

**Creativity, Capital and Entrepreneurship: The Contemporary  
Experience of Competition in UK Urban Music**

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2014

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores how a competitive marketplace is experienced by creative labour in the context of UK urban music by employing an experimental ethnographic research approach. Between 2010-2013, observations, interviews and textual analysis were conducted with two case-study 'MCs', alongside reflexive autoethnographic analysis of the author's own career as an unsigned artist. The findings contribute to the study of competitiveness by highlighting how it is understood from the perspective of producers, as well as to a wider body of qualitative academic literature exploring the ways in which creative labour operates in advanced markets. It is proposed that in an increasingly competitive context, cultural intermediaries assume a crucial role in the lives of artists for their ability to act as both a distributor and a distinguisher, thereby addressing the work of cultural sociologists and creative labour scholars that debates the role of intermediaries in cultural markets. The methods of artistic collaboration which creative labour employ to capture the attention of these intermediaries, demonstrates that competitiveness can engender collaboration. However, this co-operation often takes place for self-interested reasons, challenging the oppositional dynamic between self-interest and co-operation. Furthermore, the ways in which creative labour acquires, maximises and converts forms of Bourdieu-defined capital today is illusory, as artists can acquire large amounts of institutionalised cultural capital and thus appear very successful, while struggling to monetise this success. The thesis thus highlights how technological changes in the marketplace have altered processes of capital transubstantiation. Finally, this research proposes that the behavioural responses to competitiveness by contemporary creative labour can be understood as an entrepreneurial orientation towards creativity. It contributes to debates about the impact of entrepreneurship on artists, by suggesting that whilst it can have damaging emotional implications evidenced in frustration and disillusionment, it largely helps creativity for the way in which it motivates artists.

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor John Street. Without his continuous encouragement, patience, guidance and inspiration this thesis might never have been completed. I cannot thank him enough and feel privileged to have been supervised by him. Furthermore, Catherine Waddams, Morten Hviid, Hussein Kassim, and everyone at the Centre for Competition Policy for having faith in me, welcoming me into their research community and providing valuable feedback as my research progressed. Crucially, I wish to thank the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for funding this research. I would also like to thank my secondary supervisor Michael Harker, as well as Alexander Brown, who provided me with such motivation to undertake this research during my MA, and for their feedback throughout. I would also like to thank Simon Dell and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (NUCA) for their advice when I was forming the ideas which would eventually inform this project. I would also like to thank Dr. Deborah Thom (University of Cambridge). Her influence over my academic career has been profound, whether she knows it or not.

This research would not have achieved the kind of depth and insight it has without the invaluable contributions of Genesis Elijah and Rival. I would like to thank them both for their honesty and openness when speaking to me about their creative lives, and for allowing me to delve so deeply into their experiences of competition. Their poignancy and candour served to continually challenge my personal beliefs about the nature of the competitive experience, as well as enlighten me as to how others were experiencing the same musical world as I.

Thank you also to my Mum, Dad, Sara Beaumont, James Howat and Sarah Jennings for their feedback on sections of this thesis as it progressed. Your thoughts, as always, were incredibly appreciated and invaluable.

Finally, I want to thank my long-suffering partner Charlotte. Being the girlfriend of a musician is bad enough, but the girlfriend of a musician doing a PhD must be tortuous. Thank you for being there for me my love.

## **1. Introduction - Creativity, Capital and Entrepreneurship: The Contemporary Experience of Competition in UK Urban Music**

There has never been a better time to be a musician

Chertkow and Feehan (2009:10)

Never before, Chertkow and Feehan suggest, has it been so easy to realise your creative vision employing technological advancements, and to get your music heard. They suggest: “we have entered a world where the musicians are in charge” (ibid). I was an artist when they wrote this, and I did not recognise or share their optimism. In contrast to their confidence, my sense of despondency was palpable; an outbox bursting with over a hundred emails sent in only a few days and still not a single reply. I had crafted what I believed to be an excellent piece of music, and was pursuing a variety of angles to get heard—predominantly radio DJs, journalists (both online and in physical print publications) and radio producers. I tried various alternative approaches too; contacting people directly via social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, telephoning radio stations via the main switchboard number, and even travelling down to London and waiting outside the BBC building hoping to bump into DJs. It was then, as a relatively unknown artist, browsing the BBC Introducing resource website, I discovered an interview with radio DJ Tim Westwood (one the recipients of my emails) where he suggested that he received “about one thousand mp3s a week”. Perhaps it was indicative of naivety on my part, but the notion that someone would receive such an astounding amount of music I found unfathomable. It was then that I wondered, ‘if I am doing it perhaps everybody else is too’?

At this juncture, at the commencement of my musical career, I had the definite sense that the music industry, and more specifically what Bourdieu might refer to as ‘the field of cultural production’ existing at the level above a mere hobby or experimentation but certainly below the mainstream world of record labels, advances and heavy promotional investment, was incredibly, almost impenetrably *competitive*. To be clear, I sensed that competition for the scarce resources which might allow an artist’s specific musical aims to be achieved, was

ferocious. As I toiled away, creating the art which I loved, I simultaneously began to acknowledge that not only was I spending a large amount of time doing many things other than making music, but also wondering if I was simply seeking increasingly innovative ways of banging my fatigued head against an artistic brick wall. It was in this environment, fresh from undergraduate study and considering postgraduate research, that I began to question how one might be able to understand the ways in which artists seek to make sense of a competitive creative marketplace, and how this competition is experienced by creative labour. It is from an exploration of this general imperative to comprehend the artistic implications of marketplace competitiveness, that this thesis comes to explore the intersection between capital interplay (how economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) are acquired, maximised and converted into one another), entrepreneurship, and creativity. How then, is a competitive marketplace experienced by creative labour?

### *Competition and Perspective*

The benefits of a competitive marketplace are triumphantly extolled from multiple perspectives. Just eight years before I began to think about this research project, the then Labour government published a White Paper preceding the introduction of the latest arm of the UK's competition legislation (Enterprise Act 2002), suggesting:

Vigorous competition between firms is the lifeblood of strong and effective markets. Competition helps consumers get a good deal. It encourages firms to innovate by reducing slack, putting downward pressure on costs and providing incentives for the efficient organisation of production. As such, competition is a central driver for productivity growth in the economy (Department for Trade and Industry, 2001:13)

Competition is, in many respects, the economist's and policy maker's panacea; it is the theoretical pareto benchmark towards which markets must confidently march in order to maximise 'welfare'. Indeed, European Commission Article

82EC states that its objective is the “protection of competition in the market as a means of enhancing consumer welfare and of ensuring an efficient allocation of resources. Effective competition brings benefits to consumers, such as low prices, high quality products, a wide selection of goods and services, and innovation” (European Commission, 2005:4). But what about producers, and producer welfare? Profit is often seen as the ultimate indicator of firm welfare (Just, Hueth and Schmitz, 2005:52). Certainly in neo-classical economic terms, competition leads to reduced producer profit, implicitly suggesting it may impair producer welfare. However, it is largely reductionist to propose that the entirety of the competitive experience can be reduced to the outcome of a producer’s balance sheet. How can we seek to understand the experience of competition amongst a group of producers operating within a musical underground, and produce work which does not rely on econometric measure of ‘welfare’, be it monetary profit, or any other interpretations (Just, Hueth and Schmitz, 2005), but which instead seeks to get inside musician’s heads, and make sense of how they understand their competitive, musical world? My interest in how competitiveness impacts producers (in this case artists) does not stem from an imperative that we try to operationalise an abstract notion of producer welfare. Instead, I simply wish to invert the methodological gaze when looking at the impact of competition, away from the theoretical benefits for the marketplace and the consumer, towards the producer, and question how the producer experiences this competitiveness. In this sense, we need to better understand the competitive experience from the perspective of the producer, given a degree of consumer-side bias in current conceptualisations of competitiveness. It is a desire to view competition from the perspective of the producer, alongside my personal experiences as a musician in the competitive UK urban music scene, that has acted as the motivation for this study.

## **1.1 ‘Context’**

Since October 2007, I have been creating music under the stage-name ‘Context’. The music that I make might be broadly defined as UK urban music, but is situated within the musical traditions of numerous niche genres, including grime,

UK hip hop, dubstep, and house. The entirety of my musical career has occurred alongside my involvement in higher education, and thus to a large extent been defined by my ability to juggle both commitments. Initially, I created music whilst living in halls of residence as an undergraduate at the University of Cambridge, leading to the release of my debut EP entitled ‘Dialectics’ in January 2008. This was wholly self-produced with free music software (GarageBand) on a MacBook laptop and recorded using a cheaply purchased Samson CO1U USB microphone, which I rapped into whilst standing underneath my duvet. This body of work received extensive airplay across national UK radio stations BBC Radio 1 and Radio 1Xtra, and led to me being booked by promoters to support chart-topping acts such as Dizzee Rascal and Bloc Party. Upon graduating in September 2009, I released a second EP entitled ‘Mental Breakdown Music’, which again featured single releases that were supported on national radio. Throughout the course of my MA at the University of East Anglia, and early stages of my PhD, I released a series of singles entitled ‘Breathe In’, ‘Off With Their Heads’, and ‘Listening to Burial’, with the latter being daytime playlisted on BBC Radio 1. In January 2012, I was announced as the first ever unsigned winner of the MTV Brand New nominations list, an annual compilation of acts whom the media platform deem to be destined for great things. I subsequently secured the support of a management company who now handle the careers of myself and Emeli Sande, an artist who in 2013 broke the record held by The Beatles for having an album inside the Top 10 for the most consecutive weeks. Following the release of two further projects in 2012-3 entitled ‘Drowning’ and ‘1.4 at 12’, six years of intensive hard work culminated in me eventually being signed to EMI/Sony/ATV (Stellar Songs) Publishing in June 2013.

## **1.2. Purpose, Aims and Objectives**

Over thirty years ago, Frith (1982:9) suggested that; “we still don’t know much about how musicians make their musical choices, how they define their social role, how they handle its contradictions”. Thirty years on, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011:34) continue to note; “there has been a somewhat surprising lack of qualitative studies of...the experiences of cultural workers”. Within wider

creative labour scholarship we find research exploring the manner with which major record labels operate in terms of recouping costs, payment of advances, and marketing, or, how record companies (as opposed to artists) are responding to the technological challenges of the modern marketplace such as piracy (Meisel and Sullivan, 2002). Alongside this focus on the reified ‘music industry’, there has concurrently been a focus on professional musicians within the institutionalised, corporate sphere of music (Negus, 1999, 2011b), whilst those “struggling for success at a local level” (Cohen, 1991:6) have been overlooked. There has then been a focus on superstardom over amateurism (Cohen, 1993:126), whereby “most studies of music and musicians are of professionals” (Finnegan, 1989:8). Indeed, the interest in, say, the work of Negus (2011a) on authorship, privileges famous artists as he is critically evaluating the notion of ‘genius’. However, I am seeking to answer different questions, and am attempting to understand how the competitive marketplace is experienced by those at that bottom; the artists, such as myself, struggling to turn their craft into a career. My questions concern what it means to be a musician today, the ways in which competition forces artists to behave, how competitive forces impact their creative lives, and how this makes them feel.

A scholastic ‘call to arms’ suggesting that more work is desperately required from the perspective of grass-roots artists (Frith, 1982; Finnegan, 1989; Cohen, 1991), has been heeded by researchers seeking to explore the dynamics of this form of labour over the last fifteen years. This has produced research which I will engage with throughout this thesis and which informs its construction, studying creative labour’s responses to competitiveness from fields as diverse as television production (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2011), graphic design (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999), music production (Scott, 2012) and fashion design (Skov, 2002). Whilst this area of research is growing and looks at various different types of creative labour, little or no work looks at my genre of interest – UK urban music. Research exists into how structural economic concerns have impacted its American ‘cousin’, US Hip Hop (Harrison, 2009). Yet little work exists which explores the microsociological behavioural and creative practices of these ‘urban’ artists in the UK; the genre within which I have forged my creative life.

It was within the context of my career trajectory as ‘Context’, alongside my examination of literature into creative labour, that I began to formulate questions relating to how I could make sense of my experiences of this marketplace, and the incredible struggle to get heard. Why was I making the creative and commercial decisions I was? Could I understand the creative practices of agents within this marketplace, and what might these findings mean for how we understand and conceptualise notions of competitiveness, creative practice, and creativity itself? I wondered if I could use my position as both an artist and a researcher to examine how this marketplace is understood and experienced by creative labour. Certainly, musicians conducting a form of experiential self-actualisation and exploration of their own aesthetic philosophy is, whilst rare, not without precedent. Lizst, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century virtuoso pianist and composer wrote a series of essays entitled ‘On the Situation of Artists and Their Condition in Society’ (Lizst, 1835), and more recently, US rapper Jay Z deconstructed the experience of his creative career, alongside a dissection of his lyrical content, in ‘Decoded’ (Carter, 2010).

In academic research however, musicians-as-scholars can be delineated into three groups. In the first instance we can find researchers who become artists for the purposes of their research, or during the course of their research. Examples include Bennett (1980) who took on the role of becoming a rock musician to illuminate it as a sociological process via an ethnomusicological text, Schloss (2004) who started making hip hop ‘beats’ whilst studying sampling, or Harrison (2009) who revived his adolescent interest in rapping when researching the underground San Francisco ‘Bay Area’ hip hop community. Secondly, we find researchers whose careers as musicians have informed their work, but who don’t reflexively analyse their own creative practice as an object of research. Becker (1982) was a jazz musician in Chicago (indeed, he has stated that he took his musical career more seriously than that of sociology), and his experiences certainly informed his work. However, he makes little reference to his own practice throughout *Art Worlds*, maintaining a degree of ‘distance’ between his academic work, and his creative practice. The work of Negus (2011b) is informed by his life as a musician too. Thirdly, and less commonplace, is research by active musicians into their practice. Examples include the “artistic

research” of Dogantanc-Dack (2012:36) which explores her own live performance as a classical instrumentalist, or the recent interest in autoethnography and its relationship to musicians exemplified in the recent collection entitled *Music Autoethnographies* (Bartlett and Ellis, 2009). I wanted to ascertain the suitability of my creative career, and my experiences as an artist, in informing research which was more than anecdotal musings, and which rigorously presented empirical data to both illustrate the behavioural implications of competitiveness on musical creative workers, and evaluate what these adopted patterns of labour mean in the lives of artists. The broader purpose and objective of this study therefore is to seek to understand *how a competitive marketplace is experienced by creative labour*, and to do so from the unique vantage point which my artistic career within UK urban music affords.

### 1.3 Thesis Structure

Following this introductory chapter which seeks to contextualise the research project, chapter two will commence with the imperative that if we are to make sense of how a competitive market is experienced, we must first establish the competitiveness of that market. In the first instance therefore, economic literature is considered in an attempt to both measure the competitiveness of a marketplace, and to understand the implications of this competitiveness on behavioural strategy. The analytical framework provided by Porter (1979, 2008) and applied to the music industry using the work of Alexander (1994a, 1994b), Leyshon (2009) and others, suggests that the creative marketplace has become *increasingly* competitive in recent years due largely to two phenomena: the emergence of a new product substitute in the form of illegal downloads, and the lowering of marketplace barriers to entry. These technological developments have caused the composition of the music industry to shift towards the ‘perfect competition’ end of the theoretical marketplace continuum. Economic analysis of this nature allows us to understand key changes in the artistic marketplace, and indeed to map these changes (Alexander, 1994a). And yet if one wishes to understand what these changes mean experientially for artists, and for creative practices, one must look beyond an economic comprehension of competitiveness

which posits the existence of a connection between competition and strategy (Porter, 1979, 2008), and delve deeper into the microsociological detail of what that strategy might look like.

I thus turn to Bourdieu for his ability to unite the centrality of competitiveness in informing agent strategy (within his theory of ‘fields’ as arenas of struggle), and work which presents this strategy. He suggests how the ramifications of this competitiveness might be felt both in terms of how it impacts on the types of actors who come to operate within creative markets, as well as on the behaviours of artists themselves. Bourdieu proposes that, within the cultural marketplace, increasing complexity, abundance and competitiveness engenders the emergence of cultural intermediaries, who come to occupy a central role. This suggestion of Bourdieu (1984) regarding the centrality of intermediaries in creative markets is debated within cultural sociological literature by those who agree, suggesting intermediaries are crucial for mitigating abundance and occupy a key role in developed artistic economies (Featherstone, 1991; Seabright and Weeds, 2007; Thompson, 2010), and those who see them as an out-dated relic (Kovach and Rosenstiel 1999; Solomon and Schrum, 2007; Keen, 2006, 2007; Knobel and Lankshear, 2010). It is suggested that the nature of contemporary intermediary engagement, as well as the rationale behind it, warrants more detailed enquiry, in order to understand this facet of competitiveness and the competitive experience.

Staying with Bourdieu, it is suggested that his theoretical framework of ‘capital interplay’ within his theory of fields, allows us to understand more fully the nature of this artist-intermediary relationship as a process of acquiring, maximising and transubstantiating forms of capital – economic, social and cultural. By viewing creative practices through Bourdieu’s conceptual lens, it is suggested that we might understand the competitive experience, as the experience of capital interplay. However, whilst Bourdieu sees fields as relatively stable compositions, the rules of the game might change via external pressures, such as the technological advancements outlined in the economic literature. If there is a new game, are there new rules? Existing research on capital transubstantiation in cultural markets raises questions surrounding the operation of economic capital in particular (Li, 2002; Scott, 2012). To

understand the competitive experience we must both understand the operation of social and cultural capital in the lives of artists, but also the role money plays in their lives.

The literature review concludes by examining current research into creative labour. I turn to this research because cultural sociology suggests the ways in which artists behaviourally and strategically respond to competitiveness, but does not comment on how this strategy impacts their lives, as well as their artistry. That is, if a competitive market forces an artist to behave in a particular way, how does this necessitated behaviour impact how an artist understands his art? A theme emerges within creative labour literature concerning the role of the artist as an entrepreneur. This conceptualisation appears in various guises, such as ‘cultural entrepreneurs’ (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999; Scott, 2012) or ‘art entrepreneurship’ (Aggestam, 2007). The implication this orientation has on creativity is debated however. On the one hand there are those who see marketplace engagement as hampering and ‘crowding-out’ creativity (McRobbie, 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007), and as emotionally damaging, demotivating, and engendering feelings of anxiety (Amabile, 1979, 1982; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2011). Others however propose that it helps artists (Cowen, 1998) and in fact *motivates* them (Clydesdale, 2006; Eisenberg and Thompson, 2011). Therefore, this study will seek to both comment on the extent to which it is reasonable to categorise the contemporary processes of capital interplay – the behavioural responses to competitiveness – as entrepreneurialism, as well as explore the impact of this orientation in the lives of artists.

The literature review seeks to identify research questions about how a competitive market is experienced by creative labour. The competitive experience is a multiplicity of experiences, and thus only by answering questions pertaining to various facets of competitiveness, can we seek to make sense of how competition is experienced:

RQ1. What role do cultural intermediaries play in the lives of creative labour in a competitive market? Why do they occupy this role?

RQ2a. In an increasingly competitive environment, how are artists acquiring, maximising and transubstantiating forms of Bourdieu-defined capital?

RQ2b. Given contemporary processes of capital interplay, how do artists survive and sustain their craft?

RQ3. Is competitiveness engendering an entrepreneurial orientation by creative labour, and if so, how do artists feel that this entrepreneurialism impacts them?

Chapter three will examine which methodological approach is most suitable in providing answers to these types of questions. It begins by acknowledging that I, as an artist myself, am currently experiencing this competitive marketplace within UK urban music, and thus seeks to question whether research both in this genre, and drawing upon my own experiences, is appropriate. I grapple with the notion of using ‘the self’ as a research participant in the context of a cultural environment within which one is already embedded via an assessment of contributions in the field of both native-anthropology/anthropology-at-home and autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Richardson, 2000; Anderson, 2006; Madden, 2010). It will be proposed that my experiences in the field of UK urban music constitute “a kind of extended anthropological field trip” (Murphy, 1987;xi). It is therefore appropriate to situate a study within this industry, and simultaneously, to draw on my own experiences. By working through each research question consecutively and assessing appropriate methodologies, an autoethnographic approach triangulated with case-study based anthropological data obtained via participant observation, textual analysis and semi-structured interviews is suggested as most suitable for answering my research questions. The specific nature of the employment of this method will be deconstructed and evaluated in an audit trail. The potential for expanding ethnographic source material is considered, proposing that data from public social networking sites such as Twitter, as well the lyrics of artists - notably those of artists within UK urban music (Barron, 2013) - constitute data sources which might meaningfully be mined and analysed for their ability to communicate experiences which might not be acquired via observations and interviews alone. In this sense, the study contributes towards literature which philosophically and methodologically re-evaluates the relationship between artistry, ethnography, and the anthropological narrative (Calzadilla and Marcus, 2006; Desai, 2002).

The following chapters will highlight the key findings. Chapter four will suggest that cultural intermediaries are crucial in the lives of creative labour, not only in order to provide a distribution platform in a saturated marketplace, but also as indicators of quality to facilitate the projection of success. However, capturing their attention is a hugely frustrating process for artists who are lost in the “noise of creative ambition” (Kretschmer, 2005:10) as they frantically seek an audience. Therefore, this research highlights how intense competitiveness engenders a collaborative, as opposed to a combative, behavioural response by artists. They work together in a form of creative ‘safety-in-numbers’ as they seek to distinguish themselves in a market which anonymises in its abundance. However, this co-operation occurs largely for self-interested reasons. Furthermore, I suggest that the definition of ‘cultural intermediary’ requires expanding to include those with large online social media presences whom artists seek to exploit to maximise their routes to market.

Chapter five commences by conceptualising this process within the context of Bourdieu’s interpretative architecture of ‘capital interplay’. My findings suggest that intermediary engagement is representative of investment strategies to harness social or relational capital, and attempts to transubstantiate it into cultural capital. It is shown that today, artists are able to obtain large amounts of institutionalised cultural capital, however are unable to make their practice economically sustainable given both the large double investment of economic capital required to engage in creative pursuits and the decommodification of musical works themselves. The high cost of cultural production is illustrated, as well as the great difficulty in making this work profitable, which creates feelings of intense disillusionment and insecurity as artists are forced to sustain their practice through a variety of alternative means. In this sense, chapter five, using a term which came out of interviews with my cast-study participants, highlights the illusory nature of contemporary capital interplay, in that artists can appear to be incredibly successful in the form of their embodied and institutionalised cultural capital; a projection of success which masks their economic plight.

Chapter six proposes that these behavioural processes of capital interplay might be conceptualised as an entrepreneurial orientation towards creativity which, far

from ‘crowding-out’ artistry (McRobbie, 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007), in fact motivates and empowers artists, elevating their work. The knowledge that they are able to take control of their careers, to a certain extent, gives them confidence, and an awareness of the expectations of their audience spurs them to be increasingly innovative. The competitive market is thus shown to have a contradictory impact on creativity, both undermining and empowering artists. Furthermore, by seeking to make sense of how competition is experienced, the findings presented herein act as a contemporary treatise on the relationship between artistry and technology, suggesting that it is akin to Schumpeterian creative destruction; destroying old methods of operating by anonymising artists, yet simultaneously providing them with the creative tools to seek to combat this.

#### **1.4 Conclusion: Research Summary**

This thesis will formulate an argument that shuns the naïve optimism of Chertkow and Feehan (2009) which started the thesis, proposing instead that contemporary creative labour might be understood as a complex duality engendered by marketplace evolutions heightening competitive pressures, whereby artists are empowered yet restricted. By exploring my own creative practice, triangulated with anthropological case-study based data, I will highlight how competitiveness within the contemporary digital marketplace necessitates specific behavioural responses by artists seeking to manage the challenges presented to them. Intermediaries occupy a central role within the lives of artists as both a distinguisher and a distributor, but the nature of their role has evolved. In this hyper-competitive environment, a collaborative approach to creative practice is adopted by artists in an attempt to eliminate the problem of indistinguishability in a marketplace of abundance. Furthermore, while artists are able to acquire large amount of institutionalised cultural capital as they achieve regular national radio play, or frequent TV appearances, they are struggling to convert social or cultural capital *back* into economic capital, and therefore achieve ‘secondary transubstantiation’. Technological developments have then, whilst making it easier to maximise social and cultural capital, simultaneously undermined artists’ ability to acquire and maximise economic capital.

Projections of success are in some sense illusory therefore. However, despite the intense frustration and disillusionment felt by artists struggling with these processes, they find their entrepreneurial orientation towards capital interplay empowering and motivating, serving to elevate their creative practice, and giving them the confidence to both produce and compete. Whilst technological developments have anonymised creative labour in an environment which frustrates and discourages, they have conversely equipped artists with the tools to realise their creative visions within the competitive cultural marketplace and mitigate their indistinguishability.

A study which seeks to engage with my research questions generates work which contributes towards a number of disciplines, and which will be of interest to scholars from a wide range of research interests. Firstly, this research will address economic debates concerning how markets do or do not work, the relationship between marketplaces, agents and new technological advancements, as well as allowing for a reconsideration of competition itself and its impact on producers by inverting the methodological gaze away from consumers. Furthermore, economists interested in the nature of entrepreneurship and its impact on producers will find the entrepreneurial orientation (EO) construct employed and interpreted in an unstudied cultural environment. Secondly, it will be of use to cultural sociologists interested in debates concerning the contemporary applicability, or not, of Bourdieu's account of cultural production and the nature of capital acquisition and conversion, as well as debates vis-à-vis the role of cultural intermediaries in advanced capitalism. Finally, researchers of creative labour will find herein a focussed and specific examination of artists and entrepreneurship in a contemporary, competitive marketplace context, as well an interpretation of these behaviours in terms of the relationship between markets and creativity.

The arguments and the data examined within, form a detailed exploration of the responses of a specific type of labour to a specific marketplace. The answers to the questions I am asking matter and are relevant, given that they contribute towards our understanding of both competitiveness, and the artistic lives of creative labourers. In the first instance, this research is a modest but important

contribution towards how both scholars and policy makers might make sense of the implications of competitive markets. It questions the economic theoretical paradigm which espouses the ubiquitous virtues of competition, by inverting the methodological research gaze from the marketplace to the agent, and from the consumer to the producer. In so doing, I highlight that whilst competition certainly has wonderful benefits, at the heart of this market are producers struggling to survive, and their story is an important one. Competitiveness as a process and an experience can not be understood in its entirety via the lens of urban music artists operating in the UK alone, but the experiences of these artists can inform how we make sense of competitiveness as a concept. Secondly, by illuminating the ways in which urban music artists in the UK experience competition, this work can contribute towards a body of literature, which is growing in richness and depth, that seeks to make sense of how creative artists live their lives, and how their creativity manifests itself. I suggest that creativity can be understood as occurring within the parameters of a marketplace, and the freedoms and restrictions this environment affords agents. In this sense, the findings presented herein serve as a contemporary study into the relationship between creative labour, technological advancements, and competitive markets, and the paradoxical, often contradictory nature, of that relationship.

UK urban music is scholastically underexplored, and therefore by situating my focus within this genre, my research can assist in generating knowledge to more fully understand both how competitiveness is experienced, and the lived experience of creative labour, contributing importantly towards knowledge across multiple disciplines. For economists considering how markets do or do not work, as well as the interaction between market relations and new technologies, for cultural sociologists for the manner with which it forms a contemporary investigation into the continued applicability of Bourdieu's account of cultural production, and for music industry/creative labour scholars who seek to understand the nature and organisation of cultural production, all will find insights in this research project. I propose that UK urban music provides a particularly perspicacious context within which theorists might not only re-examine prevailing scholastic conceptions as proposed, but also to explore the operation of creativity in advanced capitalism from an unexplored

research perspective. This thesis is therefore both necessary and timely given its clarification of existing debates, and as a corrective mechanism against a cultural optimism which fantastically proclaims how fortunate today's artists are by examining how they understand competitiveness both externally as a researcher, and internally, as an artist. This research then grapples with the duality that whilst, as Walter Benjamin noted in 1936, "with the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their product" (Benjamin, 1936:67), that on the other hand, if everyone speaks at once, how can anyone be heard (Benkler, 2006)?

## **2. Literature Review: Competitiveness and Strategy**

The question posited at the beginning of this thesis, and which frames my research interest, concerns how a competitive marketplace is experienced by creative labour. This statement might be thematically split into three parts in order to guide the literature review:

1. Competitive marketplaces
2. The experience/strategic implications of competition, and
3. Studies of creative labour

This chapter will examine literature relating to each of these key themes, allowing me to explore the contributions that existing researchers have made to the study of competitiveness, acknowledging the questions their research both answers and generates, and ultimately situating a study of this nature within the context of an established research tradition. This chapter will seek to achieve these three objectives in the three proposed parts, each concluding by suggesting how the literature has generated research questions which will help me to understand how a competitive marketplace is experienced. The examination of the literature will increasingly narrow in thematic focus from structural economic debates around competitiveness in part one, focussing on the microsociological behavioural and strategic implications of a marketplace of this nature in part two, turning finally in part three to research which has sought to understand what these behavioural responses to competitiveness mean for artistry.

Part one will explore the dynamics of a competitive marketplace from the perspective of competition economics, particularly work which seeks to measure ‘competitiveness’ (Porter, 1979, 2008). This will allow me to more accurately define the barriers of the marketplace I seek to explore, and is an important starting point in order to understand the wider structural composition of the marketplace I am studying. By applying the economic theory of Porter (1979, 2008) to the contemporary music industry using the work of Alexander (1994a, 1994b), Leyshon (2009) and others, I will highlight how the creative marketplace has undergone profound shifts in recent decades to become *increasingly* competitive in its composition, and suggest that this has great potential

implications for the strategy of agents in this marketplace. However, this literature can not illuminate what the specific behavioural implications of this competitiveness are for agents. If competitiveness informs strategy, what does this strategy look like? Thus microsociological accounts from cultural sociology are used.

Part two begins with an imperative that in order to understand competition more deeply, I must explore literature that seeks to illuminate the behavioural ramifications of these structural changes. Porter (1979, 2008) suggests competitiveness informs strategy, but we must try to understand what the exact nature of this strategy, this response to competitiveness, is. Given this, I turn to the work of Bourdieu for his ability to unite a structural concern for competitiveness, with a behavioural focus on strategy. He conceptualises cultural markets as inherently competitive, as “fields of struggles or a space of competition” (Bourdieu, 1998:15), which come to be typified by the emergence of cultural intermediaries as the market increases in complexity. These are agents who operate in the conceptual space between production and consumption; those involved in the “presentation and representation” (Bourdieu, 1984:359) of cultural forms, such as critics, journalists, broadcasters, publishers etc. Therefore if we are to understand how creative labour experiences competition, we must seek to make sense of the ways in which artists interact with these intermediaries in a modern, digital context.

Staying with Bourdieu, we find he presents a theoretical framework for understanding how artists experience the competitive environment of the cultural field, based on the ways in which creative labour mobilises their reserves of ‘capital’ (social relations, prestige, money etc) and transubstantiates/converts each type into one another. This relationship between forms of capital is conceptualised as ‘capital interplay’. In the first instance, this provides a framework within which to make sense of contemporary intermediary engagement, proposing that it must be understood as an exercise in the exploitation of social capital. However, more than this, he proposes that the processes of capital interplay within cultural markets must be understood as having an “interest in disinterestedness” (Bourdieu, 1998:317), whereby

financial interests must be ignored (publicly at least), as cultural capital is maximised. How these processes of transubstantiation look in today's digital, cultural marketplace are unclear however. I examine the work of Li (2012) in the journalistic field, and Scott (2012) on music producers in New Zealand, suggesting that the study of these processes requires more detailed examination. Finally, the literature on capital interplay presents a potential paradox with reference to economic capital in cultural markets; if these markets are a domain typified by the maximisation of cultural capital (prestige) and the subjection of economic capital (money), how are artists to survive in practical terms? Competition is a process of survival after all. I conclude this section by suggesting that this literature can not tell us how these behavioural responses to competitiveness impact the lives of artists and their artistry. We can debate the way in which competition informs strategy, but how does the implementation of this strategy impact the artistry of creative labour?

Part three will therefore evaluate work in the burgeoning study of creative labour. This section seeks not only to more narrowly contextualise my own research, but also to explore interpretations of what the behavioural responses to competitiveness mean for artists and their art, specifically with reference to their impact on motivation. Creative labour research has begun to build a picture of how specific types of creative labour manoeuvre and cope with the demands of the contemporary, competitive marketplace, and have served to highlight the presence of behavioural patterns across cultural markets. Of particular interest is the emergence of work suggesting the existence of a generalised artistic entrepreneurialism (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999; McRobbie, 2002; Skov, 2002; Aggestam, 2007; Molloy and Larner, 2010; Scott, 2012). However, there is much debate surrounding the impact of marketplace competitiveness and an entrepreneurial orientation to creative practice. Some research suggests that it hampers creativity and restricts creative freedoms (Cohen, 1991; McRobbie, 2002; Fisher, 2014), is emotionally damaging (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2011), and demotivates artists (Amabile, 1979, 1982, 1983). Others suggest that it in fact helps artists (Cowen, 1998; Skov, 2002) and motivates them to create better work (Clydesdale, 2006; Eisenberg and Thompson, 2011). I propose that

this is a debate which requires engaging with empirically in order to more deeply understand the competitive experience.

Over the three parts of this chapter I suggest the following: (i) economic literature has operationalised competitiveness and how it can change over time, as well as how it applies to the contemporary music industry, but tells us little about the specific strategic, behavioural ramifications of these changes on creative labour; (ii) debates within cultural sociology raise specific questions pertaining to how competitiveness might be experienced by creative labour, and the nature of their adopted strategy, notably the role cultural intermediaries play in artists' lives, and the nature of capital interplay in advanced cultural markets. However, this work tells us little about how these necessitated behaviours impact artistry; (iii) research in the field of creative labour characterises the nature of artistic behavioural strategy as entrepreneurship, but debates the impact (both practically and emotionally) of an entrepreneurial orientation towards creativity, specifically with reference to its impact on motivation. Each thematic section will conclude by specifying the research questions generated by the literature and therefore to be investigated in this project.

## **2.1 Competitive Marketplaces: Competition Economics**

In order to begin to make sense of a competitive marketplace, and competition itself more generally, economic literature seeking to map and measure competitiveness is a sensible starting place. If I am to understand how creative labour is responding to competition, I must first scrutinise literature which allows us to define the competitiveness of a marketplace. Porter's (1979, 2008) industrial economic framework distinguishes five forces, the relative strength or weakness of which being indicative of the competitiveness of any industry. Only by first understanding the competitiveness of a marketplace, and the changes to its competitive structure, can we seek to understand how that competitive marketplace is experienced. For Porter the constitution of the forces impact on the construction of agent strategy within the industry, and in this sense, firms or

agents experience marketplaces in different ways depending on the economic composition of those marketplaces. These forces, according to Porter, are:

1. The threat of new entrants
2. The threat of substitute products or services
3. The bargaining power of suppliers
4. The bargaining power of buyers
5. Rivalry amongst existing competitors

At one end of the theoretical neo-classical continuum there is a marketplace defined as a monopoly, whereby there is only one seller of a non-substitutable product, facing the entire economy's demand curve. This seller subsequently acts as a price fixer via the restriction of quantity produced, thus enjoying supernormal profitability at the expense of consumer welfare, and inefficiently leading to 'deadweight' welfare losses. This is the very epitome of an uncompetitive market. In this marketplace:

- The threat of new entrants is low owing to very high barriers to entry
- The threat of substitutes is non-existent
- The bargaining power of suppliers is high, as they essentially hold all the cards
- The bargaining power of buyers is low/non-existent as they have to accept the sole product offered by the firm
- Rivalry within the industry is non-existent

In essence, firms do not experience competition at all. Competition does not exist.

The conceptual opposite is that of a perfectly competitive marketplace. Here there exist: an infinite number of buyers and sellers, largely owing to the non-existence of barriers to entry into the marketplace; firms who face a perfectly elastic demand curve and thus act as price takers, forced to accept the price as determined via the interaction between demand and supply; perfect factor mobility; perfect information regarding prices and quantity of product amongst buyers and consumers; and homogenous, perfectly substitutable products. In this marketplace then, with reference to Porter's forces:

- The threat of entry is high as barriers to entry have plummeted to zero

- The threat of substitute products is highly prevalent
- The bargaining power of suppliers is low given the existence of infinite perfect substitutes being supplied as they face a perfectly inelastic demand curve
- The bargaining power of suppliers is high as they can simply switch providers at any given time
- Rivalry within the marketplace is fierce

In essence, firms run to stand still. Competition is all encompassing.

What, if anything, can Porter's analytical framework tell us regarding competition in the contemporary music industry, and how might it help us answer crucial questions concerning what competitiveness *means* and how it is experienced? Upon the application of the 'forces' to the music industry today, we can observe that the contemporary digital music marketplace is in fact becoming a more competitive place. The following section will work through each of Porter's five forces, employing economic literature to ascertain how they apply to the contemporary music industry. If we are to understand how a competitive marketplace is experienced by creative labour, we must first understand that marketplace.

### *1) The Threat of New Entrants – Higher*

The threat of new entrants into an industry or marketplace acts restrictively on potential profitability and is dependent on the existence, or lack, of barriers to entry. Whilst the exact economic definition of what constitutes a barrier to entry has been subject to a degree of disagreement (Demsetz, 1982), we might reasonably define them in Stigler's terms as; "a cost of producing (at some or every rate of output) which must be borne by a firm which seeks to enter an industry" (Stigler, 1968:67). Theoretically, the greater the potential ease of entry and thus the lower the barriers to entry, the more competitive we might define a field as being. Porter proposes that a reduction in barriers to entry stimulates both competition and innovation, contradicting suggestions that the concentration of market structure facilitates innovation (Nelson and Winter, 1978; Levin, 1978). Porter's position is more aligned to that of Blair (1972:95); "new technologies [lower] barriers to entry, thus creating a potential stimulus to competition".

Porter distinguishes various different types of barriers to entry which impact the threat of new entrants into a marketplace, the most pivotal of these being ‘capital requirements’. These are the financial costs of entering a marketplace; the costs of entering the game. Within the music industry, some of the capital requirements for any artist regardless of genre are recording costs, and access to distribution channels (Alexander, 1994a). Each of these will be scrutinised.

### *Recording Costs*

When considering the capital requirements of a musician, aside from the instrumentation itself, recording costs are amongst the most crucial fiscal considerations. In the early days of audio recording (1890-1910), alongside patents acting prohibitively in facilitating devices to play music, recording technology was predicated on costly wax cylinders (both in terms of time and money). This meant that entering the industry was difficult largely given that “the costs of recording...including rental of the recording studio or the recording devices... were prohibitive” (Alexander, 1994a:4). This remained largely the case until the emergence of magnetic tape recording technology in 1950, which facilitated great cultural innovation and musical experimentation without fear of dreadful fiscal ramifications. However, post-1962, concentration occurred once again, with control over access to recording studios being highly restricted by record companies (Jones, 2002:217). This meant that broadcastable recordings were only available to artists with major recording contracts - a huge barrier to entry. The historical pattern is one whereby “production and manufacturing technology facilitated both significant waves of entry (late 1910s/early 1920s and 1950s), by lowering production costs and the minimum efficient scale of production” (Alexander, 1994b:86), followed by concentration.

Software has played a pivotal role in the democratisation of recording studio access. Until the 1960’s recording studios did not operate within the confines of a normal economic marketplace of buyers and sellers, but were instead “highly regimented and bureaucratised institutions...[which] were only available to artists signed to the record company that owned it” (Leyshon, 2009:1319). However, as technological innovation eroded the cost of recording equipment,

independent studios emerged. This meant that for the first time independent artists had access to professional equipment, albeit at a price. In this sense, the recording process was lowering as a barrier to entry to artists given the lowering of barriers to entry within the recording studio marketplace itself. This new marketplace was oligopsonistic in character, and this intense concentration of demand, and ergo buyer power, and inter-studio competition, greatly reduced the cost of ‘studio time’ (Leyshon, 2009:1317), a pattern that has continued from the 1970’s onwards. Indeed, Leyshon (2009:1317) suggests: “It was widely reported during interviews that the rates for renting studio time in 2005-06 were the same as in the mid-1980s which, if one takes into account the economy wide inflation of wages and prices over that time, represent a significant deflation of the fees that studios are able to charge”.

The development of MIDI technology in the 1980s served a dual function as it increased the quality of audio productions whilst substantially reducing their cost (Alexander, 1994a). Indeed, “MIDI allows musicians to bypass the professional recording studios until the very last moment (and sometimes entirely)” (Goodwin, 1990:49). Costs have now been lowered to such a degree that the reproduction of high quality sound recordings at home is now a viable possibility for artists:

Recording studios were highly privileged sites that allowed only those with sufficient resources to gain access to their facilities; now, with the growing ubiquity of digital recording media, . . . all manner of artists that might have been prevented from finding an audience through the normal narrow channels of the music industry at least now have the opportunity to do so (Leyshon, 2009:1317)

This suggests that it has become ever cheaper to produce a sound recording of considerable quality, and that this barrier to entry has dramatically plummeted. Thus, as a Music Broker for an independent A&R company revealed in an interview “the advent of home recording equipment [makes] it plausible if not probable that hundreds of thousands of people on a global scale, maybe millions of people . . . now have the ability to make very high-quality demos for next to

no money" (Leyshon et.al, 2005:195). However, according to Porter (1979) recording costs are not the only capital requirement of artists. If they are to be heard, their content must be distributed and therefore access to these channels is another cost.

