LIVING THE DREAM:
PRECARIOUS LABOUR IN THE LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master Of Arts in Human Geography

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University of Toronto

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2014

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the precarious nature of backstage work within the live music industry. Live music is replacing recorded music as the economic core of the music industry. Live music is a unique sector, in that it is valued for its ephemerality. Given the ephemerality of concerts, new frameworks are required to understand technical and logistical production of live music. Labour arrangements in live music reflect sweeping trends in the labour market. Backstage workers are employed in flexible, contract and contingent arrangements leading to precarious livelihoods. This thesis argues that labour precaritization in the live music industry is part of an accumulation strategy by suggesting that employers exploit the affective, emotive and cathartic nature of live music to reduce wages and extract surplus from workers. Essentially, workers are willing to accept a psychic wage in lieu a living wage. This arrangement can be called ‘lifestyle labour’ in that workers are willing to accept lifestyle components as part of their wage.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first of all want to thank my participants. I have known many of you for a number of years, and I am so grateful and thankful that you shared your thoughts and feelings with me. I was astounded by the enthusiasm you all showed towards my research and my switch to academia. I would love to be half as good at my new vocation as you are all at your craft.

Of course, no good thesis can be written without great supervision. Deborah Leslie, has been the best supervisor a grad student could ask for. I remember our first meeting where I bombarded Debby with my backstory and my ideas. I think what struck me most is that you immediately started scribbling notes. Your body language was that of excitement and enthusiasm, which immediately inspired confidence. From then on, I’ve always felt supported. We are a great match as I think we share the same handwriting.

One of the best parts about having Debby as a supervisor, is the opportunity to work alongside the other brilliant graduate students in the Cultural Economy Lab. Jeff Biggar and I regularly go on coffee excursions where we gripe about the academy, share research ideas, and commiserate the graduate experience. Chloe Fox has become a welcome addition to these sessions. I owe a debt of gratitude to J.P Catungal. J.P was one of the first people I met at U of T during his “radical campus walking tour”. While we only shared the office for a short while, J.P. was a great springboard for ideas and exposed me to many new literatures.

I’d like to offer special thanks to John Hannigan and Deborah Cowen. Both of you taught incredible courses and helped me produce some of my best work. It was also with Deborah Cowen that I had my first experience at teaching. Her incredible patience and support helped make teaching my favourite part of being a grad student. I’d like to thank Michelle Buckley, who alongside Debby and John rounded out my committee. I was fortunate enough to have lunch with Michelle before her job talk, and and I knew I wanted her on my committee. It is a good thing she got the job! Jessica Finlayson, is the most patient administrator I’ve ever seen. She helped me navigate the bureaucracy of U of T as painlessly as possible. As well, I want to acknowledge the incredible support I’ve received during my undergrad from Harry Hiller.

Along the way there have been numerous other students who have helped me. I’d like to thank all the members of GGAPSS. It has been a wonderful experience serving on the executive. I’d like to specifically thank ‘the island potluck crew’ who helped me unwind the night before my defence.

Of course, I owe an enormous debt to my friends outside of academia. Joe Lin was the best roommate you could ask for. My bandmates, Marc Serpa and Brian Parker, offered respite from the daily grind of academia.

My sister and brother both set high standards for me to follow, and both of them supported me through this process. Sarah, you have always kept me out of trouble. Ben, you have always given me someone to look up to. Finally, I’d like to thank my parents. Ivan Zendel and Natalie Rich, who have now raised three U of T graduate students. U of T should name a wing after them (or at least a bench). My parents always insisted to “never let school interfere with your education”. That philosophy helped me to be both a better critical thinker and well rounded person.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BEHIND THE CURTAIN

“No Brown M&M’s” is a popular story surrounding the rock band Van Halen. The story concerns a clause that Van Halen maintained in their production contract with promoters (colloquially called a “rider”) demanding a bowl of M&Ms with all the Brown M&Ms removed be served backstage. If there was a single brown M&M backstage, the promoter will forfeit the show at no cost to the band. Lead Singer David Lee Roth recalls a concert where upon inspecting their dressing room, he found a brown M&M, which triggered a cancellation of the show and Roth’s subsequent rampage of the dressing room (Christe, 2009). This begs the question why? Why is it acceptable to cancel a show with upwards of 20,000 tickets sold over a bowl of M&Ms? It is difficult to accept a “no brown M&Ms” clause as a reasonable request—especially one that could call for the cancellation of the show and the destruction of a dressing room. The clause is there so that the band could see whether the promoter and other vendors took the time to read the contract.

At the time, Van Halen was amongst the largest touring acts in the world. The band broke ground in a number of ways. They played in spaces that had never held large concert productions, often in sports arenas, hence the term “arena rock band”. Many of these arenas were purpose built for sports, and not intended to be used as concert halls. The configuration of the room meant that the concert production had numerous added complexities. First, these potential complications include real safety issues: the structural
capacity of the roof and floors to support equipment; the ability to safely evacuate the crowd in case of emergency; and the ability to control a rowdy crowd.

Second, the production value of a Van Halen concert was amongst the highest ever for a touring concert production. The band toured with numerous trucks and trailers loaded with thousands of tons of lights, sound equipment, and staging. This gear had to be unloaded into these old and ill suited venues.

Third, all this was done on tour, meaning that for every show, the equipment was setup, taken down, and driven overnight to the next city. Touring requires an enormous amount of both local and travelling labour to work long hours for days on end. It is commonplace to have dozens of touring staff in the artist entourage who oversee everything from the sound and lighting, merchandise sales, and marketing. Additionally, there are numerous local crew who work as manual labourers. While large production touring had been common practice for at least two decades before Van Halen, the size, scale, and pace of Van Halen’s tours was unprecedented.

For the show to go on, every element of production has to happen perfectly. The stage has to fit. Sound and lighting equipment has to suspend safely from the roof, and there must be enough electricity to power all the equipment. The risks of concert production are more than just financial: there are very real safety risks. If a roof beam is not rated to support the sound and lighting system or the stage is not able to support the weight of the musicians and equipment, someone could get hurt or killed. A concert of any size has a number of moving parts, and even small failures can lead to catastrophe. The “No Brown M&Ms” clause was there because it was a quick and effective way to ensure that the promoter and other sub-contractors had read the rider.
The situation that workers face in the live music industry has not improved since Van Halen’s heyday. Every year there are news stories about stage collapses and other hazards from around the world. Recently in Canada there have been a spate of stage accidents. In 2009, the stage and tent collapsed at the Big Valley Jamboree, a 25,000 person country music festival in Camrose, Alberta, killing one person and injuring many more ("Charges Stayed in Fatal Stage Collapse," 2012). In 2011, The Ottawa Blues Festival stage collapsed, injuring three people, one of whom was a technician on tour with the headlining band Cheap Trick ("Bluesfest stage collapse partly due to lack of preparation," 2012). More recently in 2012, a video screen fell killing a touring drum technician causing the cancelation of a Radiohead concert at Downsview Park in Toronto ("Live Nation, engineer charged in Radiohead stage collapse," 2013).

While the vast majority of concerts happen without incident, it seems that the only time the public is aware of the working conditions in live music is when someone is killed or injured. Catastrophic stage collapses are only one of numerous forms of precariousness faced by backstage workers on a daily basis. As this thesis will demonstrate, work in the live music is precarious in a number of ways, including the widespread use of part time, contract and contingent hiring practices, the lack of formal benefits, long working hours, and low pay. The industry is also characterized by multiple job holding, unpaid work, a lack of clear entry points, and geographic and temporal uncertainty. The goal of this thesis is to critically investigate who works in the live music industry, and more importantly how labour is arranged. Ultimately, this thesis will examine the division of labour and its implications in this cultural industry. The goal of this thesis is to bring backstage labour into the spotlight.
1.2 A Changing Music Industry

The modern music industry is best thought of a series of ‘music industries’ with two primary arms: the recorded and live sectors (Williamson, Cloonan, & Frith, 2011). Since the emergence of the mass music industry in the middle of the 20th century, these two arms have been economically, technologically, and socio-culturally linked. For example, a common practice in the music industry is to record an album, and tour to support record sales. Radio stations are paid to play the songs of bands on tour to sell tickets. The concert is then used as a way to generate local record sales. Up until the new millennium, the sale of recorded music was a lucrative business. The largest share of revenue in the music industry for most of the 20th century was in record sales (Karubian, 2008). Live music was treated as an important form of promotion, but not as a primary income-generating tool (Frith, 2007).

Technologically, the equipment of both live and recorded music is highly interchangeable: the microphones, cables and mixing consoles from one can be used in the other. More importantly the skill set required to produce live music is transferable to recording. Many live technicians work in both the studio and at the concerts. While each does require a unique skill set, the most important skill is the ability to critically listen and mix sounds to develop a unique aesthetic.

The widespread adoption of various digital technologies, and the rise of the online distribution threaten this two sided configuration of the modern music industry (Leyshon, 2001, 2009). Recorded music is quickly declining as a consolidated industry, while live music is ascending to be the core of a reformed music industry (Frith, 2007; Hracs, 2011). Sinnreich (2013) describes the incredible growth of the recorded music industry following the adoption of the CD, arguing that the eventual collapse of recorded music sales came about through a series of digital innovations, and macro economic changes. First, Sinnreich
(2013) suggests that the unbundling of songs from albums, as seen in the iTunes store offered consumers greater choice in their consumption of music. Simply, customers could purchase a song at a fraction of the cost of an album. While overall sales of music increased, the value of those sales decreased. Online distribution proved to be a more efficient way of buying and selling music for both distributors and consumers. As portable mp3 players became the pervasive medium to listen to music, customers found the purchase of CDs to be inconvenient and costly in comparison to online purchases.

Sinnreich (2013) also highlights how the price of urban land rose during this period, which in turn made the sale of physical media more costly. As commercial land rents increased, the cost of shelf space increased. Included in the sale of CDs was the cost of land rents for the record store and the distribution center, the cost of shipping, and the labour required to both manufacture and distribute a physical product. As the price of land increased, and the distribution systems diversified, the once monopolist model of music distribution became untenable. Contemporaneous with the growth of iTunes, businesses like Wal-Mart could afford the shelf space to sell CDs, and were able to capture the market share once held by more traditional brick and mortar record stores. CDs became a loss leader for stores like Wal-Mart, where music was used simply to get customers in the door to purchase other goods (Sinnreich, 2013). Today, there are only a handful of large record stores in operation in comparison to the previous decades.

On the production end of music – that being the actual creation of recorded music – the first technology that initiated this eventual decline in sales was the digitization of the recording process. Digital effects and tools were used in large recording studios from as early as the 1980s. Digital technology moved from novel effects and tools in the early 1980s, to large digital mixing boards that record directly to a computer rather than to tape by the early
1990s. This technology offered powerful yet affordable tools and time saving processes to recording engineers. Over the past thirty years digital recording technology has become smaller, less expensive and more functional than its analog counter parts. The current state of digital recording equipment is remarkable: for a few thousand dollars a person can build and equip a home studio comparable to a professional recording studio (Leyshon, 2001, 2009).

The term “prosumer” is a portmanteau used to describe the convergence of professional and consumer technologies. Throughout many cultural industries, the cost of advanced production technologies has plummeted. The operation of this equipment has become easier and more accessible to a non-professional user. The use of algorithms has enabled untrained and low skilled prosumers to create products comparable to professionally made products. As such, amateur and hobbyist producers are able to compete with professionals, both in the quality of goods being produced and the skills required to produce it. The rise of the prosumer has democratized and exploded the world of recorded music. Whereas until the 1990s, most hit records were recorded in very few studios around the world (Florida, 2010), today hit records are being recorded in basements and garages. When this process is met with internet based distribution systems, the old model of the recorded music industry falls apart (Leyshon et al., 2005).

New artists are able to record, promote and distribute their music without the involvement of a record label. This is not an errant phenomenon, numerous contemporary popular artists started from their basement using the internet. For example, Justin Bieber, one of today’s most popular artists, initially started his career singing songs on YouTube. While major record labels and studios still play a role in the music industry, their monopoly on the means of production is wavering and declining. Understanding the role of digital technologies and online distribution is essential to establish the eroded value and perhaps
encumbrance of fixed capital in this industry. Record companies and studios for much of the twentieth century were the only producers recorded music. As a result of digital technologies, the recorded music industry has been reconfigured. Prosumers are on an equal, or perhaps better footing to the large established companies. Unlike the professional studio model, which relied on large capital investments, prosumers are able to produce and distribute content with lower startup costs and fewer structural barriers to entry.

Today, artists are no longer deriving their livelihoods through record sales, and instead are relying on live performance (Connolly & Krueger, 2006). Record companies are now signing bands to “360” contracts in which the record company both records and distributes their music, manages their tour and carries out other marketing like merchandise sales (Karubian, 2008; Marshall, 2013). Previously, record companies would have little to do with touring. Concurrent with the decline of recorded music is a ballooning of ticket prices. Concerts are becoming more expensive to produce, resulting in increasing ticket prices (Connolly & Krueger, 2006). Bars and clubs are charging higher covers and increasing the cost of drinks and other hospitality services (Black, Fox, & Kochanowski, 2007). As well, much like recorded music, monopolies are beginning to form. For example, Live Nation merged with Ticketmaster, establishing one of the largest monopolies in the music industry (Karubian, 2008; Marshall, 2013).

Not only has the live music industry grown in importance, but it is also undergoing transformation. Numerous digital technologies are used in the live music industry, including: digital mixing consoles, lightweight amplifiers, and advanced speaker designs. However, the live music industry is not particularly threatened by these technologies. The primary difference between the live and recorded music industries is the different reliance on variable and fixed capital. Recording studios and record labels require enormous fixed capital investment in the form of equipment, record presses, and distribution systems. Producing a
A record can be produced, marketed and distributed with only a few skilled personnel. Now that the cost of recording technology has plummeted, the cost of fixed capital investment required to produce a record has been reduced. As well, with online distribution over taking physical record sales, the time and place of recorded music consumption is reconfigured towards portability, ephemerality, and flexibility. In contrast, a concert requires both a significant amount of fixed capital, and an enormous amount of labour. Furthermore, a concert is both temporary and geographically flexible. The experience of a concert has yet to be replaced by the internet and online systems. In this regard, the live music industry thrives on novelty (Earl, 2001; Gibson & Connell, 2005). The reliance on labour and its temporal and spatial flexibility make the live music industry resilient to the myriad changes facing the recording industry. As mentioned previously, a large concert can require hundreds of workers. These workers are largely irreplaceable. Live music is performed in multiple spaces, from small bars to large stadiums. Digital technologies have made amplifiers lighter and more powerful. As well, speakers and mixing consoles are smaller. These digital devices have more features than their analog counter parts. However, these changes have done little to reduce the labour inputs required for a concert. No technology has yet to replace the many technicians, crew, promoters and production managers needed for a concert. Instead, concerts are becoming increasingly elaborate. For example, U2’s recent 360 tour uses hundreds of workers everyday to erect its massive stage (Cunningham & Serimgeour, 2009). The increasing role of live music in the livelihood of musicians has only served to increase the role of technical labour.

The live music industry is more valuable then ever before, yet there has been very little critical research into the nature of this sector, particularly around issues of work and labour. What research has been conducted tends to focus on musicians (Coulson, 2012; Hauge & Hracs, 2010; Hracs, 2009, 2010; Scarborough, 2012; Zwaan, Ter Bogt, &
Raaijmakers, 2009); the declining role of recorded music (Florida & Jackson, 2010; Florida, Mellander & Stolarick, 2010; Leyshon et. al. 2005; Power & Jansson, 2004); artist management (Karubian, 2008; Marshall, 2013); and ticket sales (Black et al., 2007; Connolly & Krueger, 2006). However, a musician’s role in the production of music is much different than that of technician.

As this thesis will demonstrate, a technician’s vocation is highly precarious. Workers face both physical dangers, as well as other forms of precariousness, including low pay, long hours, lack of standard work relationships, and limited access to regular work.

