

MARTIN
Prosperity*Institute*

Risk and Freedom for Independent Musicians in Toronto

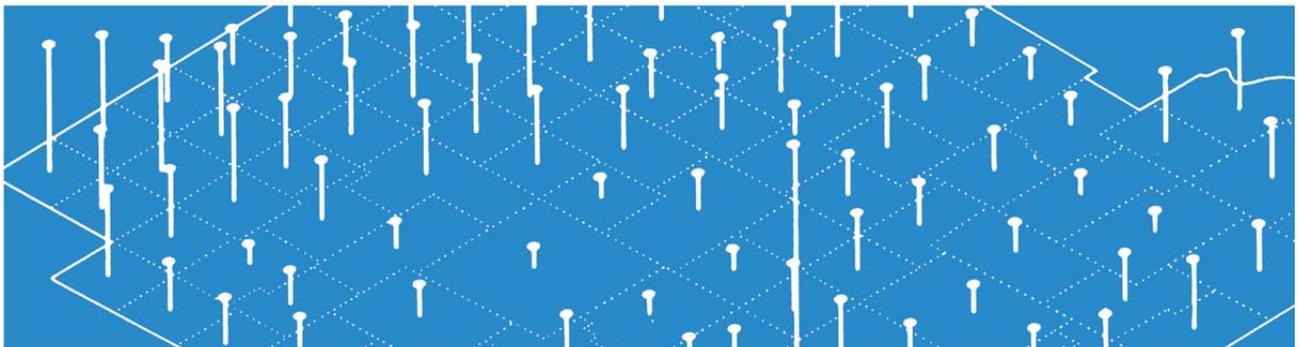
Working Paper Series:
Martin Prosperity Research

Prepared by:

Brian J. Hrac, University of Toronto

March 2011

REF. 2011-MPIWP-005



Abstract

This paper applies Ulrich Beck's (1992) conceptualization of risk and reflexivity to entrepreneurial employment in the creative economy. Drawing on 65 interviews with musicians in Toronto this paper documents the ways in which digital technologies and independent music production fragments work, both temporally and spatially. In so doing, the findings presented nuance our understanding of employment risk. Although digital technologies have democratized the music industry and furnished musicians with unprecedented autonomy, the demands of independent music production constrain this newfound freedom. Using the literature on governmentality, this paper demonstrates that as neo-liberal regimes reconfigure independent musicians as entrepreneurial subjects, these workers are governed through their freedom. Ultimately, this paper argues that digital technologies, independent music production and entrepreneurial subjectivities intensify existing employment risk and introduce a range of new conflicts, insecurities and barriers to creativity.

Introduction

Individualization means, first, the disembedding and, second, the re-embedding of industrial society ways of life by new ones, in which the individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves (Beck et al. 1994, 13).

In the 'Risk Society' (1992) Beck argues that workers are becoming individualized as a result of the destandardization of work and the shift to the 'second modernity.' With traditional certainties of work and state supports disappearing, individuals are forced to become entrepreneurial subjects who construct their own biographies by negotiating a range of opportunities and risks. Several geographers have extended Beck's framework to explore the processes through which work is becoming fragmented contractually, spatially and temporally. In particular, three successive articles published in the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*; 'Ulrich Beck's risk society at work' by John Allen and Nick Henry (1997), 'Working in a risk society' by Suzanne Reimer (1998) and 'Professional workers in a risk society' by Carol Ekinsmyth (1999) applied Beck's thesis to demonstrate how forms of fragmentation and flexibilization contribute to the experience of risk for both contract service workers and professionals in the cultural industries. Despite the value of these and subsequent studies, however, several questions and groups remain unexplored. As the literature focuses on individuals who work with firms, either directly or on contract, for example, little is known about how flexibility and risk are experienced by self-employed entrepreneurs (Christopherson 2002a; Cranford et al. 2003). In addition, although digital technologies have revolutionized entire industries, including music, and

created others, such as new media, the implications of technology on the nature of work, the process of individualization and risk remain unexplored. As a result, there is a need to examine the employment experiences of individuals who perform as entrepreneurs in the creative economy.

In this paper I critically analyze the working lives of independent musicians in Toronto. I argue that by facilitating the rise of contemporary independent music production and reducing the value of music-related products in the marketplace, digital technologies have radically altered the structure of music employment. The working lives of contemporary independent musicians are becoming individualized and fragmented across time and space. This fragmentation creates conflicts for musicians who must choose between competing uses of their time, energies and resources. Therefore, although digital technologies have had a democratizing effect on the music industry, and musicians enjoy greater autonomy and creative freedom, I argue that the demands of independent music production constrain individual choice. Moreover, I assert that as neo-liberal regimes reconfigure independent musicians as entrepreneurial subjects, they are governed through their freedom and encouraged to conduct themselves according to the imperatives of economic rationality and self-sufficiency. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the fragmented and demanding nature of independent music production and entrepreneurial subjectivity, intensifies existing employment risk for individual musicians and introduces a range of new conflicts, insecurities and barriers to creativity.

The paper begins with a review of how the conventions and structures of employment have changed over time. Particular attention is paid to the work of geographers who demonstrate that work is becoming fragmented with respect to contractual arrangements, temporal cycles and spatial distribution. The next section considers how the entrepreneurial subjectivities associated with neoliberal regimes contribute to the physical fragmentation of work and the individualization of risk. This is followed by an empirical analysis of how independent musicians in Toronto experience fragmentation, individualization and risk. This analysis highlights the competitive marketplace these workers operate in and explores the ways in which the demands of independent music production constrain the freedom and control individual musicians can exercise over their careers. The next three sections identify three specific conflicts that produce risk for musicians; the need to balance creative and business tasks, the need to balance music and non-music work, and the need to balance work with non-work. The paper concludes with a brief summary of the key findings.

The risk society

Beck defines risk as “a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself” (1992, 21). To gain a more substantive understanding, however, it is helpful to begin with the shift from what Beck refers to as the ‘work society’ to the current ‘risk society’ and then consider the implications of this shift on the nature of work.

The ‘work society’ encompasses the traditional employment system, which reached its zenith during the height of Fordism. In this system a high

degree of standardization produced certainty and security for workers and most paid employment exhibited consistent contractual, spatial and temporal structures. Widespread unionization helped to standardize contracts and most jobs, regardless of sector, tended to be spatially concentrated in large business organizations (Beck 1992, 142). The temporal dimensions of work emphasized life-long and full-time employment, often within the same firm. As the hours of work were largely standardized and scheduled around the traditional '9-5' workday, the work society constructed a clear delineation between work and non-work both spatially and temporally (Beck 1992, 142). In the work society, most individuals could depend on steady incomes, standard work schedules, as well as health, employment and pension benefits provided by the state and employers.