### *Access to Distribution Channels*

Prior to the 'digitisation' of music - the potential for online storage of music as digital files, and the reconstitution of "music as a digital good" (Bockstedt, Kauffman and Riggins, 2004:1) - nationwide or even global distribution of one's music was largely dependent on securing deals with various distribution companies who would ensure that your product was delivered and displayed in various physical retail outlets for consumers to purchase. Brock (2013:191) notes how small "independent distributors were a significant alternative distribution channel" for musicians pre-1950, but that the structure of distribution networks underwent prolonged industrial concentration via horizontal mergers in the following decades (Greer, 1984). These distribution deals became expensive and were difficult to independently finance for artists (Black and Greer, 1987). Thus, they required mediating via record labels who might then recoup their costs later by severely limiting the amount of money received per sale by the artist themselves. As Jones (2002:217) notes, "the most critical monopoly held by the music industry was the means of distribution". Jones outlines how certain record labels owned particular retail outlets, thus wholly monopolizing retail access and distribution. This was relatively rare however, and, particularly in the United States, instead of record labels attempting to own the means of distribution, they "instead worked to co-opt the media vehicles that introduced music to the consumer, hence 'payola'" (Jones, 2002:217). Alexander (1994a:9) states unequivocally; "Distribution is a significant barrier to entry into the music recording industry". He hints in 1994 at the prospect of:

A digital delivery highway for the products of the music recording industry...[which] may potentially attenuate the effects of significant barriers to entry in the music recording industry... and likely stimulate a highly competitive producer market (Alexander, 1994a:9)

Alexander's vision has been realised. The 'digitisation of music' has revolutionised potential methods of music distribution available to artists. Digital sales accounted for 99.6% of all singles sold in 2012 (BPI, 2013:4). Waldfogel (2012) suggests that any artist can sell their music to the world for under \$10 using the service TuneCore; a revolution in access to distribution channels. This service allows artists to upload a track which they have made and, for a fee, sell it in the iTunes Store or on Amazon. An aspiring artist can have their work listed in the same digital music supermarket as The Beatles or The Rolling Stones, and the entire global marketplace can potentially discover their work, purchase it, and the artist would keep 100% of the sale money. There is no comparison to be made between this and the model of distribution proposed by Black and Greer (1987). Therefore, the capital requirements of creative labourers have dramatically reduced according to this literature, suggesting that with reference to Porter's first 'force', the threat of new entrants into the cultural marketplace is higher.

## *2) Threat of Substitute Products or Services - Higher*

Porter's second force is the extent to which there has been a heightened, or reduced, threat of substitute products or services. Perhaps the most discussed and fundamental technological shift to impact the music industry in recent decades has been the emergence of file-sharing and music piracy. A wealth of literature exists examining the impact of illegal online file sharing, with studies highlighting a decline in compact disc sales as a result of the explosion of the phenomenon (Hong, 2004; Stevans and Sessions, 2005; Zentner, 2008). This research essentially highlights the emergence of a new and important substitute product in the marketplace: the illegal download. Let us consider the options of consumers wishing to purchase music prior to digitalisation. Physical formats such as vinyl or cassette tape necessitated the physical purchase of an album by consumers. Certainly one might be able to avoid having to buy music via perhaps recording tracks off the radio onto a tape, however this did not represent a widely available, high-quality alternative to purchasing the physical format. Today, consumers are presented with a degree of choice regarding their consumption; a

legal and costly (relatively speaking) purchase of either the physical product or a download from an approved online retailer such as iTunes or Amazon, or, a free illegal download. Therefore, music which previously required fiscal expenditure, can theoretically be obtained for free. Porter (2008:31) states that the criteria for an effective substitute are “an attractive price performance trade off” (in this case very high), and when “the buyer’s cost of switching to the substitute is low” (again, valid, although not non existent as sacrificing sound quality, for example, might perhaps be considered a cost given the intensity of MPEG-3 (mp3) compression).

This is not to suggest that this product represents a perfect substitute, as after all digital downloads are increasingly important (BPI, 2013), and a market for physical CDs continues to exist, especially as gifts (IFPI, 2013:16). Furthermore, the service’s potential substitutability is mitigated by a variety of factors, not least the criminality of the behaviour, availability of internet access, as well as technological expertise. With reference to the latter, it is not a substitute at all if you do not possess the necessary e-literacy to find your desired song or album online, download it, extract the audio, and play it back in the format you desire. Nonetheless, a huge number of music consumers *do* make the decision to switch providers, from legal to illegal, from paying to free. Husak (2008:25) observes: “astronomical numbers of young adults have engaged in music piracy...52% of Internet users between the ages of 18 and 29 commit this crime by illegally downloading approximately 3.6 billion songs each month”. Amongst young people the phenomenon has become culturally institutionalised to a certain extent, as “trading music has become a way of life” (Wang, 2004:135), and people have become accustomed to doing so over the past decade (Walsh et.al, 2003). In this sense, whilst the two products (legal purchase and illegal free download) are not perfect substitutes, the two goods are substitutable in many senses. Therefore, we might reasonably say that the threat of substitute products or services is certainly higher than it was prior to the digitisation of music. Indeed, as Porter (2008:34) notes: “The most common reason substitutes become more or less threatening over time is that advances in technology create new substitutes”. This is precisely what has occurred.

3) *Bargaining Power of Suppliers - Lower*

4) *Bargaining Power of Buyers - Higher*

When discussing forces three and four it is helpful to group them together because the existence of this new substitute serves a dual function. In this first instance, it raises the bargaining power of buyers, who, if able, might now make the decision with very little switching costs from legal provision to free download (Andersson, Lahtinen and Pierce, 2009). Conversely, it reduces the bargaining power of suppliers (musicians) as after all, as Porter (2008:29) notes: “A supplier group is powerful if...there is no substitute for what the supplier group provides”. This is no longer the case. It thus makes sense to explore these two forces together given the symbiotic effect the emergence of the new product substitute has on them both. Economically, the emergence of the piracy-substitute has increased the elasticity of the market’s demand curve, suggesting that whilst on the one hand, suppliers increasingly have access to distribution channels, consumers on the other have access to alternative methods of consumption to circumnavigate these channels. In this sense “the Internet functions as an enabler as well as a threat simultaneously” (Andersson, Lahtinen and Pierce, 2009:4). The notion that the bargaining power of suppliers has fallen and the bargaining power of buyers increased, implies once again an increasingly competitive marketplace predicated upon technological innovation.

According to Porter’s (1979, 2008) analytical framework therefore, the digital music marketplace is an incredibly competitive one, and indeed, has become *increasingly* competitive largely due to technological innovations driving down barriers to entry and facilitating the birth of a viable, yet arguably perilous product substitute (for suppliers/artists at least); the illegal download. Given these two key technological shifts:

- The threat of entrants is higher
- The threat of substitute products or services is higher
- The bargaining power of suppliers is lower
- The bargaining power of buyers is higher, and;

- Rivalry within the industry is ferocious.

Whilst the field of cultural production certainly does not resemble the theoretical benchmark of pareto-efficiency-achieving perfect competition, when viewed as a conceptual continuum, the field has shifted in its composition towards the perfectly competitive end of the spectrum. Porter suggests there is an important link between competitiveness and subsequent behaviours, and that the competitive composition of a marketplace affects the strategies adopted by agents. However, his work and that of other competition economists tells us little about what form this strategy might take in creative markets, and therefore how this competition is experienced by artists. The work of Porter, and the industrial economic literature used to interpret and apply his theory to the contemporary music marketplace in this first section, can analyse the relative degrees of competition within a marketplace and hint at what those changes might mean for producers, but a purely economic schematic approach can tell us little regarding the adopted behavioural strategies of agents. It can only propose potential rationales for those behaviours. Whilst Porter's analysis acknowledges that producers must be acutely aware of compositional changes to the marketplace within which they operate and alter their strategies accordingly, his analytical framework cannot tell us what these strategies may be. This marketplace analysis suggests that the musical landscape is increasing in competitive ferocity, itself an important insight. However, it explains the dynamics of competition only so far and begs the question: how can we transcend marketised, structuralist accounts which operationalise competitive forces, and delve deeper into how this competitive environment is understood and experienced by producers? These technological advancements represent 'disruptive innovations' that can revolutionise the ways in which a business can operate predicated on its ability to react to these changes in the marketplace. Indeed, these innovations are often best exploited by new, smaller firms e.g. sole-trader producers such as artists, given that they "devote the vast majority of their resources to sustaining innovations" (Putz and Raynor, 2005:46). The question is, what is the nature of their strategic response?

In order to understand this, we must critically evaluate literature which explores creative labour's responses to abundance, and which asks: what happens when a creative marketplace is flooded, how do artists respond to this, and what are the central debates within the literature? Experiential questions of this type require a change of methodological scope away from marketplace analysis, towards qualitative behavioural exploration and interpretation; a change of research perspective from the marketplace, to the firm. In order to address the problems raised here, I require literature which links both an understanding of cultural markets as competitive, acknowledging the importance of competitiveness on strategy, whilst proposing what this competitiveness means for the behaviour of agents within the marketplace. That is, a perspective which proposes the behavioural implications of competitiveness. I thus require literature which understands the marketplace that Porter describes; one which has both undergone profound compositional change and is competitive, but which goes further by outlining how this marketplace impacts on the specific practices of creative agents within it. The work of Pierre Bourdieu achieves much of this synthesis, and it is therefore this work I will turn to in section two.

## **2.2. The Strategic Implications of Competition: Cultural Sociology**

This second section of the literature review will examine cultural sociological literature, particularly that of Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1993), to examine how a competitive cultural field is experienced by creative labour, and the strategic implications of this competitiveness. I have turned to Bourdieu as he is able to unite both the centrality of competition on strategy formation as seen in the economic literature of Porter (1979, 2008), but also proposes the specific behavioural ramifications of this competitiveness. The work of Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1993) on cultural markets acknowledges, like Porter (1979, 2008), that the artistic marketplace is not only a competitive one, but that this competitive structural composition has behavioural implications for agents. Competition is central to Bourdieu. He suggests that when human beings act, they do not do so in a vacuum but in a context and setting, and actions are consequentially adapted to settings. This setting is referred to as a field; a conceptual space in which

agents and their social positions are located. A field is a competitive, dynamic, structured social arena within which positioned agents fight for specific resources, be it money, prestige, etc, and they do this via drawing upon their existing resources. Thus, “in any given field, agents occupying the diverse available positions...engage in competition [one universal unvariant of fields] for control of the interests or resources which are specific to the field in question (Bourdieu, 1993:6). The field is then a “field of forces... and a field of struggles” (Bourdieu, 1998:24). His work, and its modern application using the literature of Lury and Warde (1997), Kovach and Rosenstiel (1999), Cronin (2004), Keen (2006, 2007), Seabright and Weeds (2007), Thompson (2010), Li (2012), Scott (2012) and others, can help me to understand:

- 1) The features of this competitive struggle in cultural markets, and;
- 2) The behavioural ramifications of this struggle for creative labour

#### *2.2.1. Features of Competitiveness: Cultural Intermediaries*

In the first instance, Bourdieu suggests that as cultural markets increase in competitiveness, complexity and abundance – as in the music marketplace of advanced capitalism – a particular group of agents will rise to prominence, a group he refers to as cultural intermediaries. If we hope to understand how competitiveness is experienced by creative labour, we must understand the role these intermediaries play in their lives, and thus the nature of intermediary-artist interaction. Bourdieu, building on the work of Becker (1982) in *Art Worlds*, suggests that competitive struggles within cultural markets concern not only struggles to produce works of art themselves, but struggles to achieve an acclaim and prestige which is socially constituted. As Negus and Pickering (2004:86) propose, this struggle “can involve authors, critics, entrepreneurs, and academics, as well as marketing staff, publicists and public relations people”. This struggle is a fight as agents seek “the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art” (ibid). This struggle then is a struggle between cultural intermediaries, and their relationship to both creative works, and creative labour itself. Cultural intermediaries are then central to the artistic experience of competitive struggle.

The first part of this section on cultural sociological literature will explore the debate in the literature surrounding the role cultural intermediaries come to play in the lives of artists. This will be done in two sections. Section one will examine literature from those who agree with Bourdieu and conceptualise intermediaries as essential for mitigating abundance (Thompson, 2010) and as necessary filters of content (Seabright and Weeds, 2007). Section two will turn to those who see them as a relic of a former era, unable to respond to a wealth of content (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 1999), that they have been rendered redundant (Robinson, 2008), and thus speak in terms of the ‘death of the intermediary’ (Keen, 2006, 2007). It is suggested that the contemporary nature of intermediary engagement in the lives of artists warrants more detailed research in order to understand the experience of competition. Porter proposed competitiveness impacts strategy; Bourdieu suggests that engagement with intermediaries is a central part of that strategy.

### *Intermediaries Mitigating Abundance*

‘Cultural intermediaries’ refer to:

All the occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services (Bourdieu, 1984:359)

Subsequent terms have included ‘style leaders’, ‘taste makers’, ‘opinion formers’, ‘leading-edge consumers’, ‘symbol specialists’ (Featherstone, 1991), or ‘cool hunters’ (Klein, 2001). In the music industry, these agents occupying the space between production and consumption might include journalists, radio DJs, commentators, PR representatives, advertisers, bloggers, etc (although Hesmondhalgh (2006:226) is critical of this wide conception of intermediaries adopted by Featherstone (1991), Negus (2011b) and others). Their role within the cultural economy is to interpret creative works, qualify them, disseminate them, and ultimately contribute towards their eventual appreciation as great and

successful (or poor and unsuccessful). They are then a creator of worth, a ‘generator of meaning’ (Wright, 2005). Bourdieu (1984) suggests that this group are of increasing importance as marketplaces increase in complexity and abundance, as we can observe in the contemporary music industry, not least for their ability to transmit information about the elaborate marketplace. In this sense there emerges “demand for expert knowledge to assist consumers in deciphering the increasingly complex cultural terrain” (Cronin, 2004:351).

This notion of intermediaries distributing the cultural goods being demanded in a world of digitalised abundance to assist decision-making, has found contemporary empirical support in the field of broadcasting (Seabright and Weeds, 2007). Akin to the music industry, barriers to entry have plummeted significantly reducing the costs of (potential) broadcasters, from processes of recording and editing, to broadcasting itself (Seabright and Weeds, 2007:48). There has then emerged an environment of abundance and intense competition between broadcasters. This competitive environment means that for viewers, on the one hand, their tastes are more easily catered for by niche broadcasters. However, viewers may find it incredibly hard to seek out their preferred content, and therefore, paradoxically, larger, more trusted broadcasters might be turned to in order to limit their seeking costs. The viewing public are conceptualised as “submerged in content”, drowning in “information overload” (Seabright and Weeds, 2007:51), and thus requiring an adequate method of content filtration. This filtering is increasingly done by larger, trusted broadcasters who can mitigate this abundance of choice. Intermediaries are therefore central in this competitive environment.

What of smaller corporations or creative labourers and their relationships with intermediaries? Intermediaries acting as reliable filtration methods to mitigate oversaturation are a key phenomenon in the book publishing industry too (Thompson, 2010). Figures such as Oprah (Winfrey) in the United States, or ‘Richard and Judy’ in the UK have become pivotal ‘recognition triggers’, and indeed: “By 2008 the Richard and Judy Book Club was accounting for 26 percent of the sales of the top 100 books in the UK” (Thompson, 2010:276). In this sense, whilst individual authors-come-publishers can place their works in

digital stores for the whole world to potentially see and purchase for little cost, the swamped marketplace means that consumers will, as in broadcasting, seek trusted intermediaries to mitigate their potentially lengthy search costs.

Of particular interest to my research focus, however, is not necessarily the ways in which intermediaries interact with consumers, but how they interact with producers. What literature is there on intermediaries in cultural markets which has a supply-side focus as well as a demand-side; that is, which examines their role not only in assisting consumption, but in their (perceived) importance by producers? Research into the field of advertising points to how intermediaries come to be demanded by suppliers as they “pray on producers’ anxiety and insecurity when faced by a world of unpredictable consumers by offering their commercial skills as a corrective” (Cronin 2004:363). Lury and Warde (1997:89) suggest that for producers of content, advertisers present themselves as possessing an apparently unique expertise to understand a mythical ‘consumer’, and therefore the existence of these representational intermediaries is predicated on the exploitation of “producer anxiety”. Advertisers thus emerge as intermediaries between the production of goods by producers who worry about finding sufficient numbers of consumers for their product, which is described as “a permanent source of insecurity, uncertainty and anxiety” (Lury and Warde, 1997:90), and consumers themselves. The suggestion is that intermediaries are ‘modern witch doctors’ selling their supposedly divine ability to interpret a consumer behaviour about which producers cannot possibly comprehend. However, Cronin (2004:352) proposes that these intermediaries are engaged in ‘regimes of mediation’, fulfilling a multiplicity of roles. They advertise themselves to producers as they must compete in their own competitive environment, but also seek, via branding, to make the complex marketplace of abundance not only more manageable and predictable for producers and consumers, but also for themselves. The role of intermediaries in competitive markets is then conceptualised as central not only to consumers, but producers, who accept the apparent ability of intermediaries to guide potential audiences toward their output. Conceptually and theoretically, this is fascinating for the manner with which it turns the analytical scope away from consumers, and how *they* interact with intermediaries, towards producers, and *their* relationship with

them. This work suggests that producers demand and need intermediaries in an environment of intense worry given their ability as a trusted distributor, and in this sense, intermediaries are a crucial component in how artists experience competition.

### *The Death of the Intermediary?*

Not all theorists or commentators accept the importance and increasing role of cultural intermediaries however, and suggest that the democratisation of distribution channels (as analysed in the economic literature) means middle-men are both not required, nor able to compete with the volume of output. This appears to be epitomised when, in 2012, the CEO of EMI Roger Faxon stated: “Major record labels, if they ever were, are no longer the gatekeepers. It's the music that matters, not the source anymore” (Balto, 2012). Keen (2006, 2007) philosophically dissects the implications of this era of abundance, in which anyone can, and does, publish, lambasting this model of cultural production by conceptually drawing upon the Babel objection that ‘when everyone has a voice, no one can be heard’. He laments the death of experts in the Web 2.0 era, suggesting that this digital ‘utopianism’ fetishizes amateurism and as a result, apparently democratic distribution platforms cannot possibly discern between, say, on YouTube, a ground-breaking documentary which might raise awareness of ecological concerns impacting the entire planet, and a 15 second clip of a baby monkey riding on the back of a pig. Indeed, the prevalence of such a plethora of media outlets means that the potential for expertise to distinguish greatness from triviality has been decimated. Keen (2006) suggests that in a world of over-abundance “without an elite mainstream media, we will lose our memory for things learnt, read, experienced, or heard”. His suggestion is that it is elite intermediaries who communicate our lived cultural reality and narrate our histories, and without them, we are simply lost in content.

Advancing a similar argument, Habermas (2006), grieves for the disappearance of intermediaries, these victims of competition: “the price we pay for the growth in egalitarianism offered by the Internet is the decentralized access to unedited stories. In this medium, contributions by intellectuals lose their power to create a

focus.” Professionalised elites have, this argument suggests, been lost in an ocean of content which they are unable to manage, leaving us all to the mercy of the wisdom of the infantilised crowd, and blurring the boundaries between “audience and author, creator and consumer, expert and amateur” (Keen, 2007:2). As Robinson (2008:55) suggests: “if anyone can publish anything and everyone’s opinion is as good as everybody else’s, how are we to have any sense of truth, judgment and value?” This argument is developed further, with the suggestion that in this ‘mixed media culture’ era of proliferation, classic elites simply cannot compete with the pace of information, and therefore “the proliferation of outlets diminishes the authority of any one outlet to play a gatekeeper role over the information it publishes” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 1999:7). This literature conceptualises intermediaries as, unfortunately, having been rendered redundant due to their inability to effectively manage the plethora of content available.

Not all conceptualise this ‘death of the intermediary’ in such negative terms. Ward (2009) quotes a film producer who suggests: “The gatekeepers in the old days controlled everything, but with new technology there are no more gatekeepers. Everybody can get their film out. It’s very democratic”. This apparent democratizing potential is espoused, and its political potential enthusiastically welcomed: “The new Web is open and democratic. There are no gatekeepers” (Solomon and Schrum, 2007:14). This optimistic interpretation of the ‘death of the intermediary’ theory, suggests that creative labour can increasingly interact directly with its potential audience without the need for intermediary middle-men deciding what is and is not worthwhile of transmission. Indeed, in *Music Week* in 2007, a CEO of a music website enthusiastically proclaimed:

The [music] industry is returning to the most basic and exciting element of all, the raw ability of an artist to communicate with their audience on their own merits and not as the subject of colossal media hype. There are no longer any filters, any arbiters of taste, any barriers; only artists and consumers whose appetite for music today is insatiable (Walsh, 2007:16).

However, it may be that this digital utopianism is not wholly accurate, and that we have in fact simply swapped one set of intermediaries for another. Knobel and Lankshear (2010:142) suggest that “much has been made of the potential for new models of digital distribution to bypass these traditional gatekeepers altogether...to immediately and cost-effectively distribute their product to targeted niche audiences”. This theory is epitomised by Anderson’s (2006:52) ‘Long Tail’ Hypothesis, that “in an era without the constraints of limited shelf space and other bottlenecks of distribution, narrowly targeted goods and services can be as economically viable as mainstream fare”. However, intermediaries still have a role to play in the ‘Long Tail’ philosophy, predicated on the model; (a) make everything available, and, in addition (b) help the user find it. Indeed, how does one ‘get heard’ in an era of post-filtering? The questions this debate raises are: in a digital supermarket with an endless aisle, how do artists stand out to consumers, and crucially, do intermediaries have a role in this? Therefore, what role do intermediaries have in the artistic experience of competition?

### *Research Question*

This debate within cultural sociology concerning the contested role of cultural intermediaries in competitive cultural markets, raises the question as to whether competitiveness engenders the increasing importance of intermediaries in the lives of artists, or if it undermines their role. It generates a number of questions concerning whether or not Bourdieu and others are accurate in their assertion of the importance of cultural intermediaries in an artist’s route to market and whether or not they have remained a crucial part of the current creative economy. The contemporary nature of their role and influence on creative labour, and thus how they experience a competitive marketplace, is not clear, nor is the exact nature of their interaction with them. It is unclear how much importance, if any, artists today attribute to cultural intermediaries. Have new digital technologies created an environment where artists are now able to interact directly with their audience, thus rendering cultural intermediaries worthless? Or are there instead

new “commercial structures now emerging introduc[ing] a new and different set of gatekeepers, blockages and bottlenecks” (Lobato, 2009)?

The debate is one between a form of collectivism, of creative collaboration, and individualism, a self-realisation of aesthetic aims. On the one hand we have the work of Becker (1982), Bourdieu (1984), and Negus (2011b), which conceptualises intermediary engagement as central to the experience of competitive struggle, constituting a collaborative approach to nurturing social relations. However, what is striking about this work is that the interactions with intermediaries are often undertaken by other intermediaries, and it does not account for the nature of artistic interaction given the research focus being directed towards, say, ‘the music industry’ (a world which unsigned artists have not yet entered). For example, within the world of publishing, Bourdieu and Nice (1980:266) suggest that publishers promote authors in ways that they could not do themselves, therefore acting as a “protective screen between the artist and the market”. In much the same way, within the music industry, Negus (2011b) examines how A&R men, radio pluggers, publicists, lawyers, accountants and business managers, interact with radio station DJs, broadcasters, journalists and record companies in order to ‘build the brand’ of the artist. Intermediary interaction is then co-operative. However, for contemporary scholars who do not subscribe to the importance of intermediaries, there is *no* interaction, and if there is, it is wholly unimportant, as artists individually realise their creative aims.

It thus appears there has been insufficient attention paid to analysing the role cultural intermediaries play in the lives of creative labourers themselves, and their relationship to the competitive experience. Indeed, as Cronin (2004:350) notes: “This lack of analysis is particularly striking given the widespread claims about the growth in significance of such cultural intermediaries”. Indeed, one of the most ferocious advocates concerning the centrality of these occupations (Featherstone, 1991) cites no empirical evidence to ground his assertions. As Nixon and du Gay (2002:500) suggested in a *Cultural Studies* special on the subject: “a more sober assessment of these groups which avoids the pitfalls of either celebration or denunciation [is needed]”, and indeed (Negus, 2002:504) proposes that “the study of cultural intermediaries should provide important

insights into the changing dynamics of contemporary capitalism". By seeking to understand how creative labour currently interacts, or not, with cultural intermediaries, I will be examining how artists in a modern, competitive marketplace look to 'mobilise resources' (Becker, 1982:68) and the nature of the investments required to facilitate this mobilisation of personnel (ibid:70). The debates within the literature examined herein, leaves researchers unsure as to the exact role intermediaries play in how creative labour experiences competitiveness. Whilst research exists which examines the behavioural practices of intermediaries themselves within creative musical economics (most notably Negus, 2011b), the nature of the relationship from the perspective of artists is required. Indeed, Scott (2012) suggests that artists seek the attention of cultural intermediaries; however, if they are important, we must ascertain how they strategically capture their attention. Therefore, engaging with this debate generates the following research question:

**RQ1. What role do cultural intermediaries play in the lives of creative labour in a competitive market? Why do they occupy this role?**

However, Bourdieu does not merely provide a descriptive account of creative markets as competitive and with intermediaries assuming an ever more important role in how competition is experienced. He goes further and provides a theoretical framework within which to understand the experience of competitiveness, including the intermediary-artist relationship, in the context of a general economy of practices. In the second section of this part of the literature review, I examine how Bourdieu makes sense of the behaviour of creative labour in competitive markets within a conceptual framework allowing researchers to interpret and analyse social practices. His approach allows researchers to not only observe competitive practices, but *make sense of* the competitive experience. However, this section will also outline how within Bourdieu's theory, he suggests that external pressures on the field might change the 'rules of the game'. I thus turn to contemporary, post-digital explorations into the operation of capital interplay, and suggest that in order to more fully understand how competition is experienced, more research is required into the contemporary operation of capital, and in particular, processes of transubstantiation.

### *2.2.2. Behavioural Ramifications of Struggle: Capital Interplay*

Central to Bourdieu's analysis of the competitive cultural marketplace is the role of various forms of 'capital', and in particular their acquisition, maximisation and transubstantiation. Benson (2006:190) suggests that this occurs within fields "of struggle in which individuals and organisations compete, unconsciously and consciously, to valorise those forms of capital which they possess". Three main types of capital are distinguished by Bourdieu. Primarily there exists 'economic capital' – money – which he suggests reductionist economics has collapsed the entirety of the world's concerns to (Bourdieu, 1986:242). However, he proposes the additional existence of 'social capital' defined, in classic Bourdieusian prose, as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (ibid:248). In other words, this represents ones network of relationships conceptualised in this instance as encompassing relationships with cultural intermediaries (amongst others). In this sense we must understand any interactions with cultural intermediaries in terms of attempts to maximise social capital reserves. He furthermore suggests that artists will seek to acquire, and draw upon, 'cultural capital'. This can be understood as prestige, acclaim, or standing with one's peers and is further subcategorised into:

- (i) 'Institutionalised cultural capital' - a conferred institutional recognition to allow comparison, such as an academic qualification
- (ii) 'Objectified cultural capital' - the materially transmittable cultural object such as a painting, a book or a song, and;
- (iii) 'Embodied cultural capital' - "the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (Bourdieu, 1986:243).

Within Bourdieu's 'general science of the economy of practices', all game-players seek the maximisation of profit, but his schematic diverges from economic conceptualisations of behaviour, as not all profit is necessarily economic. The relationship between the forms of capital has been conceptualised as a process of 'capital interplay' (Goxe, 2010). Capital interplay then *is* the competitive experience. Artists will compete, Bourdieu suggests, to try and

acquire, maximise and crucially, transubstantiate (that is, to convert into one another) these types of capital according to the specific *laws of the field*.

What then are the *laws of the cultural field*? With reference to economic capital, Bourdieu suggests that “in the cultural field competition often concerns the authority inherent in recognition, consecration and prestige” (Bourdieu and Jonhson, 1993:7), and therefore the maximisation of this ‘symbolic/cultural’ (as opposed to say, economic) capital. He suggests that it is a market in maximising cultural capital as opposed to money, and that cultural production is in fact the ‘economic world reversed’ based on a ‘winner loses’ logic, given that avowal of economic interest can in fact work against artists as it is culturally unpopular (Bourdieu, 1986:110). This is not to say that the two forms of capital are mutually exclusive, but in order to avoid critical condemnation and thus a loss of symbolic power, creative labour must dance a perilous dance. Monetary compensation for one’s efforts are, of course, to a certain extent permitted, but one must maintain a veneer of disinterestedness to ensure the maintenance of one’s reputation and artistic credibility, and thus the maximisation of symbolic capital.

There is an explicit pragmatism in the suggestion that “‘economic’ interest...always haunts the most ‘disinterested’ practices” (Bourdieu, 1993:75) and thus artists must develop strategies to “defend their interests or conceal their strategies” (ibid). The tightrope-walking artist, centred via a balancing pole weighted with undeniable economic wants at one end, and the desire for ‘respect’ at the other, must maintain a delicate equilibrium to avoid an untimely demise. Being “blown off course [by]...the temptation to expand”, what Bourdieu and Nice (1980:262) call “go[ing] commercial”, is indeed a threat, and he proposes that the allure of material rewards offered by the marketplace are in fact an Edenic fruit, poised to poison the accumulated symbolic capital of artists, earning them a Noachian deluge of condemnation. This delicate scenario then suggests that the pursuit of economic capital is akin to the artistic original sin, “slier than every beast of the field” (NIV, Genesis 3), which might readily snatch away accumulated symbolic/cultural capital. Indeed, “all creators have to find an audience” (Hesmondhalgh, 2012:82), and, as Austin (2009:19) suggests,

“practicalities always enter into art”; and commercial concerns are a kind of ‘practicality’. However, the explicit articulation of this desire could prove dangerous in certain subcultural niches (Hesmondhalgh, 2012:291). With reference to capital acquisition therefore, the theoretical suggestion of Bourdieu is that within specific creative industries, cultural capital is to be acquired and maximised, and economic capital shunned. Historically, we can find examples of Bourdieu’s ideas; Nietzsche famously turned his back on his musical idol, Wagner, after discovering both his achievement of, and desire for, commercial accolades (Monthoux, 2004: 65). He felt increasingly “betrayed by Wagner’s willingness to fix his attention on anything but the highest aesthetic aims” (Austin, 2009:16).

However, the laws of the field can change. This is precisely what we can observe in the contemporary music industry as seen in the economic literature of Porter and others. This leads one to question; if this occurs, is competition still experienced in the same way? Swedberg (2011:9) notes that ‘fields’ are a “stable configuration...quite resistant to change”. However, changes often occur via external pressures and there might then occur “a redefinition of the boundaries [which] can also open up the field to important changes in the field” (*ibid*) i.e. the processes outlined in the economic literature. In a similar vein, for Thompson (2010:298): “Economic turbulence gives rise to renewed questioning of the rules of the game to new ventures that could, in some ways and to some extent, change the rules”. It is this which economic literature suggests we can observe in the music industry today; turbulence which may have changed the rules of the game. If Bourdieu is accurate, these changes must have profound implications for the rules of the field (*doxa*) and the subsequent behavioural strategies adopted by agents (*habitus*); that is, for how competition is experienced. A variety of factors exist which *force* game-players to adapt and behave in specific restricted ways according to the rules of the field, and to thus “obeys its own laws” (Bourdieu, 1998:39). However, there exists scope for innovation and the formation of strategy to manage such resource competition via the operation of an agent’s ‘*habitus*’; a set of dispositions generating practices, perceptions and attitudes acquired via socialisation, which are structured, and reflect the social situation in which they were acquired. For Bourdieu, these behavioural responses to

structural changes are constituted by competitiveness. However, if the rules of the field have changed, as the economic literature of Porter (1979, 2008) and others suggested in part one of this literature review, we might reasonably expect that the behavioural rules have changed too.

### *New Game, New Rules?*

How can we make sense of these processes of ‘capital interplay’ in a contemporary, digital context? How can we understand the way in which creative labour experiences competition *today* vis-à-vis the acquisition, maximisation and transubstantiation of various forms of capital? Literature examining the nature of capital transubstantiation in digitalised cultural markets in particular is not widespread. Li (2012) explored the nature of capital transubstantiation within a US newspaper newsroom and similarly drew upon Bourdieu’s suggestion that the journalistic field was polarized between economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2005). She suggests that capital conversions are predicated on power dynamics, and that therefore “a field with a strong economic capital can devote time and resources to produce cultural capital; a field with a strong cultural capital or symbolic capital can also generate more economic capital” (Li, 2012:13). She notes the ease with which economic capital can be converted into cultural capital given that financial investments allow newsrooms to be equipped with the resources – be it staff, equipment, etc. – in order to “produce better quality media goods” (ibid:25). Furthermore, evidence from the journalistic field suggests that economic capital begets economic capital as one’s quality of product is improved which is then monetised as one’s audience increases (Lacy & Fico, 1991); an empirically operationalised conceptualisation of the adage that ‘you’ve got to spend money to make money’. This research proposes that within journalism the focus should remain on producing quality content and thus maximising cultural capital, as this is what consumers crave. This will then generate economic capital too as consumers purchase this ‘quality’ product. However, the maximisation of cultural capital via the creation of quality content is predicated on an investment of economic capital to allow the work to take place in the first instance. She therefore observes a strong interconvertibility

between economic capital and cultural capital within the context of a journalistic field undergoing profound technological change.

What of transubstantiation by music artists? After all, the processes by which journalistic content can be monetised are likely to be very different in an industry within which consumers have a choice over whether to pay or not<sup>1</sup>. Scott (2012) has examined the nature of this capital interplay amongst music producers in New Zealand in a process he refers to as ‘capital mobilisation’. In his ethnographic study, he employs a Bourdieusian theoretical framework to analyse the behavioural practices of creative labour, and proposes that they seek to build a ‘buzz’ by cultivating networks with cultural intermediaries in a largely monetary free environment of ‘favours’ in a neo-Maussian gift economy (Mauss, 1967). In this sense they seek to exploit social capital reserves and invest them in order to utilise their exchange-value, thus transubstantiating social capital into cultural capital. In this sense, he highlights a strong interconvertibility between social capital and cultural capital, and suggests that this capital conversion is the most crucial for unsigned artists. However, economic capital is not especially prevalent in his research, as he sees much of this interaction occurring in a ‘sans capital’ environment. As such the work does not address concerns relating to the role of money in the lives of artists, such as where they both spend their money, and earn it.

### *Research Questions*

There is a contradiction in this small field of research into the operation of capital within contemporary cultural markets. With reference to capital transubstantiation, some theorists, even in the work of Li (2012), see economic capital at the very root of interconvertibility, and as the most central of capitals. With reference to education for example, Goldthorpe (1996) suggests that it is the most significant in facilitating the mobilisation of other resources. In this sense, the expenditure of money is crucial for the creation of quality products which might allow for the maximisation of cultural capital, and in financing

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 31-33

networking opportunities to bolster ones social capital. By extension, Casey (2008:4) suggests that money is the easiest capital to convert: “economic capital converts with greater ease into other forms of capital than vice-versa”. However, the work of Scott (2012) seems to reject the notion that finance is crucial in the competitive experience for underground musicians, namely because they simply don’t have any money. Indeed, for Bourdieu, economic capital is shunned by creative labour, but that is not to say accumulated cultural capital cannot translate into fiscal rewards. Moore (2004:455) takes this analysis further and proposes that “cultural capital must be understood as a transubstantiated form of economic capital”. Rejecting the notion of economic disinterestedness, he suggests that; “The appearance of the cultural field is that of disinterestedness...The reality of the cultural is subject to systematic misrecognition” (ibid). Some scholars accept that economic capital is crucial for facilitating transubstantiation, or indeed is the only method of conversion (Moore, 2004). Any analysis therefore of capital interplay must have a focus on money, and the role it plays in the lives of artists, and in their experience of competitiveness. Are artists today less reliant on economic capital, and are they able to perform capital conversion using other forms of capital more easily than currently imagined as per the suggestion of Scott (2012)? Or are contemporary processes of transubstantiation hiding a different reality? Ultimately, it appears that there is a degree of uncertainty over the way in which the forms of capital operate in contemporary cultural markets.

Little empirical work on the specific processes of the transubstantiation of capital in creative industries exists and thus an investigation into this field can contribute to a notable gap in existing scholarship on the nature of capital, capital interplay and the contemporary applicability, or not, of the Bourdieusian theory of competitive struggle. The literature on capital transubstantiation leaves the reader wondering how these processes might work in the contemporary creative marketplace, and how one can make sense of the ways in which today’s artists are able (or not) to both acquire various types of capital, and then convert them into one another. After all, this process of capital interplay is, for Bourdieu, the very essence of the competitive experience. Economic literature suggests that artistic input-costs have been driven down, but cultural sociology asks whether we can examine this process microsociologically, and make sense of what the

artistic climate is like vis-à-vis costs and expenditure incurred and profits earned (pecuniary and non). Engaging with these debates leads me to wonder if the creative marketplace continues to be a market in maximising cultural capital at the expense of economic whilst fiscal resources remain central to facilitate capital conversions, or whether the economic changes discussed have transformed this Bourdieu-observed dynamic, creating an environment of new technological possibilities. In other words, are Bourdieu's methods of capital interplay still the 'law of the field'? To employ the terminology of Thompson (2010): if the rules of the game have changed, how is it being played today? This therefore leads me to present the second research question which will allow me to more fully seek to make sense of how competition is experienced:

**RQ2a. In an increasingly competitive environment, how are artists acquiring, maximising and transubstantiating forms of Bourdieu-defined capital?**

A dissertation on the experience of competition requires that this issue be addressed, as for Bourdieu, capital interplay *is* the competitive experience. The ways in which artists seek to acquire, maximise and transubstantiate capital represent the behavioural responses to competitive forces. However, uncertainty concerning the operation of economic capital in cultural markets presents a quandary. If it is the case that economic capital is the most central form of capital and easiest to convert (Goldthorpe, 1996; Casey, 2008; Li, 2012), and yet, within the cultural field there exists an apparent disavowal of economic capital, how do artists survive? After all, as Virginia Woolf wrote, great art requires an artist to have "money and a room of one's own" (Woolf, 2001:127). Throsby (1992:202) notes: "artists, like everyone else, have to earn their living...[and yet]...it is an observable fact that many artists are...obliged to take work outside the arts, in order to earn enough income to survive and be able to continue practising their art". Existing research begs the question as to whether the profound economic changes to have impacted the music industry have made the kind of interconvertibility proposed by Bourdieu ever easier, harder, or simply different. By implication, to what extent does this allow one to comment on the sustainability of creativity in this context? That is, "in a cultural economy of low

expectations about earning enough to sustain a creative practice" (Schleisinger and Waelde, 2012:19), how do artists survive? By exploring the contemporary relevance of previous conceptions of capital accumulation and conversion for today's artists, we can seek to understand if artists are still struggling to convert social/cultural capital and thus sustain themselves, and therefore explore concepts relating to the sustainability of creativity in a competitive context.

Whilst that there are non-economic reasons to produce goods and services, as per Morton and Podolny (2002) in their work on California wine-producers who maximise quality at the expense of economic profit given their 'love' for the product, one must, as proposed, still eat. Understanding the contemporary operation of capital interplay by examining the empirical accuracy of the literature discussed herein allows us to make sense of how artists survive and sustain their craft today. Competition is, in its very nature, a process of survival after all, and thus any discussion of competitiveness must account for how artists survive.

As artists ceased to survive under systems of aristocratic or theocratic patronage, so new sources of sustenance had to be found. In recent British history, there has been an inadvertent, and then explicit, relationship between welfare provision and artistic survival. Between the eras of post-war 'consensus' welfare politics and neo-liberal Thatcherism (1960's - 1980's), the apparatus of the state and of social democracy, in the form of welfare provisions as well as generous higher education grants, was able to provide 'indirect' funding to facilitate musical experimentation (Fisher, 2014:12). As O'Rorke (1998) suggests, the 'dole made Britain swing'; a process referred to as "the benefits system covertly funding pop" (Cloonan, 2002:63). As New Labour came to power, there was a shift from this implicit government support, to a more promotional method of market interventionism in the form of the 'New Deal for Musicians'. This state benefit acted alongside Job Seekers Allowance to allow unemployed musicians the time and funds to pursue their craft, and benefited artists such as James Morrison and The Zutons. There was a duality in the relationship between the state and the music industry; in the face of copyright and piracy, the industry needed the state, and given that only EMI remained British owned and able to generate wealth for the UK, so the state needed the industry. However, what has become of these

forms of state support for the arts in an environment of austerity where creative arts budgets are slashed philosophically and conceptually underpinned by reductionist notions of instrumental rationalisation, exemplified by, for example, the abolition of the UK Film Council (House of Commons, 2011:11)? Finnegan (1989) highlighted the multiplicity of income sources required for artists to survive even in the pre-digital era, and recent work by Schleisinger and Waelde (2012:12) highlights the prevalence of ‘portfolio’ work for artists today; a “combination of various forms of paid labour to enable them to pursue their art”. This ‘cross-subsidisation’ is necessitated by the fact that the creative labourers they interviewed could earn very little from their creative work, and thus were involved in numerous other jobs, such as education or journalism. This suggests that they are struggling to convert their social or cultural capital, into economic capital. Like Scott (2012), Schleisinger and Waelde (2012) note the importance of ‘gift-giving’ within creative economies, and one of their interviewees asked the question: “How can this be turned into a more sustainable situation” (Schleisinger and Waelde, 2012:22)? Thus, I ask:

**RQ2b. Given contemporary processes of capital interplay, how do artists survive and sustain their craft?**

The economic literature of Porter (1979, 2008), Alexander (1994a, 1994b), Leyshon (2009) and others in part one of this literature review, sought to understand competitiveness at the level of the marketplace, suggesting that the cultural marketplace has become increasingly competitive. The examination of cultural sociological literature in part two sought to make sense of the behavioural ramifications of competitiveness. The work of Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1993), Lury and Warde (1997), Li (2012), Scott (2012) and others, suggests how creative labour strategically deals with the practicalities of artistic creation in a competitive context. However, this literature does not tell us how having to deal with these practicalities, impacts artists, and their art. It can tell about the practicalities of art, but not what the ramifications of having to attend to these practicalities are. That is, economics suggests that competition impacts the behaviours of artists, and cultural sociology debates what these behaviours might be, but this leave the reader wondering how the act of *engaging in these*

*behaviours* impacts the lives of artists. Competition forces game players to behave in a particular way, but to gain a deeper understanding of the competitive experience, we must explore how playing the game impacts how players understand and experience *the game itself*. This is what is missing from the literature thus far; studies of creative labour which evaluate the ways in which the behavioural ramifications of competitiveness impact on how artists understand their artistry. If capital interplay is a response to competitiveness, how do artists respond to this necessitated capital interplay? Thus, I will now turn to the creative labour literature which has grappled with how the strategic, behavioural responses to competition impacts on artists, and examine debates within this expanding area of research. Not only does this allow for a deeper and more multi-faceted understanding of the competitive experience, but will also serve to contextualise a study of this nature within a contemporary research tradition, suggesting that if I am to produce a study of creative labour, it is important to situate my work within this field of scholarship, and existing studies of this nature.

