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See the Sound, Hear the Style: Collaborative Linkages between Indie Musicians and Fashion Designers in Local Scenes

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Research Paper

See the Sound, Hear the Style: Collaborative Linkages between Indie Musicians and Fashion Designers in Local Scenes

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ABSTRACT Although economic geographers have paid significant attention to the competitive dynamics, organizational and employment structures of specific cultural industries, the existing research privileges large firms and established centres such as New York, London and Los Angeles. Moreover, despite the conceptual articulations of spillovers and “related variety” few attempts have been made to examine the collaborative linkages between two or more related industries and, more specifically, how changing macro-economic forces are affecting individual producers at the local scale. In this paper we address these gaps and argue that the growing prevalence of independent production is transforming the nature of the long-standing connection between music and fashion. Specifically, that strategic collaborations between indie producers are becoming crucial to competing in the contemporary landscape of cultural production and consumption. We also assert that the motivations and mechanisms of these contemporary collaborations differ from their historical counterparts in important ways. Indeed technological advancements and the demands of indie production are changing the networking practices that facilitate these partnerships and the ways in which indie producers value and exchange goods and services.

KEY WORDS: Strategic collaborations, independent cultural production, music, fashion

Introduction

Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants so long as it is black.¹ (Henry Ford, 1909)¹

[We will build] a car for every purse and purpose.² (Alfred Sloan, General Motors, 1924)

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¹ Cited at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Ford

² Cited at http://wiki.gmnext.com/wiki/index.php/1924,_%22A_Car_for_Every_Purse_and_Purpose%22

Since General Motors first challenged Ford's static Model T by building cars for different market segments, the one-size-fits-all approach to the mass-market has been under constant pressure (Tedlow, 1990). Manufacturing firms have responded to the increasing fragmentation of consumer markets by developing flexible production methods and incorporating user feedback into the small batches of goods they produce (Christopher and Peck, 2003). Concomitantly, new technologies and lower entry barriers have allowed a growing number of independent producers to join the marketplace as well (Walker, 2008). In many ways the cultural industries epitomize these shifts. Unlike other industries which rely on large capital investments in technology and manufacturing, symbolic content is the primary input of cultural products and this allows indie producers, with limited economic resources, to compete with global firms. The use of flexible production methods is also widespread in the cultural industries as well.

Although economic geographers have paid significant attention to the organizational structures of cultural industries (Scott, 1999; Power and Scott, 2004) the existing research privileges large firms located in the established centres of cultural production such as New York and Los Angeles. Moreover, while some case studies investigate the changing production processes and employment structures within specific cultural industries, such as magazine publishing (Ekinsmyth, 2002), fashion (Rantisi, 2004), design (Vinodrai, 2006) and film (Scott and Pope, 2007) few attempts have been made to examine the collaborative linkages between related industries, and more specifically, how changing macro-economic forces are affecting individual producers at the local scale.

In this paper we address these gaps by examining the factors that catalyse collaborative linkages between indie musicians and indie fashion designers. In particular, we explore how these relationships are forged and how the cultural scenes that contain these activities also serve as important inputs during the production process.³ Our central argument is that the growing prevalence of independent production is transforming the long-standing connection between music and fashion into strategic collaborations which indie producers use to compete in the dynamic landscape of cultural production and consumption.⁴ Moreover, the motivations and mechanisms of these contemporary collaborations differ from their historical counterparts in important ways. The new demands of independent production and global competition are forcing individuals to become more professionalized and entrepreneurial and this is severing their connection to bohemia and well-established practices within artistic communities such as bartering. This paper represents the first step towards identifying and understanding the changing nature of collaborative linkages across two related industries but further research is needed to tease out the broader and more nuanced ramifications of these shifts.

The findings presented in this paper are drawn from three streams of research; completed research on the Swedish fashion industry (Hauge, 2007), research investigating the changing employment conditions and spatial dynamics of musicians in Toronto

³ Although spheres of related sonic and visual styles are often characterized as scenes it is difficult to find a consistent definition of the concept in the literature (Straw, 1991). In this paper we define a scene as a set of related and mutually beneficial cultural performances which spillover and draw inspiration from each other.

⁴ In Canada, for example, 95 per cent of all musicians are not affiliated with a record label and are, therefore, by definition independent (Hracs, 2009).

(Hracs, 2009) and a set of interviews conducted by both authors with indie musicians and indie fashion designers in Toronto in 2008. In total, the empirical data is derived from 90 in-depth interviews as well as observation at events including concerts, fairs, CD release parties, store launches and the introduction of seasonal fashion collections. Despite their historical and institutional differences, Stockholm and Toronto share some key features that justify their inclusion in the research project. Both cities are national hubs of cultural production and consumption and are home to established yet vibrant cultural scenes that feature music and fashion as essential ingredients. Furthermore, by conducting research in two second-tier cultural economies, instead of global centres such as New York, Los Angeles or London, our investigation not only extends our limited understanding of these processes in general, but also facilitates comparisons across space and scale.