In the 1970's, however, successive waves of automation began to soften the standard employment relationship and flexibility was introduced into contracts, worksites and working hours. Christopherson (2002b, 2) defines flexibility "as the ability of firms to adjust labour inputs in response to changes in product and the volume of demand." Specifically, firms can adjust the number of workers, the functions required of workers and the wages that are paid. Thus, flexibilization has replaced standard employment relations with less certain structures and the boundaries between work and non-work are becoming fluid and forms of underemployment are growing (Beck 1992, 142). Beck (2000: 77) argues that work is becoming more contractually fragmented, spatially decentralized and less visible,

the boundaries between work and non-work are starting to blur, in respect of time, space and contractual content; paid work and unemployment are spread over large spaces and therefore become less and less socially visible from positions on the margins. Instead of company-structured labour densely packed into skyscrapers and factories, a type of spatially diffuse corporate organization is appearing...The same is true of unemployment. It too is becoming invisible, as it 'seeps away' into the no man's land between employment and non-employment.

Beck also hints at the role emerging technologies will play in facilitating the geographical diffusion of work functions including the rise of outsourcing and home-based work (1992, 142). It is important to note, however, that as Beck was writing the original German version in 1986 he could not adequately imagine or theorize the kinds of digital technologies that have become regular fixtures in the contemporary workplace. This limitation supports the need to update our understanding of how technology alters the structures, spatial dynamics and experience of work.

In addition to contractual and spatial fragmentation, Beck (2002, 53) notes that paid employment is being 'chopped up' temporally and that the standard 9-5 workday is being extended. Thus, the layering and overlapping of work and domestic identities is blurring the clear delineation between work and non-work (Perrons et al. 2006). As Jarvis and Pratt (2006: 7) argue,

In this context of course 'work' spans the whole economy: work-work, family-work, domestic-work and life-work. Any one or all of these might be conducted at home (either in an office which duplicates 'the office' or simply on a mobile phone), in a remote workplace or in transit. Inevitably, home also intrudes into work with parents having to make new arrangements 'on the fly', or to cope with home and school problems remotely...A further dimension is the pressure on individuals and companies to network strategically in order to remain competitive. This implies an extra work burden: the pressure to take part in the buzz of office, or post-office activity, or, the need to have 'face-time' with clients or remote co-workers. All of these activities place considerable burdens on individuals' time and invariably that of their household too.

Thus, flexibilization, which Beck refers to as a double edge sword, creates both new opportunities and new forms of risk, which workers negotiate in an increasingly individualized way. Biographies are becoming reflexive and self-produced and individuals, regardless of class and human capital, now engage in do-it-yourself biography construction to seize opportunities and minimize risk.

In the risk society, uniformity has given way to decisions and conflict between alternatives with varying degrees of risk. Indeed, Beck (1992) stresses that any gains in freedom and sovereignty over ones' work are accompanied by the privatization of responsibility for the economic, social and physical risks associated with flexibility. The overarching feature of the risk society is the prevalence of risk and insecurity in every sphere (economic, political and social). Furthermore, participating in the risk society is not optional and Beck argues that people are condemned to reflexive and do-it-yourself biographies (Beck et al. 1994, 14).

The geography of risk

Since the late-1990's geographers have contributed important studies that nuance our understanding of individualization and employment risk (Allen and Henry 1997; Reimer 1998; Ekinsmyth 1999 2002; Leslie 2002). These studies address the experiences of unskilled workers, such as contract service workers who are employed as cleaners, caterers, and security guards (Allen and Henry 1997) and professionals who work freelance in magazine publishing

(Ekinsmyth 1999). Taken together, the findings provide a broad analysis of how work is being fragmented, contractually, spatially and temporally. As Allen and Henry (1997: 185) point out,

A prominent aspect of this shift has been a rise in the 'contractualization' of employment, whereby more and more people are employed on different contractual terms in respect of hours, benefits and entitlements. Alongside specific contracts in terms of working time, for example variable time or zero-hour contracts, differing combinations of wages, incentives and benefits are put together for different groups of workers.

For service workers, this contractualization creates uncertainty with respect to both income and the terms of work. As a consequence, multiple job holding is becoming a central feature of the risk society as 'low end' workers struggle to cobble together enough sources of income (Paxon and Sicherman 1996; Reimer 1998).

Allen and Henry also argue that employment risk is increased by the degree of arbitrariness with respect to obtaining and renewing contracts. They argue that workers have lost the automatic right to re-employment and are now subject to clients and management (1997,187). Similarly, Leslie argues that the inconsistent duration and availability of paid shifts in fashion retailing contributes to the stress, anxiety and the individualization of risk experienced by workers. Rather than being shared, risks are increasingly individualized as workers are pitted against one another, leading to fear and rivalry in the workplace. This risk imposes a layer of physical and emotional stress on the labouring body (Leslie 2002, 66). This is a key finding because it demonstrates an important shift in the behavior of workers. Whereas individuals in the work society bargained collectively and often stood united against precarious

employment conditions, the fragmented nature of the risk society pits workers against each other and forces them to experience and mediate risk individually.

Geographers have also investigated Beck's (1992) claim that work is becoming decentralized. Allen and Henry (1997) explain that service work, particularly, the contracts of cleaning workers, are often performed at multiple worksites. Although management may be located at a central site, the contracts themselves are carried out at literally thousands of work sites, such as office buildings, which are scattered across the city. For workers, decentralization and the need to shuttle between isolated and unpredictable workplaces contributes to their experience of risk (Allen and Henry 1997).

The geography of work in the cultural industries is also becoming decentralized. The growing prevalence of contract employment is shifting the location of work from static firm locations to the homes and third spaces used by freelance workers. Ekinsmyth (1999) reports that although freelance and home-based workers in magazine publishing are required to locate within the greater London area (U.K.), to facilitate face-to-face contact between workers and employers, this spatial relationship is changing. Indeed, Ekinsmyth argues that the introduction and integration of communications technologies, such as email and faxes are slowly decentralizing the 'spacing' of work. She argues that "Employers are less concerned to employ people who live locally, as they are less reliant on face-to-face contact" (Ekinsmyth 1999, 357). Although technology may be altering the location of work in magazine publishing, further

analysis is needed to examine the extent to which technology is reconfiguring the spatial dynamics of other cultural industries.

Individualization and the rise of entrepreneurial subjectivities

Fragmentation contributes to the individualization of employment and risk but in a less tangible sense, individualization also extends to the subjectivities and conduct of individual workers. The shift from the standard employment relationship to the 'risk society' is intertwined with a shift from the Keynesian welfare state to neoliberal regimes that encourage an individualization of risk and new models of subjectivity. As the state 'rolls back' traditional supports and certainties, and firms become flexible, responsibility is being downloaded to individual workers who are being encouraged to be self-reliant and self-governing (Peck and Tickell 2002). As Banks et al. (2000: 455) suggest "the powers of state institutions to manage and counter risk have been lessened by modernization and globalization and risk management has become fully embedded within the domain of individuals."