Backstage work is also invisible. From a production standpoint, a concert is meant to be an intimate connection between the audience and the artist. It is therefore a goal of any production to hide the backstage processes that contribute to the event. Backstage workers and much of the equipment are cloaked in black so as to not be seen by the audience. A good sound system is described as being transparent. This a reference to what an artist wants the audience to hear. Lighting and visual effects are meant to appear as an extension of the musician. Indeed, backstage labour is often meant to hide aspects of the production itself. While a concert is a product which people experience on a number of sensory levels, the labour of live music is made invisible.

1.3 Research questions and design

The goal of this thesis is to explore the backstage labour that goes in the live music industry. There are two sets of research questions that inform this research:

1. How has the nature of work changed in the live music industry with the restructuring of the music sector? How do we study this reconfigured industry? How does the growth of live music affect the livelihoods of backstage workers?
2. Is work in live music precarious? How is this precariousness experienced across time and space? Why is this work precarious? Why do people choose to work in this industry?

There are three main objectives in this thesis. First, this thesis discusses the changing geography of the music industry to demonstrate that live music is ascending to become the primary focus of the music industry as a whole. While research on the recorded music industry is legion, there has been little attention paid to live music. As well, existing theories concerning recorded music are no longer applicable in light of the Mp3 crisis (Hracs, 2012). I suggest the need to explore the role of technical intermediaries to fill this gap. Second, I use empirical data to explore the types of work in the live music and the forms of precariousness these workers face. This theme will demonstrate that the music industry serves as a microcosm for understanding precariousness in cultural industries, and in work more broadly. Finally, this thesis suggests that the live music technicians discussed here are at the cutting edge of pressures felt across the labour market. A thorough understanding of how labour is arranged in this industry will provide valuable insight to better understand how labour is arranged in the so called creative economy.

Beck (2000) argues that the contemporary labour arrangement is increasingly risky, flexible, and ambiguous. The decline of the welfare state along with a globalized labour force has diminished the Fordist model of labour once prevalent in Europe and North America. The flexibility of labour offers employers the ability to remain lean and responsive to market fluctuations. However this leaves workers in precarious situations. The live music industry can be used to demonstrate the consequences of a flexibilized labour force. To extract additional surplus from a flexible labour force, employers across multiple sectors of the economy are using emotive and cultural forms of compensation. Using the live music industry as an example can show how employers extract surplus value from workers by bundling the consumption of the product into a worker’s wage. This represents a widespread
phenomenon, in which workers accept lifestyle benefits over a secure livelihood. In essence, surplus can be extracted by organizing labour around lifestyle. This thesis will trace this concept of ‘lifestyle labour’ by exploring the changing music industry and the precarious labour arrangements of the live music.

1.4 Methodology

How does one go about studying backstage work in the live music industry? To answer this question, it is important clarify the goals of this undertaking, particularly to explore motivations for working in live music and the risks and rewards of taking on this work. To do this, this thesis triangulates data from qualitative sources, including textual analysis, participant observation, and qualitative interviews (Berg, 2004). Whereas, quantitative methods might reveal statistical trends, qualitative methods are more apt to reveal personal experiences (Limb & Dwyer, 2001). Since work is an experience, and that it is an experience of a unique group of workers, is important to have a flexible methodology that allows for a variety of qualitative methods to be integrated. This scope of methods is useful as it attempts “make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the [subjective] meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). A goal then from these methods is to provide what Geertz (1973) calls “thick description”.

Ethnography is an ideal primary methodological approach for this project considering the dearth of knowledge on live musical labour and the need to examine specific socio-economic situations, individual identities, and community practices (Rock, 2001). Ethnography in its broadest sense begins with field work (Zickar & Carter, 2010). Field work can include any number of types of observation, from non-participating to full participant observation, interviews, diaries, autobiographies, and document analysis. According to
Zickar and Carter (2010) ethnography is “useful for grounding researchers with a sense of the reality of the workplace, instead of treating workers as abstract entities like many economists did” (p. 1).

A primary goal of this thesis is to uncover hidden forms of work in the live music industry. As one interviewee describes:

People do not think about these roles at all. When you go to a show it never even occurs to [the audience] that there is a crew of people and it is not visible, it is not supposed to be a visible thing. I think as a society, people just assume that there is nobody doing it. That it gets done on its own like black magic. (Interview, Janis).

As Janis explains, consumers of live music overlook the work that goes into the production. As another respondent Kurt concedes that “a good sound guy disappears” (Interview). Since so much of the work in live music happens behind closed doors, in both the literal and metaphorical ‘backstage’ (Goffman, 2002) it is essential to conduct the research through participant observation. This thesis will draw primarily on qualitative data in the form of participant observation at concerts, and interviews with sound and lighting technicians gathered during the summer of 2013 in Calgary, Alberta. There are three primary methods used for data collection: participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis. Each participant in this study has been given a pseudonym based on a famous rock and roll musician.

1.4.1 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The primary source of data for this research is through participant observation. This method was chosen because the research questions aim to investigate occupational experience. To gather data, I worked as a sound technician and production manager at five
events in Alberta. These events were of varying size, location, and content. These events include a large outdoor popular music festival, a corporate event with live music, a smaller outdoor music festival, a sporting event with music, a private corporate party, and a nightclub concert.

The opportunity to participate at these events stems from using past professional connections. At each event I was paid to work. Data gathering began when the work was offered, and concluded once an invoice was submitted. Conducting research while working did not distract from my ability to work. Nor did it interfere in my ability to get work. All of the work was part of a regular and long standing relationship with past employers.

Informed consent is an important aspect of participant observation. However it can be difficult to ensure that all participants are aware that they are being observed. Generally, I made it known to fellow workers at all shows in this study that I was conducting research. I explained to my coworkers that I would be taking notes, asking questions, and observing practices. I made known the nature and objectives of the research and my research questions. I ensured that those being observed would remain anonymous and that events would only be referred to in a general sense. At smaller shows, informed consent was easily obtained from the various workers through meetings at the start of the show. At the larger shows where I worked with dozens of crew (the music festival and sporting event), I gained informed consent through a series of individual or small group discussions with workers. I was able to hold small, informal, focus group style discussions with workers at these events over lunch and coffee breaks.

There are a variety of actors that are not on site during the concert. These include the shop workers who prepare equipment and sales staff who quote the show. For these situations, informed consent was made through phone or email conversations during the hiring and bidding process. When possible, I received written consent from participants.
Additionally, many of the participants were observed on more than one occasion, and at least one participated in the interview process where formal written consent was given. To maintain anonymity I have chosen to limit the use of quotes given to me during observation, and to refrain from an overly specific discussion of any one event.

I began taking field notes at the start of the contract negotiation. Generally, I received work offers through email anywhere from a few weeks to only a few days in advance. Typically the first email would be from a potential employer, for example from either a promoter, venue or sound equipment rental company. They would write to inquire about whether I am available to work on certain dates. I would then respond with my availability and ask for more information about the gig. The employer would respond with a broad overview of the gig, including a rough schedule for the day, the wage/rate, the type of production, equipment being used, and who else will be working along with me. As the event approached, the email exchanges would start to include more specific details which could include artist riders, hospitality, transportation issues, specific scheduling, sound design issues, and very specific details about the equipment and needs of the show.

When the show starts, the data gathering method changed to physical observation and informal qualitative interviews. Generally shows started in the morning or afternoon. Most of shows in this study began at the shop/warehouse where audio equipment is stored. The first order of business is to prepare the gear and to load the truck. At some shows this step was already done and I would meet the truck and crew on site. Generally work begins by unloading the truck, moving the gear into position and setting up and testing the equipment. This is followed by doing a dry run or sound check, operating the equipment for the show, and finally tearing down the equipment and packing it back onto a truck. In subsequent chapters this process will be explained in more detail with detailed description of the various jobs and types of work being done.
Throughout a show day, there are numerous breaks and work stoppages. During these breaks, I took the time to informally interview fellow workers about their work histories, livelihoods, and the music industry. These conversations were recorded through field notes. The same interview guide was used for these interviews as the formal qualitative interviews. Sometimes I would take notes as I spoke to them. Other times I would briefly attempt to summarize the discussion at a time when it would be less disruptive to the work at hand. Additionally, when possible, group interviews were recorded with an audio recording device. Many of the conversations were not recorded because the demands of the work prohibited it. My data gathering process ended when I submitted my invoice and received payment for my work.

All these field notes, from the contract negotiation and bidding process through the show production and the final invoice, were typed into documents and coded by theme. Details of this analysis will be discussed in Chapters 3 & 4.

1.4.2 INTERVIEWS

Qualitative interviews were conducted with seven backstage workers. Participants were selected for their experience and expertise in the industry. Only one of the interview subjects was present during the participant observation sections. The seven interviews lasted between one and two hours. The interview guide encouraged open-ended responses. Interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide based on a series of categories with sub questions. The categories were: personal histories, pay, contracts, benefits, insecurity and uncertainty, socialization, networking and isolation, policy, structure and development. These categories were chosen based on similar interviews conducted by Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010). Many of these categories overlap. For example, questions about pay and benefits often prompted a discussion of insecurity. Questions about
socialization often led to a discussion of work history. Interviews were recorded with a voice recorder, transcribed, and coded by theme. Specific questions and responses will be discussed in Chapter 3. These respondents were assigned pseudonyms.

1.4.3 POSITIONALITY

I approach this project from two positions, as an academic and as a sound technician. Reconciling the two is not as simple as it sounds. Catungal (2014), drawing on the work of multiple feminist theorists, argues the need to “locate emotion into our accounts of geographical knowledge” (p. 267). My experiences as sound technician have shaped the direction I have taken in academia. Similarly, my experiences in the live music industry affect my position as researcher for this project. I have numerous preconceptions developed through my experience working in the industry. Many of my preconceived notions inspire and direct the project, but at the same time have the potential to distort and bias the findings. These preconceptions however, do not automatically “spawn a virus of non-objectivity” (Robinson, 2008: 88). It is then important to justify my methods in the context of my subjective experience, to exercise a level of reflexivity with regard to my relationship to the research and the live music industry. It also important to acknowledge that this project serves a dual function, one as a an act of research for a master’s degree and another as a cathartic release exploring my own experience in a critical setting.

For the past ten years I have worked professionally in the live music industry as a sound technician and production manager. During these years I have been employed full time, part time, and on contract. I have searched tirelessly to find work, and also I have turned down work because I could not possibly do it all. I have been injured and I have had the terms of a contract changed on me at the last minute. I have never had any formal
training to be a sound technician. My first few jobs were on a volunteer/unpaid basis. During these years I have gained a wealth of knowledge on industry practices and work conditions. It is from this knowledge that I feel this research is both necessary and important. Unlike some other precarious workers, my participants and I generally like the work. Through this research I aim to make the industry better, safer, and more equitable. The best way to do this is to shine a spotlight from the audience to the backstage.

1.5 Outline of Thesis

Three analysis chapters form the core of this thesis. Chapter 2 will situate the current state of the music industry and the processes of its transformation. This chapter will argue that theories around cultural intermediaries have not adequately addressed the role of technical labour. Additionally, this chapter will demonstrate the important role that technicians increasingly play in creating cultural goods. Chapter 3 will discuss the various forms of precariousness experienced by workers over time and space. Chapter 4 examines the way pleasure forms part of a worker’s wage. A central goal of this thesis is to suggest that precariousness in cultural industries stems from the accepting lifestyle benefits and psychic wage components as a supplement for a stable livelihood. This thesis will conclude by arguing the need for sweeping labour policy reform that addresses and mitigates precariousness caused by flexible labour practices.
CHAPTER 2: THE WORK OF TECHNICAL INTERMEDIARIES IN THE LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Live music requires a complex division of labour that extends far beyond the role of the artist. In the context of live music, production requires on-going labour inputs from multiple specialized workers spread across space. In this regard, live music is unique as a cultural industry. Live music utilizes a significant amount of non-artistic and non-managerial labour, in the form of technical and manual labour. In many cultural industries, the division of labour is split between creative producers and cultural intermediaries which bridge (or reproduce) the distance between the producer with the consumer (Negus, 2002). In the recorded music industry, cultural intermediaries such as record producers, booking agents, and disc jockeys play an important role in determining what is deemed ‘popular’ and will therefore be successful (Negus, 2002). However, with the rise of digital technologies, increasingly the work of cultural intermediaries is carried out by algorithms, crowd sourcing, or by the artist themselves. Music curation is becoming autonomous from traditional cultural intermediaries. The actual creation and delivery of music is also becoming more autonomous. In that regard the programmers and technicians who write code, mix sound, and deliver music to an audience are increasingly influential. In essence, the work of cultural intermediation is increasingly becoming a process of technical intermediation. With live music becoming the core of the music industry, technical intermediaries will play an
increasing role in the dissemination of musical culture. The significant amount of non-creative, yet aesthetically important work, requires an understanding of the role of technical intermediaries.

This chapter will introduce a novel approach to study the post internet music industry, suggesting that technical intermediaries are playing an increasingly important role in the creation, dissemination, and consumption of music. First, this chapter will review current literature on cultural intermediaries. Following this will be a discussion of intermediaries in live music, identifying technicians as critical intermediaries in bridging the space between artist and audience. The chapter will conclude by providing a detailed description of technical intermediaries in the live music industry.

2.2 Cultural Intermediaries

Bourdieu introduced the concept of cultural intermediaries to describe the new occupations which formed alongside a ‘new petite bourgeoisie’, including “all the occupations involving presentation and representation… and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 359). This new profession, according to Bourdieu, included critics and commentators in the media. The term has since been extended by Featherstone (1991), Negus (1992) and Nixon (1997) who together use the term to describe work carried out between the cultural producer and the consumer which adds value to the product. Negus’ (1992, p. 502) work focuses on the various workers in the recording industry who bridge the distance between the artist and the audience. His use of cultural intermediaries draws attention to the various aspects of mediation in the industrial production of art. A focus on cultural intermediaries is a departure from a transmission model of cultural production, in which a cultural commodity simply flows from the artist to the consumer. Instead, by recognizing the significant power and agency of the work between
production and consumption, Negus is able to theorize the cultural economy of artistic production.

There are three ways Negus (1997) defines mediation that apply to the music industry. First, is the idea of work being performed through intermediary action in-between the production and consumption of a good. This definition gestures towards the concept of a gatekeeper, a person who controls access to both the resources needed for production and the distribution systems for a product. Negus (1992), cautions against using the term gatekeeper, instead suggesting that cultural goods are not made by a one way flow of material through various gates, but instead are a "series of interactions and mediations" as various actors take part in the production, distribution and consumption of the good (Negus, 1997, p. 67).

Second, Negus describes cultural intermediaries as a “means of transmission… between reality and social knowledge” (Negus, 1997, p. 67). This point directs attention to the links between technology and the types of music being produced. Ideas such as ‘radio friendly music’, or ‘electronic dance music’ indicate moments in music history where technology has played a mediating role in the style of music being produced. The differing qualities of media used in music greatly affect how music is made, distributed, and consumed. On the productive end, synthesizers enabled the genesis of numerous genres of music. From the distribution side of music, the radio, compact disc and the internet have had a revolutionary impact on how music is circulated. Finally, in regards to consumption, the advent of numerous listening technologies, from the electrical amplification of sound to the ubiquitous white Apple headphones, have reconfigured how, where, and when music is consumed.
Third, Negus (1997) argues that all acts of production are mediated by social relationships. This definition recognizes power and class relationships in regards to cultural production.

One important absence in the work on cultural intermediaries is the numerous technicians who develop, operate, and maintain technologies, as well as the accumulation processes of music production. Another limitation of theories concerning cultural intermediaries is the failure to address issues of space. In particular, theories are deficient at addressing how art, music, or other media move (in a literal sense) from the producer to the audience. Cultural intermediaries are primarily concerned with establishing and maintaining cultural, economic and social relationships between the artist and the consumer. Technical intermediaries refer to an altogether different group of people who bridge spatial distances rather than cultural and social distances. In the music industry, a technical intermediary can be the programmer who writes the code for online music delivery or in the case of live music, the technician who operates the sound or lighting systems. The value these workers add leads to an amplification of the artist. This amplification removes the friction of distance between the producer and consumer. For example, technical intermediaries are the mixing engineers who connect the studio to the stereo by making a CD or mp3. They are the programmers behind the iTunes store who facilitate the delivery of music to a consumer. In the case of live music, they are the front of house technicians who help amplify the artist from the stage to the audience. Bridging these distances does not involve taste making, curation, or other activities typically carried out by cultural intermediaries.