We begin by reviewing some of the seminal theoretical concepts in the economic geography literature, specifically the relevance of agglomeration theories for cultural industries, the role of socio-economic forces in constructing cultural scenes and the recent changes to the production and consumption of fashion and music. The empirical sections of the paper are organized around our central research questions; why there is a growing need for indie musicians and indie fashion designers to form strategic collaborations, how indie producers value and exchange goods and services during these collaborations, how the practices and spaces of networking are becoming more professionalized, technologically driven and “just-in-time” for indie producers and how cultural scenes and the local spaces they inhabit are becoming vital ingredients to cultural products. We conclude by outlining the “exclusivity model”, which is a specific competitive strategy employed by indie producers to enhance the value of their cultural products.

Cultural Industries and Urban Agglomeration

Beginning with Marshall's 1920 (1997) claim that the high-class performance of industrial districts rests on something “in the air”, economists and economic geographers have tried to explain and identify the features that differentiate specific places. Some stress the importance of specialization of economic activity as the most important (Porter, 1990) and these intra-industrial processes are often referred to as “localization economies” (Feldman, 2000). These clustering effects (Porter, 1990) are defined as the beneficial outcome from social and physical proximity in vertical relationships in the industry, for instance, key suppliers and buyers. Localized clusters of related firms are also said to form the basis of a local milieu that may facilitate knowledge spillovers and stimulate various forms of adaptation, learning and innovation. Firms that locate in these clusters are also said to benefit from being close to competitors and horizontal relationships with rivals. Proximity provides access to knowledge from similar firms and the specialized skills and information typical for that geographical area (Asheim, 1996; Maskell and Malmberg, 1999; Power and Malmberg, 2005). Others claim that in a more diversified regional economy knowledge spillovers are more likely to occur, because Jacobs's externalities allow firms to draw new and novel ideas from other local firms that are active in different industries. These are also known as the benefits of “urbanization economies”, and are defined as “scale effects associated with city size or density” (Feldman, 2000: 383). Within this debate there is a growing appreciation for the role that “related variety” plays in stimulating knowledge spillovers and by extension regional economic growth (Frenken *et al.*, 2007; Boschma and

lammarino, 2009). In this literature it is argued that knowledge spills over more efficiently between sectors that share mutual competences and that cognitive proximity facilitates communication and learning between sectors, firms and individuals. Intersectoral linkages between two related industries such as music and fashion, therefore, are more likely to produce meaningful synergies and spillovers than two unrelated industries. After all, as Boschma and Immarino point out, “it is unclear what a pig farmer can learn from a microchip company even though they are neighbors” (2009: 292).

Cultural industries benefit greatly from these different forms of positive externalities. Fashion, in particular, displays a strong set of connections to music (McLaughlin, 2000). Built on physical and cognitive proximity aesthetic production anchors the cultural industries to central cities, and this attracts other talent to these urban production sites of creativity (Florida, 2002). In other words, there is a certain relationship between place and aesthetic creativity; some cities or spaces exert a stronger centripetal pull for cultural industries than others. For music and fashion we see certain “clusters” of aesthetic expression and when these clusters reach a critical mass, they can be defined as scenes. This means that places play an important role in the transient activities associated with aesthetic and design-based innovation that the scenes constitute. Indeed, the cultural industries have complex dialectics between place and economic activity as the production of intangibles seems to rest heavily on the character of the space (Drake, 2003; Rantisi, 2006). Certain urban districts function as contexts for production of symbolic meanings; some places encourage the collective process of cultural production.

A moving force behind this is a certain aggregated consumer preference. Sophisticated consumers can push the producers to create products of higher quality and can be a source of competitive advantages (Porter, 1990). The level and character of demand within the domestic market affects how corporations are created, managed and how they grow. Tough competition at home, produced in part by demanding consumers, for example, prepares firms for a strenuous struggle in global markets (Porter, 1990). We find the same mechanisms in the cultural industries, even though the competitive strengths of these firms are rooted in immaterial and/or symbolic features. Within the cultural industries the very nature of competition is subjective and rooted in symbolic value. Products resting more on aesthetic assets, rather than solely on utility value, are evaluated in social settings. Through signifiers, often rooted in consumption and material culture, individuals can show their taste and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Hence, individuals with a high degree of cultural capital can act as sophisticated consumers and help cultural industry actors improve the quality of their product. However, as taste is highly subjective and even contextually dependent, the transfer or export of such products can be challenging. It is by no means certain that the dominant taste paradigm is the same where the products are being exported. This means that cultural capital is contextual and spatially dependent. It is rooted in interpersonal relationships and social norms.