### **2.3 The Impact of Strategy on Artists: Creative Labour**

This third and final part of the literature review will explore how researchers studying contemporary creative labour have sought to not only characterise behavioural responses to competitiveness, suggesting it represents entrepreneurship, but also evaluate how these necessitated behaviours have impacted on artists. Creative labour scholars have conceptualised the strategic responses to competition as ‘entrepreneurship’, employing terminology such as ‘cultural entrepreneurs’ (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999; Scott, 2012), ‘art entrepreneurship’ (Aggestam, 2007), or ‘knowledge economy entrepreneurs’ (Molloy and Larner, 2010). This work proposes therefore that the behavioural responses to competitiveness by creative labour should be interpreted as an entrepreneurial orientation towards creativity. However, there is a debate within the literature. This debate will be addressed in two sections. Following an introductory section highlighting literature which posits the existence of artistic entrepreneurialism but which reserves judgement as to its impact (Finnegan,

1989; Scott, 2012), section one evaluates research which suggests that this marketplace engagement by creative labour - being forced to respond to competitiveness by acting entrepreneurially - hampers and restricts artistry (Cohen, 1991; McRobbie, 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007; Fisher, 2014), is emotionally stressful (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2011) and de-motivates artists (Amabile, 1979, 1982, 1983). Section two examines research which has an alternative perspective, suggesting that being aware of one's involvement in a competitive marketplace is beneficial, serving as creative inspiration (Skov, 2002; Molly and Larner, 2010), as well as motivating artists (Cowen, 1998; Clydesdale, 2006; Eisenberg and Thompson, 2011). This final section of the literature will generate the final research question to be addressed in this thesis on how competition is experienced by engaging with this debate and suggesting that we should seek the perspective of artists themselves, and how they feel that 'mandatory entrepreneurship' (Fisher, 2014) - the behavioural responses to competitiveness vis-à-vis the practicalities of art - impacts them as artists.

### *2.3.1. Entrepreneurship and Artists*

Studies of creative labour focussing on grass-roots musicians have highlighted an entrepreneurial approach to creativity. Finnegan's (1989) work *The Hidden Musicians* illuminated creative labour engaging in what might be understood as entrepreneurial activity even in a pre-digital age. Her ethnographic study of musicians in Milton Keynes highlighted bands such as The Scream and the Fits, "produc[ing] their own T shirts as publicity" (ibid:112), The Void "distributing [their single] by mail order and advertising in the national music press" (ibid:114), and Synonomous taking "a business approach to their earnings and organisation" (ibid:119). She conceptualised these bands as businesses, except that they invariably operated at a monetary loss. As per Bourdieu, she saw economic capital lost as cultural capital was maximised. However, Finnegan reserves judgement as to the impact of this entrepreneurial orientation on artistry.

Thematically centralising debates surrounding capital interplay and artistic entrepreneurship amongst 'Do It Yourself' artists, is recent work by Scott (2012).

He conceptualises artistic behavioural processes as ‘capital mobilisation’, and as distinctly entrepreneurial; a risky attempt to render the creative as a future ‘subject of value’. However, this entrepreneurship is interesting given that it occurs in a largely fiscal-free environment - ‘sans capital’. In many respects, the work of Scott (2012) comes closest to realising the vision towards which this literature has been directed; a detailed study of a specific subcultural niche of musical creative labour, their behavioural practices conceptualised within a Bourdieusian theoretical framework and reconceptualising entrepreneurialism within creative industries. Scott (2012:251) acknowledges however that “it is difficult to recount what are highly nuanced social exchanges without more exhaustive fieldwork”, and in this sense it would be beneficial to build upon his findings. His work serves to observe and loosely operationalise entrepreneurialism, but comments little on the extent to which this form of marketplace engagement impacts the creative process itself, nor does he offer any judgement on this matter. However, many researchers have suggested how this entrepreneurialism impacts artists, with some highlighting the negative implications, and others adopting a form of ‘cultural optimism’ (Cowen, 1998), suggesting that it has positive implications.

### *Negative Implications: Crowding-Out and De-Motivating*

Entrepreneurial creativity emerging as a direct result of a highly competitive environment can be found in Cohen’s (1991) ethnography of rock bands in Liverpool; an environment where, according to a survey in the early 1980’s, there were nearly 1000 bands in Liverpool necessitating “a frenzy of self promotion” (Cohen, 1991:1) e.g. distributing business cards, posting tapes to record labels, or having logos stencilled on jackets (ibid:59). Her study explores the conflict between creativity and commerce, and depicts creative labour having to increasingly “think more in terms of the market” (ibid:106). Cohen highlights the tension between this marketplace engagement and creative practices, suggesting that this necessitated entrepreneurship hampers creative pursuits, or at least was perceived to by the musicians themselves. She suggests that artists felt that “their music making was constrained by commercialism” (Cohen,

1991:194). The overriding theme of her study was how artists in this specific geographic locale sought to make sense of these contradictions in their creative practice.

The increasingly entrepreneurial nature of creative work by labourers competitively forced to engage with the concerns of the marketplace emerges thematically in the work of McRobbie (2002) too. She notes that developing a more “entrepreneurial character” (ibid:519) given the requirements of self promotion and public relations management, a process which is dependent largely on one’s social networks, is key for career progression. Again, she proposes that this process is largely necessitated by competitive forces (ibid:523). In this sense, “cultural production is increasingly driven by the imperatives of market and the consumer culture” (ibid:525). Akin to Cohen (1991), McRobbie (2002:523) sees this marketplace engagement as hampering creativity and innovation given that artists are forced to spend a large amount of their time dealing with the practicalities of art, meaning that, as a result, they have less free time to be creative and undertake what she calls ‘independent work’.

The suggestion that cultural entrepreneurship is at odds with creative practice, is a notion akin to that of proponents of a ‘crowding-out’ theory. Eikhof and Haunschild (2007:523) in their study of German theatre suggest that creative labour should not engage with the financial demands of the marketplace given that “economic logics tend to crowd out artistic logics and thus endanger the resources vital to creative production”. It is a suggestion echoed by Austin (2009:25): “Art often doesn’t get marketed effectively by artists for an understandable reason: Most artists want to do art, not business”. Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh (2012:82) when speaking of the apparently romanticised tension between creativity and commerce, mentions that classically, in the West, it is assumed that “symbolic creativity can only flourish if it is as far away from commerce as possible”. This is certainly the argument of Fisher (2014:13) who suggests that ”producing the new depends upon certain kinds of withdrawal – from, for instance, sociality”. He suggests that as artists have become increasingly aware of, and engaged with, the marketplace, with all of the

urgencies, pressures and time constraints this encompasses, particularly the relentlessness of interactivity in cyberspace, so artistry suffers. He suggests a simple mind game as evidence. Imagine playing a record which had been made today, in 2014, twenty years earlier, in 1994. Would anyone be shocked at the trajectory of the creativity of future? He says no. Now, imagine playing a record from 1994, such as anything from the genre of jungle say, twenty years earlier in 1974, and people would be, he suggests, unable to conceive of such experimentation and novelty. He calls this process, ‘the slow cancellation of the future’, whereby innovation has ‘slackened’. As the machinery of social democracy has been eroded – grants for higher education, social housing, etc. – he argues, like McRobbie (2002), that artists no longer have the time to be ‘creative’, and instead become agents within a marketplace context, and are less creative as a result.

This environment, away from commerce, and therefore shielded from competitive forces, was historically one of patronage. The methodology and rationale behind this system is excellently articulated in a letter written by Archduke Rudolf, Prince Lobkowitz and Prince Kinsky in 1809 on Beethoven: “The undersigned have decided to place Herr Ludwig van Beethoven in a position where the necessities of life shall not cause him embarrassment or clog his powerful genius” (Cowen, 1998:141). Patronage was then a system of financial support offered often by royalty or nobility, to allow artists the time, space and necessary resources to ‘create’. In this environment, the artist could create work at his leisure and free from populist demands. Indeed, Haydn chose to retire back under the system of patronage from that of a more explicit form of marketplace engagement predicated on relying on a paying public for subsistence. As Haydn himself noted: “I could, as head of an orchestra, make experiments, observe what enhanced an effect, and what weakened it, thus improving, adding to, cutting away, and running risks. I was set apart from the world, there was nobody in my vicinity to confuse and annoy me” (Blanning, 2008: 28). This sentiment of Haydn, is akin to the notion proposed by McRobbie (2002), Eikhof and Haunschild (2007), and Fisher (2014); creativity thrives only when it can be free from the practicalities of the marketplace. This leads one to

wonder; to what extent is an environment of increasing competitiveness engendering an entrepreneurialism which compromises artistic integrity?

There is a suggestion that the process of engaging with the practicalities of art can not only be creatively damaging, but psychologically and emotionally distressing too, serving to de-motivate artists (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2011). Describing a ‘reservoir’ of cultural labour, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) outline in economic terms how the sheer supply of labour in cultural industries has depressed wages to the point, for many, of absolute zero. This is epitomised in many of the young people they spoke to working for free in internships. A style of networking which has been necessitated by competitive forces – a post-work ‘down the pub’ culture – means that not only are the boundaries between “socialising for pleasure and networking for work” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011:13), blurred to unintelligible degrees, but that it also blurs friendship boundaries. This causes many workers to question the authenticity of their friendships. Thus the distinction between work and home life, and friend and work colleague, are eroded as “we see the blurring of pleasure and obligation, freedom and constraint. The blurring of networking and socialising means it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a boundary around working life” (ibid). Tie this in with the paradoxically ‘crippling’ isolation which many freelance workers spoke of as they stated how they “don’t talk to anyone and... don’t see anyone” (Interview 46)” (ibid) which serves to desperately undermine their motivation, and the picture painted of the world of creative labourers, and how they experience the necessitated behavioural and strategic responses to competitiveness, is not an especially pleasant one. This emotional dimension to creative work is crucial to acknowledge therefore (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008:103).

This relationship between being involved in a competitive marketplace—aware of the demands and pressures of an audience and the expectations these can place on creative practice – and the demotivating effect this can have on artists, is more explicitly built upon in empirical studies of creativity. Hughes and McCullough (1982:305) refer to the way in which Sylvia Plath suffered from the pressures of the marketplace, when she stated: “Editors and publishers and critics and the

World...I want acceptance there, and to feel my work good and well-taken. Which ironically freezes me at my work". She suggested that it 'corrupts' her artistry; being aware of the expectations, demands and pressures of her audience undermined her writing and de-motivated her. This anecdote has been theoretically articulated as 'the intrinsic motivation hypothesis of creativity' (Amabile, 1983). This suggests that one is most creative when motivated by their own, pure, intrinsic motivation, and that thus, creativity is undermined by external pressures, or 'extrinsic constraints'. Work by Amabile (1979, 1982) serves to support this hypothesis, in studies which examined creativity under 'test-conditions'. Her work showed how the creativity of female undergraduates was hampered via the expectation of future assessment (Amabile, 1979), and that paper collages made by young children were creatively worse, as measured by judges according to 'technical goodness' and 'aesthetic appeal', when they were created in order to win a prize (Amabile, 1982).

#### *Positive Implications: 'Cultural Optimism' and Motivational Benefits*

There is an alternative suggestion; that being aware of one's position within a competitive marketplace and responding entrepreneurially in one's approach to capital interplay, in fact helps artistry. In an ethnographic study of fashion designers in Hong Kong, Skov (2002:553) sought to "map [their] working experiences and career trajectories", and discovered a group of young creative labourers not only deeply embedded within a marketplace and reliant on successfully self-promoting, but more than that, embracing the market as a "basic social mechanism for the diffusion of their work" (ibid). She suggests that this 'reluctant entrepreneurship' is a direct result of competitive forces, and of "entering a saturated retail market" (ibid:564). Her work suggests that the designers "are not against the market, and they do not believe that creativity is enhanced by a disavowal of business interests" (ibid:563). This work serves to reconsider the typically assumed oppositional dynamic between creativity and commerce, instead seeing the two as interconnected. It suggests a connection between 'ideas' and 'money', inverting their conflicting nature as classically proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1972). Molloy and Larner (2010:369) too

in their study of cultural intermediaries in the lives of fashion designers in New Zealand also observe this ‘entrepreneurial individualism’. They suggest that creative labour is becoming professionalised via competition and exposed to the carrot and stick of the marketplace from the earliest stages of their careers. As they suggest: “The marketing of their garments, and thus the success of their firms, relied heavily on the profiling of the designer herself” (ibid), resulting in the realisation of “‘knowledge economy’ entrepreneurs”.

The cultural entrepreneurship identified in the creative labour literature as a positive force for creativity (Skov, 2002), finds historical and theoretical support from Blanning (2008) and Cowen (1998). Blanning (2008) cites numerous examples of artistic entrepreneurship throughout history by more famous artists, where their engagement with the marketplace certainly did not detract from the quality of their work, from Haydn’s portrait commission in 1781 from J.E von Manfeld “which was then engraved, reproduced and advertised for sale” (Blanning, 2008:24), to Wagner’s first performance of ‘The Ring of Nibelung’ in Bayreuth on 12<sup>th</sup> Aug 1876, for which he had “composed the music, written the words, recruited the orchestra, singers and technicians, raised the money and built the theatre” (Blanning, 2008:58). In this sense, he suggests that there is no relationship between being forced to engage with the marketplace and a subsequent negative impact on creativity. Furthermore, Cowen (1998) explicitly articulates a vision of musicians as profit maximising, entrepreneurial businessmen. However, he goes beyond characterising the nature of the ‘practicalities of art’, and suggests that by dealing with these practicalities, the competitive marketplace becomes a force for nurturing innovation and cultural diversity. He proposes a Maslowian argument that “well developed markets support cultural diversity” (Cowen, 1998:22) via generating “the wealth that enables individuals to support themselves through art” (ibid:16). Technological developments lower the cost of the means of production, meaning low cost ‘labour-intensive’ innovative genres can exist alongside ‘capital-intensive’ standardised products, and as a result we consequentially observe “outside competition shak[ing] up older forms and spur[ring] ingenuity” (ibid:27). In this sense, the competitive marketplace forces you to be creative, and motivates you to do so.

This notion that marketplace engagement and competitive forces can improve motivation contradicts the work of Amabile (1979, 1982, 1983). Documentary source material on The Beatles, suggests that being engaged in competitive processes within the band elevated their creativity based on a commitment to improving their technical proficiency, and that their awareness of competitors, notably The Beach Boys, motivated them to write better songs (Clydesdale, 2006). In this sense, their creativity was not heightened by being shielded from the market, but by being aware of what others were doing and elevating their own craft as a direct response. This work is interesting for the way in which it does not study creativity in controlled ‘laboratory’ settings as per Amabile, but instead over the course of a creative career. Furthermore, Clydesdale (2006), like Cohen (1991), draws on the views of the artists themselves, with data obtained from interviews with Paul McCartney and John Lennon amongst others.

Awareness of one’s audience and market is not seen as entirely positive however, notably with reference to Brian Wilson who was said to have experienced “depression and feelings of inferiority in the face of daunting competition” (Clydesdale, 2006:134). However, even this emotional turmoil eventually served to motivate his songwriting. Research into the impact of competitiveness on motivation amongst amateur musicians too can be found in the work of Eisenberg and Thompson (2011). They suggested that not only was musical improvisation under conditions of competitiveness judged to be superior according to the ‘consensual assessment technique’ of creativity and ‘technical goodness’, but that players were significantly more motivated too.

The marketplace can do more than elevate the creativity of artists, and motivate them, but it can also create the canon which conceives of former works as great (Cowen, 1998). Cowen (1998:28) proposes: “The more notable works of art that are produced, the greater the significance of the best works from the past. The present therefore deserves at least partial credit for our understanding of the past”. This process then serves to transform popular culture into canonical high culture; co-optation in reverse. The example he provides is Shakespeare, who was considered popular and ‘low brow’. However, akin to Benjamin’s celebratory nature of mechanical reproduction, via the expansion of the printing

presses many readers could study and debate the merits of Shakespeare, ultimately elevating him to “the cultural pantheon” (ibid:43). In this argument then, the competitive marketplace is not an evil corrupting force, but a nurturer of creativity.

### *Research Question*

This body of literature on the relationship between competition, entrepreneurialism, creativity and motivation suggests two things. Firstly, that the behavioural ramifications of competitiveness, such as those debated in part two of this literature review on cultural sociology, might be conceptualised as an entrepreneurial orientation towards creative practice. Throughout the literature in the field of creative labour research, authors point to emergence of ‘cultural entrepreneurs (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999; Scott, 2012) or ‘art entrepreneurship’ (Aggestam, 2007). This explicit marketplace engagement is conceptualised in many cases as a direct response to the ferocious competitiveness of cultural markets. Secondly, there is a debate within this literature concerning how these behaviours impact artists and their artistry. Whilst the cultural sociological literature in part two of this literature review highlighted debates over the behavioural responses of artists to competitiveness, this literature on creative labour has asked how these behavioural responses impact artists, asking; does it inspire and motivate them, or does it deny them the space to be ‘creative’? Some researchers suggest entrepreneurial marketplace engagement hampers the creative process, while others suggest that entrepreneurship is the very essence of creativity and a nurturing force. Allow me to deal with each of these suggestions.

In the first instance, much of this literature examines the impact of entrepreneurship without systematically seeking to neither define nor measure the term. That is, before one can engage with the debate on how entrepreneurship impacts artists, one must examine the extent to which it is reasonable to categorise the illuminated processes of capital interplay as entrepreneurialism. The definition of what constitutes an entrepreneur has been built up, modified

and reinterpreted by multiple generations of scholars. The notion of the entrepreneur as an ‘innovator’, as opposed to theoretical notions of ‘management’ encompassing handling risk (Cantillon, 1755), emerged in the work of Schumpeter (1949). He sees these innovations as largely opportunistic, engendering disequilibrium in the economy. Kirzner (1973) conceptualised innovation differently however, interpreting it as the identification of opportunities which arise upon new information being revealed, thus moving the market *towards* equilibrium. The work of Iversen, Jorgensen and Malchow-Moller (2008) features a detailed explication of these works, and they conclude by positing that: “a coherent or unifying definition of entrepreneurship has not emerged” (ibid:2). Indeed, the work of Leadbeater and Oakley (1999) who studied cultural entrepreneurship amongst creative workers dubbed ‘The Independents’ in industries such as animation and graphic design, complicates matters of definition further (albeit serving an important theoretical function). In much the same way that Bourdieu reconceptualised the economic paradigm that the entirety of experience can be reduced to the instrumental pursuit of economic profit solely, so too do these studies suggest that entrepreneurialism must be understood to be more than the pursuit of fiscal gain alone. It will be important in the next chapter therefore, to evaluate methodologies which seek to define and measure the term entrepreneurship.

More important however, is the debate in this creative labour literature concerning the impact this entrepreneurship-necessitated-by-competition has on artists themselves. There is a clear opposition between research suggesting that it hampers creativity, and those who see it as helping creativity. On the one hand, we find scholars proposing a ‘crowding out hypothesis’ (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007), suggesting that entrepreneurship undermines creative work by restricting creative freedoms (Cohen, 1991) and denying artists the time and space to think creatively (McRobbie, 2002; Fisher, 2014). Additionally, these behaviours have negative emotional consequences as creative labour come to be typified by anxiety and stress, (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2011), and this environment of external pressures serves to undermine the motivation of artists (Amabile, 1979, 1982, 1983). On the other hand, we find scholars who suggest entrepreneurial marketplace engagement helps creativity (Skov, 2002; Molloy

and Larner, 2010), not least by motivating them to create better work (Cowen, 1998; Clydesdale, 2006; Eisenberg and Thompson, 2011). Therefore, if I am to illuminate the behavioural responses to competitiveness, I must seek to engage with the debate on how these behaviours impact artists. Given that my research interest concerns how a competitive marketplace is experienced, that is, how the ramifications of competitiveness are understood by artists, I propose that this debate requires addressing from the perspective of the producers themselves; how do they feel their necessitated behaviours have impacted on them as artists – do they feel that their art suffers, or do they feel motivated? The experience of competition is then more multi-dimensional than simply behavioural responses to market conditions; it is an experience which has deeper impacts and meanings in the lives of artists specifically, according to this literature at least, creatively, motivationally, and emotionally. Therefore, the final research question to be generated by this literature review is:

**RQ3. Is marketplace competitiveness engendering an entrepreneurial orientation by creative labour, and if so, how do artists feel that this entrepreneurialism impacts them?**

## **2.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to review particular strands of literature relating to my research interest: how a competitive marketplace is experienced by creative labour. This research interest has been split into its three component sections in order to guide the literature review: competitive marketplaces, the experience/behavioural implications of competition, and studies of creative labour. This literature review has then, via critical evaluation of gaps and debates within each perspective, presented certain questions specifically pertaining to how creative labour operates within a highly competitive cultural marketplace at a grass-roots level, and what questions we might answer in order to attempt to meaningfully map and understand this terrain. Economics tells us that competitiveness impacts strategy, cultural sociology questions what the nature of

this strategy might be, and creative labour research questions how this strategy impacts the creativity and motivation of artists.

Part one proposed that whilst economic literature suggests that the marketplace is becoming increasingly competitive, it does little to address the question of what this competitiveness necessitates, behaviourally, for agents/artists. That is, it allows for the operationalisation of competitiveness but leaves the reader frustrated when wanting to understand the implications of this change more deeply in the lives and practices of artists. In order to address this, in part two I turned to cultural sociology and in particular the work of Pierre Bourdieu for the way in which he fuses together an acknowledgment of the centrality of competitiveness in cultural markets, but also makes explicit suggestions regarding the behavioural ramifications of this compositional structure on agents/artists. The introduction of the cultural sociological approach moved the focus onto cultural intermediaries as key components of the competitive market with whom competitors have to deal, and the processes of capital transubstantiation in an increasingly competitive context. A debate exists within cultural sociology concerning the role of cultural intermediaries in the lives of contemporary artists in advanced capitalist markets vis-à-vis their struggle to be heard, and how artists need, or need not, interact with them. For Bourdieu, competitive cultural markets are typified, compositionally, by the emergence of these intermediaries, and therefore in order to understand the experience of competition for artists, a competition to achieve the critical reception and appreciation they desire, the nature of their relationship with these agents is of key importance.

The economic impact of this newly digitalised marketplace on creative labour, and how it effects their ability to obtain, maximise, and transubstantiate various forms of capital is debated in contemporary literature and requires empirical exploration in greater detail in order to ascertain if Bourdieu's 'law of the field' still applies. I propose that by employing Bourdieu's theory of capital we might make sense of the contemporary nature of artist-intermediary engagement, and by incorporating a research focus on processes of capital transubstantiation (economic, cultural and social), understand how creative labour are responding

to the demands of competition. Additionally, by exploring methods of capital interplay, we might meaningfully comment on what this might mean for how artists are able to survive and sustain their craft in this new digital climate.

Finally, in part three I turned to literature specifically focusing on creative labour in order to address the gap in cultural sociology concerning how the behaviours necessitated by competitive forces, come to impact the lives of artists and their artistry. Researchers have illuminated the generalised emergence of an entrepreneurial orientation towards creative practice and a deep level of marketplace engagement i.e. being aware of one's audience and the market towards which one's creative work is targeted (Finnegan, 1989; Cohen, 1991; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999; McRobbie, 2002; Skov, 2002; Aggestam, 2007). However, it is unclear as to whether this marketplace engagement is beneficial for creativity by spurring innovation and motivating artists, or hampers creativity, given that it is emotionally damaging, undermines motivation, and does not allow artists the time to independently create.

I have sought to focus three stands of literature - economic competition theory, Bourdieu's cultural sociology of capital interplay, and creative labour literature on entrepreneurship and its relationship to artistry – to generate specific research questions, provide an appropriate marketplace within which to seek to answer these questions, and a theoretical structure within which to interpret the answers generated. As I have worked through the literature I have sought to narrow and clarify focus throughout, and provide suitable boundaries to my research questions. By this I mean, economic literature suggested fundamental macroeconomic marketplace evolutions, cultural sociology suggested possible microsociological behavioural ramifications of these changes, while work on creative labour suggested how these behaviours might impact artists vis-à-vis their motivation and creativity. We can thus see why a study which addresses the questions relating to competitiveness generated by an analysis of the literature herein, is of importance and worthy of a study of this nature.

By exploring conceptions of competitiveness from a multi-disciplinary perspective, I have generated a number of research questions which, when

answered together, can build a picture of the competitive experience. There is an inherent assumption here; that competitiveness is a multi-faceted experience. That is to say, by answering questions relating to intermediary-engagement, capital transubstantiation, and the impact of entrepreneurialism, we can try to understand how competition impacts on a number of areas of creative practice. Only then might the description and interpretation of competitiveness achieve sufficient information ‘thickness’ (Geertz, 1973). It would be simplistic to suggest, for instance, that we might understand the entirety of the competitive experience by examining artist-intermediary engagement alone. It is but one piece of the competitive puzzle. The research questions posited will allow me to attempt to make sense of how competitive forces impact artists emotionally and behaviourally, as well providing a theoretical framework within which to make sense of those responses. Competitiveness necessitates the adoption of strategy; by answering these research questions I am seeking to learn what this strategy is, how we might characterise this strategy, and what this strategy means for creativity.

The overarching concern guiding this thesis relates to the ways in which one can seek to understand how a competitive market is experienced by creative labour. By engaging with research on competitiveness and creativity across various disciplines, the following research questions have emerged, which by seeking to answer, will provide a multi-faceted and rigorous exploration of how creative labour experiences competition, employing a Bourdieusian theoretical architecture to understand these behavioural practices. To repeat, the research questions to be addressed by the research project therefore are:

- RQ1. What role do cultural intermediaries play in the lives of creative labour in a competitive market? Why do they occupy this role?
- RQ2a. In an increasingly competitive environment, how are artists acquiring, maximising and transubstantiating forms of Bourdieu-defined capital?
- RQ2b. Given contemporary processes of capital interplay, how do artists survive and sustain their craft?
- RQ3. Is competitiveness engendering an entrepreneurial orientation by creative labour, and if so, how do artists feel that this entrepreneurialism impacts them?

### **3. Methodology: Experimental Ethnography**

Which methodological approach will best provide the answers to my research questions about competitiveness in cultural markets? As the literature review narrowed the specificity of the research enquiry, so this methodology chapter must formulate appropriate “conceptual boundaries” (Merriam, 1998:27) to adequately ensure the most practical realisation of the aims of the thesis. Given that the research questions relate, at least in part, to experiential concerns - *how* is competition understood and *experienced* by artists, *why* are intermediaries important (or not) in the careers of creative labour, *how* can we understand contemporary process of transubstantiation - it is clear that a purely quantitative approach would be unsuitable. Certainly, quantitative analysis techniques may prove insightful for highlighting specific, observable phenomena – notably relating to transubstantiating economic capital which I seek to explore - however, they cannot be the sole methodological approach. As such, it is crucial to explore a range of qualitative methodologies to ascertain which method, or combination of methods, might prove most appropriate for answering my research questions.

Structurally, this chapter will be broken into two halves. The first half - ‘Methodology in Theory’ - will explore methodological debates warranting evaluation in two sections. The first section will begin with an acknowledgement: that I am myself embedded within a particular grass-roots creative labour ‘scene’, namely that of underground UK urban music. However, would studying this genre, given my emic perspective, necessarily be appropriate? It is important that one does not study a cultural group which one knows simply because it is easy, one has access to it (Ginkel, 1998:253), or because it is more affordable (Aguilar, 1981). Would UK urban music be an appropriate context within which to research the questions posited given my position within the field? In order to answer this question I will begin by engaging with the burgeoning area of autoethnography – a research tradition where the researcher is both already embedded within a particular cultural context and is furthermore the subject of research. I will commence by acknowledging a researcher’s positionality vis-à-vis other research participants,

particularly in instances where one might be deeply embedded within the cultural context under enquiry. I will then acknowledge my position within the ‘field of cultural production’ as an artist myself, and therefore as a potential source of data-generation, evaluating the relative strengths and weakness of this ‘autoethnographic’ tradition. This first part of the chapter will conclude by suggesting, as per Murphy (1987:xi), that my experiences over the previous six years as an unsigned artist constitute “a kind of extended anthropological field trip”, and that thus my experiences are of anthropological merit.

The second section of the first half of the chapter will, having established UK urban music as a suitable site of research, and that I might incorporate my own experiences as data to be analysed, suggest that this has to a certain extent already exercised a degree of participant selection; that is, UK urban music artists, including myself. In this sense, a case-study based approach has largely been defined via the ‘boundedness’ of the research, and therefore the logical question to be asked next is; how many artists within this scene should be studied, and how should they be chosen? I will propose that given the specificity of focus, and that even if I were to research every single MC in UK urban music, the findings might only be representative of the genre under enquiry. Therefore, I will instead opt for a small case-study to allow for ‘thick description’ (Yin, 1994). The first half of this chapter will then conclude by introducing the artists who will form the basis of analysis in this research project, and outline the methodology by which they have been selected.

The second half of this chapter – ‘Methods in Practice’ - will build on the theoretical suggestions made in the first half, and outline how this methodology will be implemented in practical terms. This will be done, in section one, by working through each of the research questions consecutively, outlining how various types of research methods will be applied to each research question, critically evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the method and alternatives. This section will argue that observations, interviews and textual analysis of lyrics, triangulated with autoethnographic analysis of practice, will best provide the answers I seek. I thus conclude that a multi-faceted experimental ethnographic approach is most appropriate to answer my research questions.

However, I will seek to expand the methodological possibilities within the ethnographic tradition by suggesting that observations might occur via an analysis of social media data, a data source which can also prove illuminating for uncovering long-term emotional responses given that it is representative of purely ‘self-generated data’. In addition, I propose that I, as an artist, have been involved in a relentless and inadvertent process of self-documentation throughout my creative career, and that this data will prove crucial in exploring how creative labour interacts with intermediaries, how capital interplay occurs, and thus, suitable for evaluating the extent to which an entrepreneurial orientation might be observed. Therefore, in an exercise in “dismantling the positivist machine” (Okley, 1992:3), whereby fieldwork is reconceptualised as “lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge” (ibid), it is proposed that a crucial methodological technique for the autoethnographic component of this thesis has been for me to live my life as an artist, and in the process, generate a wealth of data which I might analyse in the undertaking of this research project. The chapter will conclude with an ‘audit trail’ detailing the implementation of my methods throughout this research.

## **PART 1: METHODOLOGY IN THEORY**

It is crucial in the first instance to acknowledge the epistemological and ontological standpoint of this thesis, which is driven by both my research interests and my research questions. I propose that knowledge is what is understood by individuals and how this shapes their opportunities and behaviours. The knowledge I am seeking to expose concerns what it means to be a musician in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and in the tradition of interpretivism, I suggest that this knowledge is socially constructed. My research interest is then not whether cultural intermediaries are important in the lives of artists, but whether or not artists interpret them as important, as reflected in both their practice and perceptions. Likewise, my interest is not in whether or not entrepreneurialism impacts the artistry of creative labour vis-à-vis the quality of their work as judged according to specific standards, but how artists feel that behaving like businessmen impacts them, and how they think it affects their work. There need

be no positivist, objective truth; artists may feel that intermediaries are vital when in fact they are not. This is not the point. The point is to understand how competition is experienced by artists. The subjective perspective is theirs to be uncovered. In this sense, personal experience is the basis of knowledge for the purposes of this research project. This first part will explore the methodological suitability of *my knowledge*, a perspective acquired over my creative career.

### **3.1. Being an ‘Insider’: The Use of the Self in Research**

A crucial methodological starting point for this research concerns an acknowledgement of myself as a potential object of research, and by extension, an appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of research occurring inside an organisational/cultural framework within which one is already embedded; as an ‘insider’. By extension, one must evaluate the methodological merits and drawbacks of using ones own experiences as an object of research. There are a variety of key questions which have been generated by reviewing existing debates within the literature across the fields of competition economics, cultural sociology, and creative labour research, concerning how grass-roots creative labour experiences a competitive marketplace. *I am grass-roots creative labour*, and I am experiencing that competitive marketplace. Thus, this section of the chapter will engage in the contentious epistemological debate within ‘native anthropology’; can one, methodologically, meaningfully draw on one’s own experiences reflexively, and if so, how? This first section of the chapter will be split into two halves; the first, analysing what I refer to as ‘The ‘Insider’ Dilemma’, addressing the implications of conducting research in a cultural context within which a researcher is already embedded, and the second, exploring the use of ‘the self’ as a research participant.

#### *3.1.1. The ‘Insider’ Dilemma: Native-Ethnography*

Living and breathing the life of an aspirational, unsigned (at the time of undertaking the research for this thesis at least) artist, I am in a position to yield insights that might not otherwise be discoverable by an ‘outsider’. However, of

course, my social position is not without its drawbacks. In the first instance it is important to note that research akin to this (as an ‘insider’) is not without precedent. There exist numerous examples of research done by ‘insiders’: Turner’s (1947) work on naval officers based on his experiences in World War II, Roy’s (1959) work on factory worker’s struggling for autonomy based on his employment experiences, Davis (1959) on taxi drivers (see Anderson (2006:376) for a summary), or more recently, Dowling’s (2007) work informed by her experiences as a waitress. Research akin to this in the world of music also exists, including Bennett’s (1980) work ‘On Becoming a Rock Musician’, written as he attempted to become a rock musician, as well as Ramsey (2003) on ‘Race Music’, which centres largely around his evocative, and often poignant, reminiscence of growing up in Chicago, both listening to and playing jazz music. Indeed, Negus’ (2011b) work is greatly informed by his former career as a musician, and he makes frequent reference to his personal dealings with record labels and managers in his literature.

Being an ‘insider’ has many great benefits, one being that one already has a large number of contacts whom might easily be called upon to assist in the undertaking of the research. After all, “basic to the conduct of research...is the development of relationships ‘in the field’... to discover the way in which their social world or reality is constructed” (Cohen, 1993:124). Therefore being an ‘insider’ can mitigate time-consuming ‘contact acquisition’. In a similar vein, Caplan (1988:9) suggests: “If anthropologists cannot think like natives, how is a knowledge of how they think, perceive and act possible”? A valid question, and one that in my case is overcome in that I *am* a ‘native’, and thus evaluations of thought and action are as much based upon how *we* think and act, as opposed to *they*.

### *Objectivity vs Subjectivity:*

One might suggest that having existing relationships with individuals in the field is problematic, compromising objectivity. Can research of this kind, this ‘insider anthropology’ be objective, and is objectivity compromised via one’s de-facto membership of the subject group? As Meyers and Marcus (1995:2) note: “In the

anthropology of art...it is no longer possible for anthropologists to address subjects “cleanly” – that is, as in subjects in relation to whom they...do not already have a history of relations”. However, what if anthropologists could theoretically approach subjects “cleanly”? Some have questioned whether or not truly objective anthropology is even possible (Maquet, 1964). The question as to whether any form of ethnography, or indeed any such qualitative methodology, can reasonably be said to be objective, wholly depends on one’s definition of objectivity itself. Hegelund (2005) suggests that in instances where ethnographic work does not fulfil the positivist definition of objectivity (itself subject to much philosophical debate), it may prove more helpful to conceptualise objectivity as a conceptual continuum. Referencing ethnography which frames specific social phenomena, and which invariably leaves out certain evidence based on the framing of research questions, methods of data collection and interpretation, he proposes: “Are data that are like this objective? Hardly! Are they, nevertheless, able to increase our objectivity? Yes, as they add another perspective through which we can look at human activities” (Hegelund, 2005:658).

Perhaps objectivity is not the most important lens through which to evaluate the merits of the methodology and perspective. Hegelund (2005:663) suggests: “If the perspective “works”, if it is capable of telling the reader something new, of explaining an observed phenomenon then it might be considered ‘true’”. Furthermore, perhaps the self-other distinction is naïve given “to write individual experience is to write social experience” (Taylor and Coia, 2006:281). This notion is expanded in the work of Church (1995:5) who points to the simplicity of the self-other separation, suggesting that “the self is a social phenomenon. Writing about myself is a way of writing about these others”. Furthermore, delineating self/other distinctions masks how “writing the self involves...writing about the ‘other’ and how the work on the ‘other’ is also about the self of the writer” (Mykhalovskiy, 1996:133). ‘Insider’ based research then grapples with the notion of providing both emic (a “perspective that reflects the insiders’ or research participants view of things” (Madden, 2010:19)) and etic (“one that echoes the outsiders’ or researchers’ point of view” (*ibid*)) perspectives on cultural production. However, by having an existing relationship with the site of research, is the researcher approaching the study with preconceived notions and

expectations of what they might find? It may be that this is an unavoidable reality. However, perhaps it is the case that we should, as researchers, face and challenge our preconceptions in a direct way, rather than acknowledging them and thus avoiding them; in this sense, “you can only be open to surprises if you know what you expect to find” (O'Reilly, 2012:35). This suggestion contradicts earlier thoughts on anthropology at home which suggested that in fact, ones membership of ‘the group’ made one blind to the ‘taken for granted’ everyday practices which could only realistically be noticed by an ‘outsider’ (Messerschmidt, 1981) i.e. that familiarity is an ethnomethodological Gaussian blur.

### *Complete Member Researcher*

Having ‘complete member researcher (CMR) status’ (Anderson, 2006) then, means the researcher represents what Merton (1988:18) termed “the ultimate participant in a dual participant-observer role”. It is worth noting that the CMR is in fact distinct from the other members of their social world which they are investigating as they are also a member of another world; the academic community. Worth noting too, is the relative pitfall of being engaged in both worlds and having two simultaneous careers, and the timekeeping and conceptual ramifications this can have (Anderson, 2006:389). This was of particular interest to myself as a researcher, as my music career blossomed alongside my conducting of fieldwork. It is imperative throughout to exercise strict analytical reflexivity, and an acknowledgement of ones role within the social world under study. Anderson (2006:384) summarises this when he notes:

By virtue of the [researchers] dual role as a member in the social world under study and as a researcher of that world, [this] demands enhanced textual visibility of the researcher's self. Such visibility demonstrates the researcher's personal engagement in the social world under study. [The researcher] should illustrate analytic insights through recounting their own experiences and thoughts as well as those of others. Furthermore, they should openly discuss changes in

their beliefs and relationships over the course of fieldwork, thus vividly revealing themselves as people grappling with issues relevant to membership and participation in fluid rather than static social worlds.

It is one thing to write about a world of which you are a member, but it is quite another to use your own personal experiences as a research case study in the same way as those of your ‘participants’. There is an emerging methodological discipline which concerns the explicit use of the self as the sole locus of research – autoethnography – and it is thus crucial to grapple with the criticisms levelled at the genre when considering its suitability for employment in this research project.

### *3.1.2 The Use of the Self as a Research Participant: Autoethnography*

The term ‘autoethnography’ (Reed-Danahay, 1997) refers to “highly personalized accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture” (Holt, 2003:2). It is then “a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context” (*ibid*). This methodology challenges many research assumptions, not least relating to the use of voice. The process has been interestingly described as researchers “writing themselves into their own work as major characters” (Holt, 2003). The use of the term ‘characters’ here is of great interest, and highlights the fluidity in distinctions between literature and scientific research. Indeed, Wolcott (1994:58) suggests that researchers need to think, and act, like storytellers. It is a controversial methodological tool and one treated with a degree of academic scepticism and suspicion in terms of its scientific rigour and applicability notably given that it “contravenes certain qualitative research traditions” (*ibid*) and is “at the boundaries of disciplinary practices” (Sparkes, 2000:21).

### *'Proper' Use of Voice*

Controversy emanates from numerous locales, such as the apparently incongruous use of the self as a voice. It is classically assumed that “silent authorship comes to mark mature scholarship. The proper voice is no voice at all” (Charmaz and Mitchell, 1997:194). However, it is crucial to consider the many benefits to be yielded from an autoethnographic approach, and from placing one’s own voice at the centre of a research project. As autoethnographers “shift their focus back and forth between social and cultural aspects of personal experience and introspective reflections” (Primeau, 2003:10), they, in so doing, are able to connect “the personal to the cultural” (Bochner and Ellis, 2000:739). As a tool, it appears perfect for the task which I have set my research - to accurately convey competition as an *experience* - as, after all, what better to attempt to elicit resonant understanding than personal experience?

The voice of the researcher featuring so prominently in discourse can be problematic however. Cavell (1997:94) in his work on social suffering and the construction of pain, suggests that any text in which the author claims representativeness of a group, might, via what it excludes from the text, “participate in the silence, and so it extends the violence it studies”. This suggestion speaks to a particular bias that insider research might generate, whereby it can silence certain voices whilst simultaneously claiming to represent those voices, enacting a form of symbolic violence as it chooses to disregard them and proclaim their apparent unimportance. Additionally, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2013:286) highlight the ethical implications of certain autoethnographic narratives whereby the researcher’s voice is central, whilst consent concerning the representation of others is not sought e.g. Ellis’ (1996) work on caring for her ill-mother was published without consulting her mother nor ascertaining her perspective.

However, as a participant in a particular culture/world, one has an inherently unique vantage point and voice, and that voice should not be silenced or overlooked as less valid than anyone else’s. Given this, one should not avoid that

which Geertz (1988) disparagingly referred to as ‘author-saturated texts’, but should instead acknowledge that they can generate pertinent and unique perspectives (Anderson, 2006:385). Indeed there is an academic tradition in research conducted by those with unique social and cultural vantage points, such as Sudnow (1978) on learning to play improvisational piano jazz, or, perhaps most epitomised in the work of Hayano (1982) which was a study of professional poker players, based on his own life as a professional poker player. Indeed, “as anthropologists moved out of the colonial era of ethnography, they would come more and more to study the social worlds and subcultures of which they were a part” (Goodwin, 2012:360); a phenomenon we can see today in the growth of ‘anthropology at home’ (Madden, 1999), or ‘endogenous anthropology’ (Ginkel, 1998) of which this research project indeed forms a part.