The work of a technical intermediary can contribute aesthetically or be transparent and invisible in the product. In the case of live music, technical intermediaries decide what

1 Amplification used in this context refers to the literal acts of sound, lighting, and video technicians who respectively make the artist louder, brighter, and larger than life. By amplifying an artist, technical intermediaries bridge the distance between stage and audience.
sound and lighting systems are used. The quality of these systems and the way they are operated greatly affects how the audience will receive the artist. In recorded music, the style of sound mixing greatly affects the reception of the music. As home recording becomes more popular, equipment manufacturers and software designers will hold increasing influence over the aesthetic characteristics of recorded and live sound. A good example of an invisible yet aesthetically influential technical intermediary in popular music is the software engineering firm, Antares Audio Technologies, whose popular “auto-tune” plugin is featured on numerous recordings, from artists such as Cher and Shania Twain to Lil’ Wayne and Kanye West. This plugin automatically adjusts and corrects the pitch of a singer’s voice to be in the correct key. Without exercising power over the style or genre of music, these engineers are highly influential in how music is made.

If Negus was to revisit his study of how popular music is made today, he would likely find the process more democratized. The predominately white male record executives of the past are increasingly being bypassed (Negus, 2002, p. 512). Individual artists have more input and autonomy. Following the declining role of cultural intermediaries in the music industry, the role of technical intermediaries becomes increasingly important. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore in detail the work of technical intermediaries in the production of live music, arguing that the study of live music will require specific attention to technical intermediaries.

2.3 Intermediaries in Live Music

In live music production there is a significant amount of specialized labour that contributes to the aesthetic quality of the commodity. Webster (2011) suggests that workers in live music production “often remain deliberately covert – part of the work of backstage
workers is to conceal the machinations from the frontstage region” (p. 9). Because of this obfuscation, the role of technical cultural intermediation remains a largely unexplored area of research. Technical intermediaries include the myriad technical and manual labour positions in live music production. Their work mediates and amplifies the artists’ vision to the audience. Technical intermediation reinforces the aesthetic goals of the artist. As such, live audio is often called sound reinforcement.

This study focuses primarily on sound, lighting, and stage technicians. This group of workers is integral to the production of live music. It is common for large concerts to require hundreds of workers. These workers set up sound, lighting and staging systems. They log hundreds of working hours for a comparatively short concert. The ephemerality of live music is unique from other cultural industries. While film and television production require enormous amounts of labour inputs, the product is a durable commodity which can be disseminated over a wide geography. This durability entails different compensation structures, including royalty systems for many of the workers involved. In contrast, many concerts do not allow recording. A live music event is about selling the experience of music. A concert is a fleeting and intimate experience. Recorded music, along with film and television, are explicitly durable commodities whose the supply chain, is organized around the sale of a physical product. The economy of durable media is declining (Leyshon, 2009). The internet and digital distribution systems have simultaneously increased access to durable cultural goods, while diminishing the prices of these goods.

The increasing role that live music plays in the livelihoods of artists indicates the disruptive role that online and digital technologies play in the music industry (Frith, 2007; Leyshon et al., 2005). As such, music along with other cultural industries are being restructured by this digital revolution. Post-internet cultural industries are becoming reliant

Since fewer workers are required to produce a record than a concert, it becomes increasingly important to discuss the division of labour as it pertains to technical intermediaries and the role of this labour. Leyshon (2001), suggests that as recording studios shutter, recording engineers will likely find work in the live music industry. This position fails to recognize the difference in skills between live and studio workers. Live music production requires more manual labour inputs. In a number of observations, sound technicians jokingly described themselves as “black box relocation technicians”, meaning that the majority of their work constitutes moving heavy audio equipment. Interviewees emphasized knowledge of electrical systems and structural engineering as being important skills in live audio production. Live sound engineers are called upon to safely wire high voltage electrical systems, and hang thousands of kilograms of sound and lighting equipment. Studio workers rarely perform these tasks. Instead they are more likely to work indoors, in a permanently installed studio system. Finally, many participants in this research described a distance between live and studio work. While many of the workers interviewed had experience in a studio, they suggest the skill sets have only minimal overlap with live music production, thus highlighting both recording and live music as separate ‘music industries’ (Williamson & Cloonan, 2007).

As such, I argue that research is needed to address two key differences between live and recorded music. First, recorded music has comparatively less technical intermediaries in comparison to live music. It takes fewer people and less hours to produce even the most
complicated record than it does to perform a concert at a large scale. Many recording engineers and producers are well known. For example The Beatles recording engineer, George Martin, is often considered the fifth Beatle. Recording technicians and engineers are credited on the album, and can be compensated through a royalty system. In contrast, live engineers are typically unknown, un-credited, and do not receive royalties (unless the show happens to be recorded).

Second, the spatial configuration of a concert limits the artist’s ability to carry out much of the work performed by technicians, such as mixing the audio or cueing lighting. Instead, technicians become an essential part of the aesthetic and artistic process of live music. The space of a concert has strict divisions between stage and audience. In theatre, this division is called the ‘fourth wall’. Technicians play an important role in establishing this relationship. In a studio, artists are able to actively participate in the production. After a session, an artist can listen to a recording, and suggest how it might be mixed better. In live music, the division of labour renders an artist unable to control how the overall production is carried out during the show.

As mentioned, the division of labour in live music production is spatially and temporally complicated. For example, touring concerts require local, translocal, and sometimes international promotion. An entourage of technicians and engineers travel with the production for months on end. There is also a significant reserve of local labour to perform manual tasks, and a contingent of peripheral workers who work in the venue in ticket sales, and hospitality. Some of these jobs exist locally. Others are translocal or international. Some of these jobs are in constant motion, while some are fixed to specific locations. Many of these jobs are not involved in the reproduction of the event, but instead are concerned only with the preparation, marketing or financial accounting of the concert. Others are involved in the daily production of the show. The spatial configuration is further
complicated within the venue itself. Certain technicians and crew are relegated to backstage, while others are front-of-house. The spatial division of a concert contains a strict separation between production space (backstage), performance space (the stage), and the audience space (house). Technical intermediaries work in all of these spaces. Technical production occupies the interstitial space between the so-called ‘fourth wall’ of the stage, and the audience.

2.4 THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL INTERMEDIARIES IN LIVE MUSIC

The remainder of this chapter will explore the division of labour in live music production by examining the myriad labour inputs and actors that are involved in making live music. In the following sections, a selection of job positions will be discussed to trace the division of labour, and discuss the complex geography of live music work. Not all concerts contain these forms of labour. It is thus necessary to delimit the area of study to only a few of the more common forms of labour. Small concerts may not have any division between artistic, technical, managerial or marketing labour. At small concerts a worker can hold all these roles. Venues with installed audio and lighting systems often require less manual labour and have permanent technical and venue staff. At the other end of the spectrum (a large concert or festival) the division of labour can be exhaustive, to the point where forms of work rarely associated with music such as catering, and other hospitality services become essential parts of the production.

Categorizing labour in the music industry is problematic. As Williamson and Cloonan (2007) argue, referring to a singular music industry bundles disparate industries and processes into a non-descript blanket term. Instead, these authors use the term ‘music industries’ to describe the multiple arms and subsectors of this complicated industry. When
discussing the live music industry, Webster (2011) suggests the term ‘live music industries’ as there are “a number of ‘industries’ in their own right, such as production companies, booking agents, and promoters.” (p.29). Much like the trades associated with house building, these industries coalesce in a gestalt of a final product, but each have unique and specialized skills.

It is not within the scope of this project to explore the complete division of labour in the live music industries. As such, I will use the typology suggested by (Brennan & Webster, 2011) and study those involved in commercial production within a ‘professionalized network’. This network refers to those workers whose desired livelihood is formed from the production of music live music, including promoters, club owners, artists, technicians and others. Calling it a professionalized network distinguishes this cohort from amateur and hobbyist actors who are not seeking a livelihood from the production of music. For example many religious and community events are put on for reasons other than wages, or profit. The focus in this thesis is on professional workers. These workers have an interest in separating themselves from more amateur parts of the sector. As Hracs (2013) puts it, “professionalization entails moving beyond bohemia and eschewing alternative and anti-market attitudes and practices in favour of professional personas and market-driven entrepreneurial subjectivities” (p. 8).

While this thesis is primarily concerned with technical intermediaries, I will spend some time differentiating technical from cultural intermediaries (such as a promoters and artist management). In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe the common positions directly involved in the production of a concert, including some of the supporting and managerial positions. This inventory of work will explore the duties and qualifications of these workers, paying particular attention to work conditions, power relationships and
industrial structure. There will be three chief divisions in the types of labour explored: managerial, technical, and manual. Absent from this inventory will be artistic and other actors. I choose to omit discussion of the artist in the supply chain of live music as their role is widely discussed in the literature on live music (See: Coulson, 2012; Hauge & Hracs, 2010; Hracs, 2009, 2011; Morgan & Wood, 2013; Peterson, 2013; Scarborough, 2012).

2.5 LABOUR IN THE LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY.

The ‘professionalized network’ in live music is described by Brennan and Webster (2011) in a report by the UK Competition Commission on the merger between Live Nation and Ticketmaster (See: Figure 1). This report focuses on the corporate and industrial structure of these large corporations. However, the descriptions of the supply chain sufficiently describe many jobs in live music industry.
While the model in Figure 1 establishes a basic live music supply chain, absent are the technical intermediaries, including sound reinforcement, lighting design, and staging. As a supplement to this model, I suggest that technical intermediaries form non-hierarchical relationships between and with the artist and promoter (through the venue) to the consumer. These relationships are important as the technical production of a show affects how the artist at the top of the supply chain is received by the end consumer. There is an apparent lack of awareness of the role technical intermediaries play in cultural industries, and particularly the music industry. Current theories concerning cultural intermediaries explore the role of intermediaries in determining musical taste and the economy of the mass music industry (Negus, 1992, 2002). These approaches suggest that cultural intermediaries bridge the distance between the producer and consumer (Negus, 2002). The influence of these actors is widely discussed in the literature (See: Adorno, 1991). However, technical intermediation is also important. Sound, lighting and other technical positions have special agency in how an artist’s performance is received by the audience. However, they have very little agency to determine what sorts of artists, genres or styles become popular. As such, it is important to determine the role of technical intermediaries in the production of a cultural product.

I suggest that the arrangement of technical work is such that it permeates multiple levels within this model. In the following section I will discuss some of the relationships between technical and cultural intermediaries. This section is supported by the literature, and empirical data gathered through participant observation. Discussion of the managerial positions will be drawn primarily from existing literatures, while technical intermediaries will be discussed using ethnographic data gathered for this research through participant observation.
2.5.1 CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES IN LIVE MUSIC

Managerial work describes cultural intermediaries in the live music industry involved directly with the production of a live music event. These include actors involved in promotion, booking and ticketing. I use the term managerial to distinguish it from technical work, which refers to workers involved in sound, lighting, and video design, amongst others. Using the term managerial also excludes other intermediaries who are not directly involved in the production of a live music event, such as equipment manufacturers and music critics (Currid, 2007). It should be noted that many independent artists work as their own booking agent, manager, and promoter. While I will often refer to any of these positions as a singular person, I am actually referring to any actor involved in carrying out these tasks. There is significant crossover between managerial and technical production, creating somewhat fuzzy boundaries between them. For example, it is common for the promoter or artists to hire technicians to design the show. Additionally, technical issues often limit certain non-technical parameters of the show. However, while there is overlap, both managerial and technical work are different.

2.5.2 PROMOTERS

Promoters are a central actor in the production of live music (Brennan & Webster, 2011; Webster, 2011). Promoters initiate the process of concert production, create the division of labour, and assemble finance capital. They are ultimately the key cultural intermediaries in the production of live music. The role of promotion and promoters is explored in a number of academic studies (See: Brennan & Webster, 2011; Fraser, 2012; Marshall, 2013; Webster, 2011). These studies point to the central role promoters play in negotiating social relationships (Webster, 2011, p. 10). Webster (2011) differentiates a ‘live
music promoter’ as being distinct from an ‘event manager’. An event manager is a position of work that applies to anything from a business conference to a sports tournament (Webster, 2011, p. 77). This distinction is important as it suggests a difference between a live music event or concert from other types of events. Webster (2011) suggests that unlike a sporting event, “A live music event… is temporally and spatially, socially and musically unique, and requires an artist, an audience, a venue, appropriate technology, and a catalyst, or promoter” (Webster, 2011, p. 77). In that regard, cultural intermediation is a key component in the work of a live music promoter.

The types and roles of promoters are myriad. The role of a promoter need not be filled exclusively by someone who identifies as a promoter. For example, when a small band hosts a show, the act of putting the show together makes them the de facto promoter of the event. A conductor in an orchestra who selects the material for that season is assuming aspects of promotional work. Webster (2011) identifies three key functions of a promoter: planning, publicity, and production. In planning, a promoter will mediate the production process between the artist (or agent and artist management) and the various technical actors including the venue, sound technicians and lighting designers. Publicity includes the marketing and advertising of an event. Production relates to the execution of the event itself. Ultimately a live music event’s success or failure falls on the promoter. Promoters also represent speculative capital, as they are able to profit most from a concert.

The geography of music promotion is unique. A live music event is inherently local. It happens in a specific place and time. However, promotion can be carried out at multiple scales: local, translocal, national and international. As such, scalar relationships generally move downward from international to local, and rarely upwards. For example, a local promoter usually promotes local shows. An international conglomerate such as Live Nation, is able to internationally promote global tours comprised of a series of local events.
2.5.3 Booking Agents

Agents are common in all cultural industries, including fine art, music, literature, film, and theatre. The basic duties of a booking agent are common regardless of the industry. Generally, an agent represents an artist or collection of artists and assists them in finding work and in distributing their work. Agents are paid a percentage of the sales and work they bring to their clients. Agents then seek to maximize an artist’s income from performing (Competition Commission 2010). In the context of live music, booking agents mediate the relationship between the artist and the promoter. A promoter will hire talent through an agent, and the agent will negotiate the terms of the contract to the benefit of the artist. Generally, a booking agent will negotiate a fixed rate with bonuses based on ticket sales, placing the burden of risk on the promoter (Competition Commission 2010). For example, hiring an artist will be a fixed cost and the promoter will make profit from the surplus after the artist is paid. Many booking agents will represent multiple acts, and sell them to a promoter as a bundle. Often if there is a multi-act concert, the artists will all be represented by the same agent. This is an important form of curation and intermediation, as an agent is able to support smaller acts by giving them the opportunity to share the stage with an established artist.

While booking agents provide information on the technical requirements of the artist to the promoter, they play a minimal role in the technical intermediation of the live music industry. The technical requirements of an artist come in the form a ‘rider’. As mentioned in the introduction, these riders contain numerous technical details of the show’s production, ranging from the types of audio equipment to be used, to catering and security needs. Riders are generally produced by the artist, and artist management. While these documents certainly play a role in technical mediation, the documents must still be
interpreted by technicians. The role of a rider is mostly in establishing minimum standards, rather than aesthetic direction.

2.5.4 ARTIST MANAGEMENT

Artist managers represent an artist on a day-to-day basis. Unlike booking agents, artist management will typically be involved in aspects of technical production. Management coordinates logistics for the travel of the tour, ensures that the venue and equipment are adequate, and that hospitality and accommodations are sufficient. Artist management also ensures that the requirements in the rider are met. Ultimately, artist management is responsible to the artist. They try to make sure both the aesthetic qualities of the show are well received by the audience and that the artists and their entourage are able to travel and perform in comfort. Thus, while the promoter is primarily involved in cultural intermediation, artist management is primarily involved in managing technical aspects of a tour or show. However, artist management is unlikely to be involved in the direct operation of technical equipment.