Consumption, Scenes and Symbolic Value

Traditionally, production and consumption have been considered two opposing activities, but with the active involvement and interaction from consumers the borders between these activities become blurred (Aage and Belussi, 2008; Grabher *et al.*, 2008). In line with the recent work of Potts *et al.* (2008), we found that by actively participating in cultural scenes

musicians and fashion designers co-produce the local stylistic and aesthetic patterns by simultaneously sending and receiving symbolic cues. By extension there is an iterative movement between how people act (both as consumers and as social citizens) and the representation of a place. Moreover, the symbolic value of place is intrinsically bound up within the consumption culture of that place.

Within local cultural scenes consumer choices are also motivated by the desire to strike the delicate balance between group conformity and individuality, where people try to fit into scenes while also signifying their authentic sense of style. For many of the artists involved in the scene, this authenticity is a very important part of their lifestyle and personal narrative. It can be vital for these individuals to show this belonging through certain signifiers including badges or symbols that are recognized by insiders but often irrelevant to the outsiders. Several of these symbols are found in consumer products or other artefacts. Importantly, by reflecting and interacting as social individuals the consumers themselves act to produce the immaterial aspects of cultural goods and services (Power and Hauge, 2008). Indeed, immaterial value is not dictated but rather socially constructed (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, symbolic value is not produced by corporate forces alone, but is socially negotiated through reciprocal, socially embedded processes, where the individual consumer plays an important role.

To summarize this theoretical section we have demonstrated that the cultural industries have a strong tendency to agglomerate and that this can be partially explained by traditional agglomeration theories, which focus on the benefits of co-location. It is also clear, however, that physical and cognitive proximity facilitate aesthetic and stylistic spillovers between related industries as well. As a result, the intersectoral linkages between co-located musicians and fashion designers, produces symbolic value for specific products and the local cultural scenes that contain them. In the next section we explore in more detail, why these linkages are becoming more important and how they play out in the day-to-day business activities of indie producers.

Collaborating to Compete

Although history is replete with connections between musicians and fashion designers⁵ we find that as independent production becomes more prevalent in these industries, collaborative linkages are becoming crucial competitive strategies for these indie producers. In recent years traditional mass-marketing campaigns using TV commercials, billboards and magazine advertisements have been challenged by alternative marketing techniques including word of mouth, viral marketing and product placement. This shift is a result of increasing consumer scepticism (Walker, 2008). Indeed, several of the fashion companies we interviewed confirmed this shift and now favour channels of communication which target individual consumers directly. In addition, Lloyd (2006)

⁵ The most prominent and lasting of these may be punk. Beginning in London in the 1970s the designer Vivienne Westwood teamed up with marketer Malcolm McLaren, and together they played an important role as creators of the punk scene. The symbolic facets of fashion were accentuated through McLaren's tenacious effort to tie in punk's anti-establishment attitude with matching clothes, mainly through his role as manager for the Sex Pistols. The result was a fashion style closely associated with the music scene (Hebdige, 1979; Breward, 2003; Breward *et al.*, 2004).

suggests a growing willingness on the part of large consumer groups to take consumption cues from creative individuals and groups with high levels of cultural capital and musicians in particular. Not surprisingly, therefore, fashion designers target musicians with specific lifestyles and images to promote their clothing lines and brands and examples of these strategies can be found on the global scale with mega-stars and increasingly at the local scale as well. As one CEO of a Swedish denim and street wear firm told us:

We have worked with a lot of rock bands—both established ones and more upcoming. We give clothes to them if we like them, and they like us but not to wear as a uniform. We don't want our brand to be displayed on the tour posters. The consumers don't believe that anymore. (Fashion Firm Founder, December 2005)

In the highly competitive marketing landscape, therefore, fashion designers and firms need to develop creative and innovative marketing tools to get their brands and products noticed and this intensifies the need for indie fashion designers to collaborate with musicians.