Can the use of the self have scientific and academic validity? Richardson (2000:15) suggests a number of criterion against which the methodology might be judged. She proposes that it should be demanded that the work achieve certain goals: intellectual impact, contribute toward our understanding of social life, be aesthetically rich and complex, affect the reader emotionally and/or intellectually, and also express a reality. As Holt (2003:12) asks of the autoethnographic work: “does this text embody a fleshed out sense of a lived experience”? All the while, “the intrinsic interest and value of the story should not be dismissed” (ibid:10), and, if the autoethnographer can be said to have drawn “on a reflective framework, pursued a methodological tradition (autoethnography) and linked… ‘findings’ back to relevant pedagogical research” (Holt, 2003:6), then, assert Holt and Richardson, this demonstrates a compliance with “the demands of rigorous science” (ibid). These criteria then, it is suggested, are the criteria against which any autoethnographic study should be judged, and for which the fulfilment of, constitutes scientific rigour. However, perhaps the most important criteria it should be judged against is; can it answer my research questions? I propose that given that they relate to interpretative experience of specific phenomena, then it certainly can.

### *On the Suitability of the Autoethnographic Method*

Murphy's (1987) work 'The Body Silent' was: "conceived in the realisation that my long illness with a disease of the spinal cord has been *a kind of extended anthropological field trip*, for through it I have sojourned in a social world no less strange to me at first than those of the Amazon forests" (Murphy 1987, xi, emphasis added). Indeed, this quote appears to crystallise a number of concerns generated in this evaluation of the suitability of an autoethnographic approach to data collection. My past few years spent as an unsigned urban music artist in the UK has been akin to 'a kind of extended anthropological field trip', and indeed my career continues to be so. It allows me to have an insight into the operation of a sometimes strange, and to many, wholly impenetrable world. As such, I, in the tradition of autoethnographic literature, might reasonably assert that the insights I have gained are important and of academic merit, and thus warrant inclusion in a study on the nature of contemporary cultural production and how competition is experienced. As Banks and Banks (2000:233) suggest: "We had no grounds for invalidating an author's own experience if it is rendered as believable...[and] has verisimilitude – this conveys the appearance or feeling of reality in a text".

The philosophical and methodological defence of the autoethnographic method herein has acted furthermore as a justificatory mechanism for situating the research focus within the genre of UK urban music - the genre within which I am already embedded - as to neglect personal experience would be a wasteful folly. The selection of UK urban music as the site of research is not simply informed by notions of convenience, accessibility, or cost (Walford, 2001), but is ideologically and academically conceived. I have a degree of cultural understanding within the context of this genre, and these insights warrant academic enquiry as a modest yet detailed study into the operation of a competitive marketplace and the competitive experience. Perhaps one of the most closely related studies to mine in terms of genre and methodological approach is that of Harrison (2009), written as an ethnography studying underground hip hop in San Francisco. However, the author was not an MC in the same way that I am; he began rapping during the course of the fieldwork and

became accepted by the rap community he was studying. Thematically, his work investigates racial self-identification, and its relationship to the concept of ‘sincerity’, with San Francisco Bay-Area hip-hop providing a context for analysing American racial dynamics, and as such seeks to address different questions to mine. However, there are certainly methodological parallels. Harrison (2009:14) proposes that studies such as these should be conceptualised as part of a ‘small revolution’ which “recognises the methodological benefits of such inextricable involvement”, and suggests that “such a fully immersed ethnographic project allows for a more profound exploration of both what occurs within [a music scene] and the meanings that underlie and inform these actions” (ibid).

However, I propose that personal experience should not be the sole narcissistic focus of data collection - otherwise, indeed, “experience simply stands for evidence of reality” (Desai, 2002:312). Furthermore, if my experience of competition is unique, then it is “uninformative about anything other than itself” (Gerring, 2007:145), thus limiting external validity (Tellis, 1997). The autoethnographic method therefore should, I suggest, be incorporated *within the context* of a wider, more multi-dimensional project, and therefore for personal experience to form part of a multi-faceted research methodology. Thus, data triangulation with alternative sources of information will be required (Denzin, 1970). Certainly I am in accordance with the postmodernism conception that triangulation is of methodological value for the way in which it can deepen our understanding of phenomena. However, Hegelund (2005:663) suggests it is important given that it facilitates “an increase in objective knowledge gained through different perspectives”. By this he means that triangulation is not required to facilitate the validation of objective truth, with all the problematic philosophical debates pertaining to objectivity in ethnography and qualitative methods discussed above. Instead, methodological triangulation assists in “making the study more objective, that is, less dependant on a singular perspective and thereby throwing more light on the matter” (ibid). The second section of this first half of the methodology chapter will therefore ask; with whom, or what, should this autoethnographic data be triangulated?

### **3.2. Triangulating Autoethnographic Data**

The above section (3.1) has, whilst arguing for the suitability of employing autoethnographic examination of personal creative practice to answer the proposed research question, concluded by suggesting that it would be preferable to triangulate autoethnographic data with material obtained from other sources of creative labour in order to avoid solipsism (Coffey, 1999; Sparkes, 2000; Holt, 2003). In the first instance, it is necessary to acknowledge the extent to which my research questions frame my participant selection. Having engaged with literature which has generated specific research questions relating to how a competitive marketplace is experienced by creative labour with specific reference to intermediary engagement, capital transubstantiation and the impact of an entrepreneurial orientation, and having additionally proposed that UK urban music is a suitable genre within which to seek to answer these questions, a large degree of participant selection has already occurred; with myself being one of them. Therefore, this framing of the research necessitates a form of case-study methodology by definition. The questions which require answering are:

1. How many cases are appropriate?
2. How should they be selected?

The following section will seek to answer these two questions, by exploring debates relating to how many other sources of creative labour would be appropriate, and what the nature of my interaction with them should be. Using the work of Leonard-Barton (1990), Creswell (2002) and Stake (2000), it is proposed that when attempting to decide on the number of artists to be studied one is invariably choosing between descriptive breadth and analytical depth. I thus suggest that by framing this research as Finnegan (1989) does - as a detailed exploration of a specific niche genre of music as opposed to 'a grand theory of music' - that a case-study based approach using only a smaller sample of artists is appropriate for the research project at hand.

### 3.2.1. Case Studies: Numerical Concerns

There is a rich case-study based research tradition within studies of creative labour both historically and in contemporary scholarship (Finnegan, 1989; Cohen, 1991; Waldron, 2006; Akinyela, 2012). Cohen's (1991) research on rock bands in Liverpool, for example, is defined by a 'boundedness'; by situating one's methodological gaze within a specific genre (and in her case, geographical locale), a degree of participant selection has already been exercised. It is within this predefined conceptual space that her investigation occurred – a style of community-based research of sorts - and thus, a case-study approach is particularly appropriate in this context as an examination of a 'bounded' system (Stake, 2000; Creswell, 2002). Case-studies are also appropriate if the purpose is to understand "an event, activity, *process*, or one or more individuals" (Creswell, 2002:496, emphasis added). One can see how these authors' research methodologies within *physically bounded* educational contexts are of interest here, where research is within a *conceptually bounded* cultural context. Educationalists attest to the suitability of a case-study based approach within the bounded system of a school, and likewise the experience of competitiveness I am seeking to understand is "occurring in a bounded context" (Miles and Huberman, 1994:25); the genre of UK urban music. Thus, a case-study approach to research design is particularly apt for answering *how* and *why* questions (as opposed to *who* or *when*) (Leonard-Barton, 1990). Indeed, this research is seeking to explore how competitiveness is experienced by artists, specifically within the bounded context of UK urban music. A case-study research design is therefore appropriate given that my area of focus is bounded (by genre), is contextual in nature (contemporary marketplace changes) and investigates 'selective' (Tellis, 1997) behavioural processes (Merriam, 1998).

However, can a case study generate sufficiently detailed data i.e. is looking at just a handful of artists preferable to looking at a wide number? With a case-study based approach, one is balancing the desire for generalizability on the one hand, with depth on the other. Finnegan (1989:4) in her ethnography of musicians in Milton Keynes states: "I am following one well-established

tradition in social and historical research, that of using specific case studies to lead to the kind of illumination in depth not provided by more thinly spread and generalised accounts”. However, a case-study based approach might limit the propensity for acceptable scientific generalisation outside of the area of study (Yin, 1994:9). This is indeed valid, however, in the first instance, complete generalisation can rarely occur from one presentation of findings and often requires supplementary research to establish any degree of universality (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Therefore one must, like Finnegan (1989:9), define one’s project not as a grand musical theory, but, as she defined it: a “modest social study based in the first instance in the local ethnography”. Indeed, statistically, a study of, for example, two artists can reasonably find its generalisability queried. However, as Walford (2001:154) notes, acknowledging the distinction to be made between statistical and analytic generalisation: “case studies or ethnographies can achieve ‘transferability’ through ‘thick description’”. This is defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985:316) as sufficient depth “necessary to enable someone interested in a making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether the transfer can be contemplated as a possibility”. It may be more prudent to conceptualise generalizability as per Hegelund’s (2005) interpretation of objectivity; as a continuum. That is, whilst a small case-study based project might not be said to be representative of cultural labour per se, it can enrich our understanding of how competitiveness is experienced by contributing knowledge of how it impacts a specific cultural niche, as well as enriching our understanding vis-à-vis the experiences of creative labour more generally.

### *3.2.2 Selection Criteria*

How many participants should this research encompass and how should they be chosen? It may prove insightful in the first instance to see how many cases have been employed by other researchers in my field of creative labour research. One of the most cited and influential studies into grass-roots creative labour is that of Sara Cohen (1991). Methodologically, her ethnographic approach paints a vivid picture of the world of musicians, and of their emotions, achieved via “face-to-face interviews, oral history and archival research” (Cohen, 1993:129). She

sought to construct a storied reality which explored how unsigned artists grapple with the tensions between creativity and commerce. Employing two case studies allowed for rich analytical depth blurring the boundary between journalistic communication, literary portrayal, and academic analysis. Indeed, having just two artists as the focus of study is seen in other research projects (Waldron, 2006). However, decisions over the appropriate number of case-studies must be guided by the nature of the research questions and what one is seeking to uncover as opposed to research traditions alone. Given the boundedness of my research focus, it is key to acknowledge that even if I used every single MC currently operating in UK urban music today as a case study, the research project might reasonably be said to be representative of nothing more than behavioural practices within UK urban music. Besides, given that my research questions relate to particular processes, and given that I am using musicians within a specific cultural niche to ascertain what their experiences reveal for the processes under exploration, generalisation to the wider population, or complete representativeness of experience, is not of primary concern. In this sense, it makes methodological sense to employ a small sample size akin to that of Cohen (1991), but to seek to ensure that the respondents might reasonably be said to be representative of the cultural niche within which they operate.

It is important to comment on the problem of this ‘representativeness’ in sampling. Research based on random-sampling seeks to maximise the potential representativeness of findings. However, narrower case-study based research based on information-oriented sampling, as is most suitable for the research at hand, generates numerous issues, not least relating to the problem of selection. Case studies “rest upon an assumed synecdoche: the case should stand for a population” (Gerring, 2007:147). That is to say, the selection process for intra-genre case-studies must ensure maximum potential representativeness to ensure methodological validity (as it may prove problematic to generalise findings outside of the genre within which this research has occurred): “typicality responds to the first desideratum of case selection” (ibid:96). Accepting that sample bias is to a large extent a wholly unavoidable phenomenon given that I have personal relationships with a huge number of potential participants within the field of study, I must seek to ensure a selection process which maximises the

criterion for both representativeness, and maximising information richness (Crabtree and Miller, 1992) i.e. ensuring that the respondents will be willing and able to share information. Given that the questions under investigation herein relate to behavioural responses to marketplace technological fluctuations which have heightened competitiveness, representativeness might be ensured by selecting diverse case-studies via ‘maximum variation sampling’, whereby “common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts” (Patton, 1990:172). This diversity can be ensured on the grounds of:

- Age: Younger and older artists will potentially respond differently to the new technology which has facilitated the current heightened competitiveness (Randall, 2012) allowing me to contrast ‘Digital Natives’ (Palfrey and Gasser, 2013) with those whom have not grown up around technology
- Stage of their career i.e. established and newer artists: The two are likely to respond to changes in the market, such as competitiveness, differently, and thus behave differently (Throsby, 1992)
- Wide variations in their available capital resources (such as varying educational backgrounds, asset wealth, etc.).

If a small number of case studies fulfil these criteria, then the findings might reasonably be said to be representative of the range of potential experiences amongst artists within UK urban music at least. In this sense too, these criteria seek to ensure an appropriateness of data (Morse, 1998), and therefore represent a deliberate and purposeful selection criteria to meet the theoretical needs of the study.

## Case-Study Artists<sup>2</sup>

*'Genesis Elijah'*: Older, established artist, high capital reserves (home owner)

Genesis Elijah is thirty-three years old and thus represents an older and more established artist within the field of UK urban music. He has been making music since 1996, and in 2005 released an album of tracks recorded between 2001 and 2004, entitled *Deh Pon Road*. Despite a short break from making music between 2006-2009, Genesis has been releasing music consistently for over twelve years. He currently lives in Watford in a home he owns with his partner (a primary school teacher) and two young children, where he works part time and continues to release music.

*'Rival'*: Very young, new artist, very low capital reserves

Beginning his creative career as a DJ and producer, East-London born Rival began MC'ing in 2008, releasing his first project in 2010. At twenty-four he is a young artist within the scene, and having only been releasing music for five years, is a relative newcomer. He currently lives in his family home in Hornchurch, Essex where he works part time and releases music.

*'Context'*: Mid-age range artist, reasonably established, high capital reserves (educational background)

Finally, there is myself performing as 'Context', who I have discussed in the introduction to the thesis.

To give an indication as to the relative current levels of success of each artist, the chart on the following page outlines some of their key online metrics (as of 28.07.14):

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<sup>2</sup> Ages quoted are as of the end of the research project, in 2013

	Context	Genesis Elijah	Rival
Twitter Followers	3,888	6,210	8,343
Facebook 'Likes'	7,324	1,947	N/A
YouTube Subscribers	1,180	2,325	939
YouTube Views	357,253	329,366	312,187
Most Viewed Video	266,654	34,383	108,818

## **PART 2: METHODS IN PRACTICE**

### **3.3. Data-Collection**

The second half of the chapter will be split into two parts. Part one will critically evaluate potential methods for answering my research questions, and part two will be an ‘audit trail’ outlining in detail the specificities of how my research was conducted. Having proposed that a case-study based project is suitable for answering my questions, and having introduced who those case-studies will be, part one will seek to explore which methods are best for answering my specific research questions. As such, each research question generated by the literature review will be examined in turn in order to ascertain which methodological technique is the most suitable for answering it. Of course, each of the research methods described in relation to each research question are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Therefore, textual analysis will inform my research into studying intermediaries as much as participant observation will inform my research into entrepreneurial orientation. However, it is helpful to delineate in turn the main research methods which apply to each research question. The structure of the empirical chapters will be guided by the nature of the research questions generated. As such the thesis will contain an analysis of intermediary-artist engagement in chapter four, of contemporary methods of capital interplay in chapter five, and of the impact of entrepreneurialism in chapter six. Part two will precisely describe how I employed the methods proposed in part one, describing what I did, how I did it, when I did it, with whom, and the problems I encountered.

### *3.3.1 Intermediary-Artist Engagement*

(RQ1) What role do cultural intermediaries play in the lives of creative labour in a competitive market? Why do they occupy this role?

*Reconsidering ‘Observation’:*

In the first instance, the role intermediaries play in the lives of artists is a largely observable phenomenon which Scott (2012:48) suggests occurs online as artists seek to create ‘buzz’. Atkinson and Coffey (2002:804) note that “the study of observable events is better accomplished by the observation of those events”. However, given the extent to which artists’ lives occur online (Collard, 2006), we might reconceptualise notions of localised, in-person observation such as those conducted in the ethnographic work of Cohen (1991) and Finnegan (1989), which were largely reflective and indicative of the epoch during which they were conducted; that is to say, historically necessitated. Instead, today, in a realisation of a neo-Foucauldian project, artists are engaged in a number of self-documenting processes allowing for their behaviour to largely be observed online, thus reconstituting observation methods and allowing researchers to reconsider the necessity for observations to take place physically. In this sense, there are a number of observable public displays of artistry which can be drawn upon to assist in answering these research questions – when songs are released, which are released, what content is shared online, how that content is shared and so on. This will be my starting point when seeking to observe how artists interact with intermediaries: observing which tracks have been released, when, and how, and the extent to which these releases have received support from intermediaries in the form of radio play and press support, and crucially, if those releases share any particular features which may have aided their success. I will be looking for which projects have received support from intermediaries and which have not, and seek to ascertain if these projects are unique in any way. These methods of release are various; from being shared on artists’ website, to videos uploaded to YouTube.

Whilst the issue of defining what constitutes a ‘cultural intermediary’ was explored in the literature, we must define a ‘cultural intermediary’ within the context of this specific marketplace. In its most simple form, as outlined in the literature review, intermediaries act as mediators between the production of cultural works by creative labour, and their eventual consumption by an audience; they occupy the conceptual space between creation, and consumption. Thus, in the contemporary music marketplace, traditional intermediaries might be radio DJs, TV executives/commissioners, media journalists or, increasingly, online journalists/ bloggers (Scott, 2012). Therefore I will observe the ways in which artists interact with, primarily, radio DJs and radio staff at nationwide UK stations (such as BBC Radio 1, BBC Radio 1Xtra, Kiss FM), as well as journalists, primarily in the form of online bloggers.

We might reconsider the methodological potential for conducting participant observation given the use of social networking websites, in particular Twitter, which is a relatively unexplored research tool (notable in addressing this is recent work by Murthy, 2013). With the permission of my participants, I was able to download their entire twitter archive for the period of research to be analysed accordingly. Within the context of the research questions here, I can read through the tweets of the artists under enquiry and treat twitter as a tool of supplementary observation, observing the very public way that artists interact with intermediaries and the nature of this interaction. It is hoped that the tweets might reveal, even if in a small and supplementary way, techniques which artists have used in their interactions with intermediaries, or even the contrary i.e. that intermediaries do not feature in their social networking history at all. Either finding would prove illuminating in attempting to build up a picture of artist-intermediary engagement; that is, Twitter-based intermediary engagement is not the sole avenue of communication and should thus be incorporated within analysis of other methods of interaction. I will thus be looking to observe instances of where artists have interacted with intermediaries, and the nature of this engagement.

To facilitate autoethnographic observation of practice, nearly my entire creative career has been documented online; from emails with managers, PR agents, and

radio DJs, to press interviews with journalists. My artistic practice has, almost inadvertently, been subject to constant and detailed self-documentation which might be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively as data sources. In many respects the richest data to emerge from any discussion of how creative labour interacts with intermediaries may be gleamed from my own practice, namely given that the available data is so detailed. The relentless and inadvertent self-documentation I have undertaken as an artist represents detailed, longitudinal fieldwork notes and observations. Anthropologists in the field will, as researchers, keep journals or logs of observations, notes, feelings, thoughts, experiences, etc. However, I have been documenting every detail of my creative life, almost unconsciously, for several years. I will thus investigate each of my releases between 2010-2013 and seek to uncover patterns of practice relating to the ways in which I have interacted with intermediaries, and see if this bears any resemblance to the experiences of the other case study artists. On each occasion that I have released a track over this period (which is 5 tracks in total – ‘Breathe In’ (November, 2010), ‘Off With Their Heads’ (January, 2011), ‘Listening to Burial’ (April, 2011), ‘Drowning’ (March, 2012), and ‘1.4 at 12’ (March, 2013)), I will observe how I have chosen to release it by analysing both my social networking patterns and my email activity over this period. I will analyse both my email outbox and inbox, to explore the ways in which intermediaries have been used in the distribution chain. I will be looking for whom I contacted, when, the content of my emails, my reason for contacting them, and the outcome of our engagement. Focussing analysis on archived, personal written electronic communication is particularly apt given that this was in many respects my sole method of interaction with intermediaries; I rarely met any of the intermediaries in person given my geographical distance from many of them (except notably on the ‘Off With Their Heads’ video shoot).

I must comment here on the nature of mining autoethnographic data. It is important when seeking my perspective on the research questions that I find data from pre-existing sources; that is, verbatim quotes from interviews with press reflecting my personal feelings, or from email exchanges with my management team, or from my tweets. In many senses, one of the main methodological techniques employed over the course of conducting this research, has largely

been for me to live my life as an artist. That is to say, by *being an artist*, by writing songs, releasing them, and living a creative existence as naturally as I understand it, which crucially entails endless, thorough, and unconscious self-documentation, one of the main forms of research and data-generation for this research was being conducted. This autobiographical process is understood by Okely (1992:3) as in many senses “dismantling the positivist machine”.

Naturally this processes is a relatively complex issue vis-à-vis the demarcation of time, requiring me to frequently ask myself when was I being a researcher, and when was I being an artist. Truthfully, the two overlapped throughout the research to a large degree. However, as suggested, one can not overlook the extent to which personal experience of this nature can contribute in insightful and meaningful ways to research, despite the debated controversies surrounding it as a technique. After all, I am a native of the culture under enquiry, and thus a central figure in the generation and presentation of emic knowledge. However, it is important that these sources of my own experience are just that; sources. It would be insufficient when commenting on how, say, I interact with intermediaries, to simply comment, pass judgement, or offer my thoughts. Evidential source material of practice is required.

### *Ascertaining ‘Why’: Triangulating Observation*

Interpretivist criticisms of more ‘passive’ research methods such as participant observation concern the potential for a disjuncture between what the participant says they do, and what they actually do. Therefore, when seeking to understand *why* intermediaries play the role they do in the lives of artists, and why artists may or may not conceive of them as important, we must do more than observe, and need to seek the opinions of artists themselves. As such the use of interviews as data-mining has proved a key component in the qualitative research tradition (Seale, 1998:202). In this instance, it serves to ensure that “attention can be focussed both on what has happened and on what the persons says about what has happened” (Becker and Geer, 1969:331) to attempt to overcome potential disclosure/action discrepancies (Pettigrew, 1990). It is perfectly logical to propose that if we are to understand why someone feels the way they do, and

why they feel they have acted in the way they have, then the best way to ascertain this is to ask them, therefore necessitating methodological triangulation in this project. The question is how should one ask them?

Focus groups are group discussions (in the case of the thesis at hand, involving all three artists) centred on a specific topic, such as intermediary engagement, capital transubstantiation, etc. As with all methodological approaches it must be understood vis-à-vis the questions it seeks to provide answers to. In this sense focus groups are best employed when seeking to uncover rarely observed phenomenon, when “particular topics of enquiry do not provide ample opportunities for observation” (Suter, 2000) or that might require environmentally fabricating e.g. how people (conversationally) think about the causes of heart attacks (Morgan and Spanish, 1985). Given that my research questions largely concern observable phenomena (interactions with intermediaries, and methods of transubstantiation) within the context of natural settings, as well as include the discussion of potentially confidential, experiential based concerns (specifically relating to monetary matters, notions of strategy, or emotions) it might be proposed that the use of focus groups is both not necessary and unsuitable. That is, it may prove difficult to ensure trust and openness about such matters in a group environment.

Given this, interviews are a particularly apt method when the data you wish to solicit concerns opinions or feelings, sensitive information requiring private face-to-face interactions, or to “delve and explore precisely...subjective meanings” (O’Reilly, 2012:119). Therefore, interviews are perfectly suited when seeking to ascertain attitudes, values and beliefs about specific phenomena (Richardson et.al, 1965), such as why participants believe intermediaries to (not be) important. Establishing trust between interviewer and interviewee is crucial to ensure the subject is as comfortable with disclosing as much information, and in as greater depth, as possible. Indeed, “the quality of the data gathered is intimately related to the quality of relationships the researcher is able to establish with informants in the field” (Newbury, 2001:3). In my case as a researcher, given that I know the informants professionally and we have a shared mutual respect for one another given our achievements within the field, I anticipated that

both individuals would be at ease when speaking to me and be willing to share, not least as they implicitly acknowledge that there is a certain sharing of experiences<sup>3</sup>. I hoped that they would be aware that they were telling me about behavioural practices which I too was engaged in. As odd as it sounds, we speak the same language (Munthali, 2001:128); we use the same slang, we know many of the same people. This chapter has already explored the strengths and weaknesses of conducting research within a cultural context within which I am already embedded as a native. However, interview situations themselves highlight some additional and distinct benefits, not least relating to issues of trust, and disclosure. This rationale suggests why it is superior to conduct these interviews face to face as opposed to conducting, say, surveys by post. Therefore, a series of semi-structured interviews were arranged with both case-studies, with several months separating the meetings. Crucial in these interviews was asking the artists why they had engaged with intermediaries in the way that I have observed<sup>4</sup>.

Given my belief in the importance of the experiential for those living within the music industry, one must get inside their heads. Semi-structured interviewing is more suited to my research questions than, say, rigid structured interviewing, given that the former “starts with broad and more general questions or topics” (Arksey and Knight, 1999:5). These are my interests; the nature of the artist-intermediary relationship, why artists conceptualise the relationship in the way that they do, processes of capital interplay, and the impact of entrepreneurialism on artistry. It allows the interviewer more freedom when dealing with potentially ambiguous concepts, allowing me to seek clarification on specific points. This is itself a skill however, requiring one, as an interviewer, to be a good listener, knowing when to interject, and when to let the participant speak. My research is not in the tradition of testing a hypothesis, and in this sense, it is important to be

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<sup>3</sup> I was conversely aware of the risk that, given that they ‘knew me’, they may have been reluctant to share for fear of revealing competitive advantage. However, given the nuances within urban music, and the nature of the scenes to which our music was explicitly aimed (Context at mainstream audiences, Genesis at ‘conscious’ hip hop fans, and Rival towards grime), this was not an especially pressing concern of mine.

<sup>4</sup> For ‘Audit Trail’ see section 3.4.

free to explore new ideas, to go off on tangents, and to be open to discovering new things, and new interpretations to my research questions (however, this plethora of generated data can make analysis problematic). Furthermore, this method privileges the participant's own, original voice by allowing them the space to fully articulate themselves, as opposed to structured interviews where their responses might be restricted.

### *3.3.2. Capital Interplay*

(RQ2a) In an increasingly competitive environment, how are artists acquiring, maximising and transubstantiating forms of Bourdieu-defined capital?

(RQ2b) Given contemporary processes of capital interplay, how do artists survive and sustain their craft?

At the beginning of the chapter on 'capital interplay', I will seek to interpret the findings from the previous chapter within Bourdieu's theoretical framework of capital mobilisation and transubstantiation. That is, the first empirical chapter will be largely descriptive, uncovering the manner with which creative labour interacts with intermediaries, and ascertaining the rationale behind this relationship. I will analyse the findings from the previous chapter and attempt to make sense of how the identified processes can be understood in terms of the acquisition, maximisation, and transubstantiation of social capital. By this I mean that any behavioural patterns so identified when exploring the nature of the artist-intermediary relationship, will be interpreted through a Bourdiesian theoretical lens, as I seek to understand the contemporary operation of social capital. It will require asking myself questions such as: how are artists today using social capital? What is its relationship to cultural capital? How are they being converted into one another? It will be an exercise in ascertaining how social capital is being maximised by artists, asking: do intermediaries play a crucial role in an artist drawing on reserves of social capital (Scott, 2012) or is intermediary-free, fan-direct engagement becoming increasingly the method of social capital exploitation (Walsh, 2007)?

Having ascertained how social capital operates within a creative marketplace, it will be important to turn next to cultural and economic capital. When exploring issues relating to the operation of economic capital, it will be important for the research to take on a quantitative dimension. Here again, the relentless self-documentation of my career will prove to be the primary source of data. In the previous empirical chapter on intermediaries, I suggested that I evaluate each of my releases during the period 2010-2013 to understand the nature of our interaction. In this chapter I will need to do the same, for the same releases, but see how economic capital has been used, and resource allocation occurred, for these projects. The financial costs of each project (recording, mastering, video production, etc.) will be counterbalanced by the profits from each project, with data primarily taken from PRS (Performing Right Society) Royalty Statements. I will also undertake this same quantitative analysis to illustrate the economic sustainability of my creative practice with reference to each of my live performances over this research period, which included large festivals as well as smaller gigs. Where the artist-intermediary relationship highlights the relationship between social and cultural capital, so this data will explore the processes of transubstantiation vis-à-vis economic capital, and ascertain the economic profitability of artistic creation.

I will seek to triangulate my own financial experiences with those of my case study artists using the interview technique as discussed above. A key technique employed to engender as full and complete disclosure as possible is to conduct the interviews under that guise that vulnerability might provide authority (Behar, 1996; Ryang, 2000). Thus, when discussing potentially sensitive information relating to how they earned money, and how much, I will be as open and transparent as possible about my earnings to encourage similar openness in their answers. When asking about how much money might have been earned from a specific project, I will openly and honestly outline how much money I have earned or lost, in the hope that this might encourage similar honesty from my case-studies (Wilde, 1992). These interviews will primarily be seeking to explore how creative artists sustain both themselves and their creative practice in the current market, and if they are not seen to be fiscally sustainable, asking both how they envisage it becoming so, and whether or not they even conceptualise

success is pecuniary terms. Central will be questions surrounding how they *survive*; that is, is music their full-time job providing them a liveable wage as an independent artist, or do they need employment for economic reasons from elsewhere<sup>5</sup>. I will be trying to find out if they experience economic transubstantiation in the same way as myself, or differently.

### *3.3.3 Entrepreneurship and Artists*

(RQ3) Is competitiveness engendering an entrepreneurial orientation by creative labour, and if so, how do artists feel that this entrepreneurialism impacts them?

My interest in seeking to understand the nature of the competitive experience from the perspective of artists themselves within a contemporary context has guided my research methodology. I am looking to uncover how day-to-day creative decisions, decisions which have been necessitated by compositional marketplace changes, impact the creativity and motivation of artists. Therefore, seeking to replicate market conditions and measure motivation or creativity as independent variables under test conditions (Amabile, 1979, 1982, 1983), would be inappropriate to my research questions. Additionally, I do not seek to measure motivation as such, nor judge creativity per se, but to ascertain how artists *feel* that the contemporary marketplace, and the acknowledgement of their role within it, impacts their creative practice.

### *Defining Entrepreneurship*

Given the endemic nature of entrepreneurship within creative labour research, and the historical prevalence of artists displaying what might be understood as an entrepreneurial orientation (Cowen, 1998; Blanning, 2008), it will perhaps in some respects not be surprising to discover that the processes of capital interplay revealed are entrepreneurial in nature. Indeed, one might, given available literature, reasonably hypothesise that to be the case. As Smiers and Schijndel

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<sup>5</sup> There are of course potentially non-economic reasons for employment e.g. as a social and psychological resource (Siegel and Haas, 1963)

(2002:1) posit, we “have to acknowledge that artists *are* entrepreneurs” (emphasis added). The real interest of the third and final empirical section of this thesis concerns the ways in which artistic entrepreneurship impacts on artists. However, if one wishes to comment on the impact of entrepreneurial capital interplay, one must first establish, as much as is reasonable to expect, that artists are, in fact, behaving entrepreneurially.

Given, as proposed in the literature review, that there is no “universally accepted definition of entrepreneurship” (OECD, 1998), operationalising the term will be problematic. For the purposes of this research project, behavioural responses to competitiveness will be highlighted via (auto)ethnographic fieldwork, and the research questions concern the extent to which these highlighted behaviours constitute entrepreneurialism. I will then seek to ascertain the impact of this entrepreneurial orientation on creative practice. It is an interpretative approach to a loosely defined terminology which will, almost by methodological definition, be imperfect (as all measures of entrepreneurship ultimately are). Indeed, Audretsch (2003:4) suggests that there exists only a “paucity of measures”. However, for the purposes of the study at hand, seeking to comment on entrepreneurial behaviours is assisted by the scope of the project, given that it seeks to evaluate the extent to which an individual producer/firm (in the form of an artist) is behaving entrepreneurially, as opposed to say, measuring the entrepreneurial activity within a national economy, or even more complicatedly, across countries. The key methodological questions are: which criteria are most appropriate to use, and how can we ascertain the extent to which these criteria are being fulfilled?

### *‘Entrepreneurial Orientation’ (EO)*

In the context of the terminological confusion suggested above, the construct of ‘entrepreneurial orientation’ (EO) (Miller, 1983; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996) acts as a useful methodological tool for my specific research questions. The EO construct, first introduced by Miller (1983), and subsequently updated by Covin and Slevin (1989) and Lumpkin and Dess (1996), delineates strategic

behavioural characteristics which are illustrative of entrepreneurial-type decision making, defined as: competitive aggressiveness, innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk-taking and autonomy. In this sense, one can evaluate the extent to which a firm/individual producer is *acting entrepreneurially* using these five dimensions. Methodologically, one can seek to evaluate the extent to which the illuminated behavioural practices in the chapters on intermediary engagement and capital interplay, fulfil these criteria, and thus represent an entrepreneurial orientation towards creative practice. The extent to which artists meet this criteria will be evaluated using both 'firm behaviour' (that is, the practices illuminated in the chapters on cultural intermediaries and capital interplay), and 'management perception' (that is, the views of the artists themselves) (Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess, 2000). By employing both measurement devices, it serves to answer those who question whether EO is a behaviour, or an attitude, by suggesting it can be both (Miller, 2011). Data might be obtained from both interview data and lyrics (the section below will outline why the lyrics of urban music artists in particular are an important source of ethnographic data).

EO is a particularly useful construct for the purposes of this research for two key reasons. In the first instance, it is useful in a context of alternative performance indicators (Pearce, Fritz and Davis, 2009); that is, where profit is not solely economic, as per creative industries where cultural and social capital is sought (Bourdieu, 1986). Some conceptions of entrepreneurship have a distinctly economic-capital bias. For example, McKenzie, Ugbah and Smothers (2007:24) suggest that: "Entrepreneurship involves individuals and groups of individuals seeking and exploiting economic opportunity." However, work on artistic entrepreneurialism suggests that entrepreneurship cannot be reduced to pursuit of economic capital alone (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999). Indeed, within the cultural field this might render buskers as the epitome of entrepreneurship. As Bourdieu and Nice (1980:268) note, entrepreneurialism requires a conceptual reconfiguration given "the opposition between ordinary entrepreneurs seeking immediate economic profit and cultural entrepreneurs struggling to accumulate specifically cultural capital, albeit at the cost of temporarily renouncing economic profit". However, entrepreneurialism is an agglomeration of dispositions, traits or behaviours, and for this reasons, the EO construct is useful

given that it forgoes financial reductionism, and instead conceptualises behaviours as representative of an ‘entrepreneurial orientation’ according to a variety of multidimensional constructs. I, as a researcher, can then measure the extent to which producer behaviours and attitudes adhere to these concepts. Secondly, in the context of confusion and ambiguity over the definition of ‘entrepreneurship’, EO represents a scholastic construct which has been widely and consistently applied. Estimates on the number of studies to have employed the framework as a method of analysis range from one hundred (Rauch et.al, 2009:762), to over two hundred (George and Marino, 2011:990). This consistency in application of the construct suggests therefore that, in an environment of confusion vis-à-vis definitions, it is “a commonly accepted conceptualisation of what it means for a firm to be “entrepreneurial”” (George and Marino, 2011:990).

### *The Impact of Entrepreneurship: Textual Analysis*

Having established the extent to which it is reasonable to categorise the illuminated behavioural responses to competitiveness as ‘entrepreneurialism’, it is key to ascertain what this impact of this is on artists. In order to uncover the emotional or psychological impact of entrepreneurship, I will propose here that a method of textual analysis of embodied cultural forms - lyrics - would prove illuminating. I argue here that within UK urban music in particular, lyrical texts can act as a window into the artists’ understandings of, and experiences of, the creative marketplace. This is in many respects a highly genre specific argument. I do not necessarily propose that lyrics *per se* can achieve this insight into environments, but that UK urban music lyrics can. Drawing largely on the work of Barron (2013), I propose that the lyrics of UK urban music are an ethnographic text of their experiences, and that these experiences often relate not only to more abstract concepts of love, loss, pain etc., but also directly to how they experience their musical world; their conception of the music industry. If one posits that the contemporary music marketplace is a highly competitive place, and the lyrics within UK urban music are notable in that they reflect

artists' experiences of this marketplace, it holds that they might offer relevant insights to understand their experience of competition.

Lyrical analysis in music studies/cultural sociological enquiry has been employed as a methodological tool to examine concepts such as diversity (Frith, 1987), and/or suggesting diversity to be representative of an arbitrary conception such as 'quality' or 'innovativeness' (Peterson and Berger, 1975). Indeed, given that the research at hand seeks to answer questions relating not to what competition can deliver in the marketplace – such as diversity – but how that competition is experienced, it is important here to formulate an argument predicated on textual forms representing a form of *primary data*, similar to the answers provided in interviews. This will be undertaken here by arguing that the lyrics of UK urban music/grime are *particularly* applicable as a form of primary data. This is because they are themselves ethnographic in nature and "can represent a distinctive ethnographic artefact" (Barron, 2013:532). A key critique of lyrics is that they are illustrative as opposed to evidential; a device to create a feeling as opposed to articulating an experience. Artists then are said to be portraying a character, and the validity of their voice is questioned. However, my argument relating to the usefulness of lyrics is, as suggested, highly genre specific. I suggest that the work of UK urban music is very much concerned with articulating an experience (Barron, 2013); it is in many respects its central premise. In this sense, the genre is epitomised by authentic, or 'real', depictions of an artists lived reality, spoken in their true voice. As Zuberi (2013) suggests: "Given the MC's tendency to discuss themselves and what they do, in many cases MC recordings are also commentaries on working in this changing media environment".

UK urban/grime music generates cultural texts which can specifically be utilised as primary sources given that they are inherently ethnographic in nature (Barron, 2013). The work of Barron (2013) suggests that grime tracks can be viewed as works of anthropology, and in this sense, albums by Mike Skinner of The Streets or Dizzee Rascal can be seen as cultural texts just as academic contributions in the anthropological tradition. Ethnography seek provide a window into the world of the everyday via insight into "a social group's observable patterns of

behaviour, customs and way of life" (Fetterman, 1989:27). Barron suggests this 'meta-conception' is epitomised in grime music given that they confer "musically based but fundamentally emic perspectives that reflect particular viewpoints of lived social realities" (Barron, 2013:544). They then "constitute qualitative 'documents of life'...derived from participant observation in the most immediate" (ibid:532). In accordance with Stokes (1997), lyrics might then be viewed as a 'dataset'. Barron (2013:541) thus suggests that grime music is "a cultural articulation that is defined by an ethnographic 'poetry' of social life" (ibid), and is "an expression of Willis' ethnographic imagination" (ibid:544): "rare and special components of the symbolic stresses of the common and everyday that ethnography so routinely picks up and records" (Willis, 2000: 6). Furthermore, these texts represent artistic experiences which have been communicated outside of the traditional confines of participant based research. They are then indicative of an expression of perception not communicated within the structures of interview scenarios or direct observation, and the methodological pitfalls those techniques potentially incur.

The social worlds studied by ethnographers have "been largely devoid of written documents other than those produced by the fieldworkers themselves" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:121). That is, the ethnographers voice is privileged over that of, for lack of a better word, participants. However, both the lyrics and the tweets of artists represent documents produced by 'participants' - indeed, as does this thesis as a piece of original research. Furthermore, this internally, native-produced ethnographic work avoids Foster's (1999) criticism of artists producing ethnographies as 'pseudo-ethnography' as the integration within the culture in question is not an external imposition for the purposes of, say, academic research as per Bennett (1980). Instead it is an organic internal derivation; a naturalistic collaboration. As a genre then, hip hop/grime is, almost uniquely, ethnographic in nature as it represents a specific communicative discourse of localised, inter-personal experience. Therefore, their lyrics are a "written representation of culture" (Van Maanen, 1988:1). As such, by both listening to and transcribing all the lyrics written by the specific artists in question over the research period, and thematically coding them, supplemented by their rich social networking history by employing the analysis of tweets I

described earlier, I can find a rich, qualitative data source which communicates the experiences of artists as ethnographies themselves. Thus, when I am seeking to understand how artists emotionally understand the impact of creative practices, the analysis of lyrics will prove crucial. It is not enough to comment on the behavioural techniques of artist-intermediary engagement, or capital interplay, but we must also seek to understand how these processes *feel* to artists. Do they feel ambivalent, empowered, distraught, frustrated, or motivated? To what extent can our interviews, but also the alternative data sources such as lyrics and tweets, reveal how artists are emotionally interpreting their social world? Their songs - their ethnographic texts – can reveal to us their affective interpretation of their reality, as; “Grime lyrics describe with molecular detail the dirt of the MCs’ vividly quotidian lives” (Hancox, 2013:175).

In uncovering emotional responses, this textual analysis might include analysis of twitter statements too as a supplementary source of data. The majority of interactions on Twitter consist of ‘Daily Chatter’; people sharing the everyday details of their lives and what they are currently doing (Java et.al, 2007). In this sense, tweets represent individuals conveying their daily experiences, and sharing their perceptions of those experiences, providing a rich qualitative data source. Anthropologically, the data generated from tweets is wholly unstructured, meaning that information which could not have been conceived of at the time of the study being undertaken could be observed, and indeed, as an ethnographer, it is crucial to embrace this ‘openness’ to information generation (Baszanger and Dodier, 1997:9). Thus, tweets for Rival and Genesis represent a publically observable (mitigating ethical concerns) diary-like documentation of their daily experiences, whilst for myself, they represent what anthropologists might call a ‘research log’ or fieldnotes. Twitter essentially constitutes research participants engaging in a longitudinal, qualitative documentation of experience, devoid of any concerns for ensuring their continued motivation which might mar alternative longitudinal qualitative methodologies. Furthermore, this data-set would be updated entirely at their own discretion, which, given the discussed nature of the website, was with incredible regularity. Between signing up for Twitter in February 2009 and signing to EMI in June 2013, ‘Context’ tweeted on average 460 times a month for 4 years (24,397 in total). Over the same period,

Genesis Elijah tweeted on average almost twice as often, averaging 946 times a month (50,146 tweets in total).