2.6 TECHNICAL INTERMEDIARIES IN LIVE MUSIC

As mentioned, I draw a distinction between cultural intermediation and technical intermediation Cultural intermediaries are concerned with dictating taste (Negus, 2002). Technical intermediaries focus on the reception of the artist. Technical intermediaries are involved in creating, modifying or reinforcing the medium in which the message will be delivered. Artists and cultural intermediaries (such as promoters), are involved in selecting and crafting the message to be transmitted. Technical intermediaries can be understood spatially mediating consumption by amplifying production or shortening the distance to the consumer.
The production of a concert requires a number of specialized technologies and infrastructures. These can include large speaker systems, lighting systems, video displays, staging, and many other elements, including trucking and logistical coordination. The product of a show is more than just what the artist performs, but also the technical and aesthetic value added by technical intermediaries. As Eddy, an experienced sound technician suggests, a sound engineer, “goes beyond just doing a show. It’s designing a sound… There is artistic merit in that. They have to use their judgment and experience to get the right type of sound for a particular artist” (Interview).

Indeed, the artist’s work is greatly influenced by technical mediation. Sound engineers are able to manipulate the sound of the artist in profound ways. Sound mixers can add reverb or chorus to different instruments and adjust the level and tonal quality of an instrument. Lighting designers are in control of the visual aesthetic of a show. Cueing lighting sequences is a craft that an artist would be unable to perform during the concert. A concert is a joint creation of the artist, the promoter, and the technical intermediaries. Janice describes how her role as a sound technician is often under appreciated:

Everybody thinks it is just the artist. It’s not. Without us, your artist is going to sound like crap, and you’re going to see a horrible show, and that goes for all lighting, audio, and video (Interview)

Technicians are responsible for specific duties related to operating specialized concert technology and equipment. Sound technicians are the most common technician because at a minimum, a live music event will require sound reinforcement, but may not require lighting, video, and other staging effects. As such, the majority of participants in this study are sound technicians, although technicians working in lighting, video, and staging are also included.
The specific job titles of people who work in sound reinforcement are hotly contested. Some respondents insisted on being called ‘sound engineers’. Others preferred to be referred to as ‘technicians’. One respondent used the term ‘sound designer’. All of the respondents who worked in sound were essentially doing the same work, but few of them had similar titles. During the participant observation phase of the research, I was hired under myriad titles, including technician, engineer, and stage manager. My duties and responsibilities were consistent regardless of the title under which I was hired. I argue that the lack of accepted titles represents the highly individualized and informal characteristics of the industry. The titles of workers tend to reflect the career position the individual has attained. Younger workers are more likely to identify as a technician, while more experienced workers identify as engineers. The difference between these titles reflects internal power differentials, rather than differences in skills or training.

However there are differing duties between technicians and engineers. Generally, a technician is responsible for configuring equipment, while an engineer is more likely to operate equipment. However, the constant overlap in duties between engineers and technicians blurred any real distinction between the two categories.

None of the respondents had formal education or accreditation as a sound engineer or technician. Throughout the observations, I did not encounter any worker with a music or production degree or certificate. As such, their job titles reflect personal preference rather than professional designation. As a result, I choose to refer to all these workers as technicians, because an engineer is a formal title afforded to those with an engineering or technical degree. As a result, sound engineer it is not accurate as a designation. The term

2 There are formal degrees available for studio engineers from accredited and reputable universities. For example, McGill University offers a sound engineer undergraduate degree, as well as a PhD in sound recording. As such, sound engineer is an accredited professional title.
technician is preferred as it refers more to the technical production of the concert. I therefore use the term technician to refer to an engineer, designer or any other distinction. Choosing the term technician over other terms is not intended to diminish the skills of those I encountered who self-identified as engineers. Rather it is simply an effective shorthand to refer to workers employed in technical production.

There are a number of other titles, which refer to workers carrying out specific tasks. A front-of-house technician is responsible for the sound the audience hears. A monitor technician mixes sound for what the artists hear on stage. A system technician is responsible for ensuring that the primary sound equipment is working. A patch technician is responsible for making sure all the connections between musical instruments and equipment are correct. Within this division, there can be additional subdivisions, with multiple people carrying out the same work. For example, at a large concert with multiple acts, it is common for each act to have their own front-of-house and monitoring technicians. Lighting, video, and stage technicians have similar configurations. Generally, these positions refer to specific duties of the workers or their spatial position within the venue.

The hiring practices of technical labour vary according to spatial configurations. There are three common forms of employment for technicians: house, local freelance, or “briefcase technician”. A house technician is employed by a specific venue. These technicians are often responsible for maintaining installed equipment in a specific venue, and making sure that ‘guest’ or ‘briefcase’ technicians have access to the resources they need. House technicians have the most predictable schedule and the least geographic uncertainty in their work. Generally, a house technician knows the venue’s schedule in advance and is involved in the coordination of the concert. Since these technicians are employed by a specific venue, their place of work is stable. However, it is common for house technicians to ‘moonlight’ at other venues and with other production companies, as it is rare that venues
can provide full time employment for technical staff. In this study, a number of interviewees had regular ‘house gigs’ at multiple venues, while also working as freelance technicians. Thus, it is common for technicians to have multiple employers at any given time and to be employed in different positions at the same time or at different times in their career. Often, house gigs are informal and freelance, even though workers can hold the position for years at a time. Only one technician in the study held a house gig with formal benefits, such as health care, although as the respondent admits, they are an exception to how work is arranged in this industry.

In union venues, many of the technical ‘house’ positions are also unionized. For example, at many large theatres, the front-of-house engineer will be an IASTE member. While IASTE is an important employer of technicians, there are comparatively fewer technician jobs than are available in non-union houses. Often the people who hold these positions work outside the union in non-union venues to supplement their income. Unionized workers are rarely employed full time. Additionally, the union only protects union members employed in union work. Workers who freelance are not covered during this outside work. In Calgary, there are only a few full time unionized technical positions. In other cities such as New York, IASTE is likely to employ more technical labour. However, these positions would still be fewer than the number of freelance jobs available, and the workers who hold these positions would very likely have to work outside the union to supplement their pay. A number of respondents in this study held permit status with IASTE, allowing them to work in union venues. However, none of them identified as a union member, and mentioned only infrequently working under union protection.

Local freelance technicians are most often employed by rental companies who provide equipment to venues that do not have permanently installed sound and lighting systems. This form of employment is by far the most common in the industry. Rather than
hiring technicians and renting equipment separately, a promoter would hire a rental company to supply both equipment and labour. Generally, these workers have an unpredictable schedule. Additionally, their place of work varies regularly. It is common for an equipment rental company to have a cadre of technicians on an on-call list, allowing the company to be flexible in their choice of technicians. These local technicians are usually not employed by a single rental company. Instead they often work for multiple local rental companies, promoters or venues. There are, however, a number of workers who are fully employed by rental companies, giving them priority over freelance technicians when there is available work. When hired, local technicians receive their wage from the equipment rental company. All of the participants in this study had affiliations with multiple equipment rental companies in Calgary and regularly worked for these different companies.

Contract and freelance workers can be hired by a venue, a rental company, or an artist. It is common practice for a touring artist to hire sound and lighting technicians who travel with the artist and ensure their aesthetic goals are consistent from venue to venue. The technicians hired by the artist are called “briefcase technicians”. They generally have little to do with the setup of the equipment, and instead simply show up with their briefcase at the time of the show. This form of employment is widely considered the most prestigious in the industry. Generally, these briefcase technicians are hired to go on tour. They must be geographically and temporally flexible to be able to travel with an artist for months on end. One technician in the study has been touring nine months out of the year for two years with a single artist. This particular worker, while advanced in their career, faced the problem of having to find housing every time they returned from tour. As well, their livelihood is tied to the willingness of the artist to go on tour.

Overall, a concert technician is very likely to be a freelance worker, who works for multiple employers under numerous occupational titles, with different forms of contracts for
each arrangement. Generally, their workspace changes often, even if they are a house technician in a venue. The nature of work, at least in Calgary, is such that no single employer is able to fully employ all the technicians it needs throughout the year, resulting in flexible labour arrangements. The inability for any single employer to hire year round staff is likely a widespread phenomena, as live music generally follows a seasonal pattern. Workers are often busy in the summer, but have difficulties finding work in the winter. The seasonal variation to employment will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

As mentioned earlier, there are a number of unionized technicians in each city who are members of The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). While the union is able to offer better protections, few members are employed full time, and the union maintains a strict seniority system, making entrance to the union difficult. These workers will be discussed in greater detail in a following section.

Statistics Canada does not have a specific national occupational code (NOC) for concert technicians. The most appropriate NOC would be “#5225 Audio and video recording technicians”, which includes a number of live music occupations (Statistics Canada, 2012). Bundled in this group are recording and radio technicians, along with video technicians. A variety of statistical sources, including provincial employment surveys, suggest this group of workers is exposed to various types of risks. Employment Ontario (2009) shows that audio and video technicians are 83% male with have an average income of $49,553 (“5225 Audio and Video Recording Technicians”). This is six thousand dollars less than the provincial average of $56,033. Furthermore, this group has a higher rate of part-time employment than the provincial average (23% compared to 19%). Perhaps most telling statistic is the level amount of self-employment amongst this group, which is more than double the provincial average (33% of workers are self employed compared to 15% of all

While this NOC includes jobs outside the population being studied, it is reasonable to suggest that live music technicians will share these characteristics. Furthermore, it is likely that given the highly flexible nature of work in this industry, that the inclusion of concert technicians with the often unionized radio and television technicians would likely skew the data to make the whole category appear less precarious. Live technicians are likely at the more precarious end of an apparently already precarious NOC categorization.

It is important to note the glaring gender disparity. Much like the music industry in general, this is a male dominated field. It is not within the scope of this research to fully unpack and explore this gender gap. There are however a number of studies of gender in popular music (For example see: Leonard, 2007; Whiteley, 2013)

2.6.1 Manual Labour

At a certain scale of concert production, a level of manual labour is required beyond technicians. These workers are called the crew. Crew work is generally low skill. The work is centred on carrying out physical tasks such as unloading trucks, lifting speakers, and assembling lighting and truss systems. However, there are a number of highly skilled crew positions, including riggers and lighting operators. Riggers are responsible for organizing the points in which equipment is suspended from a roof. Considering the significant safety precautions required for such a position, riggers are certified through training programs offered by professional engineering and trade organizations and crew unions. Crew members are sometimes called upon to operate specific lighting equipment, for example spotlight operators. A spotlight operator will be directed by a lighting technician or director to operate a spotlight based on predetermined cues. Additionally, many other crew members may have
knowledge pertaining to specific aspects of production. It is common for crew members to work exclusively with audio, lighting, video or staging.

There are two dominant forms of manual labour: union and non-union. Crew unions are typically associated with a venue, hence the term ‘union-house’. A stage crew is hired by either the promoter, technicians, production company or the venue. At the large scale of concert production, stage crew is almost exclusively unionized. The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IASTE) is one of the largest crew unions providing labour for concert productions. IASTE includes more than 119,000 workers internationally, nearly doubling their membership since 1993 (IASTE, 2012). IASTE is subdivided into different local unions. Each city will have a local union. Workers are then confined to a local labour market. In this regard, union crew are the least geographically mobile worker in the live music industry. IASTE adheres to principles of seniority, whereby established union members have seniority over new members. Union members in IASTE are given a number when they are hired. This number determines the order in which they will be called when there is available work. Workers who receive training and develop expertise in certain fields will be called for certain tasks. As mentioned, certain positions, like riggers, which are highly specialized, receive higher wages than less specialized jobs like truck loaders. Union labour is often more expensive than non-union labour. Many venues have contracts with unions. Concert productions are thus forced to hire union labour. Crew bills can be the single most expensive aspect of a concert production. Generally speaking, at the larger end of the concert spectrum, the crew will almost certainly be unionized. Concerts in smaller or informal venues can use private crew. In many bars or festivals, there are no precasting arrangements with unions. Future research should look at the geography of unionization in live music venues to better understand how crew workers across different regions are employed.
The culture and norms of IASTE vary from location to location. In some cities and venues, the contracts with IASTE are such that touring technicians (non-union) are not allowed to do any work that IASTE crew are supposed to do. Technicians in this study described situations where they had to ask an IASTE crew to open a case for them because union regulations prohibited non-union members from performing that task on the work site. In these situations, technicians possess what is known in the industry as the ‘finger of god’ or ‘the force’. Indeed, the division of labour between union crews and non-union production workers is complex. Among the benefits to being part of a crew union are the strict regulations around pay, safety, and other workplace rules like break times. Union workers generally have health benefits, vacation pay and are entitled to receive compensation for injuries and other stop work activities (IASTE, 2012).

On the other end of the spectrum are private or freelance crew labourers. Many private crew companies have been established to compete with the often expensive rates of union labour. Additionally, many production companies hire freelance crew as needed for shows. Further qualitative research is necessary to understand these two different work arrangements. Non-union crew work extensively with private crew companies, as many of the venues they work in are non-union. Interviewees describe the motley of crew workers they work with on a regular basis. These respondents suggest that many private crew workers are doing this work as a way to make connections with technicians. Their long term career goal is become a technician.

2.7 Conclusion

The division of labour in the live music is complicated by the differing roles of cultural and technical intermediaries. This chapter has argued for the need to critically
explore the work of technical intermediaries. With the rise of digital distribution systems, many cultural industries are increasingly being oriented around live performances. Unlike the recording industry, the live music industry is labour intensive. The live music sector has a unique division of labour. I argue that technical intermediaries play a significant role in the supply chain of live music. Technical intermediaries are distinct from cultural intermediaries. Technical intermediaries serve to reinforce and amplify artistic production, rather than curate tastes. Technical intermediaries bridge the space between artist and audience through reinforcement and amplification of the product. The work of technical intermediation in the live music industry is performed by a variety of both technical and manual labourers. This work has unique spatial and temporal arrangements, which result in a myriad of different organizational structures within the overall division of labour in the music industry. This concept could be extended to other entertainment industries, including film, circus and radio. Increasingly cultural industries require complex technical mediation. Future research should explore the role of technical intermediaries in these industries. This chapter explained the difference between managerial, technical, and manual work, describing the characteristics, spatial arrangement, and employment scenarios for these positions. I argue that technical intermediaries play a key role in cultural production in the post-internet music industry as increasingly, it is the medium itself which influences consumption rather than an act of curation. In the following chapter, I will explore in more detail the working conditions of some of these technical intermediaries.
CHAPTER 3: PRECARIOUS LABOUR IN THE LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Proponents of the ‘creative’ economy, such as Richard Florida (2002), are criticized for failing to address the precariousness found in the industries they identify as the harbingers of the new economy (Ross 2004). Critics, such as Ross (2008), suggest that the current era of neoliberalism is associated with an ongoing process of labour market deregulation and de-unionization. This has tremendous consequences across the labour market (Beck, 1992; Ross, 2004). These consequences manifest themselves in the rise of precarious work (Gibson & Klocker, 2005; Ross, 2004, 2008, 2009). Precariousness “refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work – from illegalized, casualized and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecwork and freelancing.” (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 3). Broadly, this definition subsumes and adds to the types of precariousness found in the live music industry. Generally, there is little illegal, or homeworking in this industry, although in extreme cases these problems are present.

Each of these studies point to industry specific and geographically unique forms of precariousness. While there are many differences between industries, there are also commonalities. Generally, cultural and creative work is irregular as it is project based. Workers are often employed on short-term contracts with little job security. Career trajectories do not follow a fixed hierarchical path. Earnings are unevenly distributed, with a few people at the top taking a disproportionate amount of income. There are few benefits attached to this work. Workers often hold multiple jobs, and in general “there is an oversupply of labour to the creative industries with much of it working for free or on subsistence wages” (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009, p. 420). While there is a lot of attention paid to work in creatives industries, little research has examined the unique risks confronted in live music production (Banks, 2007; Blair, 2003; Bourdieu, 1998; Gill & Rossiter, 2007; Hesmondhalgh, 2002; McRobbie, 2002, 2004; Morini, 2007; Neff Wissinger & Zukin, 2005; Ross, 2004; Terranova, 2004; Willis & Dex, 2003).