The literature on governmentality extends our understanding of the individualization of risk and the individuals' increasing subjectification to risk (Beck 1992). This literature stems from two of Michel Foucault's unpublished lectures in 1978 and 1979. According to Lemke, Foucault refers to government as the 'conduct of conduct,' and, the term governmentality applies to 'governing the self' and 'governing others' (Lemke 2001, 191). In the context of neoliberalism, both facets are becoming intertwined, as the state aims to

'govern others' by putting structures in place, which encourage individuals to 'govern themselves.' As Rose (1999: 69) explains,

The achievement of the liberal arts of government was to begin to govern through making people free. People were to be 'freed' in the realms of the market, civil society, the family: they were placed outside the legitimate scope of political authorities, subject only to the limits of the law. Yet the freeing of the zones was accompanied by the invention of a whole series of attempts to shape and manage conduct within them in desirable ways.

One way in which neoliberal regimes shape the conduct of individuals is by extending the mantra of economic rationality to formerly non-economic domains such as social and family life. As Brown argues, "not only is the human being configured exhaustively as 'homo-economicus', all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality" (2003, 3). Thus, ideal neoliberal subjects are entrepreneurs who make decisions in every sphere; political, social and economic, according to a rational calculation of costs and benefits. By extension, success in this form of entrepreneurial endeavor is based on the capacity of individuals for 'selfcare' – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions (Brown 2003, 5). In this way, the neoliberal state downloads the full responsibility for success and failure in the 'marketplace of life' to individual entrepreneurs. As Brown explains, "the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action, e.g., lack of skills, education, and childcare in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits" (2003, 5). In this way, "the state leads and controls subjects without being responsible for them," essentially exerting control through freedom (Lemke 2001, 201). Indeed, as Rose (1999: 268) argues,

The beauty of empowerment is that it appears to reject the logics of patronizing dependency that infused earlier welfare modes of expertise. Subjects are to do the work on themselves, not in the name of conformity, but to make them free.

Neoliberal regimes not only roll back and withdraw services, supports, regulation and institutions from workers and citizens, they roll out new programs designed to foster the creation of more entrepreneurial subjectivities as well (Peck and Tickell 2002). One such program positions autonomy as an ally of economic success rather than an obstacle that needs to be controlled and disciplined (Miller and Rose 2008). In fact, rather than desiring 'passive' citizens, neoliberal regimes encourage 'active' citizenship and empower individuals to function as entrepreneurs in every sphere. As Rose (1999, 164) asserts, more than simply reactivating the values of self-reliance, autonomy, independence, self-esteem and self-advancement, individuals now conduct their lives "as a kind of enterprise, seeking to enhance and capitalize on existence itself through calculated acts and investments." A fully realized neoliberal citizenry, therefore, is not a public-minded collective, but rather a group of individual entrepreneurs (Brown 2003, 5). The agendas of neoliberal regimes and flexible firms coincide strategically to mold individuals into self-motivating and self-governing workers.

During the 1980's neoliberal regimes problematized the neglect of the values of entrepreneurship and individual self-motivation. Instead it was argued that work should no longer be viewed as the imposition of constraint, order and routine upon the individual. Indeed, as Miller and Rose (2008, 195) point out,

The enterprising self was a new identity for the employee, one that blurred, or even obliterated, the distinction between worker and manager. The enterprising self was the active citizen of democracy at work, whether in charge of a particular product division, a large corporation or particular set of activities on the shop floor.

Writing about the 'enterprise culture' of work, McRobbie (2002: 518) makes a direct connection between the neoliberal agenda in the U.K., put forward by the Thatcher government of 1979, and the individualization of fashion designers:

What individualization means sociologically is that people increasingly have to become their own micro-structures. They have to do the work of the structures by themselves, which in turn requires intensive practices of self-monitoring or 'reflexivity'. This process where structures (like the welfare state) seem to disappear and no longer play their expected roles, and where individuals are burdened by what were once social responsibilities, marks a quite profound social transformation.

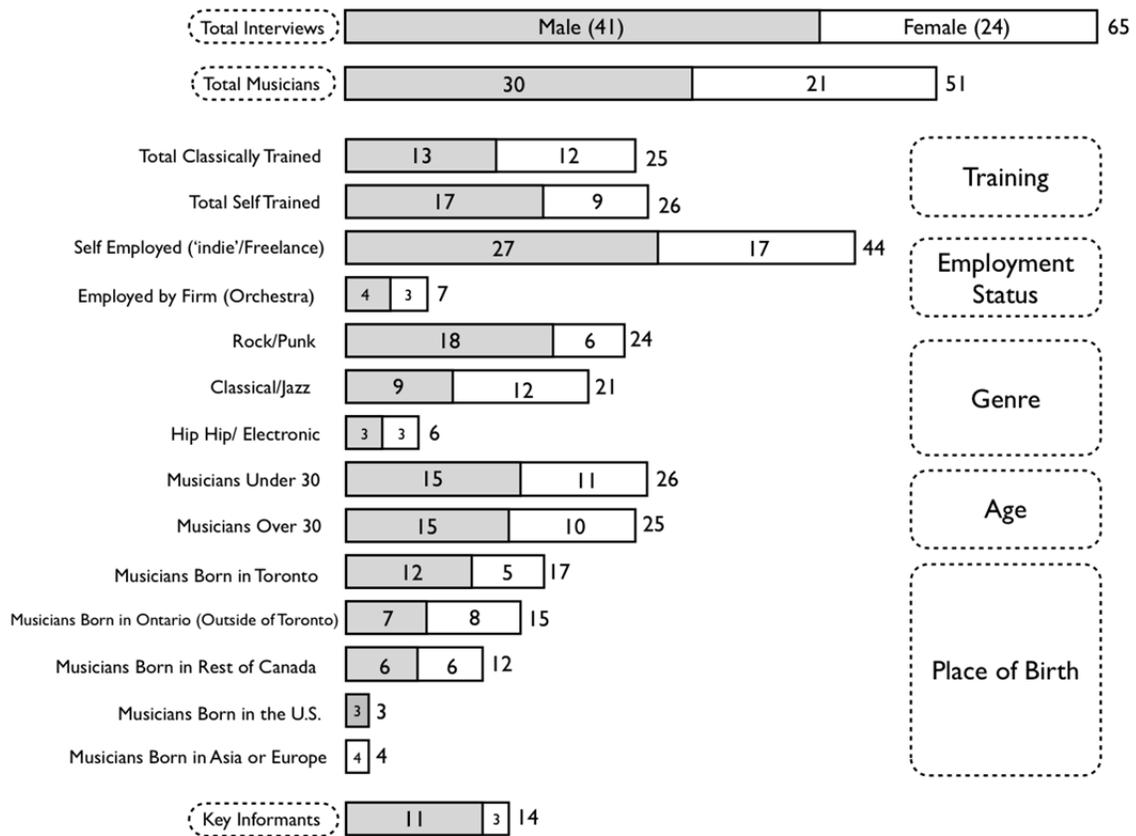
Therefore, the literature on risk and neoliberal governmentality suggests that individuals have greater freedom to construct their own biographies. Both literatures also assert that individuals are being conditioned to make choices according to the imperatives of self-reliance and economic rationality. There is a need to empirically investigate the extent to which workers in specific industries are in fact governed through their freedom (Miller and Rose 2008). In particular, there is a need to identify the ways in which human beings are individuated and the variety of practices within which they have come to govern themselves (Rose 1999, 43). Furthermore, as Jarvis and Pratt (2006, 3) argue, there is a need for geographers to consider the significant micro-compromises individuals make as a result of changing employment conditions. In the remainder of the paper I engage with these bodies of literature to consider the employment experiences of independent musicians in Toronto.