Twitter is especially important when seeking to analyse my personal emotional responses, and in this sense is important for what it can reveal. That is to say, I can interview the case-study artists and ask them directly about how specific instances have made them feel; I cannot interview myself. However, Twitter constitutes broadcasting to a public domain and is thus typified by a degree of self-surveillance over what is shared (Marwick, 2012:379). This does not necessarily compromise the validity of enquiry into emotional responses to competitiveness however, as for artists they will not seek to conceal sentiment in the same way as an individual hiding information from a ‘boss’ for example. For artists, they will distinguish between sharing their ‘real/home’ life, and their ‘artistic’ life. For instance, I very rarely, if ever, tweeted about my PhD throughout the entire research project, and Genesis rarely, if ever, tweeted about his family/children/partner. Additionally, both of these forms of textual analysis allow a researcher to map changes over time. Therefore, for questions relating to long-term emotional responses (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011), or the changing nature of particular phenomena, exploring the evolution of responses and behaviours over time can prove most insightful. They furthermore allow the researcher to situate responses within a wider contextual dimension, and “combine a concern for micro and macro social processes” (Henwood and Lang, 2003:49), a particularly important criterion when investigating a social world in a state of flux. Longitudinal data-sources address concerns relating to the potential temporality of a behaviour/emotion. If something is seen to continually occur, then it is a pattern of behaviour, as opposed to an isolated incident. Crucially, Twitter facilitates the exploration of ‘self-generated data’; that is, the subjects under enquiry can complete their ‘research diary’ in their own time, and address concerns which are of importance to them at the time of completion. Subjects can, at their own discretion, share as much or as little information as they are comfortable with, without having discourse necessarily directed in a particular direction, and free from the influence of interview bias.

### 3.4. Audit Trail: Observation, Textual Analysis and Interviews

Given that I was seeking to understand the contemporary experience of competition, it was important that my data be contemporary, and of the ‘here and now’. Therefore it was decided that the timeframe for conducting research was to be largely dictated by the funding period of my ESRC Award (2010-2013). My first stage of research was that of observation and textual analysis. I had already been ‘following’ the careers of both Rival and Genesis Elijah indirectly given my involvement in UK urban music and my absorption within that cultural scene. However, in January 2012, I mapped their patterns of releases via publically available information from a variety of websites (however, each artist had their own website or blog which updated me, as a reader, on every development in their creative career). I was looking for what was released, when, how, and with what success with traditional cultural intermediaries (primarily radio DJs and journalists). Crucial in this observation was an inductive approach seeking to uncover patterns, trying to ascertain whether or not there were there any releases which did particularly well measured in terms of intermediary-based support (radio play, press coverage), and did these releases share any particular traits? I ensured that I followed each artist on Twitter (both artists had chosen to make their ‘Tweets’ public as opposed to private), and I set up a notification so that I was alerted each time they tweeted/posted on their website. Alongside this, I transcribed the lyrics from all of their publically available songs at the time, which were available from a range of sources; primarily YouTube, but also Bandcamp, as well as the iTunes Store.

Key when analysing the data from lyrics was thematic analysis. Lyrics were coded according to specific themes, allowing me to focus on passages which specifically related to my research interests. In urban music, themes or topics are frequently addressed in bars; chunks of rhyming rhythmical prose. The standard structure of a hip-hop song is three verses of sixteen bars each, with eight bar hooks or choruses in the middle. Within these typical forty-eight bars, a wide range of themes might be addressed ranging from one overarching topic which guides the track, to multiple themes addressed in chunks of two, four, eight or

sixteen bars. Data analysis commenced via open coding; grouping the ‘bars’ from each songs into a thematic code; “categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990:62). These themes emerged from the data, and included: braggadocio, family life, music industry, love, politics, money, and upbringing. Selective coding then allowed me to separate key passages from the artist’s current discography relating to the music industry and money, and thus seek to uncover how they felt regarding the contemporary nature of the artist-intermediary relationship, the role of money in their lives, and any reference to motivation. Certainly, many songs made no reference to this whatsoever, with some being about love, loss, or many other themes. However, as suggested in the work of Barron (2013), urban music is notable in its lyrical content for the way in which it is a direct communication of contemporary experience. Therefore, I uncovered many passages within the analysed lyrics which appeared to communicate the artists’ experiences of both how they interacted with intermediaries, and the financial reality of their lives.

In April 2012 I submitted for ethical approval (which was granted) to conduct interviews given that my research involved human subjects, ensuring that the research complied with all ethical regulations of both my institution and funding body. My two case-study artists were interviewed a total of three times between 2012 and 2013 (July 2012, February 2013, and November 2013). Prior to each interview, I conducted textual analysis to ensure I was up to date with each of the artists’ latest releases, and well as updating my observation notes based on their releases and tweets from the previous months. Interviews were arranged by contacting the artists directly via their publically available email addresses from their websites. Each artist was provided with a consent form which outlined the nature of my research and my specific interests, as well as informing them that they were free to leave the study at any time and did not need to answer any questions, as well as outlining how I would be storing all data on a password protected file on my laptop. Informed consent was therefore obtained. This form also gave them the opportunity to agree to be named and quoted in the final thesis, to which they both agreed (for copy of the Consent Form see Appendix.1). The interviews were conducted at the artist’s homes (Genesis in Watford, UK, and Rival in Hornchurch, UK), and lasted approximately 1 hour

each. Interviews were semi-structured in that they used an ‘interview guide’. These were prompts, key words, and even loosely structured questions, which I had saved in the password-protected ‘Data Collection’ file on my computer, and which I would turn to at intervals throughout the interviews. As I was ‘observing’ the case studies in such detail online, being acutely aware of each time they were played on the radio, had interviews published, released a new video, etc., I could weave between discussing their current releases, yet still refer to pre-defined concepts to which I needed specific answers. My observations informed my interviews so that, for example, where I had observed a particular method of releasing music by an artist e.g. I had observed Rival releasing a wide number of tracks with remixes featuring a large number of other artists, I could ask him directly about his technique specifically.

When analysing my own creative practice, my principal method of analysis was that of email-mining. This was a method by which I was largely able to ‘self-observe’. For every song released between 2010 and 2013, I would load up two windows on my computer, one showing my inbox and one showing my outbox, and I would work historically backwards. I was, as with Genesis Elijah and Rival, seeking to inductively uncover patterns of engagement with intermediaries; who had I contacted, when, what did I tell them, why, and what was the outcome? In addition to this, for each project, I had kept receipts relating to all expenditure – money earned and money spent. I made primitive balance sheets for each project over the period, as well as creating balance sheets for my live performances over this period too. This quantitative economic data would allow me to comment on the role of economic capital in contemporary creative practice. Additionally, I transcribed all of the lyrics for my releases over the research period and again, sought to examine the extent to which I made reference to my experience of my creative career via thematic analysis. Finally, I downloaded my entire Twitter history, and again, sought to uncover any instances where I shared sentiments expressing how I was emotionally experiencing my career (as opposed to, say, telling everyone what I was having for lunch that day!). The idea for employing the use of tweets occurred to me towards the end of the research project meaning that tweets were wholly naturalistic; they were not guided by my research interests. Whilst, with

reference to my personal tweets, this was beneficial in many respects in that data was in no way informed by research aims and thus a pure reflection of sentiment, its primary drawback was that the notes were utterly unorganised, and not driven by any desire to reflect particular themes, issues, or concerns specifically relating to the research project. I was also able to download the Twitter history of Rival and Genesis Elijah at the end of the research period, and therefore use this as a supplementary form of qualitative data, and used this data-source in much the same way as the lyrics of the artists. Tweets were thematically coded to allow me to ascertain examples of artists either interacting with industries, sharing their opinions about the music industry, expressing their thoughts about the role of money in their lives, or any references to motivation. As per the work of Java et.al (2007), the vast majority of tweets from all three artists consisted of either sharing or retweeting news, promoting their music, or 'daily chatter' (sharing what they were watching on television or how they were sitting on the bus and bored, for example).

Particularly interesting in the data-collection and analysis, was the way in which my autoethnographic self-generated data was able to provide a particular set of answers, whilst the case-study data generated others. The data on my own creative career was able to provide the depth and specificity of experience, as well as the fine detail of economic expenditure and earnings which my case-studies may not have been comfortable sharing. In interviews with Genesis and Rival however, they were able to articulate their emotional experience of competition, and explain the rationale behind their behaviours in a way that I, via the autoethnographic method, would not have been able to without simply 'declaring' something to be true. In this sense, the two types of data complemented each other, and when taken together, were able to provide a 'rich aesthetic' (Richardson, 2000:15) of the contemporary competitive experience. I would also like to comment finally on the honesty and poignancy with which my case-studies answered my questions in interviews. I had theoretically understood concerns about engendering openness via a presentation of fragility, and was similarly aware that as expressive artists they certainly had the potential to be evocatively articulate. However, I was moved at certain instances by their comments, which I hope had been teased out by the nature of my engagement

with them. For instance, in my second interview with Rival, at around forty-five minutes, he slumped back and with a look of sheer exasperation on his face began to ask “When is there going to be light at the end of the tunnel?...I’m relevant and still who cares?....Do I want to be thirty-two and still up and coming?” Statements such as these stayed with me for a long time during the writing up phase.

## Conclusion

The research design proposed is that of an experimental ethnography, a research method which seeks “the understanding and representation of experience [and] presenting and explaining the culture in which this experience is located” (O’Reilly, 2012:3). From the distinctly colonial-tinged exoticism of its founding father Malinowski (1922), to the myriad of applications today such as Wall Street greed (Ho, 2009) or the experience of crippling disability (Murphy, 1987), the ambition of the discipline has remained the exposition of the research participant’s “relation to life, his vision of his world” (Malinowski, 1922: 25). It is a multifaceted methodology which encompasses the wealth of potential research tools suggested in this chapter - participant observation in cultural practices, note-taking, participant interviews, and analysis of secondary sources and texts – all undertaken within the context of the daily lives of those under inquiry, “respecting, recording, representing, *at least partly in its own terms*, the irreducibility of human experience” (O’Reilly, 2012:3). Critical to this process, is utter absorption into the culture under enquiry. At the birth of the anthropological method, and still to a certain extent today, this was often achieved geographically; the cultures being studied were foreign, distant, exotic lands, islands or tiny rural communities where the researcher would spend a prolonged period of time undertaking their research. In a globalised world however, and as the unknown is eroded further by the advancement of knowledge, ethnography has increasingly changed its focus in a homeward direction (Madden, 1999), as per my own research. This study is then ‘anthropology at home’ which achieves that vital ethnographic prerequisite of cultural absorption, achieved largely given my ‘Complete Member Status’ (Anderson, 2006), within this subcultural niche.

John Thompson (2010:406) suggests, “it is not enough to sit back and reflect abstractly on what might or might not be happening in these worlds”, you must live and breathe within them in order to accurately tell the story of their cultural operation – a modern reconfiguration of Malinowski’s original sentiment: “Proper conditions for ethnographic work...can really only be achieved by camping right in their villages” (Malinowski, 1922:7). As an artist myself I have not only set up camp in their village; I live in *our* village.

The debates raised towards the end of the chapter, exploring the extent to which the music that I and my genre-specific contemporaries create is *itself* an anthropological project, representative of an interpretation of experience, and “not merely aesthetic exercises” (Anzaluda, 1990:24), presents interesting philosophical questions concerning the research design proposed herein. It appears that this research design is an experiential, native (auto)ethnography of ethnographic self-representation; a concept recently analytically grappled with (Desai, 2002) under the definitional guise of transidioethnography. Here, as Foster (1999) suggests, we see the “artist as ethnographer”, and vice versa. Innovatively, within the ethnographic research design, the subjects, the Malinowskian ‘other’, are ethnographers themselves, constructing their own ethnographic discourse via both the lyrics they write and via their analysable online self-documentation (Rudolf, 1997), and I then, as a researcher, ethnographically interpret this in a scholastic Escherian ‘Penrose Stairs’.

I suggest that the research design proposed can achieve excellent depth of focus and ‘thick description’, not least due to such a huge amount of longitudinal, qualitative and quantitative data being generated via my own personal experience. Crucial is my ability, as an ethnographer, to *communicate* that experience. It is key to acknowledge a potential disjuncture between how artists see the world, and how it is in reality; that is, whilst I have proposed a methodological technique of enquiry to understand, for example, how artists interact with cultural intermediaries and the degree of significance attributed to them, this is not to suggest that their *perception* of the world within which they are embedded will be wholly accurate. However, this thesis is, as suggested, an interpretive exploration of experience. I am not seeking to discover, for example,

the extent to which cultural intermediaries are of importance to the music industry, but how important they are *perceived to be* by artists, and the subsequent nature of artists' adopted behavioural practices. Their marketplace reality is self-constituted, whether informed by observable fact or not. Finally, this chapter has argued for the validity of incorporating an autoethnographic approach as part a triangulated methodology. Certainly, with reference to communication of the emotional experience of competition, this perspective will prove insightful. As Mykhalovskiy (1996) suggests, the autoethnographic communication of experience should be emotionally evocative. As Hesse-Biber and Leavey (2013:285) note, key is that this method often "includes striking stories with dramatic recall about remembered events in which the author was a participant". These stories from my musical journey will thus pepper the experimental ethnographic approach outlined here.

#### **4. Cultural Intermediaries: The Role of Collaboration in Competition**

**Rival:** That's the thing. No one cares. You've got to give them a reason to care (Interview, 07/12)

Questions concerning the nature and role of 'cultural intermediaries' in competitive cultural markets emerged from the literature review. The central research question generated concerned the role cultural intermediaries play in the lives of contemporary creative labour in a competitive market, and why? This chapter will seek to understand the nature of the intermediary-artist relationship in a contemporary competitive context via online observations of the public release patterns of artists and the role intermediaries have played in these releases. This will be triangulated with numerous qualitative data sources, including semi-structured longitudinal interviews, sentiments expressed on social networks, and analysis of lyrics to allow artists themselves to explain this observed behaviour. I will be seeking to uncover what role, if any, intermediaries play in the creative practice of contemporary creative labour, and grapple with the debate in the literature concerning whether the increasing competition in the marketplace engendered by digitalisation (Bockstedt, Kauffman and Riggins, 2004) has increased (Seabright and Weeds, 2007), or diminished (Walsh, 2007) their importance. At its heart, this investigation into the behavioural practices of creative labour seeks to analyse *how artists attempt to be heard*, and what role intermediaries play in this quest. Through my observations and interviews, I set out to understand how artists interact with what I call 'traditional intermediaries' – that is, predominantly, radio DJs and journalists. My interests were primarily whether artists viewed them as important, how much they had been supported by 'traditional intermediaries', and the extent to which artists engaged with them.

The findings are presented in two parts. Part one suggests that artists, in general, see traditional intermediaries as important given their ability to act as a trusted distributor to a large audience – often larger than they might be able to reach individually using their own online platforms. However, the artist-intermediary relationship is complex given the sheer abundance of artists competing for their

attention. They feel frustrated and often ignored by these traditional intermediaries, and acknowledge that the intermediaries are themselves swamped in content. They thus adopt specific attention seeking behaviours to capture their attention and secure their support in the form of column inches, radio play, or online blog support. A crucial tactic is that of aligning themselves with numerous ‘others’ in order to capture the attention of traditional intermediaries. However, it is also suggested that these ‘others’ have become reconstituted as a new type of neo-intermediary themselves given their ability to act as a supplementary distributary mechanism alongside the ‘traditional intermediaries’. In this sense, the category of who might be included under the ‘cultural intermediary’ conceptual umbrella might be expanded to include anyone with a large online, social media presence, from celebrities to other artists themselves, who distribute content to their audience via social networking platforms. We thus see artists seeking to maximise their routes to market via both traditional intermediaries (DJs, journalists, etc.), but also neo-intermediaries (celebrities, more famous artists, etc). The creative practices illuminated highlight how competitive forces have created an environment which necessitates collaboration, and in this sense, both collaboration and competition define the experience of musicians today.

Part two suggests that the nature of contemporary artist-intermediary engagement, and the collaboration this fosters, is more complex than this form of attention seeking behaviour. It highlights the existence of a process whereby artists inform one group of intermediaries concerning support received from another group of intermediaries, in the hope of encouraging similar support in a form of ‘multiplier of support effect’. Artists then hope that others will see the way in which others are lending their support, and subsequently endorse too. This is a calculated process whereby creative labour seek to align themselves explicitly with prominent traditional intermediaries (such as getting played on BBC Radio 1, or achieving coverage in a broadsheet newspaper), and use this support to gain further endorsement. By understanding this process, we can understand *why* cultural intermediaries are conceived of as important to creative labour. Not only are they trusted distribution platforms within a sea of content of ever increasingly depth and complexity, but they are crucial signifiers and distinguishing markers of quality to help artists as they try to ‘stand out’.

## 4.1 Contemporary Engagement with Cultural Intermediaries

Making good music isn't hard. Getting it heard is a whole other mission

Genesis Elijah (Tweet, 05.02.12, 6.16pm)

In this first section I will explore how each of the case study artists employ strategic methods of self promotion and creative practice in order to secure the support of cultural intermediaries. An examination of which 'projects' artists released during the period 2010-13, combined with qualitative analysis of interview data, social networks and lyrics to allow for greater depth of explanation, will illuminate specific behavioural practices. Firstly I examine how Rival featured a variety of different artists on his releases in order to get traditional intermediaries to pay attention to his work. Secondly, how I as Context adopted a similar style of 'attention seeking via remixes'. Thirdly, how Genesis Elijah, via the creation of 'bootlegs', was able to secure large radio support. Finally, it will be shown that Context and Rival were able to integrate traditional intermediaries into their creative practice to secure and consolidate support.

### 4.1.1. Rival and the Role of Remixes

In my interviews with him, grime MC Rival spoke of how the American hip hop and RnB culture of remixes had influenced his particular promotional methods, notably the rise to prominence in recent years of the 'MC Remix'. These are not typical hip-hop remixes, with all of the sampling and copyright ramifications they entail. Instead, these remixes are usually in conjunction with, or immediately following/preceding, the release of a single or mixtape by an artist, and generally feature an identical or only slightly altered backing track to the original, but include a wealth of other famous artists. Notable examples of this phenomenon include US RnB singer Chris Brown's track 'Deuces', with a remix featuring 5 artists each of whom had obtained at least one number 1 selling album in the United States - Kanye West, Drake, T.I, Fabolous, and Andre 3000

of Outkast - or the track 'Flava In Ya Ear' by Craig Mack from 1994 which featured a remix starring LL Cool J, Busta Rhymes, Rampage, The Notorious B.I.G, P Diddy and Mary J Blige.

Between July 2011 and September 2012 Rival employed this technique no less than three times, and each time, he used it to promote his forthcoming release. On 27.03.11, Rival released a track entitled 'Lock Off The Rave', and followed this up on July 10<sup>th</sup> with a remix featuring seventeen separate artists - Discarda, Jammin, Nasty Jack, Kozzie, Badness, Merky Ace, Sharky Major, Danny D, Kwam, Big Narstie, Blacks, Dark Boi, Ego, Diesel, Jammer and Jamakabi. On the same day that he released this remix, he released his ten track EP entitled 'Biscuits'. Almost twelve months on, Rival announced that he would be releasing a new EP called 'Party Rings' on 13.04.12, and ten days prior to this, he released another remix, this time for a track called 'Headshot Season', featuring six MCs: Roachee, Merky Ace, Discarda, Big Narstie, D Power and Tre Mission. Finally, in September 2012, he released a remix of his track 'Late Nights Early Mornings' featuring J2K (who twelve months earlier had achieved a number 1 single as part of his collective 'Roll Deep'), Mercston and Big Narstie, in preparation for his Rivz and Shine EP which he released that December. In interviews, I asked what informed this method of creative practice:

**Interviewer:** So what are you trying to do with these remixes?

**Rival:** It's very hard to get noticed in this day and age. You've got everybody trying to do music the same way you've got loads of people trying to play football; it's only a selected few that get through the door... The remixes do help because even if journalists or DJs haven't paid attention to the original, the remix with the big MCs will always help, because *that's something that they need to open up on their email now* because they've seen 'Oh he's working with *this guy* now' (Interview, 07/12)

He articulates how he feels, rightly or wrongly, that in the competitive digital marketplace, by aligning his music with those of higher standing, he can capture

the attention of key journalists or DJs who might otherwise ignore his emails or requests to be heard. In this sense, he seeks to align himself with a number of ‘others’ in an attention seeking exercise which is, for him, a direct result of the perception that the marketplace is ferociously competitive, and that all artists are competing for the ears of those who they believe can help them be heard. As he notes: “Everyone’s competing; the journalists don’t have the time to check out everyone’s music” (Rival, Interview, 07/12). He feels that he needs a factor which distinguishes *his* music from other people’s in an environment where “there are a million other MCs doing what you’re doing” (Rival, interview, 07/12), and in which “DJs still play a very big factor, and the journalists as well” (ibid). Indeed, across Rival’s six EP releases between 2010 and 2013, 46% of the tracks had guest or featured artists.

**Rival:** It seems to put more light on the MC as well as the MCs he’s around...

**Interviewer:** Do you find it’s quite effective?

**Rival:** Yeah it draws loads more people to it. Loads more  
(Interview, 07/12)

Within the UK grime scene, the support of DJ Logan Sama on Kiss 100 is crucial for artists as the only DJ on legal British radio with a show which plays grime music exclusively<sup>6</sup>. His influence within the scene is unparalleled, with youth publication RWD stating: “In a highly competitive market Logan Sama remains one of the most influential and important voices in British youth culture” (Sigel, 2014). Throughout 2011 and 2012, he supported Rival at the time of the release of each of these key remix packages, playing Lock Off The Rave Remix on 11.07.11, the Headshot Season Remix on 24.04.12 and 01.05.12, and the Late Nights Early Mornings Remix on 25.09.12 and 09.10.12. He also invited him into the studio on numerous occasions. As Alessio (2011) suggested with reference to the Lock Off The Rave remix: “the love it received from radio (from

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<sup>6</sup> During the writing up of this project DJ Logan Sama left Kiss 100

Logan Sama to Rinse FM DJs) and the scene in general is undeniable”. Certainly it can be seen that much of Rival’s radio support coincided with the release of these remixes. However, perhaps more important than this, he adopted these particular behavioural strategies as he felt that they were a necessary distinguishing mechanism within the context of a competitive marketplace, and he felt that radio support was important. Indeed, the notion that he conceptualised collaborations, and affiliating oneself with well known artists, as important, can be seen when he tweeted: “The problem with Grime is we never push unheard talent out its always some sort of bring in for a mc to get heard out ere” [sic] (Tweet, 4.40pm, 24.01.10). A ‘bring in’ is where a more famous MC introduces up and coming MCs to a new audience by either featuring them on a song, or ‘bringing them in’ to a radio station appearance. This is precisely what UK rapper Wiley did when he brought Chipmunk, who went on to achieve a succession of number one singles, with him to BBC Radio 1 for a guest appearance and introduced him to listeners in 2007. By Rival having such high profile guest features on his tracks, he was in essence, ‘bringing himself in’; giving intermediaries a reason to listen to his music via his collaborations and affiliations, and ultimately securing their support.

#### *4.1.2. Context and Remixers: ‘1.4 at 12’*

In a similar way to Rival, I as Context, used remixes to be heard, collaborating with a number of ‘others’ in order to capture the attention of intermediaries. This can be seen most explicitly in the track ‘1.4 at 12’, which was released in early 2013. The original version of the track was reasonably successful, being premiered on BBC Radio 1Xtra on 26.02.13, and the video which followed in May 2013 being playlisted on MTV Base. However, my management and I felt that we were focussing too much on intermediaries at national radio and TV, and were not doing enough to maximise our routes to market via online intermediaries, such as bloggers. On 20.03.13 my manager emailed me and stated: “Guys lets [sic] come up with some ideas to improve online as we aren’t working as hard as we could be imo [sic]” (Manager, Email, 20.03.12). We came up with an idea that we would, like Rival, get remixes of my current single ‘1.4

at 12' made. However, our remixes would differ from Rival's – not only would they feature other MCs/rappers, but we would get up-and-coming producers to redo the production too. Our hope was, that by aligning ourselves with a wide group of artists, both MCs and producers, we could encourage online intermediaries to support me as they would notice who I was working with.

I commissioned three remixes of '1.4 at 12'. The first was to have the production remade by a producer called EAN who had achieved some mild success releasing dubstep records through his affiliation with the artist Om Unit, as well as for mixing and producing for the Mercury Award Nominated album for Ghostpoet entitled 'Peanut Butter Blues and Melancholy Jam' (released 04.02.11, Brownswood Recordings). I then asked both Genesis Elijah and Rival to feature on the track. By this time I was engaged in the data-collection for my research and so had an understanding of their fan-bases and wider appeal. My management team and myself had studied their online metrics (average YouTube views per video, social media presence measured as Twitter followers and Facebook 'Likes', blog support) and ascertained that collaborating with these artists could prove helpful in strategic media placements. The website SB.TV, a YouTube-based urban music platform with an enormous audience (as of 19.08.14 the channel had 459,556 subscribers and had amassed 236,471,540 views), was a key intermediary. Their distributory potential was enormous, and by contextualising my music deeply within the urban music scene by having other credible MCs appearing on my track, I hoped to secure their endorsement. They took the track as an exclusive, and premiered it to their audience on 02.04.13 (Jorquera, 2013). I immediately had a second remix made by a producer called 'Blacksmif', and I was able to organise for this remix to be premiered by MTV Iggy the following week on 09.04.13 (Patterson, 2013). The third and final remix was by producer 'Great Skies' and on 30.04.13 this remix was premiered by US hip hop website VIBE (Polonsky, 2013). Each remixer was chosen for his ability to appeal to a specific audience, and the intermediary which feeds information to that audience was focussed on in order to disseminate my work. In this sense I, like Rival, used the technique of remixes, and of aligning myself with 'others' in the form of musical peers, in order to capture the attention of key intermediaries for their dissemination potential.

#### 4.1.3 Genesis Elijah and Bootlegs

Genesis Elijah employed a similar model of creative practice, albeit in a slightly different guise in that he sought to align himself less with immediate musical peers, but famous artists from America; a technique which led to him receiving nationwide airplay and recognition. In November 2009 (UK), American RnB singer Jason Derulo released his debut single ‘Whatcha Say’, reaching Number 1 in the US Billboard Hot 100, and Number 3 in the UK Singles Chart (on 01.12.09). Some weeks later in 2010, Genesis Elijah extracted the beat from this track and replaced Derulo’s singing with his own lyrics, uploading the track online entitled: ‘Jason DeRulo - Whatcha Say (Bootleg Remix) feat Genesis Elijah’. By doing so, the hope was, that as fans of the track searched for DeRulo’s original online, they might stumble upon his, given the similar wording in the title. His video earned over 60,000 hits before YouTube’s content moderators removed it for infringement of copyright. The following year, on 26.08.11, he uploaded online a track which covered the James Blake track ‘The Wilhelm Scream’. The original track had been incredibly successful for Blake, earning him an Ivor Novello nomination that year. Genesis sampled the original production and left Blake’s chorus on the track, filling in the instrumental gaps with his own lyrics. He uploaded the track online as ‘Genesis Elijah – Falling feat. James Blake’. Elijah laments in the track:

These bills are piling up, I’m struggling to pay  
I’m sending tracks to radio stations but nothing’s getting played  
Genesis Elijah (*‘Falling’*, 2011)

Indeed, between 2010 and 2012, he received very little airplay across national radio stations, with the vast majority of his airplay support emanating from Tom Robinson on the lesser known BBC 6 Music. However, on 29.01.12, he uploaded a track which used, as its background music, ‘Video Games’ by Lana del Rey, a track which had been a huge online success that year, and having been seen over sixty-five million times on her Vevo channel (as of 05.08.14).

(Fig.1: Genesis' YouTube uploads)



Again, in an attempt to capitalize on the success of the del Rey original, Elijah uploaded his video with the title: 'Genesis Elijah - Psalms (Lana Del Rey - Video Games)' (see Fig.1 above). With both remixes, he deliberately included the name of the original track and the name of the original artist in the title. This was done so given a clear knowledge of search engines and how key words operate within them. He hoped that people might find his track alongside the more famous version. If a fan of Lana Del Rey typed 'Lana Del Rey - Video Games' into the YouTube search engine, that fan might stumble across Genesis' version and he will have gained a listener. He could have named the track 'Genesis Elijah – Psalms', but he did not. He was explicitly aligning himself with the original, more famous artist. The same linguistic technique was used for his Jason Derulo bootleg. He even wrote "feat. Genesis Elijah", meaning 'featuring'. The phraseology is as if Jason Derulo has employed his services as a featured artist.

In 'Psalms' he again laments his lack of radio support:

I'm getting paid shows and royalties  
 But UK radio never play me  
 Genesis Elijah (*'Falling'*, 2011)

However, his cover of the Lana Del Rey song was named as Zane Lowe's 'Next Hype' record on 14.02.12 on BBC Radio 1, just two weeks after being uploaded. This was undoubtedly the biggest piece of radio support ever received by the artist. In the same way that Rival and Context collaborated with peers and

received support from traditional intermediaries, so Genesis Elijah collaborated with more famous artists<sup>7</sup>. It is interesting however to note the ways in which their methods of collaboration differed. For Rival, he would approach the artists directly and they made music together. For Genesis, because the people he wanted to work with were global superstars, he essentially worked with them without their direct knowledge. In this sense, processes of copyright infringement in the form of sampling have helped a smaller, less well-known artist, compete with more established acts for mainstream radio play.

### *Neo-Intermediaries*

However, it is important to note at this juncture how both Genesis Elijah and Rival did not say in interviews that they employed these techniques solely to secure the support of cultural intermediaries. Genesis' opinion of intermediaries varied throughout the research from hatred - "Fuck the industry" (*Battle Cry*, 2011) - to appreciation - "So grateful to all the DJ's and bloggers going out of their way to help me right now. Couldn't do none of this without you (Tweet, 15.01.11, 10.05pm). However, as Rival stated in our interviews, it is not only the ears of other cultural intermediaries whom he imagines will be captured by his remix technique:

**Interviewer:** So you'd say working with these other rappers gets the DJs and stuff on board?

**Rival:** It's not just that. It draws more of an audience of people who didn't hear the original... It's not just your fans...you've got the MCs audience drawing in. Now *they* are listening (Interview, 07/12)

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<sup>7</sup> Categorising this practice as 'collaboration' is conceptually problematic, not least because in this instance the other artists weren't involved in the creative process nor were they consenting. However, collaborative is used here to exemplify the way in which Genesis is seeking to align himself with others, as per Rival and Context.

The hope is that the supporters of the other artists will listen to the track, and hopefully discover them too in a ‘supporters-by-proxy’ scenario. Therefore, not only will your supporters hear the track, but hopefully fans of the other artist will listen too, multiplying your audience. In Rival’s words: “a track goes from like two-hundred people liking it, to one-thousand” (Interview, 07/12). More than this, it highlights how fellow artists can act as intermediaries in the form of distributors themselves. In this sense, not only is competition breeding co-operation, but also a sense of community, with artists sharing each others material and helping each other. Whilst they are competing with each other for finite resources (column inches, blog space, radio play etc), they are not rivals in the pure economic sense. Instead we can see co-operative, community-like behaviour necessitated by a competitive environment. In a competitive environment one needs as many routes to market as possible and in this sense a cultural ‘other’ might both spark the interest of a traditional intermediary as demonstrated, but might also distribute the shared cultural creation to their own audience thus expanding your listenership.

This technique appears to be epitomised by Genesis Elijah who has, on several occasions, used soundbites from comedian and star of the acclaimed BBC series ‘The Office’, Ricky Gervais in his musical projects. On 01.11.11, he tweeted “Hey @RickyGervais, here’s a short film/music video I did for Halloween”, in the hope that Ricky might watch it, and ultimately share it with his online audience of over 5 million followers, which he did (Twitter exchange seen in Fig.2 on the next page). Genesis was quick to acknowledge the massive promotional push Ricky Gervais had given his music. On the same day, he tweeted: “Wow!! Over 100 new twitter followers in one day! Big shout out to @RickyGervais and everyone who checked my new video out. Humbled for real” (Tweet, 15.12.11, 5.27pm). The impact on the amount of views was huge too, amassing ‘over 7000’ in three days (Tweet, 18.12.11, 11.58pm).

(Fig.2: Genesis Elijah and Ricky Gervais Tweets)



Indeed, I as Context had attempted the same promotional tactic one year earlier. On 26.10.10, I uploaded a track where I had placed in audio from famous rappers, and then tagged them in a tweet in the hope that they might share it with their fans: “@tinchystryder – Game Over (feat. @sn1giggs @contextmc @professorgreen @DevlinOfficial + MORE (Bootleg Remix)” (Tweet, 9.01PM, 26.10.10). I was unfortunately less successful than Genesis Elijah. However, this illustrates how the cultural ‘other’ with whom one seeks to align oneself is beneficial both to capture the attention of cultural intermediaries, whether intended or not, and also to act as a distributor themselves; a ‘neo-intermediary’ who can distribute your art using their elevated social networking platform. Thus, ‘others’ are used to capture the attention of intermediaries. However, they are also reconstituted as intermediaries themselves.

An excellent example of this in popular music can be seen in Canada with singing sensation The Weeknd. In March 2011, Canadian MC ‘Drake’ had achieved five top 20 singles in the US Billboard Hot 100 (Best I Ever Had, Successful, Forever, Over, and, Find Your Love) and a number 1 album in the US with Thank Me Later. On 07.31.11 and 24.03.11, he tweeted lyrics from a mixtape called ‘House of Balloons’ by the then unknown artist ‘The Weeknd’, assisting in propelling The Weeknd into the musical spotlight. This process is referred to, within urban music, as a ‘co-sign’. However, the extent to which traditional intermediaries are seen as important is exemplified in the ways in which both

Rival and Context sought to consolidate their support by involving them in their creative practice itself.

#### *4.1.4 Context and Rival: Intermediaries in Creative Practice*

On 20.11.11, Rival uploaded a video to YouTube of a song called ‘Plan A’, and throughout the video Kiss 100 DJ Logan Sama narrates the action taking place. Instead of simply aligning oneself with artists in order to gain the support of a traditional intermediary in the form of a radio DJ, this is a case of aligning oneself with that intermediary as part of your creative practice. That is, Rival was not only collaborating with his peers in order to (at least in part) secure the endorsement and support of a traditional intermediary, but was actually making this intermediary a part of his creative process and collaborating with *them*. Indeed, he was not the only artist in the UK underground music scene to align himself so explicitly with radio DJs acting as narrators. In July 2012 Manchester based rapper Lyrican released a mixtape entitled ‘The Problem Child’ featuring track introductions done by Charlie Sloth (BBC Radio 1/1Xtra DJ), and influential US DJ, DJ Drama. It was fascinating to observe how Rival introduced the radio DJ into the music itself in order to earn the support and trust of what he viewed as a key cultural intermediary. However, this process was epitomised in the video for the Context track ‘Off With Their Heads’.

Over the course of 2010, a contemporary of mine from school, Jeffrey Engmann, was getting a good degree of support across prominent media platforms performing as the artist ‘Vertex’ in a grime/hip hop group called ‘Marvell’. This support was most evident from the UK Hip Hop DJ, Tim Westwood, who invited them to participate in his series on online ‘Freestyle Videos’ the previous year on 23.01.09, 08.05.09, and 19.10.09. I had myself been attempting to contact Tim Westwood for several months with my own material but to no avail (emails sent: 03.11.10, 10.11.10). As a relative unknown at this stage of my career, I appreciated that if I were able to align myself with Vertex and Marvell, I could potentially capture industry ears which were at present ignoring me. Both he and his manager had been at school with me, and so on 27.08.10, I sent them both a

track which I wished him to be a guest vocalist on. We recorded the track three months later in a recording studio in Norwich, with the track being mastered on 06.01.11.

I wanted to align myself closely with as many prominent figures as possible. The only way I knew how to do this was to shoot a music video in which I could ask a series of famous people to ‘star’. On 12.11.10, an artist called True Tiger had uploaded a video for this track ‘Slang Like This’ in which a different character delivered each line from the song. I wanted to take this idea, but have famous people delivering the lines. However, I did not know any famous people, but I did have a loose connection with a variety of London-based journalists. I thus set about contacting these people on the basis that; if they star in the video, they are likely to support it using the media platforms they work for. Each of the journalists I contacted, worked for media outlets from whom I was seeking support from: Joseph Patterson (MTV), Kieran Yates (The Guardian), Rahul Verma (LIVE Magazine), and Jamal Edwards (SBTV). I had spoken to each of these people before on Twitter, but never met them. Over the course of December 2010 and January 2011, I sent various emails to these individuals asking them if they were interested in appearing in a video of mine, using the appearance of an artist who was being heavily supporting on BBC Radio (Vertex) as a form of leverage. All of them agreed to appear and so on 18.01.11, I hired a Canon 5D MK II Camera and a Lens for a forty-eight hour period and drove to London. I also scheduled a dinner with Joseph Patterson and Kieran Yates. During the dinner I mentioned how I would have loved to have someone famous in the video such as Ed Sheeran, and how I had tried to contact him twice unsuccessfully earlier that month. At this point Kieran unexpectedly called Ed and put me on the phone with him. He agreed to appear in the video if I could meet him the next day, which I did. I shot the remainder of the cameo appearances on 20.01.11, and drove back to Norwich the following day. I edited the video that week. The entire process was a mixture of exhilaration and sheer exhaustion. One evening in London, after hours walking all over the city filming various intermediaries, I returned to my friend’s house in Dulwich where I was staying on his floor. He told me of how he was going to start taking his music more seriously, and how he had big plans for the next few years. My hands were

black from the ink of that day's Metro. I was sweating, my clothes stank, I had spent what little money I had coming to London, I was exhausted. As I sat there going through my footage from that day I tilted my sweat laden, filthy face into the light and said: "Do you look like this though? Do you feel like this? You don't want this as much as I do".

As a result of asking Kieran to appear in the video, she offered to do some online PR for me. Between 14.01.11 and 17.01.11 we pursued potential promotional avenues for the video which I would not have been able to achieve independently given her wealth of contacts as a Guardian journalist. On 05.02.11 she introduced me to the editor of online site RWD (Tego Sigel) to premiere the video. The video was premiered on the site on 18.02.11 and achieved over 20,000 hits in less than two weeks. All of the media outlets whom I had requested to appear in the video, promoted the video and the song on their platforms too (SBTV post: 17.02.11, Joseph Patterson Tune of the Day: 24.01.11, MTV interview: 17.02.11). Charlie Sloth also began supporting the track on BBC Radio 1Xtra, and he premiered the track on 23.01.11. On 28.02.11, MTV requested a copy of the video to be playlisted on MTV and MTV Base. It was screened the following week and played daily between 7pm and 7am (BBC, 2011). This was in many respects, my first big break in the music industry, and it had been achieved by a carefully coordinated and calculated collaborative process of seeking to align myself with as many 'others' as possible in the hope that I might be heard. In an interview conducted with the MOBO Awards later that year, I stated, "the competition is ferocious, so it's hard to get people to pay attention" (Taylor, 2011), and this is precisely what I (as well as Rival and Genesis Elijah) had achieved: getting people to pay attention.

The practices of all three artists—Rival, Genesis Elijah and Context—represent a specific set of behaviours necessitated by a belief in the central importance of cultural intermediaries - both traditional, and neo. The environment within which our creative career trajectories were being mapped is, as suggested in the analysis of economic literature, a ferociously competitive one, and one which has become increasingly so vis-à-vis its composition. Thus, in this context, a recurring

behavioural pattern can be observed: collaboratively aligning oneself with multiple sources of distribution to maximise exposure to an audience.

## 4.2. Beyond Attention Seeking: A Feedback Mechanism

In this second section, I will explore how this collaborative creativity is more complex than it initially appears. Artists seek to align themselves with others of perceived higher standing in the hope that they may distribute this content acting as neo-intermediaries, and crucially, to capture the attention of traditional cultural intermediaries in order that they might further disseminate their content to the wider public. So, Rival would ask more famous peers to feature on songs, in the hope that they might disseminate the work to their audience, and so that prominent journalists and radio DJs would see with whom he was working, and then share his music. Genesis would use the backing tracks from famous artists, and upload the track online to capture the audience of those seeking the original. His desire for the next stage – the attention of the traditional intermediaries – was underplayed in interviews. He suggested that he, in fact, felt torn on the subject:

**Genesis:** I'm supposed to be making music that appeals more to the mainstream audience - the mainstream crowd - but the last two videos I've done have been pretty hard core

**Interviewer:** And when you say you're 'supposed' to be making them, do you mean for yourself - so you feel like you should be doing that?

**Genesis:** I feel I should. If I'm serious about this then I need to make music that has a broader appeal, so more people can understand it. But I think at the same time, I think, fuck them (Interview, 02/13)

However, the tactic *did* achieve this; that is, it did capture the ears of a more mainstream audience, whether consciously strived for or not, given the subsequent endorsement by Zane Lowe on BBC Radio 1. I featured a variety of

famous artists and indeed, traditional cultural intermediaries themselves, in order to both secure their backing, and the backing of their superiors at, for instance, MTV. However, by analysing email interaction patterns which occurred at the time of each major release over this period, as well as the promotional methods of Genesis Elijah and Rival, I observed that this process is cyclical. Artists will document their support by intermediaries, and feed this information back to others in a ‘multiplier of support effect’. This section of the chapter will document this technique, exploring how artists seek to even further maximise their routes to markets and avenues for exposure by recording their successes and communicating this endorsement in the hope that support begets support.

