound too ‘cynical’:

**Neil:** I mean gigs are, gigs are quite strange behaviour, you know, a lot of strange behaviour going on a gigs. Too much stuff to talk about properly. Lots of crazy stuff and I think that has changed and it’s become far more ... yeah, I certainly think there’s some, I think behaviour’s become a bit more generalised.

**RC:** What do you mean by generalised?

**Neil:** Just, erm, what do I mean by that? I don't know. I'm getting myself, I'm trying not to sound cynical cause I don't mean it in a cynical way. I think that people, people just know what they're getting more and are there for a reason. I think it's that there's less of a sense of chance, I would say.

To summarise this review of the limitations with my method we have seen three limits to the language use within the art world I studied. The first was related to the research interview itself. I was speaking to interviewees as an interviewer not just a member of their art world. This meant that respondents felt they were speaking about their activities for a purpose that their ways of speaking about those activities were not, necessarily, able to achieve. The second limitation was participant's difficulties finding a vocabulary to say what they meant. This caused them to look for other vocabularies – often a business vocabulary. But they acknowledged problems with this. At times they felt they were using terms incorrectly, that the terms did not really mean what they wanted them to mean or that the terms gave the impression that they thought a certain way or approached their activities a certain way, when, in reality they did not. The third limitation emerged when participants had a way of expressing what they meant but felt uncomfortable with it because it was too corny, clichéd or cynical.

These limitations, though, do not undermine the art world framework and the utility of studying language use. In fact we might expect these limitations given the features of the art world we discussed. As I have already mentioned I was not speaking to interviewees in the process of making music with them but in research interviews. It is, in this sense, noticeable that during the participant observation stage of this project,

where I was gathering data from the perspective of a musician, these issues of expression did not occur. So, in this sense, my half-in, half out position with regard to the art world I was studying as well as the half-in, half-out position of the underground in the field of cultural production should mean that interviewees were unhappy talking to me in strictly artistic or economic terms. Indeed the former, we have seen, they viewed as too corny and the latter they viewed as too cynical. In this regard, then, the limitations with my method actually lend some support to the art world framework.

### **What I've learned**

Having offered an overview of my findings and having explored some of the strengths and weaknesses with my approach to studying cultural production I would like to end the thesis by reflecting on what I feel I have learned from conducting this research. While I hope that these conclusions help us to think about creative work within a wider understanding of creative production Becker, Faulkner and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett remind us that '[w]hatever you find to say about a class of artworks can easily be overturned by an example of yet another way of doing it, and such examples can be found everywhere' (2006: 17). When you are looking at how people find creative ways to make things, in other words, someone always does things differently. But, with that disclaimer out of the way, I would like to acknowledge that during this research project I have not only been fortunate to speak to some inspiring people without whom the music industries in the UK would be significantly weakened, I have also found that as a consequence of my research interviews I have started to express different opinions during the many conversations I have with friends who are musicians, promoters and run record labels. Indeed if one of the criteria for successful

research is dissemination then one result of this thesis is for the findings to be disseminated among the people who produce music in my art world.

At this point, then, I would like to return to the Preface in which I described how I found myself parked on the hard shoulder of the M25 thinking of a topic for my doctoral research. The question that came to me was ‘How was I not a rock star?’. More specifically how was I able to keep making music even though I was not particularly successful at doing it. One answer that I considered in this thesis is that there are many measures of success when it comes to making cultural texts besides economic ones. This answer was inspired by Bourdieu (1986b) and Becker (1963). I also explored how a space in which people like me can make music is organised. Inspired by the art worlds framework I explored how people find a place in their lives to make these spaces both materially in terms of finding a way to finance their activities and more discursively in terms of constructing a field of cultural production and justifying their activities as a labour of love. Throughout the thesis, then, I spent a great deal of time exploring the various relationships between these different ways of constructing success.

Through the research I have increasingly found myself reiterating the advice offered to me by Aaron, a painter and decorator and jazz drummer, which I discussed in the Preface. As I explained Aaron advised me that the best thing to do is to find a way of earning a living that supports the creative activities rather than be obsessed with forcing a way into a professional art world because making the thing you love into your job can make you stop loving it. Some people, like Jay, who runs Dubrek recording studio, have found a way to manage being a businessman and being creative and have found a

way of not getting themselves into a position where they stop loving the activities involved in making music even though they depend on making music to earn their living. But for many others, like the members of Damn You!, it is more suitable for them to produce music separately from their work – but this separation, as we have seen, is really not so separate. While they might dream of earning a living through some music-related activity they do not want to risk corrupting the thing they love. All of these options are acceptable. No one is a sell-out or a failure. Indeed whereas, in the past I have spoken to friends and talked about ‘giving it another year’ or ‘sorting out a career in a few years’, I have now found myself talking to my friends about what we can do to keep on making music sustainably. So I hope that this research project, while it has been beneficial to me on a personal level, has not just been an exercise in narcissism.

Indeed even though we might think the rise of creative work marks a decline in creativity especially as people have less time to commit to being creative I have argued that we should focus on the organisation of creativity itself as a creative activity. It is, in a sense, an art form in itself. In this regard, it is perhaps telling that while many of the people interviewed for this project play music as well as organise the production of music, several do not. Instead their creativity activity, their cultural production, is working to support other people who do play music. So I hope that this project has gone some way towards focusing attention on this creative production.

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