Methodology

The analysis presented in this paper is based on 65 interviews conducted in Toronto between 2007 and 2008. Using a purposive sampling strategy, 51 independent musicians were asked about their employment experiences. The sample also includes 14 interviews with key informants, who work in the Toronto music industry as educators, producers, studio owners, managers, union representatives, government employees and executives at major and indie record labels. These individuals provided invaluable information about the broader context of industrial restructuring within the music industry and the impact of technology on the working lives of musicians. To get a broad cross-section of experiences and opinions, the respondents varied by age, gender, level of education, genre, and career stage. Figure 1 provides a more detailed picture of the research participants.

As pinning down independent musicians, who cycle between different sources of employment, was difficult (James 2006), a snowball sampling method was used to identify participants. The location of these interviews varied but included 'third spaces' such as coffee shops, home studios, offices, performance venues, recording studios and music stores. The diversity of these locations is noteworthy because it afforded the opportunity to observe the range of spatial environments where independent musicians live and work.

Figure1: Interview Sample



The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and verbatim quotations are used in the paper to demonstrate how participants expressed meanings and experiences in their own words.

The case of independent musicians in Toronto

Since the late-1990's, digital technologies have radically altered the North American music industry. During this time geographers have contributed to our understanding of file-sharing, the so-called 'MP3 Crisis,' the impact of technology on major record labels and the emergence of new models of music production and distribution (Leyshon 2001, 2003; Jones 2002; Connell and

Gibson 2003; Fox 2005; Leyshon et al. 2005; Power and Hallencreutz 2005). As these studies focus on industrial restructuring at the macro-scale, however, little is known about how digital technology has affected the working lives of individual musicians. The following section provides context for such an analysis by outlining how digital technologies have democratized the music industry and transformed independent music production into a viable alternative to major labels.

Although independent music production has always existed, albeit in a limited form, digital technologies have democratized the production, promotion, distribution and consumption of music. Once the exclusive domain of specialized and capital-intensive recording studios, inexpensive computers, software and equipment allow recording, editing, mixing and mastering to be performed in home studios. Thus, the amount of capital and skill required to produce music has been drastically reduced (Von Hippel 2005; Leyshon, 2009). Digital technologies have also allowed musicians to enter the world of marketing and distribution for the first time. Using the Internet, independent musicians can now cheaply and easily set up websites to promote and distribute digitally recorded music tracks in MP3 format. In essence technology has lowered entry barriers, reduced the dependence on major labels and created a new geography of music production. As a result, digital technologies have ushered in a new era in which independent music production has gone from a niche alternative to the dominant model (based on participation not revenue). In fact, according to the Canadian Independent Recording Artist

Association (CIRAA), 95% of all musicians in Canada operate without major or independent label affiliation, making them by definition, independent.

By lowering entry barriers and providing tools, digital technologies afford individual musicians unprecedented levels of control, freedom and opportunity to produce, promote and distribute their products. As this musician put it,

(In terms of freedom), there has never been another time where you can be the writer, the producer, the distributor and promoter. You are the studio. You are the musician. You are the label. You are the business and enterprise of your own art. It is because of technology... (Interview)

Or as this music educator explains,

Digital technology is making it possible for people to do their own thing. Musicians can record on their own without being reliant on labels and financiers. This is opening up the world creatively to people and allowing musicians to get their music out there. (Interview)

At the same time, however, these opportunities have been accompanied by increasing demands and personal risk. As record labels 'roll-back' supports and services traditionally provided to signed musicians, musicians are now required to perform a growing range of creative and business tasks independently. To complete these tasks, individual musicians are being encouraged to become more entrepreneurial and self-sufficient. As a result, the freedom, demands and imperatives associated with independent music production serve to individualize workers and constitutes a new form of employment risk.

The tensions between 'creative' and 'business' tasks

Independent music production makes musicians individually responsible for

creative tasks such as song writing and business tasks traditionally performed by their management or labels, such as booking and promoting live performances. My research suggests that although success in the music industry is predicated on the ability of musicians to effectively perform these tasks, not all musicians recognize the importance of the business side. As this music producer argues,

I think the whole business acumen is lacking, in terms of well-thought-out plans geared towards selling product... It is finding a way to time your album time, your recording schedule with the ultimate goal being to sell albums or to sell tickets to people to see you play, and to make money off of it that is your goal or should be your goal. If you say you're making music just for the sake of it, that is fine too, but it is called the music business. (Interview)

Despite the long-standing antipathy between creativity and business, the new realities of the marketplace force musicians to devote more attention to the business tasks. In fact, many of the respondents in my sample emphasized the importance of being strategic and spoke proudly of how organized and efficient they could be in dealing with business tasks, alone or as a group. As this musician explains,

Everyone in the band has extra things they have to take care of. One member books our shows...I am what they call the 'Merch Mistress.' I take care of inventory and...a lot of accounting and making sure that if we run out of a size of shirt that we can re-order it in time for the next show. Merchandise is important. When we are touring, that is the sole basis of making money. So if we are out of something that is one less CD that we can sell. (Interview)

The need to balance creative and business tasks, however, puts enormous strain on independent musicians who struggle to allocate their time and energy effectively. This difficulty is exacerbated by the fragmented nature

of these tasks and the skills required to perform them. Creative and business tasks require musicians to multi-skill and spread their time and energy across a range of workspaces. In particular, the growing emphasis on touring highlights the complex geography independent musicians operate within and the difficulties it can cause. As this musician puts it,