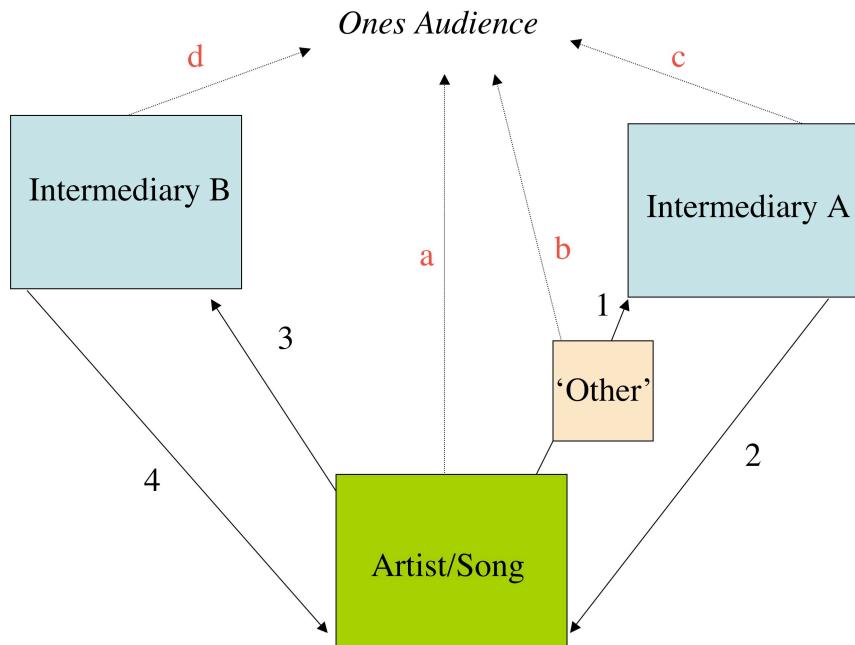
#### *4.2.1. A Multiplier of Support Effect: Context and ‘Breathe In’*

For each of my single releases between 2010 and 2013, I would employ various tactics to capture the attention of radio DJs, and following their support, would upload the audio of the radio play online, and then feed this content back to the online blogosphere (and directly to my fans on Facebook/Twitter). For instance, in November 2010, I created a song called ‘Breathe In’ and asked an artist named Nico Lindsay to feature. Nico had been heavily featured by DJ ‘Logan Sama’ in a series of shows on Kiss 100 called ‘Chosen Ones’ in April of that year. I believed that securing a feature from him might give my track a slight edge to the ears of certain other radio DJs; the type of attention-seeking model of creative practice discussed earlier. On 14.10.10 the track was played on BBC Radio 1Xtra and named their Track of Week after extensive emailing to DJs by me. However, it is interesting to note how the next morning I uploaded audio of the track being played on air and put it on YouTube, and then sent this evidence to twenty-two other online cultural intermediaries (predominantly bloggers) in order that they might circulate this success. This technique of using intermediaries to gain the attention of other intermediaries, whose endorsement is then fed back to other traditional intermediaries can be seen repeated over and over again by myself, Rival, and Genesis Elijah between 2010 and 2013. I would furthermore use radio success from one DJ in order to bolster the reputation of the track with other DJs and would send mailouts following an on-air play. For example, on 23.11.10, I

emailed six separate BBC Radio 1Xtra producers and DJs informing them of the airplay received on 14.11.10 in the hope that I might both capitalise on, and consolidate, my current levels of support.

It may prove helpful at this juncture to conceptualise this technique employed for the ‘Breathe In’ project visually, to understand how it acts as a method of maximising one’s route to market. Fig3 below, read from bottom to top, illustrates all potential routes to market as shown via routes a, b, c, d. Route a represents an artist’s direct intermediary-free engagement conducted online via social networks. Route b represents the neo-intermediary method of distribution discussed earlier. Routes c and d are those of traditional intermediaries disseminating content. Lines 1, 2, 3, and 4 represent, when read as an OO symbol, a cyclical process; support is gained [1], documented [2], fed onwards [3], re-document [4] and fed onwards again [1] in an on-going pattern. The diagram below therefore shows a form of feedback mechanism.

(Fig.3: A Feedback Mechanism)



For ‘Breathe In’ then, I used the ‘buzz’ surrounding Nico Lindsay (the ‘other’) to contact BBC Radio 1Xtra (as illustrated by line 1): seven prominent BBC Radio 1/1Xtra and Kiss 100 DJs were contacted via email on 27.10.10 and 28.10.10.

Intermediary A (BBC Radio 1Xtra) then dispersed the song to market on 14.11.10 as the track was premiered. This is represented by Route to Market c. I then documented this support (line 2) by uploading an audio rip of the radio play to YouTube the following day, and fed this information (line 3) to online blogs; I contacted twenty-two online blogs on 15.11.10, and included in my email a link to the audio rip of the BBC Radio 1Xtra play which I had uploaded to YouTube that morning. Following this mailout, various blogs, represented diagrammatically as Intermediary B, then dispersed this information to the marketplace (Route to Market d), in a series of pieces published between 15.11.10 and 30.11.10. I would then document this support (line 4) and feed this information back to the radio station (line 1), as well as to my own fans. Four routes to market are being maximised; a (me to my audience directly), b (Nico to his audience directly via retweets on Twitter and Facebook posts), c (radio to listener) and d (blog to reader). The bottom half of the diagram represents a type of feedback mechanism. Indeed, this pattern can be seen continually recurring throughout the course of my career. For example, the following year, in 2011, when I was attempting to promote 'Off With Their Heads' to radio DJs, I would tweet DJs who had not yet played the song, reminding them of those that had (see Fig.4 below; both @Semtex and @CharlieSloth are DJ's on BBC Radio 1Xtra)

(Fig.4: Context: Alignment Via Tweeting)

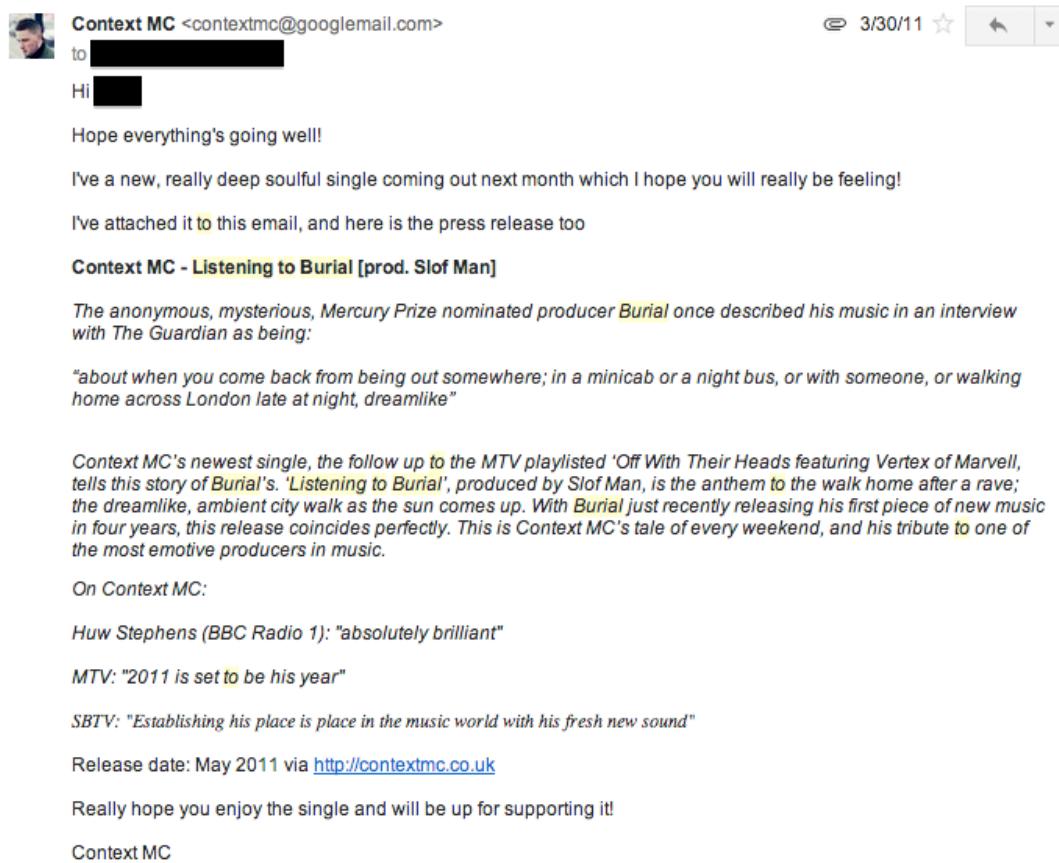


@Semtex thought this rip from @CharlieSloth on Saturday might be of interest. New single: Me ft. Vertex of Marvell: <http://bit.ly/ik3gUQ>

#### 4.2.2. A Multiplier of Support: Context and 'Listening to Burial'

We might use this feedback mechanism diagram in Fig.3 to analyse the nature of the artist-intermediary relationship with reference to Context's follow up track entitled 'Listening to Burial', which was even more successful. It appears to build on the techniques used on 'Breathe In'. After mastering the track on 30.03.11, the track was sent to twenty-seven DJs and producers at BBC Radio 1 and 1Xtra. The original email sent to these intermediaries is documented in Fig.5 below. It can be seen how, even before the intermediaries have heard the track, I am aligning myself with 'others' (Line 1 – Fig.3) in order to capture the ears of Intermediary A. I included quotes from famous broadcasters such as MTV, and explain how my previous single had been playlisted on MTV.

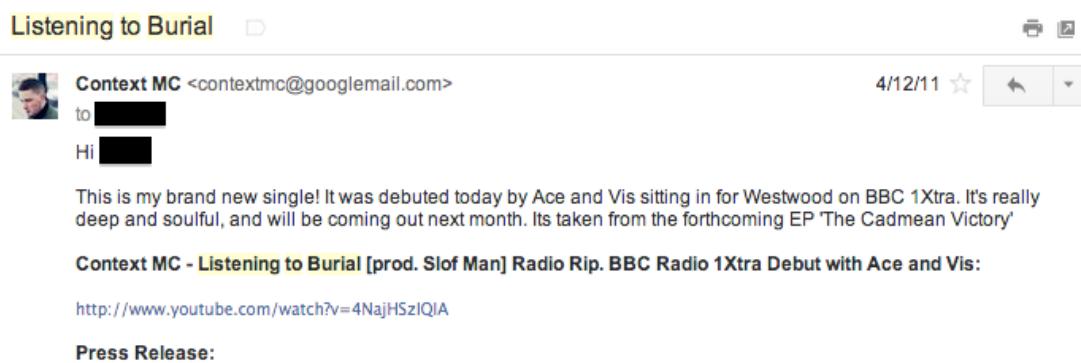
(Fig.5: Context: Alignment via Email)



Context MC <contextmc@googlemail.com>  
to [REDACTED]  
Hi [REDACTED]  
  
Hope everything's going well!  
  
I've a new, really deep soulful single coming out next month which I hope you will really be feeling!  
I've attached it to this email, and here is the press release too  
  
**Context MC - Listening to Burial [prod. Slof Man]**  
  
*The anonymous, mysterious, Mercury Prize nominated producer Burial once described his music in an interview with The Guardian as being:*  
  
*"about when you come back from being out somewhere; in a minicab or a night bus, or with someone, or walking home across London late at night, dreamlike"*  
  
*Context MC's newest single, the follow up to the MTV playlisted 'Off With Their Heads featuring Vertex of Marvell, tells this story of Burial's. 'Listening to Burial', produced by Slof Man, is the anthem to the walk home after a rave; the dreamlike, ambient city walk as the sun comes up. With Burial just recently releasing his first piece of new music in four years, this release coincides perfectly. This is Context MC's tale of every weekend, and his tribute to one of the most emotive producers in music.*  
  
On Context MC:  
  
*Huw Stephens (BBC Radio 1): "absolutely brilliant"*  
*MTV: "2011 is set to be his year"*  
*SBTV: "Establishing his place in the music world with his fresh new sound"*  
*Release date: May 2011 via <http://contextmc.co.uk>*  
  
Really hope you enjoy the single and will be up for supporting it!  
Context MC

Between 31.03.11 and 02.04.11, I heard back from four people at radio stations, three of which stating that they had forwarded the track on to colleagues who might enjoy it. It was frustrating to hear back from so few of those contacted, and on 6.04.11, I sent ‘chasing’ emails to sixteen further DJs and producers. On 12.04.11 the track was premiered on BBC Radio 1Xtra by DJs ‘Ace and Vis’ (line c). That day, I extracted the audio from the radio play, and uploaded this support to YouTube (line 2), which I shared directly with my fans (Line a). Between 12.04.11, I sent this documented endorsement to twenty-eight online blogs (Intermediary B - Line 3). Again, the email sent to these intermediaries is shown below (Fig.6), and it can be seen how I am informing Intermediary B (websites/blogs) of the support from Intermediary A (BBC Radio 1Xtra).

(Fig.6 Multiplying Support by Email)



Listening to Burial

Context MC <contextmc@googlemail.com>  
to [REDACTED]  
Hi [REDACTED]

4/12/11 ★ ↻ ↻

This is my brand new single! It was debuted today by Ace and Vis sitting in for Westwood on BBC 1Xtra. It's really deep and soulful, and will be coming out next month. Its taken from the forthcoming EP 'The Cadmean Victory'

Context MC - Listening to Burial [prod. Slof Man] Radio Rip. BBC Radio 1Xtra Debut with Ace and Vis:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NajHSzIQIA>

Press Release:

The YouTube rip of the radio premiere was posted to a variety of websites between 12.04.11 and 14.04.11 (line d), such as: RWD, Urban Development, Once Upon a Grime, Dance with the Monkey, Hip Hop Kings, UK All Day, B Somebody, Overrating the Underrated, London to MK, and MTV (Patterson, 2011). Again, this support was documented by myself (Line 4) and was fed back to my existing fans. Additional radio plays had been received during this time on both BBC Radio 1 from Ally McRae and on BBC Radio 1Xtra from DJ Charlie Sloth, and others on 25.04.11. I fed all of this support back to four more DJs and producers at the BBC (Line 1), completing the feedback mechanism on its first ‘loop’.

I began this process again for the music video for the track, which I personally filmed and edited between 01.05.11 and 08.05.11. On 10.05.11, I uploaded the video to YouTube and organised an online ‘premiere’ for the track with MTV’s website (Intermediary B). This was achieved based on both the quality of the video, but also the growing radio support. Following the MTV premiere, on 11.05.11, I contacted eleven online blogs where I attempted to consolidate all of the current support. In the email, it can be seen how I am aligning myself with as many ‘others’ as possible, from radio DJs, to Britney Spears! The email reads:

It's been a whirlwind 2011 for Context MC already. He has been: named one the top 5 UK underground acts by massive US website The Huffington Post; invited to Abbey Road by BBC Introducing; playlisted by MTV; had press support from MTV, [SB.TV](#), RWD, Semtex (BBC 1Xtra) and K Mag; performed at I Luv Live; been shortlisted for Glastonbury; and was a featured artist on myspace's homepage alongside Lady Gaga, Kings of Leon and Britney Spears! Now, After the huge success of the MTV Base playlisted ‘Off With Their Heads’ earlier this year, Context MC is back with another completely independently produced, directed and edited smash hit music video. This time, it's for the late night anthem, and tribute to Hyperdub records genius, ‘Listening to Burial’.

The tune has been getting hammered over recent weeks on BBC Radio 1Xtra by the likes of Mistajam, Ace and Vis, who named it one of their Fantastic Four selection, and by Charlie Sloth on both the Hip Hop M1X Show and the Weekend Breakfast Show. Joseph ‘JP’ Patterson also endorsed the track on BBC Radio 1, naming it one his Top 3 Tracks of the Month, and, after radio backing like that, a video was inevitable!

‘Off With Their Heads’ was groundbreaking in its concept, and ‘Listening to Burial’ is no different. The video shows a house party where everyone is raving, and where time is slowed down for everyone inside, whilst Context MC sits outside, where time is

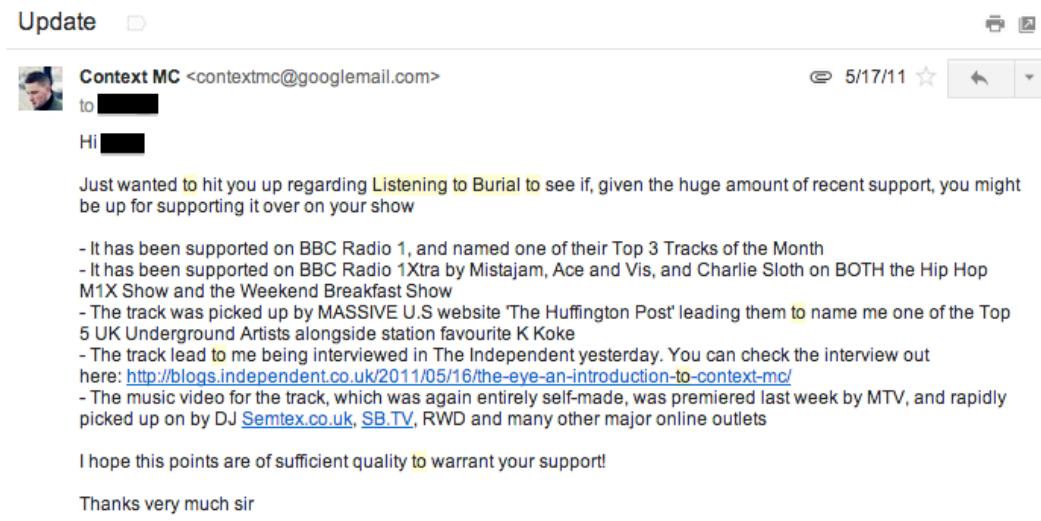
moving in real time, alone, listening to Burial. The video features the tracks producer Slof Man, who manages to encourage Context into the house for one last rave towards the end of the video, before he eventually begins in [sic] walk home at dawn.

The video was exclusively premiered yesterday by MTV, who quickly praised the video saying: "The Norwich-based rapper has impressed us again with yet another simple but effective concept". DJ Semtex (BBC Radio 1Xtras) blog was rapid in its endorsement of the track too. In conjunction with the release of the video, the track will be available THIS WEEK from the iTunes Store, as well as free version too. Head over to <http://contextmc.co.uk> for full details!

(Context, Email, 11.05.11)

The video was shared on a number of major websites (line d). I then documented the online support for the video (Line 4), and fed this information back, once again, to DJs and producers at radio stations (Line 1). On 17.05.11, I contacted sixteen more intermediaries at the BBC (see Fig.7)

(Fig.7: Continuing to Multiply)



Update 

Context MC <contextmc@googlemail.com>  
to [REDACTED]

5/17/11   

Hi [REDACTED]

Just wanted to hit you up regarding Listening to Burial to see if, given the huge amount of recent support, you might be up for supporting it over on your show

- It has been supported on BBC Radio 1, and named one of their Top 3 Tracks of the Month  
- It has been supported on BBC Radio 1Xtra by Mistajam, Ace and Vis, and Charlie Sloth on BOTH the Hip Hop M1X Show and the Weekend Breakfast Show  
- The track was picked up by MASSIVE U.S website 'The Huffington Post' leading them to name me one of the Top 5 UK Underground Artists alongside station favourite K Koke  
- The track lead to me being interviewed in The Independent yesterday. You can check the interview out here: <http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2011/05/16/the-eye-an-introduction-to-context-mc/>  
- The music video for the track, which was again entirely self-made, was premiered last week by MTV, and rapidly picked up on by DJ [Semtex.co.uk](#), [SB.TV](#), RWD and many other major online outlets

I hope this points are of sufficient quality to warrant your support!

Thanks very much sir

On 24.05.11 the track was released on iTunes, and was played on BBC Radio 1 that day. The following month, the video was added to the daytime playlists of Channel AKA as well as MTV Base's evening schedule. Between May and

September I continued to receive plays on various radio stations. After 24.05.11 my email contact with DJs can be seen to become more intermittent. It would have been counterproductive to update every DJ about every play, so I simply continued to note down all my support and continue to build up a library of evidence. On 21.09.11, I was informed that the track had been playlisted on BBC Radio 1. It was added to the playlist at the station on the week commencing 24.10.11. This was the greatest achievement of my musical career so far. It meant that my track would be played daily on BBC Radio 1, to a nationwide audience.

#### *4.2.3. Documenting Endorsement: Rival and Genesis Elijah*

Even at an early stage of my career I appear to have been acutely aware of the importance of aligning oneself with these prominent media outlets. In January 2010, I stated in an interview with 24/7 Magazine: “Someone who has just got a tune out and saying ‘come and check this out’, is overlooked compared to someone saying ‘come and check out this tune that Radio1 and 1Xtra are playing’. That’s helped me get my name out there” (Board, 2010). However, successes with intermediaries are not simply fed back to other intermediaries to gain further support, but documented and fed back to existing and potential fans too. In an interview, Rival suggested that documenting one’s achieved support is crucial in compounding and multiplying support elsewhere:

**Interviewer:** What about any other ways of getting people to pay attention to you, to listen to your music...

**Rival:** ...If you put up a radio rip of it getting played on 1Xtra or Kiss 100, or any radio station...people tend to pay more attention to that

**Interviewer:** Because of the radio station?

**Rival:** Yeah because of the radio station, so that’s a promotional tactic (Interview, 07/12)

By ‘people’ he means of course other radio stations, DJs and bloggers will pay attention, but also that existing and potential fans are being made aware of who is supporting you. The media endorsements are perceived signifiers of quality. Indeed, documenting support from intermediaries and feeding this information back to existing supporters could be seen throughout my fieldwork by each artist. Following Genesis Elijah’s play by Zane Lowe on BBC Radio 1, on 12.03.12, he obtained an audio recording of the show and uploaded it to his website so that his fans, or anyone interested, could see the support he had received (see Fig.8 below). Indeed, on Context’s blog which was active between 2009 and 2012, it would document every single press achievement and radio play on an almost weekly basis.

(Fig.8: Genesis Documenting Radio 1 Support)



In 2010, Genesis Elijah uploaded a freestyle he had performed over a track which had been released earlier in the year by well-known UK rapper Skepta.

The track was called ‘Mike Lowry’, and was subsequently heard by Skepta, who then went on to discuss the Genesis cover version in an interview. This in itself was interesting as an example of collaborative-creativity as a response to competitiveness, with Genesis Elijah aligning himself with Skepta who, acting as a neo-intermediary, might be able to disseminate the song to a new audience. However, Genesis incorporated the feedback mechanism methodology discussed above. In Genesis Elijah’s May 2011 EP release ‘I Aint Even Charging Bruv’, he included the audio of Skepta discussing his freestyle. He was documenting the endorsement of this neo-intermediary, and feeding this information back to his supporters and traditional intermediaries as a signifier of quality and a seal of endorsement, or approval, from within the UK urban music scene.

The same approach can also be seen with reference to Genesis’ interactions with Ricky Gervais. As discussed above, Genesis was able to integrate Ricky Gervais into his creative practice, and was able to capture his attention, leading to Ricky tweeting Genesis’ video to millions of his followers. This reconstituted Ricky Gervais as a neo-intermediary. He was able to disseminate Genesis’ content to an entirely new audience and shift from simply being a consumer, to occupying the conceptual space between production and consumption. However, this ‘endorsement’ was then documented by Genesis, again on his blog, and he was able to feed this information back to the readers of his website, as seen in Fig.9 on the following page.

(Fig.9 Genesis Documenting Ricky Gervais Support)

**Ricky Gervais Endorses Genesis Elijah's New Track**

It's not everyday that the Hollywood A list elite and the UK underground Hip-Hop scene cross paths but today was this day.

Ricky Gervais, who is getting ready to host the 69th Golden Globe awards next month had found himself involved in a bit of controversy again over comments made on twitter yesterday. As always his fans came to his defence and one of those fans just happened to be UK rapper Genesis Elijah.

Genesis Elijah tweeted Ricky Gervais with a quote from one of his songs saying "If you don't like what I tweet then unfollow and block" along with a link to the video of his song titled 'My Truth'

To Genesis Elijah's surprise Ricky Gervais then retweeted it to over a million of his twitter followers adding the word "Inspiring"

Genesis then messaged back saying "Hope you liked the track. Thanks" to which Ricky Gervais replied...



Genesis Elijah is now only the 31st person to be followed on twitter by Ricky Gervais.

The song 'My Truth' which features a vocal sample of Ricky Gervais has seen a massive increase in views since being shared and is now tipped to be one of Genesis Elijah's most watched videos

By understanding how this feedback mechanism operates, we are able to understand why both neo and traditional intermediaries are conceptualised as important by contemporary creative labour. Not only do they act as a trusted distribution platform in a sea of content – a way to be heard, and a route to market – but they also act as a signifier, even if just an illusory one, that we are attaining success. They are a signal to people – intermediaries and fans alike – that this artist is doing well, warrants your attention, and should be listened to. Rival suggested in interviews that: "*This music scene is based on illusion* and what they think is happening.... If they see something on MTV, they instantly think 'that person's great'" (Rival, interview, 07/12). In this sense, this collaborative-creativity is based on the projection of success; the fabrication of

perception. In a saturated marketplace, this projection of success is crucial for artists seeking to keep their head above water and in signalling to a potential audience of fans and cultural intermediaries that they are worth listening to. It is the formation of artistic alliances in the hope that one stands out from the crowd. As Genesis Elijah stated: “For loads of people it’s like they’ll hear something and be like: “Is that good? Zane Lowe said it’s good so it must be good”” (Interview, 02/13). In this sense, collaboratively forming alliances allows artists to distinguish themselves from the masses, and signal that they are a voice which should be heard.

#### **4.3. An Indistinguishability Dilemma: The Disillusionment of Competition**

We’re all trying to do the same thing innit, we’re all trying to move in the same direction man. It’s hard out here  
Genesis Elijah (*‘Falling’*, 2011)

Engaging with cultural intermediaries, both neo and traditional, has been illustrated to be central in the lives of contemporary creative labour. Their support is sought in order to both provide a trusted distribution platform in a sea of cultural content, and to assist in the projection of a perception of success within the field of cultural production itself. Genesis Elijah was, however, relatively sceptical of the importance of more traditional intermediaries. In his track ’10 Dollars’ he states: “Bare faced, I don’t give a fuck about airplay/ They never like me anyway so why should I care mate? They’re lame/ They don’t support me, I don’t support them, fair play” (*‘10 Dollars’*, 2012). In interviews too, he suggested the role was primarily one of perceived self-importance:

**Interviewer:** How important do you feel that [traditional intermediaries] are to what you do, what you are trying to do, or to the goals you have for yourself?

**Genesis:** They are important because we make them important...*It's such an illusion.* Its an illusory business...I think a lot of these positions are self important. They need you to think that they are important. But they are not as important as you think they are. Its only because we make them important, so it becomes something special (Interview, 07/12)

It was fascinating to hear how both Rival and Genesis employed the terminology of the music industry being ‘an illusion’, wholly unprompted in interviews. Their scepticism underlies a crucial point concerning the way in which artists interact with intermediaries; namely, that it is incredibly difficult to operationalise and quantify their importance or adequately evaluate the extent to which aligning oneself closely with as many cultural ‘others’ as possible as a promotional method contributes, or not, to an artists’ level of success. Was ‘Off With Their Heads’ playlisted on MTV due to it featuring famous people in the video? Did Rival and Genesis Elijah earn the support of the countries biggest DJs solely due to the more famous acts they chose to align themselves with, and more acutely, did these radio plays have any tangible impact on their current or future success (however one chooses to define ‘success’)? Genesis’ comments also point to the suggestion that as much as cultural intermediaries are demanded by artists, they also prey on the insecurities of producers (Lury and Warde, 1997). That is to say they present themselves as a corrective mechanism in a complex and competitive world.

Genesis’ ideas are furthermore aligned with Bourdieu’s assertion that intermediaries seek to both claim and reproduce their legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1984:359). They seek to legitimise both themselves and their role in this new economy, and qualify cultural forms in a process of ‘the economy of qualities’ (Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002:197), “for it is through such legitimisation that they hope to consolidate their own social position” (Maguire, 2008:214). They thus demand their own existence. Indeed, Negus (2002:501) posits that research of this nature arguably exacerbates this problem and suggests “in significant ways, a focus on cultural intermediaries reproduces rather than bridges the distance between production and consumption”. Arguably the

research presented here is a part of the problem which Negus identifies. The literature I have engaged with generated research questions relating to the role cultural intermediaries play in the lives of creative labour, questions which I have sought to grapple with in this chapter. However it might be that by focussing on the very real impact they have on creative practices in a competitive marketplace, and thus highlighting the high degree of importance attributed to them, I serve only to further legitimise their position. Perhaps this does not matter; the point is that artists *are* pursuing this collaborative approach to creativity because they, to varying degrees, perceive it as important, rightly or wrongly. The phenomenon is indicative of the degree of desperation felt by artists in the competitive world of the unsigned music industry.

Artists are engaged in a constant quest for credibility and endorsement in an attempt to eliminate the problem of indistinguishability engendered by marketplace proliferation; a validity conferred by a culturally superior ‘other’. We align ourselves with as many ‘others’ as possible in order to be heard in as many ways as possible. The literature review led me to posit the question: ‘in a digital supermarket aisle with infinite space, how can you be heard and found?’ Well, it appears that artists are increasingly seeking to stand out and be heard by aligning themselves with as many intermediaries, both neo and traditional, as possible, and feeding back their attained support as markers of quality and credibility in a saturated marketplace, as they struggle to, as suggested by Kretschmer (2005:10), break through the “noise of creative ambition”. Speaking about his techniques of remix’s, Rival employed an interesting phraseology to describe his perception of the de-facto stance of intermediaries towards him, whom he conceptualised as being uninterested and uncaring:

**Interviewer:** What’s important to you when you’re choosing artists to go on the remix

**Rival:** ...I think, OK, let me get big MC’s on the remix *so it doesn’t automatically become a song that they turn away from*  
(Interview, 07/12)

Engaging with these intermediaries and the processes of tactical self-promotion are crucial for artists. In our interviews, Genesis Elijah stated that this need to market ones self was absolute, suggesting that: “Success now is no longer in the product itself, its in how that product is marketed” (Genesis Elijah, Interview, 11/13). The role intermediaries play in this ‘success’, or at least the perceived role they play in perceived success, is seemingly vast. Rival claims “journalists, bloggers, all of these websites that people seem to go on all the time, they’re, they’re, they’re a very big fraction promotion wise in music now” [sic] (Rival, interview, 07/12). However, given the perceived power that intermediaries hold vis-à-vis their ability to help artists get heard, and the complex methods artists adopt to try and capture their attention, not only is the cultural environment a complex one, but hugely frustrating one too. The necessity for collaboration was infuriating for Rival, as seen when he tweeted “Why do I do grime, I support a scene da ent [that isn’t] based on talent jus bring in’s #fuckgrime” (Tweet, 01.03.10, 4.38pm). The frustration at not being able to be heard is tangible in the words of all three case studies, and in particular in the seething anger in Rival’s track ‘Riot’. His deep, gritty voice angrily spews venom concerning his resentment over a violent oscillating bass sound:

I can’t sit on my arse and keep waiting,  
Too many ‘pars’ [shuns] so no, I ain’t playing,  
I’m going to headlock, chokeslam, suplex any DJ till it’s my tune  
they start playing...  
Yeah I’ll start waving swinging that blade quick,  
Radio: get me on the playlist,  
Because for too long I’ve been silent,  
Oh so quiet, now I’m on a ting where it’s going to get violent  
Scene best rate me, or I’m going to start causing a riot  
Rival (*‘Riot’*, 2011)

Whilst Genesis is more relaxed, more ‘matter of fact’ in his resentment, rapping over more melancholic instrumentation, perhaps indicative of his age and length of time spent making music, compared with Rival’s youthful tempestuousness:

You can kiss my arse, I look at all you pricks and laugh  
Fuck the industry, don't be expecting a Christmas card...  
Last year I used to email DJs heat [hot tracks],  
And get no reply, where's the common decency?  
Genesis Elijah ('*Battle Cry*', 2011)

My name ain't got a big enough buzz  
Feel like giving up cuz [cousin]  
They ain't feeling what I do  
Seven years in line they act like I ain't even in the queue  
Genesis Elijah ('*Falling*', 2011)

I too recognise that frustration of being ignored, of being lost and swamped in an ocean of creative content, from my own practice. On 20.04.10 I tweeted: "Sometimes I feel like being bare [really] polite gets you nowhere. Safe [thanks] to all the polite people in music/the industry". Months and years of trying to get people's attention is an arduous and often demoralising task. Rival too, could often be seen on social networking sites angrily berating radio DJs for constantly ignoring his requests, tweeting on 21.05.13: "Fuck DJ Cameo [from BBC Radio 1Xtra] and his show" given his persistent dodging of his calls and emails. The same was also true with Logan Sama. Before Rival was achieving support on the station, he tried on numerous occasions to very publicly get Logan's attention on Twitter, but with no reply. Eventually Rival tweeted: "Real tlk tho what hav I gt to do to get played on @djlogansama show? Wtf kmt am I shit or suttin" [Real talk though, what I have got to do to get played on Logan Sama's show. What the fuck, kiss my teeth, am I shit or something?] (Tweet, 22.02.10, 5.08pm). Indeed, the following month he again tweeted: "Oi @djlogansama r u gna [are you going to] play any of my tunes today or u gna par me [are you going to par me]" (Tweet, 29.03.10, 3.03.pm). This frustration was incredibly apparent in my interviews with Rival:

**Interviewer:** So how does it feel when you're hitting these guys up [contacting intermediaries] and they don't shout [contact] you back?

**Rival:** You get to a point in music where you get so frustrated with trying to make people listen, that don't listen, I just feel like 'Is there any point, or should I just live my life?...I think if you can take the time to inbox [DJs] or contact them...they don't holla at you [contact you back] or continue to tweet, then that's just a very big disrespect...If I'm putting in 100%, you can at least put in 10% to contact me back (Interview, 02/13)

His anger seemed to be epitomised in his interactions with prominent urban music website 'Grime Daily' in 2010, when he was attempting to get them to share his material on their site. After a series of tweets over a number of weeks with no replies, he wrote to them: "Oi @grimedaily dnt piss me off, put my shit up man wt is dis?" (Tweet, 28.06.10, 3.07pm). Grime Daily responded saying, "@wtf? are u being serious", to which Rival responded: "U lot stil ent replied, iight look I'm saying 12am if da ent up dnt smile wen u c me #RealTalk @grimedaily" [You lot still haven't replied, alright, look, I'm saying if it isn't up on the site by 12am, don't smile when you see me] (Tweet, 28.06.10, 3.44pm). As an artist in urban music, it was one of the first times I had ever seen an artist explicitly articulate his frustration at being ignored in such a direct and threatening way. The exasperation was too much for Rival.

A competitive creative career is certainly exhausting and at times, incredibly disillusioning. The bridge section of the track 'Breathe In', I rap:

I don't want backs to be turned no more  
I don't want to crawl through all the dirt no more  
I don't want to be treated curt no more  
I don't want to be eat, breathe, sleep work no more  
I don't want to be ready to burst no more  
I don't want to be feeling the hurt no more  
I don't want a back with no shirt no more  
I don't want fuck all cash earned no more  
I don't want to pour my life out, before the night's out, and get told  
'light's out now' no more

I don't want to feel down no more  
Believe me – who said chasing a dream would be easy?  
Context ('Breathe In', 2010)

This bridge is articulating the turmoil at being relentlessly ignored and having 'backs...turned', the frustration at being consistently brushed off and treated rudely ('treated curt'), and being tired at living and breathing a working life that you love, which sometimes doesn't love you back. However, as I ask myself at the end: did I expect this process to be easy?

#### 4.4. Conclusion

**Rival:** No one cares about you until everyone cares about you  
(Interview, 02/13)

**Genesis:** Why is it they only see you're talented when everybody else starts saying it?  
(Tweet, 22.02.12, 10.22am)

The primary findings of this chapter are:

- Cultural intermediaries have a great deal of perceived importance for artists in a competitive marketplace not only as a distributory mechanism, but also a distinguishing mechanism.
- A wide range of actors now assume the role of a 'cultural intermediary', from traditional radio DJs and journalists, but also neo-intermediaries in the form of celebrities and other artists.
- Competition within the marketplace is engendering an increasingly collaborative approach to creative practice. However, this style of collaboration is not an opposition between competitive self-interest and co-operation, as artists co-operate, but for largely self-interested reasons.
- The artist-intermediary relationship is incredibly frustrating for creative labour.

Ferocious competitiveness is causing artists to place an intense focus and importance (rightly or wrongly) on the role cultural intermediaries play in their career trajectory. This finding is aligned with the work of Bourdieu (1984), and as documented in other cultural industries (Featherstone, 1991; Seabright and Weeds, 2007; Thompson, 2010). The fieldwork findings herein appear to suggest a high perceived significance of cultural intermediaries as per the suggestions of Bourdieu (1984), Featherstone (1991) and others – at least in the creative field of underground UK urban music. However, my work paints a picture of cultural intermediary interaction which is more complex than intermediary-to-market models. I highlight how artists must in the first instance attract the attention of intermediaries, and this is increasingly done by affiliating ones self with a culturally superior ‘other’. Only then might one capture the attention of the vital journalist, radio DJ or online blogger. It is also hoped that this ‘other’ can distribute the artists’ content, reconstituting them as an intermediary themselves; a neo-intermediary. Furthermore, the nature of the artist-intermediary relationship is more complex than this attention-seeking behaviour, as once the traditional intermediary has lent support to the art, this is then documented, and fed to other (often online) intermediaries. The artist’s alliances are compounded in order to maximise their exposure to market. This feedback mechanism is cyclical and ongoing between, and even within, relevant intermediaries/intermediary-led organisations. It is a process whereby one continually attempts to prove the support they are receiving in order to multiply this support elsewhere, akin to culturally proving ones worth.

There appears to be an implicit understanding amongst creative labour that the marketplace saturation engendered by the technological changes discussed in the economic literature, namely plummeting barriers to entry, has resulted in a marketplace within which it is incredibly difficult and frustrating to attempt to get noticed, and that they are floating in a sea of indistinguishable and anonymous content. One of the primary techniques for mitigating this indistinguishability is to align oneself with as many intermediaries as possible: a collaborative response to competitiveness. This collaborative approach to creativity is akin to that observed by Leadbeater and Oakley (1999:16) in their work on ‘independents’ seeking to forge careers in creative industries such as

animation: “Independents have individualistic values but highly collaborative working practices”. It is the case however, that for this group of musicians in urban music at least, these ‘collaborative working practices’ are predicated upon the necessity for a *distinguishing mechanism* as much as it is for the benefits of creating art together. It allows artists to communicate to both (potential) fans, and intermediaries themselves, ‘look who I am working with/am aligned with: take me seriously’. This therefore serves to blur the boundary between competitive self-interest on the one hand, and collaboration on the other, as artists appear to work together, but for largely selfish-reasons i.e. to advance their own careers by attracting attention. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008) highlighted a competitive environment necessitating collaboration too, albeit in a different sense, in their work on television researchers. In this industry, it was key to work together and create a network of contracts given the short-term nature of employment. Only through forging relationships, could the next job be found. They quote a young researcher who states: “‘You get jobs on the basis of who you have worked with before’ (field notes, 13 February, 2007)” (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008:112). A similar scenario can be seen in music: artists appear to believe that you get taken seriously on the basis of who you are working with/aligned with. It is a collective response to an environment of abundance. It is a creative ‘safety-in-numbers’ approach, whereby artists feel alone in the cultural wilderness and thus seek to club up together and ‘piggyback’ on the successes of others in order to be heard by intermediaries who might disseminate their work to a wider musical public. An evolution of intermediaries has therefore occurred. Old intermediaries used to be the distributors and sellers of music, but in an era of abundance we need distribution to be managed in a new way. Record companies were the intermediaries of scarcity; media platforms are the intermediaries of abundance.

This ‘wide definition’ of who constitutes an intermediary, which I have suggested in an era of online social networking might include ‘neo-intermediaries’, may prove theoretically controversial. Hesmondhalgh (2006:226) proposes that many recent studies into cultural intermediaries are, like mine, inspired by Bourdieu, yet don’t adhere to his relative narrow conception of new petite bourgeois *critics*. However, Bourdieu (1984:359)

suggests in *Distinction* that intermediaries might emanate from “sales, marketing, advertising, public relations”, and I have proposed herein that these neo-intermediaries are able to act as all of these things. Indeed, it is hoped this the findings in this chapter might contribute towards a debate which seeks to reconsider who can reasonably be said to be a ‘cultural intermediary’ (Negus, 2002); that is, who is encompassed under the conceptual umbrella of “presentation and representation” (Bourdieu, 1984:359).

Cronin (2004:351) proposes that intermediaries become of crucial importance “to assist consumers in deciphering the increasingly complex cultural terrain”. The findings of this chapter suggest that contemporary artists appear to *believe that this is true* to a certain extent. These findings have not sought to assess the extent to which intermediaries are successful at distributing content, nor examine the extent to which they limit seeking costs, and are important in the decision making processes, of consumers. Instead it highlights their *perceived* importance amongst contemporary creative labour, and the subsequent behavioural implications this entails. The ability of intermediaries to assist consumers in decision-making processes is not evaluated here, but instead, it is shown how artists believe intermediaries to be important, rightly or wrongly, and adopt specific behavioural practices accordingly. This suggests two things. Firstly, as proposed by Molloy and Larner (2010:375), whilst Bourdieu was accurate in identifying ‘cultural intermediaries’ and the role they might play in the lives of creative labour, he was wrong in conceptualising them as “a last-ditch effort by a failing petit bourgeoisie to use a degraded popular culture to maintain some semblance of prestige”. Ultimately, he did not foresee the central role they would come to play in the lives in creative labour, and in the creative economy. Secondly, it suggests that these findings present only evidence as to the *perceived importance* of intermediaries. That is to say it does not prove their importance on demand-side factors such as consumer decision-making processes, but instead shows supply-side influences whereby artists assume intermediaries to be important in these processes. They become important, because they are perceived as being important. Lury and Warde (1997:96) suggested that intermediaries were a form of “modern witch doctor” who, via their apparent

“special knowledges are able to sell their divinations to the worried producers”. It appears, within UK urban music at least, they no longer need even sell themselves; we as creators inherently believe them, and perceive this to be true.

The intermediaries discussed here, in the world of UK underground urban music, differ to the intermediaries from the world of ‘the music industry’; the A&R men, the accountants, the business managers, the lawyers (Negus, 2002, 2011b). These individuals rarely, if at all, feature in the lives of artists in the underground. Bourdieu and Nice (1980:264) propose in a footnote that a certain type of intermediary assumes the responsibility of “sparing [the artist] the tasks associated with the valorizing of his work, which are both ridiculous, demoralising and ineffective”. For example, Negus (2011b:111) outlines how ‘building a profile’ within the institutionalised music industry is the responsibility of promotional staff acting as intermediaries, contacting radio stations, and cultivating those relationships. However, in my study, intermediaries don’t shield artists from this. Instead, artists now assume this responsibility of intermediary-engagement, and largely are able to execute it with great success. Whilst I had an experienced team of managers guiding me for the final year of this research project as Context, the responsibility for intermediary-engagement, of nurturing relationships with radio stations and journalists, still fell to me. In another example, Negus (2011b:104) notes how, to maximise potential airplay, multiple remixes of tracks will be produced to appeal to wider variety of media outlets; exactly as per Context with ‘1.4 at 12’. For unsigned, underground artists, this “protective screen between the artist and the market” (ibid:266) does not exist. Intermediaries no longer protect the artist from the market; they *are* the market with whom artists interact. For artists today, intermediary-engagement does not occupy the role of shielding them from the market; it is the very essence of the relationship between the artist and the cultural marketplace. However, what is the nature of their relationship with the *economic* marketplace? This will be the topic of discussion in the next chapter.