In the music industry the growing impetus for musicians to collaborate with fashion designers stems from the need to differentiate their products on the basis of something other than sound. As new digital technologies have made it easier to produce recorded music the marketplace has been flooded with indie musicians and their music-related products. The oversupply of cultural goods with similar styles and quality has also resulted in consumers being inundated with choices and looking for a way to differentiate the offerings. Therefore, in the new landscape of music production, getting consumers to buy recorded music and attend live performances is largely based on the ability of musicians to be original and stand out from the crowd (Figure 1).⁶

As multi-million dollar mass-marketing campaigns are not feasible for indie producers, however, entrepreneurial musicians are strategically enlisting the services of other creative individuals to enhance the symbolic value of their products. In particular, our interviews reveal the growing understanding that success is predicated on effectively crafting and promoting visual styles that work in tandem with sonic styles. This manager, for example, explained the importance of the “whole package”:

Musicians [must] remember that their consumers are not only consumers of audio samples. When they walk into a room they are inspired by the visual element, the textile element, they are inspired by the way it smells, just the way everything is, the whole package is why they consume. The website, the graphics, everything ... (Artist Manager, March 2008)

Indeed, several respondents described this “whole package” as the key to competing successfully in the new marketplace for music and, more specifically, that visual imagery is becoming an essential component. As this respondent put it:

⁶True to their name, “The Magic” entertained the audience with their sonic and visual performance, which featured original clothing and dancing back-up singers.



Figure 1. “The Magic” performing at the Horseshoe Tavern in Toronto. *Source:* Brian J. Hracs, August 2009.

I think the visual is tremendously important ... obviously the music comes first, but image is second because we are dealing with the media, press and radio, online promotions, and people want to know who the band is. What is their image? (Indie Label Founder, March 2008)

It is clear that the new marketplace for cultural products is increasingly dependent on multi-media integration and online environments. As such, the quality and originality of cross-media “packaging” factors prominently in the relative success or failure of cultural producers. Recognizing the importance of cross-media packaging and developing an effective campaign, however, are two different things. Although the demands of indie production require musicians to diversify their skill-sets and perform a range of creative and noncreative tasks, many musicians lack the expertise to develop effective stylistic portfolios. To solve this problem these musicians seek out creative collaborators with complementary skill-sets including visual artists, photographers and web designers. In particular, our respondents explained that collaborating with local fashion designers is the best way to enhance the visual components of their live shows, websites, press-kits and merchandise:

Bands need them [fashion designers] so badly because musicians in the city just don't understand that they are not playing behind a wall. They are on stage and people are looking at them, every little thing, it is so visual ... People need an image, you can sell an image, you can sell a sound, but it is a lot easier to sell an image, people will listen to it after. (Indie Musician, October 2007)

Importantly, while collaborations between musicians and fashion designers have traditionally materialized through social networks or chance encounters at cafés and clubs, contemporary collaborations between indie producers are often carefully planned and strategic. As this manager, whose firm represents indie musicians and indie fashion

designers explained, for example, pairing these individuals up is an intentional strategy to compete in the marketplace:

Something that we are doing within our network is pairing up fashion designers that we have with our musicians. We are putting them together to come up with really specific stuff. I am asking the designers to translate the sonic art of the musicians into a marketable visual style. But that also goes for how [the musicians] conduct themselves and present themselves onstage in a visual manner, it is the whole package. (Artist Manager, March 2008)

Similarly, as many indie fashion designers struggle with limited resources including small or non-existent marketing budgets, word-of-mouth marketing, often through friends and acquaintances, has become crucial to their success. By extension, indie fashion designers expressed a growing need to collaborate with musicians because of their status as trendsetters and ability to market fashion brands and products to sophisticated consumers. Indeed, business savvy designers, who are scene members themselves, exhibit an acute awareness that sending messages through the right people is a very effective way of spreading ideas and promoting products. As this quote illustrates the interaction between designers and musicians is often part of a strategic marketing campaign, which benefits both parties:

ACNE [Swedish brand] lent us some clothes for the CD cover photo shoot. Way cooler than our ordinary clothes—I think it was from their upcoming collection. It gave them good publicity I guess, we being musicians and all. We had to return the clothes afterwards though. I guess we are not big enough for freebies yet ... (Indie Musician, September 2005)

Although soliciting well-positioned scene members to wear and promote their products is an effective marketing strategy for fashion designers, we found that overt sponsorship is very rare. This is because credibility and integrity are important for both indie musicians and indie fashion designers. Even if the designers and musicians are friends and members of the same scene we were told that if the marketing is too obvious, irreparable damage can be done to the musician and the designer. These relationships, therefore, need to be carefully crafted and deployed with subtlety. This musician, for example, expressed the need to be genuine and to promote her collaborators in a casual way:

Audiences are becoming more skeptical and are able to smell bullshit from a mile away ... So if I sponsor somebody, I'll work it in without being cheesy, if I believe in it ... If someone says "you're so hot". I would say "do you like my outfit? It's by my friend so-and-so." Or "look at what my friend made", or "this is a test outfit what do you think?" ... So I'll just try to be genuine. I'll say "a girlfriend of mine is making some really cool stuff and I like it, so I decided to wear it to my show, it's called this if you like it". (Indie Musician, July 2008)