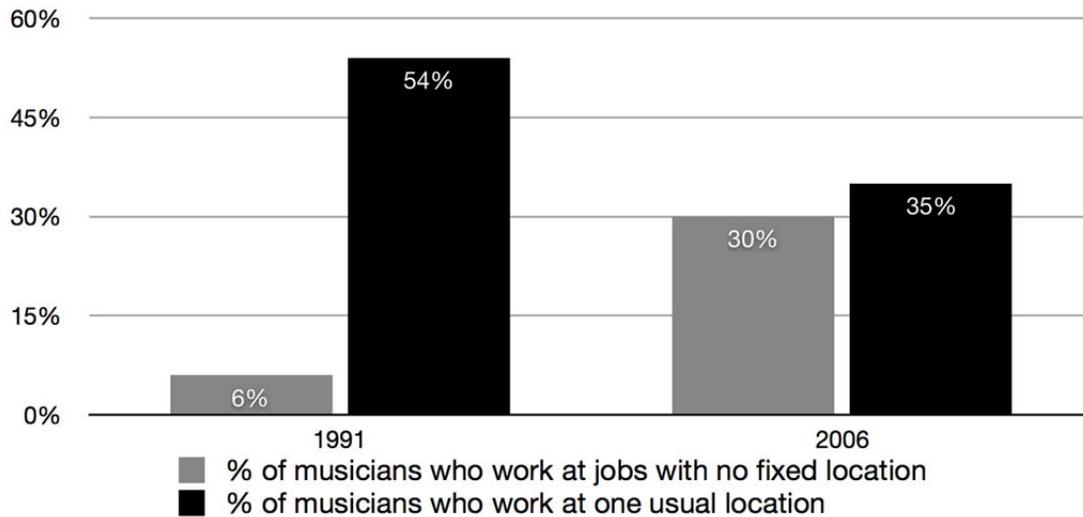
The biggest challenge for musicians in Canada is that the landscape of the country is so large. In Canada you have to go from Montreal to Vancouver just to sell a few records. (Interview)

Or as this musician explains,

We toured Western Canada twice...We literally drove for five days before we played our first good show. It is frustrating and when you are relying on that to put food on the table it is really difficult. (Interview)

Live performances take place in a variety of geographically dispersed venues while other tasks such as recording and marketing are also performed in a range of spaces, including the home, virtual spaces, studios and third spaces such as bars and coffee shops. As a result, independent music production requires musicians to oscillate between multiple tasks and multiple work sites. Figure 2 demonstrates that rapid decentralization of music work.

Figure 2: The Spatially Fragmented Nature of Music Work in Toronto



Source: Statistics Canada,
 Catalogue Number – 97-564-XCB2006005 (2006)
 Catalogue Number – 97f0012xcb01050 (2001, 1996, 1991)

The process of juggling these psychic, physical and spatial transitions is now often compressed into a matter of hours. Indeed, for the musicians in my sample, simply figuring out this calculus creates conflicts and contributes to the various forms of risk they experience. As this musician asserts,

You always have to think outside the box because you are making things up as you go along. For example, trying to plan your schedule so that you can do everything that you need to do in a day. Today I have one million things to do, after this interview I am meeting with a client for a consultation. I have two students coming in for lessons. I have a meeting with a mother of a student, and then another meeting with the former student. You have to figure out how to get to where you need to be in time, despite the traffic, and despite the distances. (Interview)

For the musicians I interviewed, temporal fragmentation also creates conflict. Much like the account of service workers by Allen and Henry (1997), independent musicians work around the clock, and they must also shift quickly between creative and business tasks. As this musician contends,

The biggest thing is multi-tasking. Last night I was up until 3:30 in the morning just making sure different business things were taken care of...

Then this morning I did two performances. The first one started at 8:45 a.m. (Interview)

It is clear that the work performed by independent musicians is chopped up into a range of either creative or business related tasks and that each task may be performed at a different time or work-site. As stated, this extreme fragmentation puts pressure on independent musicians to strategically structure their workdays and allocate their time, energy and resources.

When asked about the consequences of this pressure, several respondents reported feeling constantly torn about which tasks to prioritize. Indeed, some of the musicians in my sample feared that they were not devoting enough time to being creative and enhancing their creative output, including their songs, live shows and merchandise. At the same time, there was an understanding that great creative content and talent is not enough on its own to succeed in the crowded marketplace for music, and that the business tasks (packaging and marketing in particular) are essential ingredients as well. As a consequence, many of the musicians I interviewed agonize over devoting time to being creative or developing the business framework to support that creativity. The comments of this musician highlight the problem:

There is pressure for everybody in the Toronto indie music scene to do all of their own business stuff. The worst thing about it is that it really has taken a toll on their ability to become better musicians...The hours that they have to dedicate to all of this other stuff eats into their practice time...So basically you rehearse once a week, because you have to play shows and do all of these other things on top of that. That leads to another point. Most indie bands in the Toronto music scene suck. They don't play tight shows. They are not that creative. They have not really matured as musicians, and this goes on for year after year after year...I

don't feel like I'm doing enough right now. We rehearse once a week we do a show once a week. For me, because I write all the music and do all the business, I definitely spend a lot of time every day doing all this extra stuff. The rest of the band doesn't do that so much, but when practice time comes everything is all charted out. We are ready to go. It is organized and efficient. (Interview)

Beyond highlighting the difficulties independent musicians face as a result of their flexibility and freedom, this quote also demonstrates that greater autonomy produces intense and continuous self-scrutiny and self-dissatisfaction (Rose 1999, 93). Independent musicians are required to perform business tasks, which they are often not suited or trained for. If they devote too much time to the business side, the creative content, on which their careers and earning potential rest, can suffer. This is complicated by current market conditions, which place a strong premium on original creative content such as songs, visual imagery identities, live shows and merchandise (Hauge and Hrac 2010).

These findings lend empirical weight to McRobbie's (2002) assertion that multi-skilling and de-specialization corrodes the creativity of these individual workers. Indeed, the time and energy independent musicians can afford to devote to being creative is significantly lower than their counterparts who work within the confines of major record labels. As entrepreneurial subjects, therefore, independent musicians are compelled to prioritize the economic viability of their endeavors above their passion for creativity. For these musicians, market competition and the structure of the work leave little room to exercise the freedom of choice. In fact, the evidence suggests that independent musicians have cast off their corporate yokes only to 'freely' drive

themselves even harder under the entrepreneurial imperative of economic rationality and self-reliance. As this musician asserts,

You have to be driven! I mean I used to think that I was talented enough and things were going to fall into my lap. But now I know that is not going to happen. If you are not willing to work hard in this day and age it is not going to happen. You are not going to have your hand held. You are going to have to do it yourself. (Interview)

As new modes of entrepreneurial subjectivity and creative production emerge, the success or failure of musicians rests squarely on these individuals and specifically, their ability to be self-motivating and self-governing. These individuals bear the burden of managing all of the risks associated with independent music production and the contemporary marketplace for music-related products. In spite of the need to balance creative and business tasks musicians face these challenges alone and as this musician argues, the responsibility is on them:

You have to make sure you are better than anything other people are going to see. I have to make sure that every single person that comes to my show is going to be absolutely floored. And that they walk away thinking 'I have to come back and see this band. I have to bring friends. I have to go to their website and download the music.' (Interview)

The tensions between music and non-music work

What is actually meant when someone earns so little, that two or more jobs are needed to make a living (Beck 2000, 83)?