## **5: ‘Show Me The Money’? The Contemporary Nature of Capital Transubstantiation**

It’s hard trying to make an income off of a dream

Rival (*‘When Will This All End’*, 2012)

Cultural markets are competitive environments, and central to this competitive struggle, concerns the way in which artists interact with cultural intermediaries. This was a key premise of Bourdieu (1984). My findings suggest that intermediaries are of crucial perceived importance for artists given their ability to act as both a distributor, but also crucially as a distinguisher: a seal of approval and validation within a ferociously competitive market. However, the nature of the artist-intermediary relationship is but one facet of the competitive experience for creative labour. As discussed in the literature review, Bourdieu suggests that intermediary engagement should be understood within the wider context of his ‘general economy of practices’, whereby all behavioural responses necessitated by competitiveness can be understood vis-à-vis the operation of capital. Capital interplay is the competitive experience, and therefore this chapter will seek to make sense of the findings relating to cultural intermediaries within Bourdieu’s theory of capital, but also to build on them, seeking to ascertain the role of money in the lives of artists in underground UK urban music.

At the heart of Bourdieu’s analysis of creative labour, and central to his conceptual understanding of it, lies a concern relating to the operation of, and the artistic quest for, capital. As discussed in detail in the literature review, the Bourdieusian approach reconceptualised capital from the purely economic concern inherent in prevailing economic paradigms, and suggested that within the cultural field one could observe creative labour attempting to acquire, maximise and convert/transubstantiate/interconvert three distinct kinds of capital: economic, social and cultural. Transubstantiation refers to processes whereby one form of capital is converted into another kind. The research questions posited in this thesis, and of interest throughout my fieldwork and data analysis, relate to how artists in contemporary markets experience the relationship between these

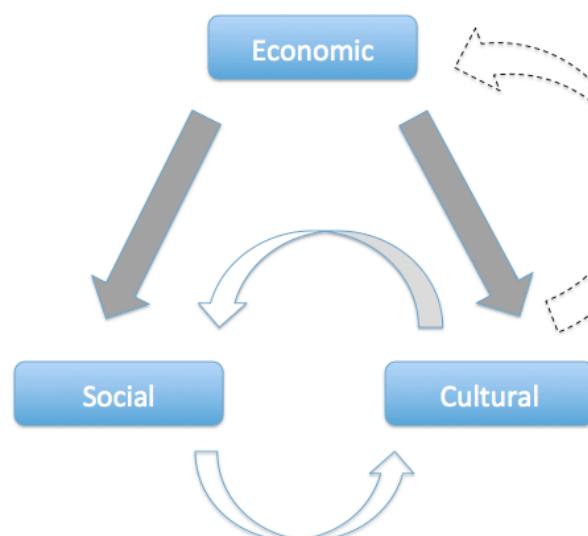
defined forms of capital, and how, or not, artists are able to transubstantiate them into one another. Of particular interest is how, in contemporary markets artists are able to survive and sustain their creative practice given these processes of capital interplay. In this sense, understanding transubstantiation processes is crucial for appreciating creativity in a digitalised creative climate.

The first part of this chapter presents the findings from the previous chapter on cultural intermediaries as interpreted through Bourdieu's theoretical framework. It reconsiders the nature of the artist-intermediary relationship in terms of how creative labour obtains, maximises and transubstantiates various forms of capital. It is suggested that the findings presented in the previous chapter on how artists interact with cultural intermediaries is representative of a strong interconvertibility between social and cultural capital, and vice versa. The previous chapter is then representative of creative practice maximising cultural capital *via* the exploitation of cultivated social capital. In addition, the digitalisation of communication technology has increased the opportunities available to artists to maximise their social capital via online social networks, and thus, the opportunities to convert this into much desired cultural capital. Secondly, my findings suggest that creative practice requires a large 'double expenditure' of economic capital in order to facilitate it; an expenditure of fiscal resources in order to create and distribute their cultural products, but also sufficient resources to provide the time and space within which to create. These costs are in effect sunk-costs, meaning artists are running largely at a loss, which is compounded by a conceptualisation of success in largely non-monetary terms. Therefore, this represents a conversion of economic capital into cultural capital, which is rarely converted back, and whilst entry-level costs have reduced, the cost of competing is incredibly high, with little return. Thus, this crucial second finding suggests that whilst artists are increasingly able to acquire large amounts of embodied and institutionalised cultural capital, it is incredibly difficult to transubstantiate this into economic capital (although carefully cultivated networks of social capital are able to, in certain regards, mitigate this material disadvantage). I employ the terminology used in earlier interviews by Rival and Genesis Elijah, and suggest that this process highlights how contemporary processes of capital interplay are illusory for the manner in which they allow for

the projection of high levels of apparent successes, despite artists experiencing financial hardships.

Given this, part two of the chapter asks crucial questions relating to how our case study artists are able to support their creative practice. A business model predicated on economic and social investment for cultural gain is fiscally unsustainable, generating important questions as to how creative practice can be sustained and facilitated. The chapter concludes by highlighting how artists seek ultimately to recover their costs via a short-term faith investment in a future ‘secondary transubstantiation’ – the eventual recouping of economic capital invested at a later date - often provided by a record company. I suggest that the nature of capital interplay in the contemporary cultural market of UK urban music might be diagrammatically conceptualised as in Fig.10 below. Social and cultural capital are transubstantiated into one another, fed by a double investment of economic capital. This process is the transubstantiation of economic, into cultural and social capital. Additionally, artists hope for a secondary transubstantiation indicated by the dotted arrow. This would represent the potential sustainability of creative practice. Each element of this diagram will be explored throughout the chapter, forming the basis of analysis, eventually providing a complete description of the representation below.

(Fig. 10: Contemporary Capital Interplay)



However the picture is certainly more complex than this. By the end of my time undertaking fieldwork, both myself as Context and Rival had obtained contracts with major record companies, although for the latter, the relatively low amount of money received had made little or no difference to his life. The hardships of surviving as an artist were well documented in the course of my data analysis and these are highlighted, exposing the desperation and arduous instability experienced. My concluding remarks seek to comment on the link between fiscal hardship, and creativity itself, questioning whether we should be concerned at the findings presented, given that it proposes creative practice is in many respects financially unsustainable in advanced capitalist markets due to its inability in the short term to provide fiscal compensation.

## **5.1. Capital Interplay: Social, Cultural and Economic**

### *5.1.1. 'It's Who You Know': Cultural Maximisation via Social Capital*

The relationship between artists and cultural intermediaries serves as an illustration of the contemporary artistic quest for capital maximisation. The analysis in the previous chapter suggested that artists today, largely as a response to the problem of indistinguishability engendered by a marketplace proliferation due to huge economic changes, engage in a variety of highly collaborative techniques in their approach to both creative work and self promotion, in order to be heard. However, what are these findings concerning the nature of competitiveness and subsequent increasing importance of cultural intermediaries an example of, in conceptual terms vis-à-vis the discussion at hand relating to capital transubstantiation?

The findings presented in the previous chapter highlight how artists seek to align themselves with a number of 'others' in order to harness them as a distribution platform, reconceptualising them as neo-intermediaries, as well as to capture the attention of cultural intermediaries. This was conceived of as important in order to both maximise routes to market, and thus achieve exposure and hopefully acclaim, as well as to ensure the projection of an image of success. In this sense,

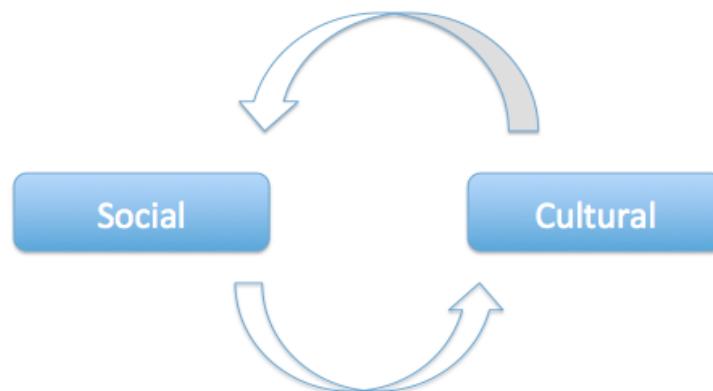
we can understand this affiliatory, collaborative creativity in terms of “investment strategies” (Taug and Roberts, 2003:92). Bourdieu suggests, in accordance with my findings, that: “a membership in a group provide each of its members with the backing of a collectively-owned capital form, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.” (Bourdieu, 1986:248) Thus, the ‘investment strategies’ refer to the building and maintaining of social relationships with cultural intermediaries within the music industry, and this ongoing process is thus a social investment. Additionally, the ‘credit’ referred to can be understood as obtained cultural capital in the form of social standing or acclaim from ones audience or peers. If we employ the same empirical examples used in the previous chapter, this process becomes clear.

When I filmed the video for ‘Off With Their Heads’, I was maximising my social/relational capital (the intermediary contacts whom I asked to appear in the video – from other artists, to journalists from MTV), in the hope that this would lead to the video being playlisted on MTV; institutionalised cultural capital. This acquisition, maximisation and transubstantiation was indeed ultimately successful. Furthermore, the video itself exists as a form of objectified cultural capital, as a display of technical proficiency. We can observe a similar phenomenon occurring with Rival’s earlier discussed methodology of remixes. He maximised his relational capital with other artists in order to maximise institutionalised cultural capital in the form of documentable radio play, and in turn reinforced existing social capital, in the form of his relationships with radio DJs themselves. Thus, whilst the previous chapter was able to document the contemporary artist-intermediary relationship, when situating the phenomena into a theoretical context accounting for processes of capital transubstantiation, we can appreciate what the practices *represent* in conceptual terms: collaborative creativity as cultural practice represents investment strategies facilitating capital conversions.

We can observe a strong interconvertibility between social or relational capital and cultural capital. Indeed, via the aforementioned feedback mechanism approach used by artists, this process is a self-perpetuating one. Achieving, for example, institutionalised cultural capital in the form of say, being placed on the MTV Brand New for 2012 list as occurred with me in January 2012, begets a

large amount of interest, in turn generating more contacts and associates who can be utilised to maximise cultural capital further. I was announced as the winner of the annual list on 09.01.12, and that day, I received emails from: a prominent music industry manager introducing me to a media lawyer with firm Clintons, a manager from Red House Management asking to manage me, an A&R at Polydor Records, a prominent record producer from group ‘True Tiger’, a junior A&R Manager from Ministry of Sound Records, a freelance MTV employee introducing me to an A&R at Sony, and a widely distributed free magazine in London called ‘LIVE’. Thus, the cultural practices identified in the previous chapter represent attempts to maximise cultural capital via the exploitation of social/relational capital in a self-perpetuating cycle. The feedback mechanism seen in Fig.3, is graphically represented in Bourdieu’s terms in Fig.11 below. It illustrates how social investment strategies have become of central importance for artists, and that this social capital is readily transubstantiated into cultural capital.

(Fig.11 Socio-Cultural Transubstantiation)



It is relevant at this juncture to comment on how contemporary artists undertake these ‘investment strategies’ to maximise social capital. Rival spoke in interviews about the importance of cultivating relationships personally: “I might see these people at raves or parties” (Rival, Interview, 07/12). However, it is important to note how he was able to do this given his residence within, as he

called it “the London bubble”, and certainly it represented only one way of relationship cultivation. The preliminary way relationships were cultivated by all three artists was online, through emails and social networking sites such as Twitter<sup>8</sup>. For example, if there was a particular journalist or blogger whom I wished to contact, I could easily find their email, and then supplement contact by finding these people on Twitter, ‘following’ them, and then engaging myself in conversation with them. Particularly striking was my contact an Island Records marketing manager. In 2010 when I was attempting to contact her to secure her backing as a journalist at LIVE Magazine and prominent blog Urban Development, I began following her on Twitter and noticed her discussing how she required a particular song to listen to; 50 Cent ft. Destiny’s Child – Thug Loving. I quickly emailed her the song, engaging her in conversation as she thanked me for sending it over. Throughout the year I continued to chat with her online, and on 23.1.11 when it came to promoting ‘Off With Their Heads’, she was able to submit the video to TV stations for me, securing airplay on Flava TV. This example illustrates how online investment strategies ensured that even those living outside London are able to have a fighting chance at capturing key intermediaries attention, and thus facilitate the maximisation of social capital, and its eventual transubstantiation into cultural capital. However, what is the role of money – economic capital – in the creative practice of contemporary artists? In 1998 Meja sang ‘Its All About the Money’, but in an environment whereby currency operates as social investments made for cultural gains, how do monetary concerns factor in the equation?

### *5.1.2. Artistic Expenditure: Economic Capital and the Practicalities of Art*

Bourdieu suggests that capital interconvertibility is subject to the same constraints as the thermodynamic relationship between mechanical motion and heat which informs it: “profits in one area are necessarily paid for by costs in

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<sup>8</sup> For a short period in 2010, I observed Rival networking using the BlackBerry network ‘BBM’ (BlackBerry Messenger). In February 2010 he tweeted: “Networking tme who has bb [BBM] send ur pins [contact ‘pins’] this is for mc’s models singers etc. The whole scene [music scene] holla me [contact me]” (Tweet, 05.02.10, 11.48pm).

another" (Bourdieu, 1986). In the case of the artists at hand, as well as for Bourdieu, these costs are invariably economic ones. Thus, cultural and social profits are paid for via economic costs. As illustrated, the collaborative technique employed when creating 'Off With Their Heads' was indeed successful if conceptualised as an exercise in the maximisation of cultural capital via relational capital, and the transubstantiation of the latter into the former. However, as documented here, the loss of economic capital was vast.

The mastering of the track conducted on 05.01.11 cost £60.00 (Precise Mastering Invoice No.889), the hire of the camera from Camerarent on 18.01.11 was £94.80, lens hire £32.40, with a damage deposit was £1250.00, petrol from Norwich to London and back<sup>9</sup>, and eventually submitting the video to MTV via Fastrax at a cost of £109.20. In order for the TV edit, the track had to be remastered on 05.03.11 (Precise Mastering Invoice No. 962) at an additional cost of £60.00, and resubmitted to Channel U (Mushroom TV Ltd) independently on 24.03.11 at a cost of £23.50 (Invoice No. AKATRANID\_945), and resubmitted to Fastrax at a cost of £37.20 (Invoice GBFTI1010210) on 18.04.11. Therefore, the total expenditure for the creation of this song and video was £462.10. This economic capital was certainly then subject to successful transubstantiation into institutionalised cultural capital, as it was playlisted on MTV.

What of the economic profit earned from this work? My July 2011 PRS statement (Distribution Number 20110701, CAE: 590748220) suggests that 'Off With Their Heads' earned just £31.78 in royalties; £13.73 from BBC Radio 1Xtra play, and £14.56 from MTV Base, with the remainder as miscellaneous. The following PRS statement (20111101) shows earnings on the track of £42.90, with the majority of that income (£25.61) coming from one BBC Radio 1 play. It finally earned an additional £7.42 in the following PRS Distribution (2012041), taking total earnings from the track at £82.10; a loss of exactly £380.00. The track was given away free as a promotional tool, thus earning no money from sales. In this sense, a product, which required economic investment, had itself

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<sup>9</sup> At January 2011 levels according to the AA, average petrol prices were 128.27 pence per litre, for a journey of over 200 miles equates to approximately £45.00 in fuel

been wholly decommodified by external economic pressures exerted on the marketplace. Not only was social capital invested to generate cultural capital, but extensive economic capital was invested, and lost too. There thus exists a paradox; what I will refer to here as the ‘Distributor-Hostage Paradox’. By this, I mean that whilst, as mentioned, access to global distribution channels have, via technological advancements, become unimaginably democratised as legal online retailers allow individual artists to sell their product for a minute fee, related technological advancements mean that many consumers may not in fact choose to purchase the product from the retailer, but can instead circumnavigate the price mechanism and obtain it for free, illegally, holding suppliers hostage. In this sense, I acknowledged, rightly or wrongly, that even if I were to try and sell my song, people might download it for free anyway, so I felt I might as well give it away. This finding, that competitive forces have driven down profits of firms, may in some respects not be surprising.

A similar, albeit more extreme, scenario can be observed with reference to the production of the ambitious, underwater video for my track ‘Drowning’. Hiring the cameras cost £236.93 from HiRental, both myself and the actress had to obtain HSE diving qualifications to perform at such deep underwater depths at a cost of £150.00 each. The actress was paid £100.00 for her one day of work, and the cost of hiring the underwater tank was £1500.00, making the total expenditure for the video alone £1986.93. Indeed, expenditure was minimised hugely as we maximised our social resources in persuading a prominent director from EMI – Louis Ellison – to direct the video for free, as well as calling in various other favours. I was then mitigating economic expenditure via exploiting social capital reserves. However, combined with the mastering for the track at £72.00 (Invoice. 1253) the overall cost of creation was in excess of £2000.00. Given this vast expenditure my management company and I felt we had to at least attempt to make some money back by selling the track online, despite acknowledging that sales would be minimal. As of 04.03.13 (approx. 18 months from release) the track had sold 588 copies earning a total of £236.00. In PRS revenues across 2012 following its release, it earned £258.67, making a total loss on the project of £1800.26.

We can observe a similar pattern of economic loss for cultural gain with reference to live performances conducted throughout the fieldwork period. On 17.07.13, I was invited by prominent online media outlet SB.TV to perform at Wireless Festival in the Olympic Park in London, on the same day as famous artists such as Jay Z. For three consecutive days before the festival (July 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup>), I hired a band and rehearsed in a practice room in Shepherds Bush in London, at a cost of £70.00 per day. Each of the three musicians in the band were paid £25.00 each for each rehearsal day (a total expenditure of £225.00), and £40.00 each for the performance itself, totalling £120.00. For the performance itself, I was paid £100.00, of which 10% went to my booking agent at CODA, meaning that by doing the show I lost £465.00. The same pattern of financial loss for cultural gain can be seen when I performed at Reading (25.08.13) and Leeds (23.08.13) Festivals later that summer. Given that myself and the band had performed together already that summer we required less rehearsal time, meaning I only had to hire the rehearsal space in Shepherds Bush for one day. Along with paying the musicians, this cost me £145.00 (£70.00 per day and £25.00 per musician). Again, each band member was paid £45.00 for each performance (£270.00), and I was paid £100.00 per show of which 10% went to my booking agent. Over the two festival days, I was paid £180.00, but spent £415.00, making a total loss of £235.00. This is before accounting for the cost of petrol from London to Leeds and back again which I had to bear.

Certainly the band was a great expenditure, and in email exchanges with my management undertaken on 05.07.13 we debated the necessity of the large cost. Nonetheless, I did the festivals because they were seen as important for experience, but also for creating a successful image, and aligning my name alongside the other acts. However, this economic loss-making can be observed even in instances when the band was not involved. On 29.04.13 I performed at Koko in London as the support act for chart-topping UK rapper Devlin. For this we did not involve a band, but had to employ a DJ, and what is referred to as a 'hype man' (a fellow rapper who joins you on stage to acoustically bolster the performance). I was paid £200.00 for the show, of which 10% went to my agent, however, the DJ was paid £50.00, and the hype man £150.00, a loss again of £20.00.

In no other genre are artist [sic] expected to work for free while putting out quality work but some of you seem to think its ok for us  
Genesis Elijah (Tweet, 23.07.12, 6.25pm)

What do these economic loss-making exercises represent conceptually? It suggests an investment, and loss, of economic capital, in order to facilitate the maximisation of cultural capital. Indeed, this economic loss-making exercise is arguably compounded given that the stated goal of musical economic investments is rarely economic return. In an interview with Genesis Elijah I asked:

**Interviewer:** How do you conceptualise [a track] doing well?

**Genesis Elijah:** I look at it in views... Views. Purely online. We put it on Soundcloud it got a couple of thousand views, on YouTube it did pretty well, and artists inboxing me like Akala and Lowkey [well known rappers] and other people saying, “this track’s nuts”. So that’s cool. Done it (Interview, 11/13)

Thus, it appears that, for Genesis Elijah, a track having been successful is not conceptualised in terms of whether it has earned him money or not, but by how many views it achieved online. These ‘views’ are his objectified cultural capital (whilst I was seeking institutionalised cultural capital in the form of TV playlisting in addition). Indeed throughout our interview, he would gauge the success or failure of tracks with reference to the amount of YouTube views they achieved: “I did the Jason Derulo track, which is actually off YouTube now, but I think we got like 90,000 views on that. So it’s massive” (Genesis Elijah, interview, 11/13), or, “with the Nikki Minaj and Tinie Tempah [bootlegs] – I think that got like 80,000” (*ibid*). One can of course suggest that there is an economic element in that revenue can be generated via the Google Adsense service which pays you for views from one’s video uploads. However, neither Genesis Elijah nor Rival are even registered for this free service (as of 28.08.14) and the income received is relatively low, certainly when compared to the cost of

the videos. As of 04.09.13, my monetised uploads (that is, videos eligible to receive income from their views based), had amounted to 116,338 views, with a generated income of £75.69 (Publisher ID: pub-7129376940829489). Income per video is not specified via the service, but Off With Their Heads (at 46,433 views as of 04.09.13) is taken to represent less than 30% of total achieved views, it represents earnings of approximately £25.00. Rival too in an interview conceptualised success in non-fiscal terms, stating that: “Feedback is better than any form of money... When people come back to you; that’s your money back right there...Like when people write your lyrics back to you” (Rival, Interview, 02/13). However, he too was quick to open up about the financial hardships he encounters as an aspiring artist:

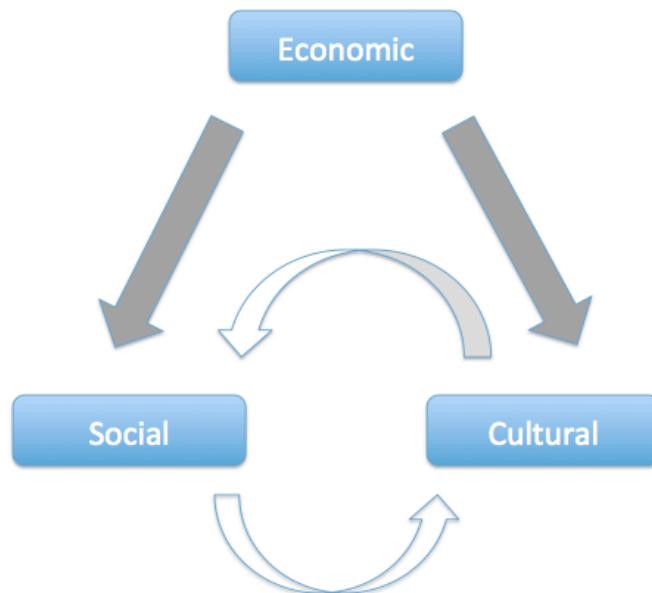
**Interviewer:** So, I would say that I earn very little money from music, if any. Is that the case for you too?

**Rival:** If I was a football team I’d definitely be in debt right now... You’re not doing it for the funds, but Jesus Christ it’s hard when you’re broke...Music’s a hard grind (Interview, 02/13)

The experiences of all three of us illustrate the problematic economic scenario of necessary expenditure with little to no revenue from music itself. More than this, however, the transubstantiation process from relational to cultural at the expense of economic, additionally “presupposes an expenditure of time that is made possible by possession of economic capital” (Bourdieu, 1986:253) i.e. “a labor of time which must be invested personally by the investor” (Taug and Roberts, 2003:85). That is to say, it is one thing to calculate the cost of, for instance, Off With Their Heads, with reference solely to input costs, when in fact hours and days of free time were required in order to produce the video. The same is, of course, true regarding the experiences of performing live; entire working days were dedicated to rehearsal time, which were both economically costly, but which could have never been attended were one to have, for example, full-time employment or fixed working hours. Fig. 12 on the next page, adds to the earlier figures by including economic capital in the diagrammatical conception, visually illustrating the documented ‘double investment’ (time, facilitated by money, and

money itself) required to engage in transubstantiatory processes of capital interplay. ‘Double investment’, then, is the suggestion that creative practice requires an investment not only of necessary economic capital to produce creative work, but also to facilitate said practice in terms of the time required to meaningfully engage in it.

(Fig.12 Cultural Business Model)



## 5.2. Getting Played, Not Paid: The Illusory Nature of Capital Interplay

The reduction of barriers to entry into the marketplace has then engendered a fascinating paradox whereby the ‘scene’ is saturated at an introductory level, yet distinguishing mechanisms, such as videos, are costly. Artists are then culturally rich, but economically poor, a scenario epitomised in the lyrics of Genesis Elijah when he raps:

When you ask me what I think of the game,  
I say: “Yeah, it’s alright but I think it’s a shame,

That brehs [men] spit flames [rap well] but ain't really getting paid”

If you want to get the papers [paper/money] gotta bring it to the  
[United] States,

But I can’t complain though, a brother’s getting played,  
[BBC Radio] 1Xtra, Channel U [Music TV station], man you see me  
everyday

Genesis Elijah (*'The Interview'*, 2010)

He suggests that artists are getting played, but not paid. The phraseology Genesis and Rival employed, wholly unprompted, when discussing intermediary engagement as an ‘illusion’ is equally applicable here. Success in the music industry is illusory; artists can be played on the radio, have their video on television, and be performing at festivals alongside the biggest acts in the world, yet they are earning no money. They exist within a non-monetised market of sorts, epitomised in the manner with which contemporary intermediary engagement is understood as the maximisation of social capital serving to blur the boundary between the exploitation of market-relations based on an exchange of services, and social relations based on an exchange of favours (Adler and Kwon, 2002:18). In this sense, transubstantiation in the other direction, from social/cultural to economic, is incredibly difficult. As I suggested in a tweet from 2011: “Everything is a profile raising exercise. Only later can it be a revenue raising exercise” (Tweet, 20.09.11, 10.56pm). This environment is not only financially difficult for artists, but also emotionally draining. Rival’s lyrics are littered with sentiments of despair, from thoughts of quitting music and returning to a more profitable career selling drugs...

Feeling to quit music and get back to the days of just amping  
[venting anger],

Dealing with problems by shanking [stabbing], gun handling,  
Look, shotting [selling drugs], illegal ways of getting cash in  
Rival (*'Late Nights Early Mornings'*, 2012)

... to his difficulty at balancing his commitments:

Violence and crime stays glued to my mind  
Rivz has two sides, do music or hype  
But I'm stuck in the middle, been choosing for [a long] time  
So is it music I write, or do "moves" on the sly?  
Being a yute inside, but the truth is I need studio time  
Studio time costs paper, paper I don't have, so I've gotta stay on my  
grind  
Rival ('Tyrant', 2010)

Indeed, between 2011 and 2013, I repeatedly commented on the desperate state of my financial situation, tweeting:

No lie, Cash for Gold just rescued me from complete destitution  
(Tweet, 11.06.11, 5.01pm)  
Urgh. Can't even afford £1.30 to get the bus. Bored of being broke  
(Tweet, 22.10.12, 6.13pm)  
I AM SO SICK AND TIRED OF BEING SKINT (Tweet, 22.01.13,  
1.06pm)

Genesis Elijah too suggested in his track 'Falling':

You ask me how it's going what am I suppose to tell you?  
My sales ain't doing well and another deal just fell through  
I'm fighting tooth and nail as well dude  
Genesis Elijah ('Falling', 2011)

Artists lamenting the difficulty of their situation is certainly nothing new; the hardships endured by creative labour are well documented from the letters of Van Gogh to his auctioneer brother written during his time in 'The Yellow House' (Gayford, 2007), to any number of others throughout history. However, these findings are important if only to situate the reality of capital transubstantiation in a modern context, highlighting that even today as barriers to entry have plummeted, the costs, both fiscal and emotional, are high, given that artists are able to attain a high degree of *perceived*, perhaps *misleading*, success,

epitomised in the institutionalised cultural capital embodied by radio or television playlisting, or festival performances, and yet, struggle to convert this into economic capital, and thereby render their practice sustainable in economic terms. Capital interplay is therefore illusory in nature, as artistic projections of success and cultivated public perceptions, mask the realities which this research highlights. On 23.03.12, shortly after shooting the music video for 'Drowning', I tweeted: "My life is a myth right now. I'm shooting music videos which cost thousands of pounds, yet I'm emptying out my 2p jar" (Context, Tweet, 23.03.12, 3.35pm). This tweet exemplifies the artistic illusion. It was particularly interesting to see how in a video Rival uploaded in April, 2012 called 'Questions and Answers' he was asked the question: 'What job other than music do you think you would be doing if you didn't have a music career?'<sup>10</sup> However, it is largely only a projection of a career. Indeed, the year before in July 2011 he spat the lyric: "Rival get up, get your bread up, Make sure that you eat you need some Ps ['paper/money], because true say I live in poverty (Rival, *'In the Morning Freestyle'*, 2011).

What is suggested by the research conducted for this thesis? Economic capital is a prerequisite required to facilitate the maximisation of cultural capital. Given the specific conditions under which this creative labour operates however – non institutionalised, young, etc. – and the decommodification of the output, it is less that a source of revenue is necessarily the problem, as artists appear willing to produce at a loss, but a source of sustenance. In this sense, how can artists acquire the economic capital required to maximise cultural capital? The concerns at hand here are: in a saturated, non-institutionalised marketplace, with economic investment a pre-requisite, but with a decommodified product, how can this creative labour take place, and continue to do so? If a creative business operates whereby social capital is to be exploited, cultural capital is to be maximised, and economic capital is to be invested, how can it stay alive? The following part of the chapter will seek to explore how artists are able to sustain their practice.

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<sup>10</sup> He stated then when he was younger he wanted to be an architect, but that now, he would like to work in graphic design, or 'the media'.

## 5.3 On The Relationship Between Subsistence and Creativity

I'm trying to get that type of P [money] KPMG pay their partners,  
Tunage as my eating,  
So I will keep pushing till my heating,  
Bill gets paid via Austin [Head of BBC 1Xtra] in the playlist meeting  
Context ('SBTV Warm Up Session', 2012)

### 5.3.1 Sustaining Creativity

A key research question to have been generated by the literature review concerns the ways in which contemporary processes of capital interplay impact the sustainability of creative practice. If artistry operates largely at an economic loss, as per the case-studies presented, how do artists survive? For the artists under examination here, each has their own special account as to how they are able to sustain themselves, suggesting that artists today find economic assistance from a multiplicity of sources. The environment today is then akin to that outlined by Finnegan (1989:282): "Almost all of these [sources of patronage: "the church, the state, aristocratic or royal courts, leading families, business, the 'local community', or, finally, the mechanisms of the market"] entered in and that reliance on just one source of support was no longer the pattern... The basic system was in a sense a 'self-support' one by the amateur players themselves". She notes: "Where did [small bands] draw their resources? The answer here leads on to the very broad sphere variously termed 'the market', 'self help' and 'private enterprise'" (ibid:285). However, the artists in my research are not simply hobbyists needing to purchase an instrument and then having to learn to play it, but aspirational artists seeking to make a career from their craft. They are spending, as well as losing, thousands of pounds on, for instance, just one music video as was most notably shown vis-à-vis the production of 'Drowning'. However, all appear to acknowledge, that for their practice to flourish as they see appropriate, none feel that could have a full time job, and still make music. With reference to whether or not Rival felt he could have a job and still operate creatively, he suggested:

**Rival:** Full time? Crazy. I couldn't do it and still do studio. I wouldn't have time...I wouldn't have time to promote... The time commitment would kill me...I'd get fired for skipping work...I see music as a 9-5... Its voluntary work though (Interview, 02/13)

Indeed, I share Rival's sentiments, tweeting: "...people act surprised that I don't live off music. How do you think music pays me at my level? Art is expensive" (Tweet, 12.05.13, 7.49pm) and later that month: "I'm an artist who'd basically been doing an UNPAID internship for 7 years. Music pays me nothing and costs me shitloads" (Tweet, 30.05.13, 1.15pm).

### **Genesis Elijah**

In the first instance, we might turn to Genesis Elijah. In our interview, he disclosed to me that he was able to eliminate what is for most people their greatest economic expense as he was able to buy a flat from money earned selling CD's around ten years ago. This revelation shocked me:

**Interviewer:** So, you bought a flat from selling CDs?!

**Genesis:** Yeah...I used to treat it like a super business...How many sales I was making an hour, how much money I was making per hour, to make sure I wasn't earning less than 10/20 pounds per hour – coz otherwise what's the point? I was putting in my lunch breaks – I had a break from there to there. I put in travel... everything...  
There were days where you'd make £500 in a day (Interview, 02/13)

As he stated in his track 'Out Cold':

They wanna know whey I ain't blown ['blown up']/become famous]  
already...

Why I ain't all over the telly with a flow this deadly

Tell them don't worry about me, I own a home already  
Money's not a problem  
Genesis Elijah ('Out Cold', 2013)

He acknowledged too, that given the decommodification processes identified in this thesis, earning money such as that from selling CD's today would be near impossible:

**Genesis Elijah:** When I came into it, we started selling CDs for a fiver. The year back, or two years before that, AC [fellow rapper] was selling CDs for a tenner. Actually selling CDs, on the street, for ten pounds. Now, that is unthinkable. Selling CDs now for three pounds is hard...Competition forced money down... (Interview, 02/13)

He was able to purchase a two bedroom flat in Watford with the proceeds from his sales. In this sense, Genesis is, to large extent, able to sustain his creative practice based on what music *used to be*: a commodity. He is thus able to just work a few days a week at a local gym, and devote the rest of his time to his music. Nonetheless, despite this, he acknowledges that his present income from music is distinctly reduced: "If I could do that - make the money how I did back then - I would do that. But, the scene's just different now... I make less than I did then....PRS is like, a bonus. Oh cool man, lets get some trainers or go out for dinner" (Genesis, Interview, 02/13). He, like myself, acknowledges that the income generated from the Performing Rights Society (PRS) is really just 'bonus' money. In this sense, Genesis Elijah's relationship to copyright is fascinating and worth mentioning briefly here. As Schlesinger and Waelde (2012:26) found, the owning of specific rights does not generate any notable income, and this is certainly this case with myself as Context too. More than this however, it is in fact Elijah's ability to exploit copyright by re-interpreting the tracks of existing famous acts in his 'bootlegs' which is one of the factors allowing him to meaningfully compete in the market.

Additionally, he suggests that he supplements his income via product diversification whereby he films and edits music videos for other artists, as well as selling T Shirts with his slogan 'This Is My Hustle' printed on the front. This product diversification was particularly interesting as an example of artists no longer being reliant on selling their music as physical objectified cultural capital, but instead selling the intangible representations of their embodied and institutionalised cultural capital (although certainly this is not a new phenomenon, see Finnegan, 1989:265). Genesis stated in interviews:

**Genesis:** Recently, the last three months, a lot of money has come from shooting videos - so that's like another new avenue that's opened up all of a sudden... [Also] slowly over the course of like 2 years I sold quite a few T-Shirts. I got a little bit of money, so as a business idea, it can work (Interview, 02/13)

From producing beats for other artists, to his video directing, he has numerous projects aside from just music in order to try and generate an income:

**Genesis:** I've got all these things that I'm juggling so if one flops [fails] then okay. So if the Genesis Elijah thing, rapping, ain't working, I'll stop and focus on, say, production.

**Interviewer:** So is it like a safety net? You're spreading your risk?

**Genesis:** Yeah (Interview, 02/13)

Furthermore, Genesis is able to exploit his reserves of social capital in order to minimise his necessary economic expenditure, and appears to validate the assertion of Coleman (1990) that relational capital can mitigate the costs of economic disadvantage. Genesis stated: "I've never paid for studio ever. Like, I've always worked with people that kind of, they see that I've got potential and it can help them as well... When we do proper post production stuff we use like, Levels Recording. That's a proper studio. I think its, that's like 70/80 grand worth of equipment" (Genesis, Interview, 11/13).

There can be little doubt that Genesis was, at the time of undertaking this research, best able of the three of us to make a living out of his art. The combination of his low cost of living, combined with clothing sales, music video services which he offered to artists at between £150.00 and £250.00 per video, as well as his prolific live schedule meant he was able to generate a degree of income. However, he too acknowledged the immense difficulty he faced achieving secondary transubstantiation, tweeting: “If it wasn’t for CD/T-Shirt sales and all my overseas work I couldn’t live off music” (Tweet, 17.05.11, 7.54pm). Nonetheless, his sheer dedication and relentless hard work over this period was, as an artist myself, genuinely inspirational, most notably his ability to perform gigs so consistently and for a profit. However, I asked him:

**Interviewer:** Do you think you could live off music, and sustain your current level of creative practice, if you were privately renting where you are now? So, around £900/£1000 a month in rent?

**Genesis:** No way. Impossible (02/13).

## Rival

Rival too, as with Genesis, has been forced to sell a product *other than music itself* in order to supplement his income. He told me that:

**Rival:** I’ve seen more money off selling hats in two weeks than I have off music (Interview, 02/13)

Again, he has fashion products emblazoned with his logo (‘Headshot Season’), which he sells to compensate for the fact that his music does not. It was interesting to discover that this form of product diversification had, for Rival, a non-economic element too. That is, he did not start making these clothes and selling them primarily as a well to make money. In the first instance, there was a degree of pragmatism as he explained that he saw no point in spending, say,

£100.00 on a jumper with someone else's name on, when he could spend £100.00 to have a jumper made with his own name on, which he could then wear in music videos to promote his image and brand. More than this though, he suggested that the clothing brand allowed him to have a "personal connection" with his supporters. He told me: "You want them to feel more in touch with you as a person. They can wear your clothes at shows...People won't pay as much attention to you unless you are personal with them...You make fans feel part of your musical journey. That's what I try to do" (Rival, Interview, 02/13). In this sense, neither merchandising nor music are his primary income. Rival's ultimate method of subsistence comes from the fact that he still lives at home with his family (at the time of our first two interviews at least), with no rent, no bills, and is able to claim "Job Seekers [Allowance]". He comments in his track '*This Ain't Easy*': "What do you know about hard times though?/ JSA [Job Seekers Allowance] living trying to grind and cope" (Rival, '*This Ain't Easy*', 2012). I could almost hear the relief in his voice when he recalled getting his JSA through: "Job seekers helped me *the best* at times" (Interview, 02/13). Indeed, this interplay between welfare/social provision and culture is noted by Mark Fisher, who suggests: "Many of the key developments in popular culture since the 1960s were facilitated by the space provided by the welfare state, social housing, etc. They amounted to a kind of indirect funding for cultural production" (Fisher, 2012). Thus we can observe the state acting akin to the aristocratic or theocratic patron of old, providing the artist the time and space required to undertake his craft.

In addition to this, Rival appears to exist in a relatively money-free economy of sorts. He suggests:

**Rival:** The main studio where I record and get stuff mixed and mastered is in North London and management pay for that...I was in a position where I could get bits and pieces of free studios. Travel and food is the most expensive thing I pay for...Plus my girlfriend works so I was in a position where I could get some form of handout (Interview, 02/13)

Again, as with Genesis Elijah, Rival is able to exploit his social/relational capital in order to mitigate his economic. His reserves of social capital are able, to a large extent, mitigate potential economic losses, as he acknowledges that his management team pay for much of his studio time, and for his mixing and mastering. However, he acknowledges that his money-free existence can be problematic: “The most that hurts me is when you have to go for example these MTV parties and stuff like that and you think automatically ‘I need clothes, I need trainers’...and if you’re not getting that for free...its hard” (Rival, Interview, 02/13)

## Context

Once again, my ability to sustain my creative practice is predicated on a unique set of living circumstances. In many respects, Higher Education and the ESRC acted akin to my patron of sorts<sup>11</sup>. Richard Russell, Co-CEO at XL Records (who have released music from acts as influential as The Prodigy, Dizzee Rascal and many more) tweeted in 2010: “To channel inspiration properly you have to be as free as possible of the mundanities of everyday life. You have to be unrestricted” (Tweet, 17.11.10) (a quote that is almost linguistically identical to the Archduke Rudolf letter about Beethoven discussed earlier in the literature review<sup>12</sup>). My PhD stipend of just under £1130.00 ensured I had complete flexibility with my working hours. That is, if I had studio sessions or meetings in the day, I could work at night, or vice-versa. Without it I would have been forced to get a full time job, and like Rival, I share the definite sense that it would be impossible for me to perform and compete *at my desired level* if I had to work. Indeed, in an interview with MTV in March 2013 I stated:

**Context:** Uni is the ONLY reason I can make music, that's a simple fact. How else would I live day to day? I can't live with my parents;

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<sup>11</sup> The relationship between the state, and the artistic practices of Context and Rival, is particularly interesting when you consider that the state is both the facilitator of art in terms of indirectly providing the funds which facilitate creative practice, but is also an intermediary in the form of BBC Radio 1 and 1Xtra, and thus the distributor and distinguisher of art as well.

<sup>12</sup> See p.58 for original quote

my Dad's in Scotland and Mum's in Manchester. My student loan *is* my income. Music is an incredibly expensive hobby. It's like a full-time job that pays no money in the short term (Halima, 2013)

In addition I, like Rival, was fortunate to have a partner who had a well-paid, full-time job, and she could thus support me. Indeed, between the period of August 2011 until July 2013, she paid 2/3 of our rent expenditure each month while I paid 1/3, in order that I might pursue my creative ambitions. All three artists share the definite sense that for us, music is an expense to be paid for, and that creative practice itself is not a money making enterprise except in a supplementary sense, at least in the short term while we are relatively unknown to the general public. Genesis stated PRS might buy him "trainers", or Rival stated that intermittently he might receive "£250.00 a show [live performance] or £250.00 for a 'sixteen' [bar guest verse on a track]" (Interview, 02/13). What we all thus appear to acknowledge, is a striking difficulty in achieving what I will refer to as 'secondary transubstantiation'; that is, we are able to convert economic and social capital into cultural capital, and indeed transubstantiate the latter two into one another in a self-perpetuating process, and do so incredibly successfully, but find it increasingly difficult to transubstantiate either social or cultural capital back into economic capital, and therefore to make creative practice economically sustainable. This is the illusory nature of contemporary capital interplay; apparent success masking unsustainability.