Whether the collaborators are actually friends or just business partners, the transactions are almost always described as favours among friends. Therefore, there is a delicate balance between selling out and helping other members of the scene. One explanation for this is that some cultural producers invoke the bohemian ethic as a defence against accusations of "selling out" or being too business-minded. Indie musicians and indie fashion designers need to brand and collaborate to compete, but they also need to disguise these

strategies to make it appear unplanned, organic and authentic because “trying too hard” is no longer cool. The fact that many indie producers characterize themselves as entrepreneurs and willingly employ such competitive strategies, however, points to a larger shift whereby new production conditions and intensifying competition in the marketplace for cultural products are severing the links to the traditional spaces and lifestyles of bohemia. Indeed our findings here and elsewhere (see Hracs, 2009) suggest that as indie producers become more professionalized, reconciling their careers with the traditional ethos of bohemia becomes increasingly difficult. So, for example, while Lloyd (2006) explains that bohemians endeavour to isolate themselves from the trappings of mainstream society and the economic systems they loath, survival and success for indie musicians and fashion designers is increasingly predicated on their ability to embrace and operate within the mainstream. Thus, whether by choice or necessity, indie producers engage in a delicate balancing act between harnessing strategic business practices to compete and alienating their peers and fans. Furthermore, the professionalization of indie producers is also changing the way these individuals network and how they value and exchange their goods and services.

Beyond Bartering: The Valuation and Exchange of Cultural Goods and Services

One of our central research questions was to investigate the ways in which indie musicians and indie fashion designers value and exchange goods and services. More specifically, to see if the growing importance of such collaborations has been accompanied by any major changes to the structures of these relationships. There is a common assumption that exchanges between artists and bohemians usually involve bartering (Menger, 1999; Lloyd, 2006). Although the structure of these exchanges are undoubtedly more complex on the ground the prevalence of bartering can be explained by the fact that these individuals often possess low levels of economic capital but high levels of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). We found that although bartering is still the dominant form of exchange the parameters of the relationships are in fact changing to reflect the professionalization of indie production. In the following section we provide examples of three broad ways in which indie musicians and indie fashion designers exchange goods and services: traditional bartering, adjustable value exchanges and full value exchanges. While we acknowledge that these other forms of exchange are not necessarily new, it is the shift toward these mainstream forms and away from traditional bartering that is worthy of note.

In traditional bartering arrangements individuals or groups trade goods and services for free. For example, an indie musician collaborates with an indie fashion designer to create a new clothing line but no money changes hands:

We're doing an exchange where she's designing clothes for me and I get to keep them. I'm her muse for her next line. She's starting a new line and it's based on what I consider when I'm getting dressed for a show. . . . I get to actually discuss with her and have a say into what it's going to look like and I'll be the model for the line, plus she gives me clothes to wear. (Indie Musician, July 2008)

Interestingly, despite the lack of monetary remuneration, this musician was satisfied with the gift of free clothes and the opportunity to provide creative input.

Adjustable value exchange implies the exchange of monetary payment commensurate with the economic and symbolic status of the individuals involved. More established and financially stable producers, for example, often support their collaborators by paying them what is deemed to be a fair value, but this amount can also be lowered if the individual has low economic capital but high cultural capital. As this musician put it:

I teamed up with this girl Hysterick Fairy and she made clothes for me for a while . . . she would get a photographer present to take shots of me wearing her clothes for her site and I would receive clothes. I still paid her but there was some bartering because she was doing it for a lot less than it was worth. (Indie Musician, October 2007)

We assert that the growing importance and dynamism involved with adjustable value exchanges warrants further consideration by economic geographers.

On the surface full value exchange seems straightforward, exchanging goods and services for full price but how are symbolic goods and services ascribed a monetary value? How much is a custom-made shirt or an hour of live music worth in the marketplace? Interestingly, the practice of creative collaborators writing cheques to each other for hundreds or thousands of dollars worth of goods and services is also about establishing a sense of professionalism within the arts and this provides further evidence that the ties between indie producers and traditional bohemian conventions are being severed. Indeed, some indie producers simply refuse to barter. In Toronto, for example, one artist manager, who works with musicians and fashion designers, vehemently opposes the barter system of exchange and instead recommends that artists raise the professionalism, confidence and value of their work by paying fairly for any collaborative goods or services:

I advise that the value of each artist's work be compensated and that as the value exchange is compensated it trickles down through the whole process. So when I convince a band like "Fighter Lover" to pay their designer for the work that was done, and pay fairly, there are a few things that happen in psychological terms. First of all they are proud of it, secondly they establish a strong value system for themselves, so now they are less inclined to want to give it away, they expect that exchange in return because an investment has been made. When this exchange system is in place, relationships last longer, they are more fruitful, they are more formal, they're more inventive. (Artist Manager, March 2008)

As this quote suggests there is a growing sentiment among indie producers that formal and professional arrangements are more efficient, productive and creative. As a result, the motivations and mechanisms of collaborations and exchanges are fraught with tensions, between not only bohemian lifestyles and the forced engagement with the mainstream, but the constantly shifting norms and practices in the marketplace as well. We found evidence of valuation and exchange methods ranging from favours among friends to discounts based on status and full value exchanges that mirror those of other professionals. Although we submit that more research on the exact nature and logic of these relationships and exchanges is needed, it is clear that significant changes are affecting these industries. In particular, changing production structures, employment conditions, market dynamics and promotional strategies are impacting indie musicians and fashion designers.

“Just-in-Time” Networking and “Hanging Out” with a Purpose

In addition to assessing the nature of the exchanges between indie producers we were also interested in investigating how the trend toward professionalization might be changing the structures and spatial dynamics of networking and the creative process itself. Once again the existing literature provided a set of common practices and assumptions to test. In general, recent studies on the networking practices of individuals who work in the cultural industries emphasize the primacy of face-to-face interaction (Christopherson, 2002; Grabher, 2002; Currid, 2007). These studies also indicate that networking takes place in a variety of spaces including office settings and third spaces outside of working hours. In contrast to their cultural industry counterparts artists do not usually work in offices or follow pre-set working hours. Consequently, artists are often simultaneously working on creative projects and networking in coffee shops and other third spaces. Artists in Wicker Park, Chicago during the 1990s, for example, are described by Lloyd (2006) as spending long hours working and “hanging out” in coffee shops waiting for inspiration or a meaningful collaborative opportunity to organically materialize:

The nascent arts community responded to Urbus Orbis’ opening with immediate patronage ... this patronage often consisted of interminable loitering over a single cup of coffee ... It provided a site for the long hours of “just hanging out” that artists and their friends like to spend while awaiting the lightning bolts of inspiration. (108–109)

Our interviews confirm that coffee shops and third spaces remain popular hangouts for indie producers. The ways in which musicians and fashion designers spend their time, however, is changing to reflect the demands of indie production and competition (see also Hracs, 2009). Indeed, several respondents explained the need to become more professional and efficient when working and networking. Rather than waiting for inspiration to strike or collaborators to appear, for example, indie producers are proactively and strategically scheduling their time and interactions. As this musician put it:

We are so busy that we actually book meetings just to see each other. We might meet at places like this coffee shop, where there is Internet access. We can hang out and work on our Internet stuff like websites and promotion because a lot of the things we do are on the Internet. (Indie Musician, March 2008)

While some indie producers prefer to interact face to face, even if their attention is being devoted to a range of tasks, several respondents acknowledged the growing importance of virtual channels for networking. These online channels range from email, online forums and blogs to specific virtual environments explicitly meant to facilitate networking such as MySpace and Facebook. Although the virtual spaces associated with the Internet are often considered “placeless”, indie producers explained that the virtual environments they use are in fact locally rooted and connected to cultural scenes. Consequently, these new networking practices might be thought of as “just-in-time” as indie producers are appropriating networking practices which not only meet the needs of their business strategies but their hectic schedules as well. As this musician put it:

Networking has changed so much. It happens on the Internet. Everyone has got a MySpace page and a Facebook page and who knows what else, and you work a lot of that out in that forum. That's where the hanging out happens ... It's not just ... with people all over the world for the sake of it, it is much more strategic ... An enormous piece of my schedule is coming home from gigs at 12 or 2 in the morning and spending an hour on the computer answering emails because that is when I have the time. Now I've got an iPhone and I can do it on a break during the gig. (Indie Musician, September 2008)

Our findings coincide with the three-part typology of networking provided by Grabher and Ibert (2006), particularly, their distinction between “sociality” and “connectivity” networking. “Sociality” networking involves face-to-face interaction with individuals who share common characteristics and skill-sets, workers in the same industry or firm, for example. The primary goal is to transmit and receive information about sources of employment across a large network of loosely connected individuals. The organizational logic of “connectivity” networks, on the other hand, is based on solving specific problems and overcoming deficient skill-sets. As a result, individuals seek out and “connect” with collaborators who can offer complementary skills and expertise. Connectivity networks, therefore, are strategic and likely to occur between workers in different industries. Moreover, Grabher and Ibert (2006) indicate that as connectivity networks are short term and based on a specific problem the interactions often occur in virtual spaces.