Although many independent musicians are skilled, educated, hard working and increasingly professionalized, the goods and services they produce have limited value on the open market. In Canada between 1998 and 2004, for example, it is estimated that consumer spending on music decline by 40% (Carniol 2005). In response to the devaluation of recorded music, independent

musicians now focus on live performances to make money. As Hyatt (2008) points out, musicians in his sample earned 3.4% of their income from selling CDs and 48.5% from performing live shows. As the number of musicians trying to make a living from performing increases, however, the oversupply drives the value down and produces intense competition for paid work in Toronto's music scenes.

In fact, my research indicates that although live performances are the chief source of income for musicians, many independent musicians earn little or no money for their live performances. Several respondents explained that getting paid for performing was a 'treat' and that even when they do get paid it is between \$20 and \$200 for the whole band. Faced with the challenge of being economically viable and self-reliant in a notoriously low-paying industry many musicians 'choose' to take on additional jobs. Although many of my respondents were reluctant to take on extra work, the decision was often described as a necessary evil and the only way of continuing their musical careers. As this musician puts it,

I work at (a music instrument store) and I am also a drum teacher... As a musician it is very hard to make money and there is no steady or certain income. So I had to get a job that had guaranteed hours and pay. I needed something steady and reliable so now I know exactly how much I will make from Cosmo, and my teaching at this point is a bonus and the money goes toward making music. (Interview)

Much like the conflict between creative and business tasks, musicians who take on additional jobs face even more fragmented schedules and difficulties allocating their time and energy. While many additional jobs are music-related, such as teaching lessons or working at a music equipment

store, some of these jobs like factory work are completely unrelated. These additional jobs may be spread across multiple worksites and involve 'flexible' or on-call hours and require skills that musicians may not possess by nature or training. Thus, taking on additional jobs and further rounds of multi-skilling and de-specialization exacerbates the corrosion of creativity (McRobbie 2002). Furthermore, the layering of flexible jobs can generate additional conflicts and sources of risk and uncertainty for musicians.

On the most basic level, musicians struggle to divide their time between making music and their additional jobs (an undertaking made even more difficult when these competing activities occur on opposite schedules or at distant locations). Indeed, respondents explained the stress associated with performing late night concerts in the city and then waking up early to work at a factory or strip mall in the suburbs. As this musician puts it,

I suffered from sleep deprivation. Balancing the job and the band stuff was exhausting and getting up early everyday was hard. I took a lot of sick days that I wasn't supposed to take, so that I could sleep. (Interview)

For many musicians, finding this balance becomes untenable when the additional jobs conflict directly with important music activities such as rehearsing, recording or touring. As this musician explains,

I am currently unemployed because my work wouldn't give me the time off to go on tour and there was no way I was missing out on that, so I quit. I was working in a factory out in Etobicoke...making soap and wrapping gifts, stuff like that. Completely unrelated to anything musical, but it paid the bills. (Interview)

Scheduling and spatial conflicts between music tasks and additional jobs puts added pressure on musicians. Several respondents complained that their

additional jobs were depleting their reserves of energy and creativity leaving them unable to effectively perform creative tasks even when they had the time.

As this musician argues,

As a musician I was having rehearsals four nights a week and they were going pretty late. But then I had to get up every morning at 7 a.m. to get to my other job. So I was walking around like a zombie most days. I need something that is less draining because if I have to exert so much time and energy into a job then by the end of the day I am not going to have any energy left to be creative and make music. (Interview).

My research indicates that many musicians operate in a diminished capacity in the face of these pressures or simply drop out of the industry all together.

In the absence of external supports from firms or the state, independent musicians have no choice but to function as self-sufficient entrepreneurs who motivate and monitor themselves. As Beck (1992) states, in the face of growing uncertainty and risk there is a strong desire among workers to create that certainty for themselves. In order to accomplish this, many independent musicians are forced to allocate their time between their musical careers and additional jobs. The imperative to be entrepreneurial and self-sufficient, however, necessitates the elevation of economic rationality above all other things, including creativity and the domestic sphere. As this musician asserts,

I think 75% of all of my money goes right to the band and I don't have a life. I can't buy anything for myself. Everything goes toward the band because we do everything independently so we have to pay for everything on our own. (Interview)

The tensions between creativity and economic self-sufficiency force independent musicians to make difficult decisions about where to allocate their time, energy and resources. Moreover, prioritizing business tasks and

additional jobs can corrode the creative output of musicians. In the next section I examine the consequences of prioritizing work over non-work to highlight the enormous social costs associated with of entrepreneurial employment.

The tensions between work and non-work

The boundaries between work and non-work are not only becoming blurred in the physical sense but also as a result of the growing compulsion to prioritize work over all other things in life. Temporally, work may be performed at any point in the day and the workweek has extended to include weekends and holidays. Spatially, work is being distributed across multiple physical sites, a range of virtual spaces and inside the home itself. The 2006 Canadian Census indicates that 33% of all musicians in Toronto worked from home (Statistics Canada 2008a). However, unlike other industries in which firms foist flexibility onto their employees, independent musicians ‘freely’ choose to privilege work over non-work as a result of their apparent compliance with neoliberal imperatives. As this musician explains,

In order to make a living you have to be willing to work when the work is there. You have to make hay while the sun shines and everything else in your life has to come second to that. This is very difficult when it comes to having a social life and relationships or a home life. I personally don't have much of a social life because of this. It is high energy. It takes huge amounts of energy and hours. In the first few years working I literally had three or four days off in a year, including weekends. You need to be completely driven to make it. (Interview)

The shift toward self-directed and spatially decentralized work has been accompanied by the temporal fragmentation and extensification of work (Jarvis and Pratt 2006). The strict delineation between work and non-work time, which

typified the work society, is being replaced by flextime in the risk society (Beck 1992). Rather than being parceled out into neat and predictable blocks, contracts and shifts are now performed during evenings and weekends (Allen and Henry 1997; Reimer 1998). Indeed, Leslie (2002: 64) points to the growing prevalence and uncertainty of part-time and shift work:

As in other forms of retailing, the majority of employees in clothing retailing are part-time. Many work only one or two shifts a week, and shifts are often as short as three hours. An additional problem is that the hours are unpredictable.