The live music industry is unique from other cultural industries, making this study important in at least three regards. First, this industry is centred on productions which travel from city-to-city, utilizing both local and geographically mobile labour. Workers from across space converge for brief periods of time in specific locations. Second, unlike durable cultural commodities, such as fashion, art, film, and recorded music, live music is ephemeral and fleeting. Live music deals in experience (Cohen, 1991). Third, as discussed in chapter 2, the role of technical intermediaries is more significant than in other cultural industries. These three dimensions –translocality, ephemerality and technical intermediation– complicate labour arrangements. Precaritization is then a unique in the live music industry.

There are two goals of this chapter. First, this chapter will provide a review of current research on precarious cultural labour. This review will explore the unique aspects of work in cultural industries. While each cultural industry is different, the commonalities point
to a shared experience of employment, and a more general shift toward more flexible patterns of work (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009). Second, this chapter will analyze empirical data gathered on the live music industry. I argue that the live music industry has largely been neglected in the study of cultural labour. Addressing this deficit is important because recent years have seen the music industry shift economically from recorded to live music (Frith, 2007). As well, with the increasing role of technical intermediaries in cultural industries, it is important to introduce research that focuses on the labour arrangement of these workers. The data suggests that live music work is characterized by unique forms of precarity not commonly found in other cultural industries. Many of these risks run parallel with those found in manual labour industries, for example risk of injury and long-term physical stress. As such, I suggest that work in the live music industry adds a new dimension to the study of cultural labour. I present empirical data gathered through both participant observation and interviews to highlight these unique forms of precariousness.

3.2 THE SHIFT FROM FORDISM TO FLEXIBLE ACCUMULATION

Understanding precariousness in cultural labour requires an investigation into the broad changes affecting the labour market from the 1970s to the present day. Harvey (1990) describes the transformation of capitalism in the late twentieth century from a Fordist to a flexible regime of accumulation. Fordism is a regime of accumulation where mass production is linked to mass consumption. This implies stable relationships between capital, labour, and the state. A social contract existed whereby workers received high wages in exchange for co-operation in a Taylorist production system. The widespread adoption of Fordism meant that workers had stable, life long jobs. The state supplemented any gap in monetary wages through the provision of welfare or a social wage. The mobility of capital was constrained through the friction of distance and state protections (Harvey, 1990).
By the early 1970s, the Fordist regime of accumulation began to collapse. Harvey (1990) highlights a number of concurrent factors leading to crisis, such as the rising price of oil, labour market liberalization, and automation. Free trade policies, new global transportation systems, and inflation also contributed to this crisis. In response to the growing cost of domestic production and the decreasing cost of transportation, capital began to relocate overseas in search of lower labour costs. In America, these moves followed firms relocating to states with “right to work laws”, primarily in the American south. This came as a blow to unions in Northern states. However, capital mobility eventually grew, and firms began relocating abroad, first to Mexico and Canada, and later to countries of the global south (Harvey, 1990).

By the 1980s, the labour market of the global north was increasingly flexibilized through the process of offshoring, contingent work, and the diminished role of unions. This led to the erosion of the standard Fordist ‘job for life’. These changes entailed a de-linking of production from consumption (Harvey, 1990). The remaining post-Fordist production system in the North American context was increasingly based on competitive individualism and entrepreneurialism. Additionally, the role of the state shifted from a managerial or welfare provisioning role to an entrepreneurial role in which government was increasingly concerned with growth rather than social justice (Harvey, 2008). Post-Fordist economies are recognized by the dominant role that service sector industries play. Service sector work is typically knowledge-driven and consumer-oriented.

One misconception about the post-Fordist labour market concerns the role of automation and digital technologies. In the past, automation was envisaged to create white collar jobs by freeing the hands of blue collar workers. This however, is not entirely the case (Sennett, 2006, p. 93). Many human-service sector, creative, and knowledge driven jobs are eliminated through various types of automation, and digital technologies. Sennett (2006)
uses the example of Sprint Corporation’s adoption of intelligent voice-answering machines. In four years, Sprint was able to shed 11,500 workers, while seeing a significant growth in revenue and productivity (Sennett, 2006). These jobs are different from manufacturing jobs that are eliminated through mechanized automation. In more creative sectors, software has reduced the labour devoted to many time consuming and laborious tasks. In architecture for example, the ability to 3D render plans instantly has devalued numerous entry level positions that would have produced the same product.

The widespread adoption of unpaid internships or “work for experience” models of entry into creative industries stem from a devaluing of human skill through the automation of many skilled tasks (Perlin, 2012). Many highly skilled jobs are increasingly automated. In the recorded music industry the act of curation is increasingly being carried out by end user operated software algorithms. As such, automation has eliminated many curatorial jobs in the music industry. As well, comparatively less labour is required to operate and maintain a digital recording studio than an older analog studio (Watson, Hoyler & Mager, 2009).

In the live music industry, many aspects of work, including the planning and promotion of shows are being automated. The increasing use of digital technologies has made the equipment lighter and easier to transport. However, while the equipment has become lighter, concerts are becoming bigger, requiring more labour than ever (For a description of one of labour requirements at one of the largest touring concert productions, see: Cunningham & Scrimgeour, 2009).

Perhaps an even more sweeping change in the labour market is “skills extinction” (Sennett, 2006). One of the problems with an aging labor force is that as workers age, their skills become outdated. While it is possible to retrain an aging worker, it is far easier for firms to hire younger workers, whose skills are fresh. Younger workers are also willing to work for less pay and fewer benefits (Sennett, 2006). Additionally, through the
meritocratic system which most businesses operate under, older workers are often higher paid, and expect greater compensation for their work than younger workers. As I will explain later, in the live music industry, skills only affect a worker’s wage to a certain point. Instead, through competition with younger workers whose undeveloped skill sets are still adaptable, established workers suffer from wage regression.

These changes have caused an erosion of the standard employee/employer relationship (Ross, 2009). The need for new skills in concert with both the automation of creative tasks, and the role of an increasingly skilled global workforce, has given rise to contingent employment in the global north. Instead of being employed in a job for life, skilled workers are hired on an as needed basis or for the completion of a specific project. This on-demand production system characterizes many post-Fordist labour economies. There are numerous contingent labour practices used in post-Fordist economies including part-time, contract, freelance, short-term, consulting, temporary, and internships. The precarity often associated with immigrant, youth, and low skill jobs are becoming the template for high skill and high income jobs. A recent survey in Ontario reveals that up to half of Toronto’s workforce is precariously employed (Lewchucket. al., 2013). Ross (2009) suggests that this emerging precarity is emblematic of perhaps a return to pre-Fordist labour practices. This suggests that secure work relationships were a temporal anomaly in the history of work (Ross, 2009).

Lazzarato (1996) uses the concept of ‘immaterial labour’ to encapsulate these shifts. He presents two aspects to define immaterial labour. First, is that the “informational content” of the commodity is increasingly important in creative and service sector work (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 132). Skills are increasingly focused on the use of “cybernetics” and computers. This aspect again highlights the need to understand the role of technical intermediaries in cultural industries. The second aspect points to “cultural content”
produced by immaterial labour, which “involves a series of activities not normally recognized as work” (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 132). Immaterial labour then, conceptually unhinges “the old dichotomy of mental and manual labour”, as manual labour is increasingly becoming “intellectual”. Lazzarato (1996) argues that labour has undergone a mass intellectualization. Drawing on this logic, I argue that cultural labour is emblematic of emergent trends in the broader labour market.

3.3 Precarious Work in Cultural Industries

The lack of employment security and this process of precaritization is felt particularly hard in cultural and creative industries. Precarization in cultural industries stems from a variety of factors, including the changing tastes and consumer demand for cultural goods, the technologies of production, and the accumulation strategies by speculative investors. With the constant and often unpredictable nature of consumer demand for cultural goods firms tend to be lean, specialized, and flexible. The compact arrangement of firms results in less full time labour and instead requires workers to be flexible. As a result workers in cultural industries tend to earn the majority of their income from multiple sources of employment (Gibson, Murhoy & Freestone, 2002; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Christopherson and Storper (1986) argue that rampant sub-contracting in post-Fordist economies reflects an accumulation strategy to exploit the maximum variety of creative workers. Ross (2004) argues that “the most important influence of the New Economy will be on employees’ expectations of work conditions, not on the nature of investment or business opportunities” (p. 15). Workers, accordingly, seek the so-called ‘no collar’ workspace, where in workers trade “control over time and work options… for the
withdrawal of job security” (Ross, 2004, p. 17). Autonomy, flexibility, and contingency characterize the no-collar workspace.

In cultural industries, and the music industry in particular, the individualization of risk and uncertainty are more predominant than in other industries. Banks et. al. (2000) identify the lack of formal career trajectories combined with the constantly changing nature of business development as unique amongst cultural industry work. These forms of insecurity and flexible arrangements mirror precariousness across the cultural labour market. In the following section I will explore a two concerns common across cultural industries, how pleasure is put to work, and how cultural labour blurs the boundary between work and life.

3.3.1 AFFECT AT WORK

A common finding in cultural labour research suggests that work in cultural industries is “intensely pleasurable (at least some of the time)” (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 15). Morini (2007) argues that “cognitive capitalism”, another synonym to describe the current economic paradigm, “tends to prioritize extracting value from relational and emotional elements” (p. 40, quoted from Gill & Pratt, 2008). Cultural workers, along with workers in general are increasingly called upon to display emotion at work (Hochschild, 2003). Additionally, workers are seeking occupation that offers self-fulfillment and self-realization. The discussion on affective labour can guide an understanding of how pleasure is put to work. Lazzarato (1996) identifies a dual meaning to affective labour, arguing that this form of labouring furthers exploitation by manipulating subjectivities, while also promulgating opportunities for resistance from various forms of interaction and solidarity. The latter meaning reflects the autonomist Marxist position that worker movements are the catalyst for
change. Lazzarato (1996) suggests that the control over the sub conscience of workers threatens to be more authoritarian than the older Fordist system. A basic tenet of this philosophy is that resistance comes, not through the typical Marxist call for less alienating work, or improved working conditions, but rather through the ‘refusal to work’ (Negri, 1979; Hardt & Negri, 2009). This refusal as resistance is undermined when work is made pleasurable, and thus blurs the distinction between working life and non-working life. In cultural labour markets, the pleasurable aspects of work have allowed capital to subordinate and supplant life with work.

While seemingly innocuous, as this thesis will suggest, the exploitation of emotion and passion from workers is central to the accumulation strategy of employers in the live music industry (See: Chapter 4). This accumulation strategy likely underpins how many cultural industries generate surplus value from labour and why cultural labour is often precarious.

3.3.2 WORK LIFE BALANCE

In addition to the nature of emotion as labour, cultural labour also blurs the temporal boundaries between work and life. For the autonomous Marxists, the shift in capitalism towards the organization of life around work is problematic (Weeks, 2005). The long working hours of cultural workers, independent of economic compensation, signals precarious labour (Ross, 2009). Long working hours, irregular schedules, seasonal variation, extended periods of unemployment and extended periods of work (for example travelling for work) have profound personal, familial and social costs (Ross, 2009). Terranova (2000) describes work in the digital media industry as a “24-7 electronic sweatshops” (p.33). The author continues that free labour is a “large and an important, and yet undervalued, force in
advanced capitalist societies” (p. 33). The use of free labour is largely a temporal phenomena occurring in two ways. First, in a very literal sense, free labour takes place when companies use intern labour, offering experience as compensation for productive work (Frenette, 2013). In this way, a potential career is offered as a delayed reward to compensate for free labour carried out in the present. Work consumes life over an extended time frame. An additional temporal dimension of precariousness in cultural labour is the conversion of free time into free labour (Terranova, 2000). Writing on artistic labour, Greffe (2004) suggests that artists need to have “the skills of a legal expert, a financier, and a manager to make the most of their artistic talents” (p. 88, cited in Hracs, 2013). Learning these new skills happens on a workers own time, thus furthering the subsumption of work into life. The need to constantly network to find work further erodes the work-life balance of cultural and creative workers. Neff, Wissinger and Zukin (2005) describe this as “compulsory networking”, saying that a “fluid boundary between work-time and playtime is shaped by compulsory “schmoozing,” “face-time” or socializing within the industry after the workday” (p. 321).

An additional collapse of the work-life binary can be seen in the generally flat career trajectories available to workers. Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin, (2005), identify cultural work as having “flatter job hierarchies” in which there is very little difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ jobs (p. 316). The lack of a “ladder of promotion” or “career pathway” in cultural industries according to McRobbie (2002) is a result of network sociality, where work “has been re-invented to satisfy the needs and demands of a generation who, ‘disembedded’ from traditional attachments to family kinship, community, now find that work must become a fulfilling mark of self” (p. 521). Workers hold multiple jobs simultaneously, and change jobs throughout their career. The lack of job stability, combined with changing demands from
employers, and the short life span of projects, means that workers have little opportunity for career growth, and instead find themselves having to reinvent themselves throughout their career. Gill (2013) using academic labour as an example arguing that “exploitation… operates in and through technologies of selfhood that are producing new kinds of labouring subject: individualized, responsibilized, self-managing and monitoring and increasingly carrying their office or workplace ‘on board’ at all times in a mobile device.” (p. 13).

What we see occurring at multiple time scales is that participation in cultural labour (and increasingly labour more generally) requires workers to devote non-working hours to improve themselves as working subjects, to sacrifice career longevity for shorter term benefits, and to allow the infiltration of work into life.

A limitation to a number of studies on cultural labour is the focus on a narrow set of actors within these industries. Many studies use terms such as ‘creative labour’ to differentiate from “…manufacturing, service and technical labour…and other low-paid, low-status and menial jobs…”, which support so called creative labour (Banks & Hesmondhaulgh, p. 416).

There are two problems in distinguishing between creative and non-creative work. First, the differences between creative and non-creative workers is largely arbitrary. As demonstrated in chapter 2, many of these so-called ‘menial’ technical positions play important enabling and mediating roles in cultural production. In the larger discussion of precarious labour, an emphasis on immateriality in creative work obscures the “all-too-material” labour behind it, as “even the zeros and ones that make up the Internet’s codes have to be written, and entered by someone, somewhere” (Gill & Pratt, 2008, p. 9).
Second, Gill and Pratt (2008) suggest that debates around precariousness often fail to address issues of “solidarity across difference” (p. 12). How does one find solidarity between a fashion designer and a sweatshop worker? How does one find commonality between a fast food worker and computer programmer or a sound technician and a musician? Instead, the notion of precarious cultural labour could be better addressed by studying precarity in general. As Neilson and Rossiter (2005) suggest that there is no model precarious worker, instead as they note “precarity strays across any number of labour practices, rendering their relations precisely precarious – which is to say, given to no essential connection but perpetually open to temporary and contingent relations” (para. 18). In that regard, it is labour contingency and flexibility that can tell us about precariousness generally. As such, the remainder of this chapter explores the contingency and flexibility of labour in the live music industry by asking how is labour arranged? How do workers and employers navigate contingencies? What forms of precariousness do workers face?

In the following section, empirical data will be presented to explain how labour is arranged in the live music industry. It will be shown that workers in the live music industry are at the bleeding edge of pressures felt across the labour market, and that the study of this group can provide new insight into the precaritization of work in other sectors of the economy.

3.4 Work in the Live Music Industry.

Empirical data for this project was gathered using a combination of participant observation and semi-structured interviews.
3.4.1 Education and Training

As argued, entry into the live music industry rarely begins with post-secondary education. Only one interviewee pursued semi-formal training in music production at a recording studio. However, Janice cautions that “there really is no world for education in this [industry] and there never really has been. There is no requirement for most of the jobs you are going to get that needs you to show a degree” (Interview). Even IASTE does not require technicians to have any formal degree or certification.