The evidence suggests that the practices and spatial dynamics of networking among indie musicians and indie fashion designers are changing. There is a shift from “sociality”, which encompasses traditional “hanging out”, to “connectivity” networking which reflects the increasing professionalization of indie producers. Indeed, these accounts demonstrate that indie producers can no longer afford to wait for creative inspiration or chance encounters to organically materialize. Rather, by engaging in scheduled and strategic collaborations indie producers are “hanging out” with a purpose. Moreover, we are witnessing the emergence and incorporation of new technologically driven spaces of networking which augment face-to-face interaction.

Local Linkages: Scenes and Synergies

Local spaces and scenes contain and shape collaborative linkages between indie producers. Just as sonic and visual styles are merged to produce a marketable cultural product, links to local cultural scenes, or more specifically, the characteristics, identities and preferences of those who participate in them, provide a further input and source of symbolic value to cultural products. These localized scenes are seldom static, however, and styles, trends and the physical sites they imbue display a restless dynamism. In Toronto, for example, even scenes that are closely knit on the basis of style, such as “indie” rock/alternative fashion, diverge spatially across one of the city's main streets. The hipster haven of “Queen St. West”, which established itself in the past 10–15 years, is now considered played out by many “pioneers”. As a result, some of these individuals are now seeking refreshing refuge in the burgeoning arts community along “Queen St. East” and a neighbourhood called Leslieville, in particular. Thus, as a spatial and stylistic signifier of authenticity and cutting edge cultural consumption, producers link their products with the local scenes. As this fashion designer explained, the products that sell first have a local label:

We have bags with Leslieville on them and they sell out every weekend. All the stores here, except Starbucks, are independent. There is a lot of retro and vintage. There is definitely a “DIY” scene here; you can take courses in a lot of different things. There are a lot of hands on creative stuff. (Fashion Designer and Boutique Owner, April 2008)

In a further example of how sonic and visual styles are not only contained within but inspired by physical spaces this respondent described why the “Bovine Sex Club”, a popular and distinctive bar and music venue along Queen St. West in Toronto, is an “appropriate venue” for her band (Figures 2 and 3):

The “Bovine” is definitely a “Satan’s Candy” type place and I think that if we started making clothing it would be for people who patronize the “Bovine”. So if we described our clothing style it would be typical “Bovine” type of thing, rock and roll. . . . Where you play has to suit your style . . . (Indie Musician and Fashion Designer, March 2008)

Despite our focus on the local scale, the production of scenes has a versatile relationship with space and place, and scenes can be produced both at local and global levels. There is, however, reciprocity between these different sites and scales of production; they are not only dependent on each other but there is also the possibility to export or import aesthetic styles from one place to another. Interestingly, although global subcultures might



Figure 2. The unique exterior of the Bovine Sex Club in Toronto. Source: Brian J. Hracs, July 2007.



Figure 3. A live performance inside the Bovine Sex Club in Toronto. *Source:* Brian J. Hracs, July 2007.

appear to be a contradiction in terms, there is compelling evidence that global pipelines allow different sonic and aesthetic styles to travel across space (Bathelt *et al.*, 2004; Storper and Venables, 2004). In a chapter entitled “Translocal Connections in the Goth Scene”, for example, Hodkinson (2004) finds a remarkable level of sonic, visual and cultural consistency within different Goth scenes across space. Indeed, in his case study magazines, DJ set lists, festivals and Internet forums served as global pipelines which facilitated the dissemination of Goth styles and products across space.

The Rise of the “Exclusivity Model”

Our exploratory research also generated data about unanticipated trends in the marketplace. One such trend is the resurgent importance of merchandising as a viable revenue stream for indie musicians at a time when deriving revenue from recorded music and live shows is becoming more difficult. To successfully tap into this revenue stream indie producers are employing what we call the “exclusivity model”, which involves the production of small batches of niche products that can be customized in real time to reflect the changing tastes and values of the scene. Unlike traditional merchandising campaigns such as mass-produced T-shirts, contemporary indie musicians are adding value to their products by developing, marketing and selling goods and services with high symbolic content to sophisticated consumers in niche markets. Examples of these products include clothing designed specifically for bands and their fans by local designers, or handcrafted CDs with original artwork. Indie producers are also infusing elements of local cultural scenes and placing the emphasis on the exclusivity, authenticity and “scene appropriateness” of their products. Taken individually, none of these facets are entirely new, indeed the music-related posters and clothing in the 1960s and 1970s were highly imaginative and Andy Warhol started imbuing his art with elements of local scenes over 40 years ago. However, our

recurring argument is that these practices are becoming more essential in the contemporary marketplace. No longer the domain of innovators like Warhol, the strategic fusion of styles, spaces and scenes is becoming standard practice for individuals struggling to survive in the reconfigured landscape of independent production. As this respondent explained:

People want to be part of the club, they want to have the limited edition stuff, we have done that with some of our latest releases, we have done releases in vinyl, which had been handed numbered, with hand etchings on the fourth side of the vinyl . . . So we are selling [limited edition products] at a premium. People start talking about it, it helps promote the album in the live show, you get some buzz going. People start saying I was one of the few to snag this new cool album. (Indie Label Founder, March 2008)

The “exclusivity model” also provides empirical evidence of the assertion by Grabher *et al.* (2008) that production and consumption within local cultural scenes is becoming increasingly conflated and that by participating in the scenes themselves, indie producers simultaneously drive and react to market demand. By extension, as scene members, indie producers may accrue first-mover advantages by developing and delivering new products with high levels of symbolic value to the marketplace before their less immersed global counterparts.

Conclusion

In this paper we argued that the growing prevalence of independent production is making the long-standing connections between music and fashion more crucial to the success of indie musicians and indie fashion designers. More specifically, because of the shift in how fashion products are marketed and how music is produced, competing successfully in the overcrowded marketplace is increasingly predicated on the ability of producers to differentiate their cultural products in creative ways. Therefore, we provided evidence of fashion designers using musicians to promote their brands and clothing lines and indie musicians getting fashion designers to enhance the visual components of their stylistic portfolios. Furthermore, we asserted that increasing competition has forced many indie producers to become more professionalized and that this transition has had a number of important consequences related to the ways in which indie producers form collaborative linkages through networking and how goods and services are valued and exchanged during these partnerships. We endeavoured to update the traditional understanding of artists “hanging out” as a networking practice, in the bohemian sense, by suggesting that professionalized and entrepreneurial indie producers are losing the luxury of waiting for opportunities to come to them and instead actively pursuing strategic partnerships in a “just-in-time” fashion. Moreover, we alluded to several new and technologically driven spaces of networking where indie producers “hang out with a purpose” such as MySpace and localized online message boards. We have also demonstrated how the professionalization of indie producers has impacted the structures of their collaborations. For example, we argued that traditional bartering, as a method of value and exchange, is becoming less popular with indie producers and other methods such as adjustable value and full value exchanges are becoming more widely used. Spatially, we inferred that local spaces are growing in importance as not only the containers of collaborative activity but also as tangible inputs to the production process in their own right. More specifically, that linking

locally produced goods and services to the ethos of the local cultural scenes is now regarded as a way to further differentiate specific products and imbue them with the symbolic capital bound up within the scene itself. Finally, we presented the “exclusivity model” as an example of how these other shifts are playing out in the marketplace and explained that in an era of uncertainty benefits accrue to indie producers who can rapidly recognize and react to changing market conditions and consumer tastes.

To conclude we submit that the lessons gleaned from this case study of indie musicians and indie fashion designers may also hold valuable lessons for producers of cultural and traditional products more broadly. Particularly for those in industries experiencing dramatic shifts to production structures, marketing strategies and consumer demand. Indeed, as new digital technologies reshape the way cultural products are produced, marketed and consumed this case study provides evidence that even indie producers in niche markets generate and accrue positive agglomeration externalities. By co-locating and collaborating indie musicians and fashion designers co-produce both tangible and intangible outputs. Most visibly, cultural products, but in the Marshallian “something in the air” sense, cultural producers not only create symbolic value but an intangible infrastructure of authenticity and pools of creative energy contained within the local cultural scenes as well. Harkening back to Porter (1990), access to this intangible infrastructure requires physical proximity but as we have argued, for musicians and fashion designers, cognitive proximity is also essential. Therefore, in order for meaningful synergies and spillovers to occur and local cultural scenes to grow in size a critical mass of related economic activity is needed. In Stockholm and Toronto, for example, the continued vitality and development of each city’s cultural scenes can be attributed to the agglomeration of related cultural industries including film, fashion, music and media. If we apply these findings to the burgeoning creative economy, we might speculate that scenes which are diverse, yet sufficiently cohesive, will be more innovative, resistant to market volatility, attractive to talent and therefore more likely to succeed and expand. Conversely, scenes with fewer creative activities will generate fewer synergies and be more vulnerable to rapidly changing production structures and consumer tastes. After all, diverse scenes in cities such as Montreal have proven remarkably resilient over time whereas smaller and more specialized scenes, such as Seattle’s grunge music scene of the 1990s, have dwindled in the face of constant change.

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