This temporal fragmentation of work contributes to employment uncertainty and income insecurity for workers. In particular, as Leslie (2002) highlights, the precarious experience of being 'on-call' is spreading quickly for retail workers who wait by the phone to be summoned to perform a few hours of low paid work. Being 'on call' is also a common feature of freelance employment in the cultural industries (Ekinsmyth 1999). The uncertainty produced by the contractualization of work leads to what Beck describes as underemployment (1992). This flexibilization forces many individuals to devote more time and energy to work-related activities, including performing multiple jobs, networking, training and looking for work.

As Ekinsmyth (1999, 361) explains, the uncertainty of obtaining contracts compels freelancers in magazine publishing to take on as much work as possible even at the risk of developing physical and mental illnesses. Moreover, she argues that workaholic tendencies are more prevalent for home workers who struggle to segregate work and relaxation.

In addition to performing the work directly associated with contracts, many workers in the cultural industries perform time-consuming and unpaid tasks in order to maintain their employability. As Jarvis and Pratt (2006: 7) explain,

The extension of work (time) only captures one dimension of the issue. A further dimension is the pressure on individuals and companies to network strategically in order to remain competitive. This implies an extra work burden: the pressure to take part in the buzz of office, or post-office activity, or, the need to have 'face-time' with clients or remote co-workers. All of these activities place considerable burdens on individuals' time and invariably that of their household too.

This compulsion stems from the neoliberal conceptualization of unemployment. As Rose argues, unemployed and underemployed individuals are obliged to improve their "employability by acquiring skills, both substantial skills and skills in acquiring work, and obliging the individual to engage in a constant and active search for employment (1999, 162). Indeed, Batt et al. (2000) argue that new media workers spend considerable time maintaining their employability by networking, looking for work and upgrading their skills. They report that although new media workers spend an average of 42 hours a week at work, they spend an additional 20 hours a week on average upgrading their skills and looking for new work.

The allocation of time between work and non-work is often described as a depletion model where adding to one depletes the other, yet there is a tacit assumption that some harmonious balance is ultimately achieved. In reality, however, the extensification of work eliminates the hope of any such balance and forces workers to choose between competing activities (Perrons et al.

2006). Ekinsmyth (1999: 360), for example, highlights that in order to maintain their employability most women in magazine publishing choose not to have children.

The fragmentation and extensification of work produces obvious tensions between work and non-work. In some cases the extensification of work occurs as a result of contractual obligation and fear. In the cultural industries, the extensification of work is construed as a calculated choice –while firms and contractors do not explicitly require workers to attend after hours events to network, spend their weekends updating their skills, or take on simultaneous contracts, individuals feel compelled to take on these responsibilities (Batt et al. 2000; Christopherson 2002a). In one sense these workers freely decide to ‘bring work home,’ but in reality there is no viable alternative. After all, without networking to find work, training to perform that work, and over-working to pay the bills, these individuals would face even greater employment risk.

Although the respondents in my study were under no illusion that they had to accept the extensification of work to survive as independent musicians, they were not oblivious to or comfortable with the consequences. In fact, much like the conflict produced by choosing between creative and business tasks and spending time on additional jobs, independent musicians struggle to reconcile their desire to be self-reliant musicians with taking time for their families and themselves. Yet, this is precisely the goal of neoliberal regimes, which endeavor to reposition the social and the economic as antagonistic. As Rose argues, “economic government is to be desocialized in the name of

maximizing the entrepreneurial comportment of the individual” (1999, 144). In other words, independent musicians are held hostage and controlled by their freedom (Lemke 2001). As this musician puts it,

You never have the sense that you are done, that you are really free. It is not that you never take a day off, but you have to take a day off in spite of the fact that you think you should be practicing. It is not like you come home and you're done. Even though you don't have any energy to do anything, when you come home you also feel that you should be looking at something or practicing something. There is always that nagging feeling. (Interview)

Much like the account of retail workers feeling constantly 'on call,' musicians who are waiting for that next paid source of income reported being forced to put other things on hold to maintain their employability. As this musician explains,

As a freelancer you are totally dependent on when the phone rings. If you get offered a job you can't afford not to take it because you will lose your place in line and they won't call you back again. So that means that it is very difficult to create anything outside of the music, to create a life because you are so tied to being available when the phone rings. (Interview)

While cell phones extend the feeling of being 'on call,' other digital technologies allow a greater range of tasks to be performed in the home or remotely. Whereas musicians traditionally recorded and produced music in studios, with computers and software these tasks can now be performed in the home. Moreover, with social media programs such as MySpace and an Internet connection, musicians can also network with fans and collaborators, promote and distribute their products via their website and perform most of their non-creative tasks whenever and wherever they can find the time. Therefore, digital technologies facilitate the privileging of the economic over the

social by removing the spatial and temporal barriers that have traditionally segregated these realms.

In *Powers of Freedom* Rose (1999: 233) asks, “What are the costs of our contemporary freedom?” The findings in this section demonstrate the steep social costs independent musicians incur as a result of their newfound autonomy and freedom. In line with Ekinsmyth’s (1999 2002) analysis of female freelancers in magazine publishing, several respondents in my research explained that being a self-reliant independent musician was incompatible with raising children and that choosing between the two was difficult. As this musician argues,

As a freelance musician, you have to keep your expenses down and you have to sacrifice things. I live in this tiny house and I didn’t have children because I didn’t think this would be a good way to bring up a child. (Interview)

The social lives of many musicians are compromised by the demands of independent music production and their additional jobs. To return to the depletion model, there are simply not enough hours in the day to allocate evenly, and some imperatives are being prioritized at the expense of others. As we have seen, however, temporal fragmentation is accompanied by spatial fragmentation. Therefore, just as the choice of independent musicians to ‘bring work home’ prioritizes economic over social activities, choosing to ‘leave home’ for extended periods produces a similar and cumulative effect. For example, several respondents commented about the destructive impact of touring on their personal relationships. As this musician explains, “It is very hard for a musician to balance both lives. If you are dedicating yourself to music and only

music, then you are going to find it hard to have a personal life” (Interview).

Conclusion: does technology offer freedom?