Despite the lack of formal training in live music production, there has been a proliferation of unaccredited recording schools. These schools emerged as a result of the changing demand for recorded music, as the “…million dollar studio is no longer an necessity to make a successful commercially viable recording.” (Interview, Kurt). Since the proliferation of prosumer technologies has enabled artists to record outside the studio, large studios responded by developing alternate revenue streams. One these alternate streams is conversion to a training institution. These schools provide introductory education on sound recording, which as Janice (Interview) suggests, provides little in the way of preparing workers for the live music industry.

Instead, entry into live music is typically done through unpaid, informal internships or apprenticeships. This trend is seen in recorded music (Frenette, 2013) and other cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008, 2011; Neff & Arata, 2007; Ursell, 2000). According to Greenhouse (2010, para. 8), up to 50% of American undergraduates have held an internship, compared to only 17% in 1992. The politics of internships are widely discussed in academic literatures. These studies highlight the class-based nature of free young labour (Perlin, 2012). In the live music industry, these internships are informal, in that there is no institutional support. Rarely are these training arrangements even called
‘internships’. Instead, these training arrangements described by participants are casualized, closely resembling job shadows or apprenticeships. Rarely would these positions be paid. Respondents described having eager volunteers pay either directly or in kind for the opportunity to learn and mix even in this informal setting. Kurt is an experienced house technician at a large music venue in Calgary. He described how finding suitable young technicians posed a challenge as there were no formal training institutions. Instead, he established his own volunteer recruiting program to train potential staff. In regard to volunteering: “… in general, the successful technicians that I know, [volunteering] is how 90% got started” (Interview, Kurt). Kurt goes on to describe successful technicians,

That’s how they learned, was by volunteering. The reason it starts up as volunteering is that they have no skills! So you can’t pay them. On the other hand, they are not paying for the education, and it is a valuable skill that they can learn. I don’t feel bad about that. (Interview)

Kurt’s nonchalant attitude to not paying low skilled workers reflects the problematic nature of entry into the live music industry. The general critique of unpaid internships applies to entry into the live music industry. Volunteering is a form of labour exploitation that only those whose families can afford them. Historically, internships are offered by businesses to allow young workers to understand how work in a particular industry is carried out (Perlin, 2012). However, today, internships are being used by numerous businesses as a way to secure free or low cost labour. Frenette (2013) specifically explores the role of internships in the recorded music industry, finding that these internships are established with ambiguous terms. As such, the goals of the internships differ from the lived outcomes of these positions. Frenette (2013) uses the term “provisional labour” to describe this ambiguous form of arrangement. In the live music, provisional perhaps does not go far enough. Instead of working for established companies, interns will generally work off the books for an individual technician. Many interviewees have experience training technicians,
yet there is no institutional support for these positions. These internships have rippling affects throughout the live music labour market. Volunteering devalues the total labour costs of the show, in that having volunteers provides more workers for the same cost to the employer. Furthermore, since volunteers are often carrying out less skilled tasks, they in effect diminish wages for manual labourers.

3.4.2 PAY AND WORKING HOURS

Generally, backstage workers in the live music industry work on contract for irregular hours. Concerts typically occur at night on the weekend. Backstage workers work for long periods, at relatively low pay rates. Depending on the scale of the event, the setup and tear down can extend well beyond the time of the event itself. For example, work at one research site in this study required my fellow workers and I had to travel eight hours by truck to the concert. We travelled two days in advance to set up the show. The daily work schedule began at noon, and did not end until 4 a.m. the following morning, resulting in four consecutive days of 16 hours shifts. It is quite common for shifts to be in excess of 12 hours, with some respondents claiming to have worked more than 24 hours straight:

There are very few days that are less than 12 hours. And I worked shifts that have been as long as 24 hours straight. Now those are in situations where the portfolio of the engineer, the sound engineer, is perhaps a bit wider than it should have been (Interview, Kurt)

As another technician puts it,

On a show, a standard rate at [a specific venue] is 300 a day. And you get a meal. But it is generally a 10 a.m. to 1 or 2 a.m. day. They are long days. But you get paid well, and you get fed. (Interview, Bob)

As another describes it,
…but if you think about how much work and how long the hours, the last day we worked 24 hours. So that’s crazy! And a day rate does not end at midnight. It ends when the load out is done. (Interview, Sid)

To accommodate the varying schedules of concerts, and irregular and often unpredictable length of shifts, most workers are hired on a contract basis. These contracts, or ‘day rates’ as they called, are generally fixed. For all five events studied in this project, my day rate was essentially uniform, despite varying lengths of work, degrees of difficulty, and skills required. This day rate is fixed such that it does not account for the skill level of the worker. Less skilled workers receive the same day rate as more skilled workers. Additionally, respondents described how throughout their career, that the day rate did not change. Janice describes how day rates work, and how the local standard rate of $300 has remained fixed for a number of years:

My day rate is $300 a day and that is when I am working freelance, to be available for an entire day, whether that is four hours, eight hours, or ten hours. Whatever it turns out to be, they want me to be available on call for an entire day. Sometimes that turns into 16 hours and then you're really sad that you agreed to $300. Sometimes that turns out to only be five hours and then you’re really happy. So that $300 is the standard day rate for audio guys [sic] in town. Nobody’s tried to raise it in a while. The last guy I know who tried to raise his daily got dropped from all of his call lists, that was like four years ago. (Interview, Janice)

In this context, wage rigidity primarily benefits the employer, as the process of hiring, budgeting, and quoting for production costs is fixed. In this process, uncertainty and risk concerning the variable labour costs of each event is transferred to the individual worker. When asked about how much power they have in negotiating their day rate, Eddie responded:

It is kinda like a “This is how much you get paid” thing. You could ask but... It is a touchy subject as usual…. It is just like any other job, you can ask for a raise and maybe they will give you one… I don't ask for a raise all the time because I know it is pointless... (Interview)

Similarly, Jimi described the difficulty in negotiating wages:
Yes, [you can negotiate] to a point, but its tough because you have to take the emotion out of it. It sucks that you have to like get angry and get serious with these people, completely breaking the vibe to get them to understand that you know “I'm not to be fucked with.” I'll just hang up, like I have no problem doing that, but you have to do it to them for them to realize. (Interview)

Often contracts are formed with limited information on the nature of the show. For example, schedules, equipment, artists, and lists of fellow workers are often disseminated the day of the event. Eric describes how many times he felt tricked into gigs. He would accept a show under certain pre-tenses, then certain details important to his compensation would be changed without his permission. In the story below, Eric initially agreed to a contract which required him to be at the venue at noon. However, the employer asked him at the last minute to instead be at an altogether different location at a much earlier time to pick up the truck used for the gig. This extended his working schedule by three hours, and yet his wage was not adjusted:

As soon as you say “yes”, it's funny how then all of a sudden [the employer will say] “Oh, instead of meeting at the gig, meet at 9 a.m. at the [truck rental company] and you pick up the truck. It just becomes one thing after another and by the end of it—holy fuck!—It wasn't at all what you agreed to! But you agreed to do the show... (Interview)

This “show must go on” mentality pervades all aspects of concert production. Throughout the research process, production schedules, workloads, and crew configurations were altered, without modifying the contract. While many variables in a shows’ production are flexible, the contract between employer and employee is seemingly unchangeable.

For example, during the course of this research, the venue for the nightclub concert was changed only a few days before the event. The new venue presented technical challenges not present in the original plan. These challenges were resolved by extending the working hours of the various backstage workers involved in the production. Compensation was not adjusted. Backstage workers accept these flexible working arrangements as part of the
business. While all respondents had fallen victim to this practice, few demonstrated resistance. Instead, most respondents argued that “the show must go on”. Through this system, workers become burdened with uncertainty and risk. Here we see that these live music workers epitomize the model ‘flexible’ worker.

3.4.3 Physical Risk

Respondents described many forms of risk in their working life, including: irregular pay, unpredictable availability of work, seasonal variation in availability of work, and risk of physical injury (both through dangerous working conditions and repetitive stress injuries).

Many workers described the threat of repetitive stress injuries:

I tweaked my back wrapping [a very heavy cable]. And I was out for two weeks or something. And that sucked… I still have back issues all the time. That's what I mean, I can't afford to lift improperly. I'm [in my twenties] with a back problem, that sucks. (Interview, Jerry)

Another worker reiterates this notion,

I've never been too sick to do the show. I've never had a sick day. And as far as injury, I've been injured. I've had my hands smashed in a freight elevator… I'd have my legs kinda cut up, just as the shows are dark and those big legs that come out of the stages and stuff, bashed my shins into those. That's not necessarily injury now, I could still walk, but it hurt like a motherfucker… I've probably blown my back out like I think maybe 3-4 times… (Interview, Jimi)

When asked about injury and physical risk, respondents had numerous stories about their accumulated scars. Generally, respondents receive small cuts and bruises on a regular basis. Most respondents discussed how physical the job is and the toll it takes on the body. These physical elements include: standing on concrete for a whole day, lifting heavy equipment, wrapping cables, and tripping on cables. The physical risks at concerts are myriad.
As mentioned earlier, stage collapses, though infrequent, have devastating consequences. Fortunately, none of the participants in this study have experienced a stage collapse. However, Sid, told a story of how a large speaker system he set up was close to falling over:

I’d had one that looked like it was going to actually rip apart… We were setting up at [at an outdoor venue], and one side of the [speaker system] was up in the air. Just as I was bringing up the other side, this wind just came in and lifted the corner of the stage up. So I [lowered the speaker system I was working on]. As we are coming around to the other side, the entire PA was almost horizontal, a [very large speaker array] in the wind like that! [Safety wires] were whipping around, and people [were] getting whipped in the face trying to pull it. That was really scary, but that’s the closest. (Interview, Sid)

The duties of these workers often include making safety decisions, which in many cases they are either unqualified to make, or too invested in the production and execution of the event to make an unbiased decision. In the situation described by Sid, a sound technician was responsible for the safety of other crew on site. Yet as Sid admits, he is unqualified to make these safety decisions, and instead simply does the job he was hired to do.

While physical injury is frequent, the more pervasive forms of risk have to do with the nature of live music and how seasonal it is.

3.4.3 Seasonal Variation

The seasonal variation and unpredictable nature of work in the live music industry greatly affects the livelihoods of workers. Generally, the summer is the busiest time of year due to the frequency of music festivals. During the summer, respondents described having to turn down work because of the large amount of work available. In contrast, in the winter, some respondents described having to take on work they would not otherwise do, just to make ends meet. When asked to explain the experience of seasonal variation in the availability of work, Jimi describes it as such:
There is still tons of shows and tons of money that gets thrown around on shows in the off-season, which is basically September to May. It also depends on the industry. I know front house guys that don’t get a lot of off-season work, so they’ll be in the shop cleaning cables, fixing cables… Just full maintenance. They are kept afloat. These companies seem to realize “hey we need to retain these people because we need good people and good techs around who when the summer comes in, the shit goes crazy.” They got our back because we fucking got theirs. (Interview)

Jimi is describing a common experience amongst local backstage workers, where their job changes with the seasons. As noted, in the off-season workers often maintain and prepare equipment to supplement their income. Shop work can be described as a comparatively low skilled job. Many technicians described entering the industry through shop work. Jerry is both a freelance sound engineer and full time shop worker for a large sound company in Calgary. He describes his shop work as an “anomaly”, “it is low paying, but steady hours” (Interview). He uses this income to shelter himself during the off-season. Describing his yearly financial fluctuations, he say it’s,

…a fragility during those [winter] months. I can do this, if no other expenses pop up whatsoever. If I get a flat tire, and I need a new tire, it's like “oh shit”. Or anything happens at all. If everything is perfect than generally I can make ends meet. If not than its shitty. January is definitely like “oh shit”. December is a dead month anyway, and you buy Christmas presents. January is generally a “oh fuck”, kind of month. (Interview)

It is apparent that in this industry, multiple job holding takes on new meaning. These workers carry out comparatively different work at different points in the year. There are however, moments of respite in the winter months. For example, Sid describes New Year’s Eve as a bonus:

Within those [months] there are little bonuses like New Year’s Eve. Everyone’s day rate goes up to $500 because it can, you know. Everyone is having a New Year’s party and every one needs a New Year’s tech. (Interview)

The event cycle in the summer is far more promising. For example, in Calgary, the Stampede is an annual event in which the city plays host to numerous live music events. The
The event itself has multiple stages with daily programming. Throughout the city, bars and music venues play host to multiple concerts during The Stampede. Multiple respondents described how the Stampede is a significant source of their annual income:

It is always about $5-$8000 a year worth of income for me is in a very short period of time. Yet it always pushes me into another tax bracket. (Interview, Janice)

While the Stampede pays well, technicians described their working days as exhausting. In many regards these workers were expected to violate many provincial labour laws, for example, working more than 16 hours straight for more than 10 days. This exploitative form of employment is not specific to the Stampede, and occurs at most large summer music festivals.

Other studies on cultural labour have identified these exhausting work schedules as providing a level of satisfaction to the worker, conditioning the worker to see themselves as making a personal sacrifice for the production of music (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Ross, 2008). On whether or not these forms of work are satisfying, Janice suggests that:

Maybe there is a level of satisfaction for you and maybe I can say that about [a large music festival]. I’ve done [this particular music festival for many] years in a row. [The working day] is 8 a.m. to around about 3:30 - 4 a.m. everyday and back at 8 a.m. [for many days]. That is a psychological triumph and you can’t help, but break into celebratory tears after it is over. You learn a lot about what it is like to live through something extremely challenging. You know you get to the halfway point and you are like ‘there is no way this is only halfway’. So I definitely felt proud of myself after that and having done that much work in that period of time changed the way I view extremely hard work and long days in shift work. It's amazing what you're capable of when you choose to do it, but that said I hate it and I wish I would never do that again. I'll keep doing it because the nature of industry, but if I never had to work another sixteen hour day, I would be a much happier person. (Interview)

The cynicism of the survivor or martyr like aspect of cultural work is certainly present, but clearly, this type of work is not preferred. Ross (2008) describes these exhausting stretches of work as a way of testing employees “with an endurance course of challenges and edgy feats, rewarding their mettle and initiative with jackpot-style wealth.” (p.
36). In the case of live music however, the ‘jackpot’ is a fixed $300 day rate. While typically these workers only work a few days a week, these “endurance courses” of events offer them sometimes more than two weeks of consecutive day rates. In that regard, surviving these stretches allows them to earn well beyond their typical weekly wage. Ross (2008) continues saying that this method of labouring is “is little more than a warmed-over version of social Darwinism, but, when phrased seductively, it is sufficiently appealing to those who are up for the game” (p. 36). He argues,

Indeed, it is more like the survivor challenge of an action video game, where skills, sense of timing and general alertness to the main chance enables the protagonist to fend off threats and claim the prize. In return for giving up the tedium of stable employment, there is the thrill of proving yourself by finding out if you have what it takes. (Ross, 2009, p. 36)

Respondents echoed these ideas from Ross (2009), describing the gratification from exhausting schedules. The seasonal variation of work in this industry makes it difficult for employers to employ a full staff year round. As such, a number of methods are used to arrange labour. Having access to a large cadre of skilled freelance workers allows employers to mitigate seasonal variation. In this regard, the risk of seasonal variation is downloaded from the employer to the worker.

3.4.4 SOCIALIZATION, NETWORKING AND ISOLATION

Most workers described deep social connections with fellow workers. The community of backstage workers in Calgary is somewhat small, with Kurt saying that “for the most part everybody knows each other” (Interview). Since shows require flexible crews, it is common for workers to work with numerous different technicians and crew members on a regular basis. The frequency with which workers moonlight with different employers
means that most professional workers are aware of their cohort. As mentioned by all
interviewees, there is very little competition for work amongst established technicians. The
availability and regularity of work for the most part remains in a state of equilibrium. Each
technician will have certain promoters, venues and rental companies whom they regularly
work for. There is, however, competition with new workers. When “green” technicians
mature, or when new skilled technicians move into town, they must carve out space in this
crowded ecosystem.