This paper began by highlighting the need to investigate the interplay between technology, fragmentation and risk. While it is clear that digital technologies furnish individual musicians with unprecedented levels of freedom and autonomy, to what extent do independent musicians experience newfound freedom? To address this question, the paper considered the dynamic and competing demands being placed on individual musicians and concluded that despite the promise of being able to construct ones’ own biography, the freedom exercised by musicians is severely constrained. Structurally, the creative and non-creative demands of independent music production force musicians to multi-skill and de-specialize (thus, reducing the amount of time musicians can spend on being creative and the quality and originality of their creative outputs). Furthermore, as the demand for music related products declines, downward pressure is placed on the incomes independent musicians can earn from producing and selling music-related products. As a result, rather than being free to pursue opportunities in the democratized marketplace, independent musicians are compelled, as self-reliant neoliberal subjects, to take on additional jobs to sustain themselves. Splitting time, energy and resources between music careers and additional jobs, however, puts musicians in an even more precarious position as they face added layers of fragmentation, risk and uncertainty. The net affect of essentially pursuing two

or more careers simultaneously is the inevitable creation of further conflicts for workers. In particular, there are steep social costs associated with the prioritization work over non-work and the extensification of work and economic imperatives into the domestic sphere.

These findings indicate that the working lives of musicians have become individualized and fraught with risk as a result of digital technologies, independent music production and entrepreneurial subjectivities in the neoliberal era. Ultimately, therefore, although digital technologies and independent production provide the promise of unprecedented freedom to pursue creativity, for the majority of independent musicians in Toronto this newfound freedom is illusory.

References

- Allen J and Henry N 1997 Ulrich Beck's risk society at work: labour and employment in the contract service industries *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 22 180-196
- Banks M Lovatt A O'Connor J and Raffo C 2000. Risk and trust in the cultural industries *Geoforum* 31 453-464
- Batt R Christopherson S Rightor N and Van Jaarsveld D 2000 *Net working: work patterns and workforce policies for the new media industry* Cornell University Ithaca
- Beck U 1992 *Risk society: towards a new modernity* Sage London
- Beck U 2000 *The brave new world of work* Polity Press Oxford
- Beck U Giddens A and Lash S 1994 *Reflexive modernization: politics, tradition and aesthetics in the modern social order* Stanford University Press Stanford
- Brown W 2003 Neo-liberalism and the end of liberal democracy *Theory & Event* 7
- Canadian Independent Recording Artists Association 2010 Homepage [Available at <http://www.thenewindie.com/faq.php>]
- Carniol N 2005 *Music industry sings the blues* Toronto Star Toronto October 27
- Christopherson S 2002a Project work in context: regulatory change and the new geography of media *Environment and Planning A* 34 2003-2015
- Christopherson S 2002b Why do national labor market practices continue to diverge in the global economy? the "missing link" of investment rules *Economic Geography* 78 1-20
- Connell J and Gibson C 2003 *Sound tracks: popular music, identity, and place* Routledge London
- Cranford C J Vosko L F and Zukewich N Precarious employment in the Canadian labour market: a statistical portrait *Just Labour* 3 6-22
- Ekinsmyth C 1999 Professional workers in a risk society *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24 353-366
- Ekinsmyth C 2002 Project organization, embeddedness and risk in magazine publishing *Regional Studies* 36 229-243
- Fox M A 2005 Market power in music retailing: the case of Wal-Mart *Popular Music and Society* 28 501-519
- Hauge A and Hracs B J 2010 See the sound, hear the style: collaborative linkages between indie musicians and fashion designers in local scenes *Industry & Innovation* 17 113-129
- Hyatt D 2008 *An overview of the financial impact of the Canadian music industry* Joseph L Rotman School of Management University of Toronto [Available at <http://www.omdc.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=6245>]
- James A 2006 Critical moments in the production of 'rigorous' and 'relevant' cultural economic geographies *Progress in Human Geography* 30 289-308
- Jarvis H and Pratt A C 2006 Bringing it all back home: the extensification and 'overflowing' of work: The case of San Francisco's new media households *Geoforum* 37 331-339

- Jones S 2002 Music that moves: popular music, distribution and network technologies *Cultural Studies* 160 213-232
- Lemke T 2001 'The birth of bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality *Economy and Society* 30 190-207
- Leslie D 2002 Gender, retail employment and the clothing commodity chain *Gender, Space and Culture* 9 61-76
- Leyshon A 2001 Time - scale (and digital) compression: software formats, musical networks, and the reorganization of the music industry *Environment and Planning A* 33 49-77
- Leyshon A 2003 Scary monsters? software formats, peer-to-peer networks, and the spectre of the gift *Environment and Planning D* 21 533-558
- Leyshon A 2009 The software slump?: digital music, the democratisation of technology, and the decline of the recording studio sector within the musical economy *Environment and Planning A* 41 1309-1331
- Leyshon A Webb P French S Thrift N and Crewe L 2005 On the reproduction of the musical economy after the Internet *Media, Culture and Society* 27 177-209
- McRobbie A 2002 Clubs to companies: notes on the decline of political culture in speeded up creative worlds *Cultural Studies* 16 516-531
- Miller P and Rose N 2008 *Governing the present* Polity Cambridge
- Paxon C H and Sicherman N 1996 The dynamics of dual job holding and job mobility *Journal of Labor Economics* 14 357-393
- Peck J and Tickell A 2002 Neoliberalizing space *Antipode* 34 380-404
- Perrons D Fagan C McDowell L Ray K and Ward K Eds 2006 *Gender divisions and working time in the new economy: changing patterns of work, care and public policy in Europe and North America* Edward Elgar Publishing Northampton
- Power D and Hallencreutz D 2005 Competitiveness, local productions systems and global commodity chains in the music industry: entering the US market *Centre for Research on Innovation and Industrial Dynamics* Department of Social and Economic Geography, Uppsala University
- Reimer S 1998 Working in a risk society *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23 116-127
- Rose N 1999 *Powers of freedom: reframing political thought* Cambridge University Press Cambridge
- Statistics Canada 2008a *Census of Canada 2006: Labour Force Activity, Highest Certificate, Diploma or Degree, Location of Study, Age Groups and Sex* (Topic-based tabulations; – 97-564-XCB2006005 2006
- Statistics Canada 2008b *Census of Canada 2006: Labour Force Activity, Highest Certificate, Diploma or Degree, Location of Study, Age Groups and Sex* (Topic-based tabulations; –97f0012xcb01050 2001 1996 1991
- Von Hippel E 2005 *Democratizing innovation* MIT Press Cambridge

Author Bio

Brian J. Hracis is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Martin Prosperity Institute, Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto.

Working Paper Series

The MPI is dedicated to producing research that engages individuals, organizations and governments. We strive to make as much research as possible publicly available.

Our research focuses on developing data and new insight about the underlying forces that power economic prosperity. It is oriented around three main themes: economic performance, place, and creativity.

Disclaimer

The views represented in this paper are those of the author and may not necessarily reflect the views of the Martin Prosperity Institute, its affiliates or its funding partners.

Any omissions or errors remain the sole responsibility of the author. Any comments or questions regarding the content of this report may be directed to the author.