The professional network of technicians in Calgary is then best described as a core
of established insiders competing with outsiders. Janice describes the formation of this
network:

We have managed to find each other in this mess of incompetent sound guys getting
work. The competent ones have sort of found each other and recognized: “hey you
are not bullshitting us all right now. We are not bullshitting each other. Let’s stick
together and lift each other up over top of these guys that have been bullshitting us
for last ten years”. I think that’s how it’s been working out (Interview)

In the above passage, Janice is making a distinction based on the skills of workers,
essentially saying that entrance into this network is based on a process of peer review of
one’s skills. Workers outside this professional network follow one of two main distinctions as
described by Kurt. “Green” technicians are inexperienced new technicians looking to find
work. “Prosumers”, “weekend warriors” or “pro-amateurs” according to Kurt, are those
workers who may have the skill set, or the experience to be a professional technician, but
instead do the work for fun or for some other benefit. As it turns out, according to both
Kurt, Eddy, and Janice there are numerous venues where work is carried out by people who
are not paid. Instead the accept entry into the venue, compensation in food and beverages,
or for the experience of the work itself. This phenomena where work is compensated with a
soft wage pervades the industry. In this extended passage, Kurt describes how these two forms of competition affect his livelihood:

One [form of competition] is when technicians may be new to the city... [I have subcontracted to these new technicians] to take shows from me, when I've been unable to [work at these shows]. Then during the show [these new technicians] have tried to undercut my rates at the venue. I have found that to be extremely ethically distasteful. And it has been catching up with them. One tech only has to tell another tech. Who wants to hire that fellow if he's going to try to take their work? That is the only time when I've felt bad about another professional technician and it was only once in my whole career. (Interview)

While this is an isolated incident, Kurt also describes how prosumers displace him from many gigs:

The other thing that has made me feel irritated is prosumer engineers, or pro amateurs. They position themselves as professional, but they are amateur. This one really irks me, when people that have other day jobs will take a gig from you, by offering to do it for free. So that has a major ramification upon my livelihood. One, I immediately lose that gig and I'm losing however much money a month. I'll bring it into one case that happened, $300 - $900 a month is now off my plate, because someone has offered to do it for free. The second thing that happens is that it reduces the value of our services across the board, which is really also detrimental, because it is a very specialized skill set that does demand a certain level of discipline and skill to do. (Interview)

From the above passage we see how Kurt describes some of the negative social consequences of flexible labour arrangements in the live music industry. While the professional network of technicians has constructive and supportive relationships, outsiders (be it new technicians or “prosumer technicians”) tend to disrupt the labour market. This phenomena is essential to understanding how precariousness persists in this and other cultural and creative industries. These workers displace career-oriented and established technicians through their acceptance of alternative forms of compensation. If someone is willing to work for free, it creates competition in the labour market which results in wage regression and wage rigidity. This process “is skewing the industry. It's able to happen because it is an arts industry, but it is detrimental to technicians across the board” (Interview,
Kurt). In the following chapter, this process of wage regression will be looked at more closely.

### 3.5 Conclusion

While research on cultural labour and precariousness is legion, there has yet to be any attempt to understand labour in the burgeoning live music industry. Research shows that cultural labourers face myriad forms of precariousness, including, low pay, contingent working arrangements and limited career trajectories. This chapter discussed ways that cultural work blurs the boundaries between work and life. From both interview data and participant observation, this chapter has shown the nuances of work in the live music industry. The live music industry is unique amongst other cultural industries. These workers generally have limited access to training, accreditation, and professional development. Additionally, live music workers are exposed to physical risk from dangerous working environments, with limited protections from unions and professional organization. There are other forms of precariousness faced by workers in this industry. While some of these relate to the work itself, for example physical dangers from stage collapse and industry, there are numerous forms of precariousness which stem from how labour is arranged in the industry. The work is predominately freelance, contract, and contingent. Furthermore, the lack barriers to entry to work in this industry allow a surplus of labour to create downward competition, which results in a process of wage regression. Additionally, the extreme seasonal variation of available work adds temporal variations to a worker’s precariousness. These observations can serve as a useful probe into the livelihoods of freelance workers more generally. Live music technicians are at the cutting edge of labour pressures felt across the economy. Increasingly work is carried out in contract and contingent forms, with unpaid interns and amateur workers displacing professional workers. One dimension which was left
absent was a description of how work is experienced in motion, as seen in the music touring industry. Future research should explore how workers are made precarious through the act of touring.

In creative and cultural labour markets, wages are increasingly starting to include soft benefits including the promise of future work and the opportunity for self-realization, fulfillment or simply pleasure from consuming the good being produced. In the following chapter I argue that this exchange of hard for soft benefits is a principle aspect of the precarization of workers in the creative and cultural economy and increasing in other sectors of the economy.
CHAPTER 4: LIFESTYLE LABOUR IN LIVE MUSIC

4.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Du Gay (1995), a Fordist work-based identity was contingent on a constitutive ‘other’. When manufacturing work was dominant, the factory worker's constitutive ‘other’ was feminized labour within the domestic sphere. This constitutive ‘other’ eroded with the changing nature of the global economy. Service sector work became the dominant form of employment, and the relationship between production and consumption created new work identities. Du Gay (1995) identifies these work identities as hybrid, work-based subjects (Urry, 1990). A hybrid work subject can be understood as a worker whose identity is formed both by the production and consumption of their work. As is clear from the previous chapters, live music workers are attracted to the work for more than just the wages it provides. Workers are choosing this vocation as they are attracted certain pleasures derived from the consumption of live music. As Gibson & Kong (2005) argue “for many, participation in cultural activities is initially driven not by career development motivations, but by a personal desire to engage with the affective, emotive, cathartic dimensions of creative pursuits such as music, writing and painting.” (p. 544). This chapter will draw on this idea of a hybrid subject by arguing that worker precaritization in live music work is a result of a hybridized wage form that includes the act of consumption. In other words, the labour arrangement in live music is organized around the worker's consumption of the product they make. In that regard, this hybrid wage becomes a resource used for capital accumulation, while serving to make precarious workers willing to accept it.
The first section of this chapter will describe how labour is arranged in this industry. A goal here is to respond to Butler’s (2011) question: “Under what economic and political conditions do... joyous forms of cruelty emerge?” (Butler, 2011, p. 1). The purpose of this section is to suggest that employers use worker’s passion towards music as a resource. Employers are able to use non-monetary ‘psychic’ or hybrid wages to attract workers. This serves to reduce monetary wages. In other words, the psychic compensation of workers is part of the accumulation strategy by capital in the live music industry.

The second section of this paper will draw on the work of feminist theorists, particularly the work of Hochschild (2003), to demonstrate an apparent gap in emotional labour theories. This gap describes the pleasure as wage concept. Pleasure as wage presents a novel way to understand the process of precaritization in cultural and creative industries. Instead of a living wage, workers accept a lifestyle wage. In live music, the wage is made up of social and cultural capital, as well as or instead of economic capital. I call this arrangement ‘lifestyle labour’ to describe the broad swath of workers who choose pleasurable work over more secure work.

Precariousness in the live music industry results from a complex set of relationships between workers, employers and the music being produced. As with many cultural industries, a passion for the creative aspects of production attracts and retains workers. A key soft benefit from working in a cultural industry is the opportunity for self-realization in the creative process (Ross, 2009). Workers are attracted to flexible working arrangements, the social status afforded by creative work, and the pleasure of producing cultural goods they enjoy consuming. However, the pleasurable aspects of working in creative fields blur the boundaries between work and life, and coercing workers to accept pleasure as wage over a sustainable livelihood.
These pleasurable aspects and benefits are what I call ‘lifestyle labour’. Lifestyle labour describes work in which the labour is carried out by workers who accept the lifestyle benefits afforded through the work, as a supplement to reduced monetary compensation. Profit in the live music industry is generated from the extraction of surplus through the emotional or psychic compensation of workers in the form of cultural consumption of the good being produced. The precarious working conditions described in previous chapters are a result of pleasure at work being offered as a supplement to monetary compensation. Pleasure as wage becomes a unique form of governmentality which disciplines labour to produce surplus value, while accepting contingent and flexible employment. The use of the phrase “living the dream” aptly describes this act of self-discipline by workers. In this chapter, I argue that the “dream” of working in music is used as a disciplinary technology to create self-regulated workers willing to accept precarious working arrangements while creating surplus value for employers.

4.2 LIFESTYLE LABOUR AS A NEW GOVERNMENTALITY

While often cultural workers are thought to act autonomously in that they choose to pursue a particular career, Lorey (2009), suggests that “ideas of autonomy and freedom are constitutively connected with hegemonic modes of subjectivation in Western, capitalist societies” (p. 187). It is essential to frame precariousness in the live music industry not as an anticipated and individually constituted moment in an individual’s career, but rather as a structurally determined process in the industrial labour arrangement. As Lorey (2009) puts it “precarization is increasingly a part of governmental normalization techniques and as a result, in neoliberalism it transforms from an inherent contradiction to a hegemonic function” (p. 195). In other words, pressurization is method by which to maintain power and
extract surplus. From this perspective, precarization is a powerful aspect in the art of
governing creative subjects. Part of this neoliberal governmental incursion is a reframing of
work as a form of freedom (Giddens, 1991; Rose, 1993). McRobbie (2002) describes a
double process of individualization. First, an “obsessive celebrity culture” extends now to
creative work in general. Creative work is fetishized, as young people imbue cultural
industries with celebrity status. Second, that creative freelance workers are “…disembedded
from ties of kinship, community and social class” (McRobbie, 2002, p. 518). Opportunities
for worker solitary and collective action amongst cultural labourers are reduced through
individualization. This double process of individualization is apparent in the live music
industry. While job titles differ greatly from person to person, there is still stratification
based on the social status of different aspects of work, including one’s spatial position in the
venue (whether they are mixing front-of-house, from the stage or not at all) and by the type
of contract in which they are hired (see: chapter 2). Additionally, ‘an obsessive celebrity
culture’ forms from working with more popular artists in bigger venues.

This double process of individualization is key to understanding precarization in live
music. Young workers are attracted to this industry because of the convivial nature of a
concert, the opportunity for self-actualization, and even the illusion of freedom. For young
people, work “is increasingly important as a mark of cultural identity” (McRobbie, 2002, p.
518). In that regard, young people are able to gain social status through this work. When
these pull factors are combined with a lack of formal barriers to work, a surplus of workers
forms. The lack of barriers means that new workers often compete for work, by working for
free or at reduced wages in order to gain experience, make connections and learn skills.
Additionally, the limited barriers to access allow hobbyist and amateurs to displace
professional workers, by working fully in exchange for the consumption of the show as their
wage (see previous chapter). The resulting glut of workers serves to undermine labour solidarity and drive down wages.

4.3 **LIFESTYLE LABOUR IN LIVE MUSIC**

The consumption of music is proportional to one’s knowledge (Throsby, 1994); “the more you know about the subject, the more you enjoy consuming it” (Crain & Tollison, 2002, p. 1). This is evident amongst the backstage workers observed. These workers possessed expert knowledge about numerous aspects of music. Most participants played music as either a hobbyist or semi-professionally prior to entering live music production. Participants played instruments in bands, or worked as DJs. Many described how playing music served as an entry point into the industry. Kurt describes how “in bands I was always the person who was always the technically competent one, even at an amateur level” (Interview). He goes on to describe how working as a sound technician “was a nice way of me being able to be surrounded by [music], and to still be able to develop skills, musical skills, while being able to support a family” (Interview). The emotional compensation afforded through working with music is a strong theme amongst all respondents. Jimi framed his current work in the live music industry as a stepping stone to further his musical aspirations. When asked about what his goals are, Jimi responded, “[t]he dream for me is to take everything that I’ve learned from [being a technician] and apply it to my musical skills and being able to learn how to tour and just basically trying to get some kind of advantage” (Interview). As I observed, the choice to work in music is driven by consumption of music.

The love of music, and specialized knowledge of music production, attracts workers to the industry. At the same time developing their specialized knowledge limits their work
options outside of the industry. This phenomenon can be described as a cultural labour trap, where workers are coerced into a sector and become trapped there. Jimi described how he felt unable to leave an employer because there was no other place to use his highly specialized skill sets.

My skills are so specialized what am I going do? Can I go to the other [production company] across the street? [that company] doesn't exactly exist! (Interview, Jimi)

During participant observation, I worked with a number of ‘green’ workers, a term used in the industry to describe new and uninitiated workers. These workers were drawn to the world of music. Their work has status within their social network. At numerous times during the shows, these new workers would be greeted by their friends, who are there as audience members. They would bring them backstage, and show their friends the fruits of their labour. The public nature of work in this industry, suggests social network crossover for workers in terms of their professional and personal networks (Scarborough, 2012). Many interviewees discussed how they often were able to get guest list positions and tickets for their friends:

There are a lot of unwritten benefits and a lot of that has to do with your direct relationship with the venue, and with the community. I have to buy tickets to rock shows so rarely. This is because I have a good working relationship with every promoter and venue in town. (Interview, Kurt)

The willingness to accept a lifestyle-based wage stems from a workers’ accepting the consumption of the good as part of their wage. Gill and Pratt (2008) suggest ways in which ideas from the autonomist Marxist school can be integrated with research on cultural labour. Their use of affect suggests work is a form of pleasure. Cultural industries have a tendency to be presented as ‘fun’ and ‘exciting’. The title of this thesis represents a sarcastic double entendre within the concert industry, that workers are “living the dream”. The dream refers
to earning a livelihood through music production. Indeed, technicians and crew chose to enter the industry through a passionate connection with music. Some level of entertainment is afforded to workers in a convivial atmosphere. The constant exposure to music and festivity make this work ‘fun’. The ironic side of this ‘dream’ is:

...the fatigue, exhaustion and frustration that are well documented in studies of cultural work. It misses also the fears (of getting left behind, of not finding work), the competitiveness, the experience of socializing not simply as pleasurable potential, but as a compulsory means of securing future work.”

(Gill & Pratt, pp. 15-16 See also: McRobbie, 2002; Ursell, 2000)

The concept of affect introduces the possibility for discussion of power, suggesting that pleasure through work is a Foucauldian disciplinary technology (Gill & Pratt, 2008). In terms of wage negotiation, pleasure can be used to coerce workers to accept lower wages in exchange for seeing the show or for working at more interesting shows for less wages. In some cases this negotiation is pushed to the extreme, where work is volunteered for entry into the show.

Gill and Pratt (2008), drawing on the autonomist Marxist concept of temporality, explore how cultural work blurs the boundaries between work and life, suggesting that cultural work calls for the almost total subsumption of life into work. In this quote from Mick, we see how this blurring is internalized through his enjoyment of the work,

I love working with musicians, working with artists, seeing the outcomes of it… Its extremely professionally satisfying, socially satisfying, artistically satisfying. And I love it! Is there a balance between work and leisure? I probably work a lot more than most people, but a lot of that work is stuff that I enjoy doing. (Interview)

In the case of freelance workers, this blurring plays out in a variety of situations. In order to get work, freelancers have to self market themselves through a constant act of networking, Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) describes this as being ‘always on’. Since moonlighting is a necessary practice to maintain full time employment, almost all concert technicians work freelance. Freelancers must devote enormous sums of unpaid time to
developing, and practicing an ever expanding skill set required for them to be find work in
this industry:

This is a self-taught industry, you know what you're up against. It is competitive. You are up against a lot people, so you are always trying to be on and always trying to be learning (Janice, Interview).

While a technician's wages are not necessarily commensurate with their skills, their ability to find work is based on their skills at operating equipment, their ability to produce the necessary aesthetic of the show, i.e. having it sound or look good, and their reputation in the professionalized network:

People say you are only as good as your last show... There is really only room for you to fuck up once. Some people think you can fuck up more than that, but you really have to have a reputation in the industry as being dependable and competent. You do not even have to have a reputation of being good. (Mick, Interview)

Concerts do not exist in a bubble. They are the meeting point for the network of actors in the live music industry (Cluley, 2009). Technicians, when working are not just working to make that one show look or sound great, but they must constantly be marketing their work to potential employers. The ever-changing ecology of venues and equipment require workers to have a wide and up to date skill set. Employers often hire technicians because of their reputation at using certain equipment, operating in certain venues, or being skilled at creating specific aesthetics for certain genres of music. Potential employers then exploit the tacit knowledge of their technicians developed during the technician's previous work and their free time. The life of a technician is then “harnessed to capital” (Gill and Pratt, 2008 p. 17). This constitutes a form of ‘flexploitation’ (Ross, 2008). Perhaps the most extreme form of colonizing one’s time is found in touring. Touring requires technicians to work for months on end. In this circumstance, the subsuming of life into work is complete. Like a soldier in a foreign war, technicians have no respite from work. While touring technicians often have many hours off in a day, and multiple days off in a month. However,
they are still required to travel with the production, and their freedom to leave the tour is contractually limited.

### 4.4 Extending Emotional Labour

Hochschild’s (1983) discussion of emotional labour is similar to Gill and Pratt’s discussion of affect. Emotional labour encompasses service sector work in which employees either display or produce emotions as part of their work (Hochschild, 1983). Service sector workers are called upon to assume certain emotional characteristics. Workers are required to express certain personality traits, like being courteous and polite. They are expected to internalize their role as workers, rather than just perform the waged duties of work (Hoschild, 2003). The results of this internalization are a further blurring of work and non-work activities. Hocschild’s (2003) work can serve as a theoretical grounding to understand labour arrangements in the live music industry. However, as I will argue, Hocschild’s theory neglects the concept of emotional gratification as wage. Central to Hocschild’s argument is the notion that an emotional labourer must “mentally detach themselves… from her own feelings and emotional labour” (Hoschild, 1983, p. 17). When pleasure is used as wage, the worker is no longer detached from their emotions, but rather these emotions and passions are central to the job.

Bob’s work history aptly demonstrates how an attraction to music, and the dream of playing music influenced his entrance into the live music industry. As a young musician, Bob was unable to make a living playing music, but was able to earn a modest living as a technician. For Bob, playing music was less economically feasible than working as a
technician. However, working as a technician afforded him both a psychic wage and a monetary wage:

From a very young age, music has struck a strong chord with me. I knew from a young age that was what I wanted to be around and support, the arts in general and music in particular. So this was a nice way of me being able to be surrounded by [music]… Even the first couple of years of being a technician, I was still playing in bands… It became an economic decision for me to essentially stop playing in bands in any kind of serious way. (Interview)

Mick describes how when he hires new workers, they are often excited by the work. As Mick explains,

…you hire a [new technician] and they want to get autographs… You have to be able to read that level of appropriate professional contact. That has been consistently an issue with [new workers]. (Interview)

Here we see a common complaint from some of the more established technicians in this research, that many technicians are working for compensation other than a monetary wage. In the above example, the new worker was attracted to the celebrity status of music.

In her study of flight attendants, Hochschild (1983) found that airlines expected employees to maintain a very specific emotional appearance. Flight attendants go beyond just providing service with a smile, but internalize the airlines’ emotional demands. What is observed in live music is a process in which workers are exchanging their labour for an emotional wage. These technicians are not expected to provide ‘service with a smile’, but instead are being compensated by their own consumption of the products of their labour. This distinction is vital to understanding how labour is arranged in the creative economy. I argue that this exchange of pleasure as wage is key to the process of precaritization.

Hochschild (1983) identified three broad categories of emotional labour. The first category describes any worker whose job is to have face-to-face contact with the customer. The second category includes workers who are responsible for producing emotions in the consumer. The third category contains workers who are expected to present themselves with
emotional qualities determined by the employer, for example “service with a smile”. Live music technicians can loosely fit into all these categories. However, there are numerous limitations to this vocation fully fitting into a single category. While these workers do often have face-to-face contact with the audience, a key aspect of their job is to remain a ‘backstage’ component of the show. Indeed, technicians are not the face of the good. In regard to the second categorization, technicians are certainly involved in producing affects in the audience. However, technicians are an intermediary in the production of affect. Arguably, these workers enable the artist’s vision to be amplified and reinforced. In that regard, a good performance from a technician ought to appear invisible in the final good. As Kurt says “good technicians disappear” (Interview). Finally, while the employer expects a minimum level of professional etiquette, a technician’s emotional state can hardly be called ‘managed’.

Hochschild’s central argument is that in the commodification of emotions, workers are detached and alienated from their own emotions in the workplace. I argue that live music technicians fit within the central definition of emotional labour. As they sell their passion for music for wage, their wage is reduced.

In a sense, lifestyle labour bundles a social and cultural wage into a monetary wage, or to use the language of Bourdieu (1983), workers are accepting different forms of capital compensation, particularly social and cultural over economic capital. These workers are choosing to have a job that is personally satisfying, accepting flexible and contingent arrangements to live their dream. In live music, the oversupply of new workers is a result of these workers seeking the lifestyle afforded by this live music work. As a worker’s career matures, the lifestyle benefits fade, leaving them in a precarious situation. In lifestyle labour
we also see how capital is able to accumulate surplus labour by keeping wages low by offering a lifestyle wage to workers.

4.5 CONCLUSION: LIFESTYLE LABOUR AS AN EXPLANATION FOR CULTURAL WORKER PRECARITY

As noted, lifestyle labour represents the institutionalization of a pleasure as a wage compensation system in which the various lifestyle elements of work are accepted instead of a sustainable livelihood. I use three characteristics to define this form of work. First, workers enjoy consuming what is being produced, and are likely to consume the cultural good regardless of their employment in the industry. Consumption of the commodity is part of the lifestyle the worker seeks or already maintains. In the case of live music, workers in this study have pre-existing emotional and personal connections to music, music production, and the social setting in which it occurs.

Second, the act of work blurs the boundaries between work and life. Workers who engage in lifestyle labour may have fuzzy definitions of what constitutes personal time, working time, and leisure time. This fuzziness can manifest itself in a number of ways. Workers are likely to work long hours for extended periods. They may actually use work as a form of leisure. Many workers remarked that mixing a good band is an important factor in accepting work. For example, Jimi tells a story where he accepted high paid work, but missed the opportunity to work at lower paid but likely more enjoyable show:

I realize now that because of the financial circumstances I put myself in, I had to do certain shows where I was getting paid more [for less enjoyable work]. [However a certain band was playing elsewhere]. I chose to work [the higher paid gig] as opposed to going to that show… and after finally getting to see [the lower paid show] I realize I made the wrong choice… I should’ve done [the lower paid but more enjoyable show]. (Interview)
Third, workers are willing to accept an intrinsic wage, or elements of pleasure as a wage, as a supplement or in lieu of a monetary wage. Workers who are advanced in their career are less likely to accept an intrinsic wage or intrinsic components of a wage.

The importance of lifestyle labour helps to explain how emotional compensation affects the process of wage negotiation. Lifestyle labor suggests that freelance and informal labour arrangement, along with the lack of formal barriers, such as accreditation in the live music industry is the root cause of precariousness.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This study has two central arguments. First, existing theories of cultural intermediaries fail to address the role of technicians in cultural production. I argue that while technicians do not play a significant role in taste-making amongst audiences, they serve to amplify, reinforce, and craft the aesthetic vision of the artist to an already established audience. In the case of live music, given the simultaneity of the concert, the role of technical intermediation is critical in the real time dissemination of the music. Research on live music needs to be attentive to technical and manual labour in the industry. Increasingly, audience preferences are influenced by autonomous algorithms, equipment design, and other technical factors, such as production quality. Understanding the role of technical intermediaries is critical in the post internet cultural economy.

My second argument is that work in live music is precarious. Live music workers face myriad forms of risk, insecurity, and contingencies. They work long hours at low pay. Physical injuries are common. Additionally, workers are required to hold multiple jobs, in differing arrangements and capacities at different points throughout the year. Workers in this study described the difficulty of having a sustained livelihood in context of seasonal variation of live music. This precariousness is not only the result of economic volatility, but also relates to the nature of the sector and how cultural labour is arranged. Precaritization is used by employers to extract surplus in the live music industry. I describe the process resulting from labour market competition which creates wage rigidity. Competition is a result of a surplus of workers willing to accept non-monetary compensation as part of their wage. I describe this compensation structure as ‘pleasure as wage’. Affective elements produced
through a live music event are accepted by workers as part of their wage. Essentially the act of consumption is returned to the worker as part of their wage. This model reflects trends seen in other sectors of the economy. I extend this ‘pleasure as wage’ concept to describe a more general form of labour arrangement I call ‘lifestyle labour’. Lifestyle labour is detrimental to a sustainable livelihood. Instead of workers receiving stable employment, and the opportunity to afford the products they produce (as seen under Fordism), workers are offered lifestyle amenities through the direct consumption of the commodity they produce.

In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu (1996, p. 81) describes the production of art as “an economic world turned upside down”, suggesting that cultural capital forms in opposition to economic capital. However, as discussed in this thesis, cultural, social and symbolic capital work together. Work in cultural industries is organized around this exchange of pleasure as wage. A primary goal of this research is to explore how labour is arranged in the live music industry by breaking the fourth wall between stage and audience. When the curtain is lifted, we see the consequences of flexibilization and individualization in the labour market. Scholars from multiple disciplines discuss this sweeping trend towards an increasingly flexible model of labour. Ross (2009) explores the concept of job instability in the age of globalization, suggesting that temporary work, or non-standard work, is increasingly affecting high skill and high wages jobs. Increasingly the idea of a stable career is becoming a distant memory. Ross (2009) characterizes these changes as a result of ‘flexploitation’ by employers in higher skilled sectors of the economy, arguing that flexible labour arrangements are an explicit part of an accumulation strategy. It is clear through this research that flexibilization is a major part of the live music industry. Numerous scholars including Beck and Camiller (2000) and Sennett (2006) have described the current labour market, where the risk and uncertainty of production are downloaded to a disciplined labour
force in the form of insecurity. McRobbie (2002) goes so far as to describe the disappearance of ‘labour’ in the sense of powerful unionized labour. Instead, a whole new disempowered group of workers called ‘new labour’ has emerged (McRobbie, 2002).

Generally, these studies identify a process of self-precaritization. In the British fashion industry, McRobbie (2004) found that fashion designers were able to make their own economy. The enterprise culture of fashion frames the designer’s livelihood as one of their own creation. Neff, Wissinger, and Zukin (2005) echoed this finding in their study of fashion models and new media workers. In these studies, workers are attracted to the autonomy of the work and the opportunity for creative fulfillment. However, these workers are conditioned to accept risk as normal in their work. Cultural workers in general are attracted to cultural work for the same reasons as workers in the live music industry. This thesis echoes many of these findings from other researchers.

5.1 FLEXICURITY

How can the precarious nature of work in the live music be challenged? What policies could address the risks involved in working in the live music industry? Banks and Hesmondhalgh (2009) argue that policies on cultural and creative industries are reluctant to recognize or engage with issues of precariousness. Addressing the forms of precariousness discussed in this thesis will require a large scale, structural adaptation of social welfare services to protect vulnerable workers, while still allowing them to work in a flexible arrangement. Considering that cultural industries regularly violate simple labour laws (such as the limits on the amount of hours in a shift) it is unlikely that enforcing labour market regulations will be effective. Enforcing labour laws might actually hurt live music workers, as
numerous shows may become untenable to produce. Instead, policy direction should address flexibilization across all sectors of the economy.

As the labour market moves towards flexible practices (such as part-time and contract work) it calls into question the relevance of Fordist social security system. Most social security systems in countries of the global north were devised at a time when the labour market was predominately composed of full time, ‘job for life’ forms of employment. Numerous social programs exist to deal with problems relevant to Fordist labour, including employment insurance and various health and welfare programs (Harvey, 1990, 2008). The labour market today is different from the Fordist era, and a new system of social security is required, particularly, one that can allow for flexible labour practices, whilst still providing basic social welfare (Gollmitzer & Murray, 2008; 2009; Murray & Gollmitzer, 2012). With precarization increasingly being used as part of an accumulation strategy, it is important to consider the ever diminishing power that an individualized labour force has to change their situation. The goals of a new social security system should be to escape this “precarity trap” (Murray & Gollmitzer, 2012).

Flexicurity is a specific policy framework designed to adapt social security measures to meet the needs of the creative and cultural economy (Gollmitzer & Murray, 2009). This policy was developed in Denmark to and consists of a three-sided policy framework aimed at providing social security to an increasingly flexible workforce (Gollmitzer & Murray, 2009). First, flexicurity recognizes the need to formalize flexibility in numerous aspects of production, particularly as it pertains to hiring, and ending contracts (Gollmitzer & Murray, 2009). Both workers and businesses can benefit from flexible work practices in this regard. However, the risks and burdens of flexibility are often borne by the workers, while the benefits are disproportionately absorbed by the employer. The approach used is to establish formal frameworks around contingent labour practices, which create legal boundaries, and
better define rules around these flexible practices. A key problem observed during this research was the frequent changing of contracts, well after the negotiation process. Ideally, a legal and normative framework around how contracts and wages are arranged could be established through a flexicurity framework.

Second, flexicurity reconfigures the remnants of the welfare state to support workers through the now normalized periods of unemployment (Gollmitzer & Murray, 2009). The seasonal nature of contingent work requires a rethinking of how programs such as unemployment insurance are distributed. For example, many freelance workers have the equivalent of full-time work composed through a mixture of part-time and contract work. However, because they do not have a single full time job, there are multiple benefits they are not eligible to receive both from any one employer or the state. Thus, new systems are required for classifying occupational status, determining benefits, and tracking working hours. In the case of live music, none of the workers at any point identified themselves as part-time workers. All of them work beyond the amount of hours to be considered a full time worker. However, in most cases their work status was officially and legally only part-time. Since these workers are employed through part time or contract work, they lack the protections and benefits afforded to full-time workers.

Finally, Flexicurity suggests the use of active labour market policies to ensure that workers have access to training, job banks, and other proactive programs (Gollmitzer & Murray, 2009). In studies of cultural workers, one of the most frequently cited problems is the lack of opportunity for professional and entrepreneurial skills development (McRobbie, 2004). There is a need to have more active policies in helping these vulnerable groups of workers to develop their skills, and prevent what Sennett (2006) describes as “skills extinction”. In the case of live music, skills development occurs in the worker’s leisure time or through informal knowledge transfer on the job site. There are few training programs
available to them, and their working schedule makes planning for skills development difficult. Active labour market polices would advocate for training programs that meet the schedules of a flexible workforce. Additionally, active labour market policies could help establish proper accreditation systems that can serve as a barriers to prevent a glut of workers from causing wage regression. Writing on the effects of the global downturn to Toronto designers, Vinodrai (2013) suggests in particular that the Danish flexicurity programs “protect employees against economic hardship while trying to improve labour market participation, decrease unemployment and allow for turnover and mobility in the Danish labour market” (p. 8).

Essentially, the Danish Flexicurity systems accepts formal and legal flexible labour policies, while preventing uneven power relationships. It provides social security systems to employees who are part of this flexible workforce, and actively tries to advocate for and improve upon the livelihoods and potential of flexible workers. Currently in Canada, there is a policy gap in flexible work practices (Arthurs, 2006; Gollmitzer & Muray, 2009; Lewchuck et al., 2013). This gap has made it difficult for workers to operate in a creative economy. As well, the lack of security in employment has had particularly burdensome repercussions on workers. This is particularly apparent in cultural industries, where artists and workers often make livelihoods though other source of revenue rather than cultural production (Markusen, 2006; Throsby & Zednik, 2011). Considering the widespread and multi-scalar interest in cultural and creative industry development, it is paramount that policies be established that allow businesses, artists and workers to operate in the current flexible paradigm. One of the formative goals of this research is to provide empirical grounding to this necessary policy debate as much of the current policy debates are lacking in-depth, qualitative empirical data on the lived experience of cultural workers.