### *5.3.2. The Secondary Transubstantiation Dream*

**Context:** Someone really needs to sign me. Just to pay off my Wonga debts...Im [sic] clinging on by a fiscal thread out here  
(Tweet, 23.04.13, 6.39pm)

**Genesis:** ...My advice to up and coming artist [sic] is get a real job...  
(Tweet, 07.11.12, 6.25pm)

In an interview with Rival, he perfectly extoled a sentiment which I too hold dear, as indicated in earlier quotes by myself.

**Interviewer:** I don't earn enough money off music for it....

**Rival:** ...to be a job

**Interviewer:** Yeah to be a job. Is that the same for you?

**Rival:** Exact same thing for me. Right now, I'm doing the longest shift in the history of work, but when I get that pay cheque, it's gonna pay out good

**Interviewer:** So you're doing a job for free?

**Rival:** Its voluntary work man (Interview, 02/13)

Rival optimistically stated: "Eventually you'll make a tune and it's all gonna pay off...It hasn't come full circle yet" (Rival, Interview, 02/13). Genesis too spoke of this potential pay off: "The level I'm on now, is cool coz I can live but there is another level that I want to get to - and I'm not there yet...I wanna do this full time, not worry about money, and I want to do it on my terms" (Genesis, Interview, 11/13).

How might this 'coming full circle', to use Rival's language, look? How can artists transubstantiate their accumulated cultural capital into economic capital in this saturated, decommodified era? Certainly all three of us acknowledge the great financial assistance that can come from getting 'the deal'; this is either a songwriting deal with a publisher, or a record deal with a record company. Signing with these companies will provide you with an 'advance'; a one-off, up-front payment that is later recouped from either your royalties (in the case of publishing), or your sales (in the case of a record deal). As Rival stated with reference to record labels: "they can help me a lot with money right now...The main reason for me to get signed is for the advance" (Rival, Interview, 02/13). The provision of this advance would represent the immediate conversion of accumulated cultural capital, and well nurtured social capital in order to have the right contacts to set up the necessary meetings, into economic capital. This process can be seen represented in the dotted line in Fig.10 from the beginning of this chapter, and completes the diagrammatic conceptualisation of contemporary

capital interplay. We might refer to this process as ‘secondary transubstantiation’ - a process whereby social and/or cultural capital is re-converted into economic capital so as to render creative practice fiscally sustainable. It is a faith-investment; a dream that creativity might one day prove profitable. In November 2012, lamenting my situation, I tweeted: “Just had to pick so much mould off my bread and cheese to make a safe sandwich. This is low. *Eventually victory will taste sweet tho [sic]*” (Tweet, 07.11.12, 12.21am, emphasis added). Yet, one year on, in March 2013 I tweeted: “Someone told me recently “your whole life is a ‘one day’. A ‘maybe’”. Starting to think they’re right” (Tweet, 20.03.13, 3.13.pm); this reliance on a ‘maybe’ transubstantiation, is the faith-investment.

We can see the realisation of this ideal perhaps most aptly with my signing to EMI/Sony/ATV Publishing in June 2013. In the first instance, I had established a high quantity of cultural capital via sound investment strategies over a number of years (both economic – funding my practice, filming videos, etc. – and social – engaging with cultural intermediaries to promote this body of work). I was then signed by a management company in December 2011. This process was largely the outcome of social capital exploitation, combined with good luck. I met someone in a nightclub in Cambridge who knew I was an MC having seen me perform there whilst I was at University. At the time he was working on the Giles Peterson show on BBC Radio 1 as a Broadcast Assistant. He mentioned that I should send him some music so it could be played on the radio. He also, on the side, ran a record company with an old friend from school. After hearing my forthcoming music, he showed it to his friend, who’s Dad was managing Emeli Sande. I met all three of them in a bar in Old Street, London on a dismal and rainy evening in November 2011 and signed to them the following month. This trio of music industry insiders themselves had access to a vast pool of economic and social capital; that is to say, they were employed in the music business, very well connected, and had a lot of money to invest in me. Via my management I was introduced to two prominent A&R’s from EMI/Sony/ATV Publishing in November 2012, and in June 2013, I signed a publishing deal for a large five-figure fee (see Fig.13 on the next page for invoice). This transubstantiation was the culmination of over seven years of work, and indeed, when aggregated, the figure in fact represents a very low annual salary if conceptualised in those

terms. Nonetheless, I had achieved the ideal secondary transubstantiation; that is, I could both sustain, and profit from, my practice. The day my money came in I cried. Honestly, I cried. I booked a holiday for my girlfriend and I to Paris and for the first time in my adult life, I didn't have to worry about money.

(Fig. 13: Context EMI/Sony/ATV Signing)

**GEORGE MUSGRAVE T/A CONTEXT**  
2ND FLOOR, 44-46 WHITFIELD STREET, LONDON, W1T 2RJ  
Tel +44 207 637 3210 Fax +44 207 580 1230

Invoice Number: CX 14001

Date: 21st May 2013

Stellar Songs Ltd  
344 A Coldharbour Lane  
London  
SW9 8QH

	£
RE: CONTEXT PUBLISHING ADVANCE	
TO: Contractual advance agreed as per clause 2.1.1 of the agreement dated 21st May 2013	£ 50,000.00
VAT @ 20%	£ 10,000.00
<b>TOTAL DUE</b>	<b>£ 60,000.00</b>

Rival, concluded one of our interviews in 2012 by talking with a depressive tone that I know only too well from my many painful experiences:

**Rival:** My frustration in music is at an all time high. I'm in a position now where I'm relevant but I'm still frustrated... You get to a point where you feel like, when is this all gonna end? Like, when is there gonna be light at the end of the tunnel? You can be in a very dark place in music (Interview, 02/12)

He held little choice other than to remain in his current living arrangement and wait for the 'light at the end of tunnel'. It was fascinating to chart the development of Rivals career over the course of the fieldwork, notably as on 01.11.13 he announced that he had signed a record deal with Capitol Records, one of the largest and most successful record companies in the world, releasing

music by artists from The Beatles to Katy Perry. In a subsequent interview however, he suggested that the deal, worth less than £10,000.00, had changed his life very little: “The deal actually hasn’t helped at all with my living situation” (Interview, 11/13). He suggested that the advance was essentially just allowing him to start saving money, and he lamented: “I still feel like an independent artist” (Interview, 11/13). In this sense, even with a record deal, Rival had still not achieved secondary transubstantiation. Indeed, upon meeting him later in the research process (November, 2013), he had moved out of home, and was living with a friend, and working four days a week in order to meet his rent obligations. He articulated beautifully, in a statement which, as an artist in a similar position to him at the time of the interview (February 2013), blurred the line between nihilism and pragmatism, when he stated: “Do I want to be thirty-two and still ‘up and coming’, or do I want to be thirty-two with a job, a car, a house, living my life?” (Rival, Interview, 02/13). What he meant was that he was sacrificing so much, and placing himself in great financial insecurity, all of which comes with a huge opportunity cost, all the while appearing to the general public to be incredibly successful. Does he want to spend years trying to make it in music and struggling through the monetary hardship, only to get to thirty-two and realise that if he had spent the last few years working in regular paid employment he’d be in a much better financial position? There is then great risk to creative practice, and with that risk can come profound disillusionment.

Genesis Elijah however found himself in a slightly different situation, not least due to being a homeowner; that is, his living arrangement mitigated to a large extent his necessity for a double investment. His investment of time was less expensive in monetary terms than was, say, mine, while I was paying rent. Time is afforded to him via circumstance in this sense. Given this he is able to treat his creative practice akin to another part time job of sorts via his extensive live dates, then, as he suggests: “As long as the quality is high, I’m going to be doing shows and making money from doing shows... I want to do a 100 shows a year. The work *is* the goal almost” (Genesis, Interview, 07/12). Despite this however, he still acknowledges the potential rewards a major record deal would bring, stating:

Right now I'm trying to call Richard Russell [of XL Records] to get a deal with him,

I'm done with 'almost made it', streets are filled with them  
Genesis Elijah ('*Psalms*', 2012)

#### 5.4. Conclusion

This whole industry is one big illusion and nothing is as real as it looks – You feel me?

Dot Rotten ('*Normal Human Being*', 2011)

This chapter has sought to explore the ways in which capital interplay operates in the contemporary field of competitive cultural production. Part one interpreted the findings from the previous chapter on cultural intermediaries using Bourdieu's theory of capital. It was suggested that we can observe transubstantiation occurring as social/relational capital is converted into cultural capital, and vice versa, epitomised in the investment strategies of the highlighted collaborative approach to creativity. Section two suggested however, that whilst artists are able to obtain and maximise embodied, institutionalised and objectified cultural capital via exploiting reserves of social capital, in processes which have been significantly democratised via the digitalisation of communication technologies and access to social networking platforms, this process requires a 'double investment' of economic capital, which artists are increasingly struggling to recoup. My creative work over the period of this fieldwork was analysed to illustrate how each of my projects – song releases, videos, and gigs – operated at a monetary loss. Finnegan (1989:293), despite writing in a pre-digital era, was acutely accurate in her assertion that "music can be a marketable skill with its own rewards and requirements; it also has costs and conditions which have to be covered in one way or another if the activity is to continue". The competitive environment is hugely costly, not just fiscally, thereby problematising the sustainability of creative practice, but also emotionally as artists become typified by uncertainty and disillusionment. Indeed, this sense that music has created an environment of debt was echoed in

interviews, notably with Rival. Artists are then able to acquire high levels of institutionalised and objectified cultural capital, but are unable to make this economically profitable. I describe this process by drawing on the terminology used by Rival and Genesis Elijah in interviews, as 'the illusory nature of capital interplay'.

These two empirical chapters (chapters four and five) which have emerged from my research might be conceptually understood as one singular body of work which explores the contemporary nature of capital interplay in advanced markets. Chapter four illustrated creative labour's strategic investment in social capital and its subsequent transubstantiation into cultural capital, whilst chapter five has highlighted the necessary double investment of economic capital in these processes and the immense difficulty in achieving secondary transubstantiation. Thus, the two chapters together are an examination of the ways in which contemporary artists are seeking to acquire, maximise and transubstantiate capital in a modern, competitive cultural market. Taken together, these chapters suggest to us the following regarding capital interplay for contemporary creative labour:

- We can observe high interconvertibility between social and cultural capital epitomised in the central role intermediaries play in creative practice
- Social capital can mitigate economic disadvantage to a certain extent
- The investment strategies to maximise social and cultural capital, and ultimately transubstantiate it, presuppose a double investment of economic capital
- Secondary transubstantiation from social or cultural capital into economic capital is incredibly difficult for contemporary creative labour
- The contemporary nature of capital interplay is illusory as it allows for the projection of great success in the form of maximised cultural capital whilst masking the reality of low resources of economic capital

The penultimate finding is in many respects not particularly unique given that artists have always complained of their financial plight, as I have discussed. And indeed, economic conceptions of competitiveness would lead one to hypothesise

that profits for firms would certainly fall as competition increases. However, what is interesting in this analysis is that independent artists can *appear* to be incredibly successful – from regular radio play on national radio stations, to having music videos broadcast on television, to performing at world renowned festivals – and yet are still not achieving secondary transubstantiation. Thus their perceived success masks their struggle. It is this which can be seen in the contemporary field of cultural production, and it is this finding which contributes towards our understanding of contemporary capital interplay. The illusory nature of capital interplay for today's artists means that indeed they struggle economically, as artists always have, but they are increasingly able to maximise alternative capital sources which masks the reality of their plight. Given this, artists are resorting to faith-based mechanisms of 'secondary transubstantiation' from record companies, which even then, as seen with Rival, are not always the fiscal lifeline they are perhaps imagined to be. In this sense it not necessarily that they can 'prop-up' their creative work via additional 'portfolio work' (Schleisinger and Waelde, 2012), but in fact, in the short-term, their creative work is a complete loss making exercise. Only Genesis Elijah is able to make any money directly from his musical work via his live shows.

What do these findings suggest? Given the current nature of capital interplay, is the sustainability of creative practices threatened in advanced cultural markets? At a basic level, this research has proposed that the field of cultural production is a highly saturated and competitive one, within which a double expenditure of economic capital is required; an investment which is incredibly difficult to claw back. The chapter concludes by suggesting that artists today require a special set of living circumstances to be able to sustain their practice. By this I mean that each has their own way of surviving, and to continue being creative, which they would be unable to do if they had to work a nine-to-five job. So we can see Rival operating in a money-free environment living at home, Genesis living largely off the profits from a former era of commodified music, or me being able to create only due to the flexibility which higher education afforded me. The picture appears to be a relatively bleak one in terms of the financial outlook for artists who might not be afforded the special circumstances that we are.

To what extent might we use these findings to comment on the link between pecuniary hardship, and the creative process itself? The suggestions made herein are that to a large extent, given the huge difficulty in achieving secondary transubstantiation, the forms of creative practice illustrated in this research are economically unsustainable. However, is it the case that this hardship fuels the creative processes itself; stoking ones ‘creative capital’ (Florida and Goodnight, 2005). Surprisingly Rival outlined how this might practically be true given that when he was on Job Seekers Allowance he would “just stay in my house and write lyrics because I couldn’t do nothing else”! More than this though, is it this hardship which ultimately motivates and propels creativity itself? Was Edward Moore’s hymn accurate in its exclamation: “Poverty! Thou source of human art, Thou great inspirer of the poet’s song!” (Edward Moore, Hymn to Poverty)? Is the inability to transubstantiate social/cultural capital for economic capital, simultaneously the fuel for another form of capital; creative capital – the artistic catalyst? Should the contemporary nature of capital interplay be received with profound worry, or is it the basis of creativity itself?

## **6: Artists and Markets: The Impact of Entrepreneurialism**

**Interviewer:** So do you think about what you're doing in business terms?

**Genesis:** Definitely. I look at it as an enterprise

The ways in which creative labour experiences a competitive marketplace, as illuminated in this research project so far, appear to depict artists deeply engaged with their marketplace, aware of the demands of their audience, technologically astute, and seeking innovative methods of getting their product to market. That is, the behavioural responses to competitiveness highlighted in chapters four and five which together represent the contemporary processes of capital interplay, seem to represent the entrepreneurialism suggested in research which points the emergence of 'cultural entrepreneurs' (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999; Scott, 2012), 'art entrepreneurship' (Aggestam, 2007), or 'knowledge economy entrepreneurs' (Molloy and Larner, 2010). However, this chapter will seek to examine whether the illuminated behaviours are in fact illustrative of entrepreneurialism, and then seek to engage with the debate concerning how artists feel that entrepreneurialism impacts their lives and their artistry. In part one, I will attempt to define the term entrepreneurialism systematically, and then apply this schematic framework to assess whether or not we can observe it amongst the artists under enquiry in this research project. This will be done using the concept of 'entrepreneurial orientation' (EO) provided by Lumpkin and Dess (1996), as outlined in the methodology chapter. Their categorisation is delineated as: competitive aggressiveness, innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk-taking and autonomy. The extent to which artists adhere to these categories will be ascertained using both an analysis of 'firm behaviour' (the behaviours highlighted in chapters four and five) triangulated with 'managerial perceptions' (Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess, 2000) in the form of lyrical analysis and interview data. This will allow me to postulate whether or not we might reasonably categorise the contemporary behavioural responses to competitiveness highlighted in this research thus far as 'entrepreneurialism'.

In part two, I will comment on how this entrepreneurial marketplace engagement impacts on artists. I will grapple with the question; if competitiveness has turned artists into entrepreneurs, how has this entrepreneurialism impacted them as artists? There are contradictory findings within creative labour research vis-à-vis the impact of artistic entrepreneurship. Some suggest that it ‘crowds-out’ creativity and hampers it (Cohen, 1991; McRobbie, 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007; Fisher, 2014), is emotionally damaging (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2008, 2011) and that it furthermore de-motivates artists (Amabile, 1979, 1982, 1983). Others suggest the opposite, that it motivates and helps creative practice (Cowen, 1998; Skov, 2002; Clydesdale, 2006; Eisenberg and Thompson, 2011). The negative emotional impact of the behavioural responses to competitiveness on artists have been highlighted in previous chapters, in the notion that intermediary engagement is typified by frustration, and that the inability to achieve secondary transubstantiation engenders feelings of disillusionment and uncertainty. However, I was interested to build on these emotional responses, and engage with the debate in the literature regarding potential (de)motivational implications. Following interviews with Genesis Elijah and Rival, analysis of Tweets and lyrics, as well as autoethnographic analysis of my own creative practice, I suggest that the impact this ‘EO’ is having on artists is largely motivational, spurring creativity and empowering them. The findings in this section of the chapter when taken together with those in earlier chapters, suggest that the psychological and emotional experience of competition is complex. Feelings of stark frustration and disillusionment at an indistinguishability dilemma and the unsustainability of creativity are counterbalanced with an optimistic sense of empowerment at being equipped with the tools to seek to redress this.

Part three suggests that technological developments are at the heart of the processes illuminated in this thesis. That is, they have created the highly competitive marketplace which has left artists desperately struggling to be heard, and the emotional stress that comes with that struggle. However, conversely, they have provided artists with the technological tools with which to seek to mitigate their disadvantage, and thus the opportunity to adopt a style of empowering, strategic entrepreneurship.

## 6.1 Measuring Entrepreneurialism: Entrepreneurial Orientation (‘EO’)

This first part of the chapter will seek to apply the methodology discussed in chapter three, which attempts to measure entrepreneurship according to the definition of Lumpkin and Dess’ (1996) in their ‘entrepreneurial orientation’ classification. Artistic entrepreneurship is an endemic theme within creative labour research, as discussed in the literature review, and in many respects, artists behaving entrepreneurially has been a historical pattern, certainly amongst famous artists anyway (Cowen, 1998; Blanning, 2008). However, few of these studies have sought to use an interpretative framework within which to establish the extent to which artists are behaving entrepreneurially. They are proclaimed as being ‘entrepreneurs’ for the way in which they create new products or enter new markets. Artists behaving as entrepreneurs is conceptually interesting in and of itself. However, more important, is the way in which this entrepreneurial orientation impacts artists. As such, before seeking to comment on how entrepreneurial marketplace engagement impacts artists, it is first important to assess whether or not the behavioural responses to competitiveness highlighted thus far are indeed truly representative of entrepreneurialism, and if it is reasonable to characterise the behaviours in this way.

Defining and measuring entrepreneurialism is problematic (Aggestam, 2007:31)<sup>13</sup>. It was for this reason that this research has chosen to adopt the construct of entrepreneurial orientation (EO), given both it’s lack of financial reductionism within a research context where performance indicators are varied (Pearce, Fritz and Davis, 2009), and given the relatively consistent definition and usage across numerous studies. Indeed, George and Marino (2011:990) suggest that the concept has been used in “more than 200 studies in a broad variety of fields ranging from management, to marketing...to health care”, and this consistency of application has led to, so suggest Raunch et.al (2009:762), “wide acceptance of the conceptual meaning and relevance of the concept”. In this sense, in a context of terminological ambiguity (Iversen, Jorgensen and

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<sup>13</sup> I deal with this problem in Chapter 3, section 3.3.3

Malchow-Moller, 2008), the EO construct represents a framework within which researchers can ascertain the extent to which firms are behaving entrepreneurially, employing a construct which has had consistent academic use, and is therefore widely accepted (George and Marino (2011:990). EO is defined as competitive aggressiveness, innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk-taking and autonomy. Each of these criteria will be defined, and evaluated vis-à-vis the extent to which the artists in this research project adhere to them.

### *1. Competitive Aggressiveness*

Defined as: “The tendency of firms to assume a combative posture towards rivals and to employ a high level of competitive intensity in attempts to surpass rivals” (Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess, 2000:1056)

How fervently Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess’s notion of competitive aggressiveness applies to the artistic practices illuminated herein is not entirely clear. In one sense, we might propose that far from assuming a ‘combative posture’ towards rivals, the practices relating to social capital maximisation and transubstantiation, as seen in the nature of contemporary artist-intermediary engagement for all three artists, indicates a ‘collaborative posture’. Artists, far from fighting, work together in order to mitigate their sense of indistinguishability in a saturated marketplace. However, this collaborative approach towards creative practice is employed in order that artists might distinguish themselves and thus progress their careers. In this sense, they collaborate in order to surpass other rivals. Can collaboration be interpreted as, and indicative of, ‘competitive intensity’ therefore? It is difficult to interpret whether contemporary creative labour fulfils this criteria based on an analysis of firm behaviour alone.

With reference to ‘managerial perceptions’ (Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess, 2000:1057), the lyrics of both Rival and Genesis Elijah are littered with how they perceive other MCs, and suggest a combative stance towards them:

Tell my competition that I feel for them  
They're in front my goals, God knows I'm willing to kill for them  
Genesis Elijah ('*Psalms*', 2012)

Let me take charge when I'm spitting  
When I bar it's a 'par' [slang term used similarly to 'Faux Pas'], last  
man standing, a pure competition  
Rival ('*Last Man Standing*', 2011)

I hear MCs but they ain't even half great  
[Be on the same] Level with Rivz? I'm like nah not a chance mate  
Got a cocaine flow know you know why I'm Class A, see I bar great  
This is a warning to any MC in the game, like an arcade  
I'm a cocky cunt, Denzel, MC's I'm washing tons  
[Denzel Washington/washing MC's means hanging them out to dry]  
Rival (*Warning*, 2011)

This music scene is a mess ting  
Here's the next thing, MCs that think they're next thing  
Oi, look bredrin,  
You better stand to the side when I rhyme on the mic  
Rival ('*Rivz N Shine*', 2012)

Fuck what you write fool, nigga you talk shit  
I just laugh, how are you dissing each other? You're all shit  
Fuck the gun talk, you're Jay Z's face – all lip  
Genesis Elijah ('*Battle Cry*', 2011)

Any MC I'll blaze them blatant  
Shame them, any MC can get dashed – Damon [Damon Dash]  
Roll with a mask and sword – Jason [from 'Halloween']  
Rolling deep – brazen [also 'Brazen' is a member of grime collective  
'Roll Deep']  
Rival ('*Range*', 2011)

Certainly this style of braggadocio presentation of self is a feature of rap music (Rose, 2008; Williams, 2012). This is the idea of putting down “someone else’s attributes while praising one’s own” (Keyes, 2002:137). In this sense, their combative discourse might be interpreted as a stylistic musical feature, as opposed to necessarily reflecting their true perceptions. However, much of Rival’s early work in 2010 were ‘war dubs’; tracks specifically written with the objective of insulting other MCs – a process known as ‘sending’ (calling someone out) – and earlier in the year he tweeted: “Deadline up, itz peak for guys now. I’m not tryna b kl with d scene lyk dat” [sic] [Deadline up, its peak [intense] for guys right now, I’m not trying to be cool with the [music] scene like that] (Tweet, 28.06.10, 4.08pm). Indeed, in 2011, Rival entered an event called ‘Lord of Mics’, a form of battling where MC’s would ‘clash’ one another. Each would take turns rapping and would insult each other’s ability with a vote at the end to see who had the superior ability. Whilst this environment was meant to be friendly, it was highly combative and competitive. One of the ‘clashes’ ended up with one artist punching another in the face after he insulted his girlfriend.

There is a profound projection of a combative stance throughout their embodied cultural texts, however this not always necessarily reflected in practice, as seen in the highly collaborative approach to creativity. As such, it is difficult, via both interpretative methods, to ascertain the extent to which underground urban music artists adhere to this first criteria of ‘entrepreneurial orientation’; competitiveness aggressiveness. Their texts suggest so, but practice is down to interpretation, as artists appear to behave collaboratively, but for competitive reasons.

## *2. Innovativeness*

Defined as: “Attempts to embrace creativity, experimentation, novelty, technological leadership” (Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess, 2000:1056)

It seems rather superfluous to assess the extent to which artists ‘embrace creativity’. They are creative artists after-all; their artistry is predicated on creativity. However, it is interesting to note how artists do not only display

creativity in a musical sense - they, by definition, embrace creativity in their creative work - but are creative and experimental in their attempts to maximise routes to market, and maximising their capital acquisition (both social, cultural and economic). The behavioural practices highlighted in the previous chapters show artists seeking increasingly novel ways of maximising their chances to be heard on as wide a scale as possible, frequently seeking to maximise cultural capital via an exploitation of social capital reserves, which can in many instances mitigate their material disadvantage. Artists are forced to come up with novel ways of attracting the attention of both fans and intermediaries, a theme Rival addresses in 'This Aint Easy' when he says:

What do you know about living your dreams,  
But not getting known by the scene,  
Coz you ain't what they want you to be?  
What do you know about *trying to find a way in* constantly?  
Rival ('This Ain't Easy', 2012)

During my first interview with Genesis Elijah, I commented on how he seemed to be continually coming up with fresh ideas, both artistically in terms of new video concepts, but also practically too. For instance, when I visited his home to conduct our interviews, I was aware that he was quite 'removed' from the musical community of inner-London, having moved from Brixton to Watford some years ago. However this geographical distance had not stopped him, and some of his videos had been filmed entirely by himself, with the camera mounted on a tripod and the movement in the videos being inserted later by him when he edited them in Final Cut Pro. I had never seen this approach adopted before in my years as an artist. Indeed, both myself and Genesis Elijah had taught ourselves to film and edit music videos using the latest video editing software (Final Cut Pro for Mac), exemplifying our "commitment to master the latest in new products or technological advances" (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996:143). When I asked him about this willingness to experiment, and his relentless generation of new ideas towards both the creation of art and the methods of dissemination, his answer was the perfect 'managerial perception' of 'creativity, experimentation and novelty':

**Interviewer:** It's like it's not enough to have a few ideas on how to make tunes, and getting them out there you know. You seem to be coming up with new ideas all the time

**Genesis:** But the way our mind works, is that we are the dreamers. We're the ones in school staring out the fucking window. That's just what we do (Interview, 02/13)

### 3. *Pro-Activeness*

Defined as: "Forward-looking, first mover advantage-seeking efforts to shape the environment [such as] by introducing new products or processes" (Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess, 2000:1056)

We can certainly see that artists are proactive in the way that many people might understand the term: tenacious, relentless, individualistic, ambitious etc. As Rival states in his track 'The Fall':

A lot of peeps [people] just cant get up when they're down,  
I used to have that problem, now?  
On a regular basis man I'm blazing, levitating, man I'll lift off the  
ground  
Rival ('The Fall', 2013)

This notion of pro-activeness is akin to that proposed by (Hartshorn and Sear, 2005:279); "an individual's achievement, focus and drive". They use the term 'self-starter', and it certainly appears that the artists here exhibit these behaviours both in terms of their creative output but also in how they seek to market that content. Furthermore, Lumpkin and Dess (1996:146), citing Venkatraman, suggests a key feature of pro-activeness is that of "eliminating operations which are in the mature or declining stage of life cycle". That is, businesses/producers are pro-active when they acknowledge shifts or changes in the marketplace which might render particular products, or methods of production, as obsolete,

and thus evolve both their product and how this product is created, manufactured and sold/consumed. In many respects, myself as Context, and Rival, have only been making music for a relatively short period of time, and thus we are perhaps less well placed to make this style of judgement which is reliant on slightly longer-term practices. However, it can be seen with reference to the way in which Genesis Elijah used to sell CDs in the street, but rapidly saw that his profit margins were being squeezed as the digitalisation of music eroded demand for physical music products. He thus proactively switched to using his music as a promotional device to sell other types of products for which a demand did exist, such as T-Shirts and music videos. In this sense he seeks to not only meet a demand, but to create a demand. The same is also true of Rival. With reference to wearing his own clothing he stated: “The cost of me going into a shop and buying something for £100.00, all these mad prices, I’d rather spend £100.00 promoting my own product knowing that that’s what going to be recognised” (Interview, 02/13). He is seeking to create a novel form of brand recognition, by designing products which he can then wear in his own music videos, and thus generate interest. As he notes: “It created a demand and it’s got its own store, and it’s doing well” (Interview, 02/13).

Pro-activeness is not solely based upon one’s ability to react to the environment. Whilst the exploitation of market opportunities and a firm’s ability to respond to the demands and challenges of the market is key, to be truly pro-active, one must seek to influence and shape markets by seizing new opportunities thus acting as a market leader. In this respect the artists under enquiry do not appear to shape their environment. The products they introduce are not especially new; the idea of artists in UK urban music selling their own merchandise had been popularised years earlier by brands such as ‘Boy Better Know’ by JME, and more recently, ‘Star in the Hood’ by Tinchy Stryder. In this sense, there do not appear to be examples within this thesis of artists acting as pro-active shapers of their environment.

#### *4. Risk-Taking*

Defined as: “Activities such as borrowing heavily, committing a high

percentage of resources to projects with uncertain outcomes, and entering unknown markets" (Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess, 2000:1056)

If we delineate 'risk-taking' according to the three criteria of Baird and Thomas (1985), as Lumpkin and Dess (1996) do in their work – borrowing heavily, committing resources to unknown outcomes, and entering unknown markets – we can find that all three artists adhere to all of these conceptions. With reference to borrowing heavily, I can certainly attest to this in my own creative practice. Between 2011 and 2013, until I signed my publishing deal with Sony/ATV/EMI, I was borrowing over £200.00 a month from my partner to ensure that I could continue making the music I wanted to make, and I also had a university friend who would pay for various expenses relating to music (often these were travel and occasionally submitting videos for consideration to television). When my publishing advance came in I owed my partner just over £2000.00, and my friend from university £1180.00. Indeed, for Caves (2000:3), creative industries are largely typified by risk and uncertainty about potential successes, certainly with reference to record companies at the reified level of 'the industry'. The same is also true of book publishing (Thompson, 2010); creative corporations are essentially engaging in risk management. Here, we see that individual artists do too. As I stated in a track 'The Cannon of Sammus', which I was asked to feature on for US rapper Vast Aire:

So I'm scribbling it down until my pen bleeds  
Then I'm ringing up the 'bank' asking for the interest rate on what  
they'll lend me  
So I can be like a V8 accelerating while you're peddling a 10-speed  
Because you need cash if you want content out every 10 weeks  
Context ('*The Cannon of Sammus - UK Remix*', 2011)

Conceptualising risk-taking as the investment of economic capital into projects with uncertain outcomes is also perfectly applicable to all of the artists that I am studying. Analysis in the previous chapter suggests that artistic practice necessitates a double investment of economic capital which, while assisting in the maximisation of cultural capital and the apparent presentation of 'illusory'

success, is near impossible to either gauge the outcome of, or recoup in monetary terms. As Rival suggested in our interviews, “when you enter music you are probably more than likely to spend more money than you’re ever going to see coming out of it” (Rival, interview, 02/13), and in this sense we are, each of us, taking risk. We are subjects of Beck’s (2000) ‘brave new world of work’, freelance labour increasingly reconstituted as ‘me and company’ characterised by overwhelming risk. All three artists are seeking other markets to spread our risk via product diversification in case music doesn’t bring us the stability we desire, be it video directing or clothing design for Genesis, or hats for Rival, or a good educational background for Context. Even so, we have all risked a huge amount by investing our faith in the ‘secondary transubstantiation dream’ for which the outcome is wholly uncertain, and for which in many respects, “have a reasonable chance of costly failure” (Miller and Friesen, 1978:923).

Finally, with reference to entering unknown markets, it is intriguing to note how all of the artists employ skills that they have learned in their creative careers, to enter new fields to seek to both maximise their economic capital, and promote their careers too. For example, in the process of learning to film and edit his own videos, Genesis Elijah set up ‘Escape Route Media’ where he produces music videos for other artists. He has no formal training at film school, and stated to me that he knows very little about this market, but nonetheless, he has engaged with a marketplace, learned new skills, and is using these skills to his advantage. The same is also true of Rival with his clothing range ‘Headshot Season’ (Genesis too has a clothing company ‘This Is My Hustle’). Neither artist is a fashion designer, nor had any experience of these markets prior to entering them. Finally, given the promotional skills that I learned in my career as an artist, I set up a PR company in 2012 called ‘Calibre PR’. Along with a friend from school, we would grow the social media platforms of new start-up firms, teaching them how to actively engage an audience, as well as delivering them content for websites e.g. promotional videos or adverts. All of this was done solely using knowledge I had gained from being an artist.

## 5. *Autonomy*

Defined as: “Actions undertaken by individuals or teams intended to establish a new business concept, idea, or vision” (Lyon, Lumpkin and Dess, 2000:1056)

It is perhaps reasonable to suggest that it is a self evident truth that the artists under enquiry herein fulfil the criteria of autonomy, given that in the creation of their music, and their novel attempts to disseminate this content to a wide audience, they are ‘establishing a... vision’; their creative vision. Lumpkin and Dess (1996:140) call this an ‘independent spirit’, and being “self-directed in the pursuit of opportunities”. In this sense we can suggest that the artist’s behaviours highlighted in this thesis so far, the behavioural responses to competitiveness, are illustrative of innovativeness, risk taking and autonomy. Competitive aggressiveness can be seen clearly in ‘managerial perceptions’, although the behaviour of artists suggests that they are behaving co-operatively, albeit for competitive reasons. Finally, whilst artists are certainly pro-active as many might understand the term, we cannot reasonably say that the artists under enquiry have shaped their environment. Their behaviour appears to represent strategic and calculated reactiveness, rather than pro-activeness. However, given their adherence to three, and largely four, of the five provided categories, I would posit that it is reasonable to categorise their behavioural responses to competitiveness as an entrepreneurial orientation towards creative practice.

The operationalisation of entrepreneurship by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) provides an interpretive framework within which it is reasonable to suggest that a firm/producer is behaving entrepreneurially. This was an important first step in my argument; one cannot seek to engage with the debate vis-à-vis the impact of entrepreneurship on artists, without first ascertaining that it is reasonable to classify artists as entrepreneurs. As suggested, given that the definition of what constitutes ‘an entrepreneur’ is not universally agreed upon, and thus by abstraction nor is how to measure the term, it is difficult to make conclusive statements of certainty. However, in this section I have proposed that it is reasonable to suggest that the processes of capital interplay outlined in the

previous chapters, the behavioural and strategic ramifications of competitive struggle, represent artists behaving entrepreneurially. That is to say: the contemporary processes of capital interplay are representative of an entrepreneurial orientation towards creativity. As suggested by the literature review, this finding is in many respects not especially surprising and might have reasonably been hypothesised given entrepreneurship emerging as such an endemic theme in current creative labour research (Skov, 2002; McRobbie, 2002; Molloy and Larner, 2010), as well as the historical lineage of artistic entrepreneurs, at least amongst famous artists (Cowen, 1998; Blanning, 2008). However, having established that it is reasonable to categorise contemporary creative practices, and the way that artists are responding to the challenges of a competitive marketplace, as an entrepreneurial orientation towards creativity, the next key question is; if competition has turned artists into entrepreneurs, what is the impact of this entrepreneurship on them as artists, specifically with reference to their motivation?

## 6.2 The Impact of Marketplace Engagement

As discussed earlier in the literature review, there is a debate surrounding the extent to which engaging with the marketplace as an entrepreneur might ‘crowd out’ creativity and be de-motivating, or whether it might be a catalyst for creative practice. This next section will seek to comment on how this marketplace engagement impacts on the artists themselves, and will suggest that the impact of ‘behaving entrepreneurially’ relates primarily to *motivation*. Entrepreneurship motivates artists in three distinct ways: conceptually, by empowering artists to create because they know that they can; creatively, by encouraging artists to create better works because they feel they should; and practically, by pressurising artists to create because they feel they must.

### 6.2.1. *Genesis Elijah: Artistic Empowerment*

In my interviews with Genesis Elijah he suggested that new technological developments facilitating his ability to manoeuvre through the market on his

terms were, whilst not especially profitable in a monetary sense as suggested, hugely empowering and motivational. From my observations, I had seen from his releases online that he often had music videos which he had clearly shot entirely on his own, such as the video for 'Psalms'; there was no one else in the video and the camera was mounted on a tripod for the entirety. I had observed the same style of video production for his track 'Reign of Fire' the previous year too. I was intrigued by this utterly independent and pro-active approach to creativity.

**Interviewer:** You've shot videos own your own, tripod, no one else... Did you just think, I can't pay anyone else to do it so I'm going to just learn how to do it myself?

**Genesis:** It's more that if I feel like shooting a video, I want be able to shoot one - that's what I want. I don't have to rely on anyone else, and having to think 'can I do that'? If I can find the location, the actors, whatever - I can do it. It can be done... Everything *I control*. If I really wanted to, I could make a beat now, I could write to it, I could go to 'Last Resort' [studio], record it, come back and shoot the video and have it out by tomorrow. If I really wanted to. I mean, that in itself just kind of *motivates me*, to do things, because now *I ain't got to worry about being let down*... When I do work hard, it follows through (Interview, 02/13)

This suggestion served in many senses to challenge my preconceptions regarding the impact entrepreneurship might have on artists. As an artist myself, I wasn't entirely sure how convinced I was by the argument that treating your artwork like a business necessarily helped creativity; the inner artistic romantic in me still clung to the notion that it might in some way detract from the purity of creative work (Fisher, 2014), adhering to a form of Adornian sentimentality. In many respects, as the construction of the question from the interview suggests, I had conceptualised, perhaps unconsciously, the individualistic approach of Genesis Elijah to music video production as an attempt to mitigate economic disadvantage. I never thought that he might conceive of it in terms of motivating

his creative practice. My interviews with Genesis led me to re-think this. The topic emerged again later, when with Rival, I had asked:

**Interviewer:** Do you feel like you spend a lot of time doing things other than music? It's a bit vague to try and divide it up, but in terms of your time...?

**Rival:** I'd say its 30% actually making the record, and 70% promoting the record... So that's time, money, travel... Its all good staying in the studio and recording the great music, but if you're not going to spend twenty times more time actually promoting the record, like, how many more people are you trying to get to hear it? You want people to hear it, and I know *I can get them to listen*

(Interview, 11/13)

His suggestion was that whilst he was certainly spending a large amount of time promoting his music, instead of making music, this ability to self-promote and market oneself was in some respects motivational given that he knew he could at least try and make people listen. He acknowledged that he was not simply making music and throwing it out into the field of cultural production hoping that it might be heard. Instead, he was pursuing various entrepreneurial tactics e.g. aligning himself with others via collaborative creative practice to capture the ears of traditional intermediaries (and even involving them in his artistry) as seen in chapter four, and these processes which had been necessitated by competitive forces, meant that he was empowered to take control of his creative career. This is what he means when he says he 'can get them to listen'. Despite the fact that this process was, as discussed, hugely frustrating and demoralising as artists often felt ignored and shut out of 'the industry', the knowledge that he could get his music into the right hands, and potentially listened to by people, was empowering. And so again, with Genesis, in our final interview, I asked a similar question:

**Interviewer:** Artists are becoming, to me, all things to all men. To use an art example, its like you're painting a picture, hiring the

gallery and the auction house – it seems like the artist is doing everything. In terms of how looking after everything impacts what is at the root of everything, the music making, do you feel that you spend time doing all these other things that in an ideal world you wouldn't? Or do you think it helps it even?

**Genesis:** Yeah it definitely helps. I know for a fact now that if I make something, I'm going to get it out there - it will be heard. That again, is a wicked motivation. I feel like, the way the game has changed as an artist you have to be able to do all those things. ... There will be a few that get lucky breaks and that but those that just make the music and don't know anything else about the rest of it – they're in a situation where they're not in control of their destiny...

**Interviewer:** I'd never thought before that it was so much a *confidence* issue... (Interview, 11/13)

This link between creativity, competitiveness, and motivation was hinted at in the conclusion of chapter five when I offered some preliminary thoughts on the potential links between poverty and artistry. However, the interviews with my participants where we discussed their apparent entrepreneurialism caused me to reinterpret the links between marketplace engagement and motivation once again. Here, creative practice is not motivated solely by structural determinants such as material disadvantage, nor notions of pure intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1983), but instead is socially constituted by the knowledge that *it can be done*. In this sense, what Amabile (1985) refers to as 'extrinsic constraints' which previously undermined Genesis' motivation, notably the apparent unreliability of others, or lack of resources, had been removed via technological advancements, changing the power dynamics of creative work from an unreliable social process, to a dependable individual pursuit. New technologies meant that he could behave entrepreneurially, and this entrepreneurialism motivated his artistry given that he knew he could have an idea, create an idea, and release and market an idea. Genesis then creates, because he knows he can. The absence of specific limitations had awakened the realisation of potential, and thus, confidence. The

impact on his creativity then is not commented on vis-à-vis the perceived ‘quality’ of his artistic creation *per se* (Amabile, 1979, 1982; Einsberg and Thompson, 2011), but in the sense that he can actually create work in the first place. Genesis articulates that new technologies have, to a certain extent, placed his destiny in his hands, tweeting: “I’m coming after the game AGGRESSIVELY!! Not because I need it but because I can #WatchWhatIDo” (Genesis Elijah, Tweet, 13.02.11, 8.55pm). Rival too suggested something similar in an interview when he said that: “YouTube allows me creative space to *create a demand*” (Interview, 11/13). His suggestion is that whilst intermediaries are crucial as distributors and distinguishers, he acknowledges that he has the ability to, even if only in a small way, carve himself out a digital niche whereby he can be heard, and where he can try to create a demand. Thus for Genesis, and Rival to a certain extent, being able to engage with the marketplace in an entrepreneurial manner had spurred creativity, as it engendered a degree of motivation which he had lost years earlier in the music industry when he was unable to fully realise his creative vision. Competition has necessitated an entrepreneurialism which has empowered artists, giving them the confidence to be creative, safe in the knowledge that they can at least try to have it heard, seen, and appreciated.

#### *6.2.2. Context: Audience-Facing Artistry*

Genesis Elijah had suggested in interviews that as he was now able to be more creative, and therefore be increasingly prolific, he was becoming more aware of the demands of his audience:

**Genesis:** Nowadays I think I put a lot more thought into who’s going to buy [my music], who’s gonna listen, what kind of people is this gonna appeal too.

**Interviewer:** So, you think about that more now?

**Genesis:** Definitely (Interview, 02/13)

Upon exploring my own creative practice during this research, I too came to share Genesis' sense that engaging with the marketplace might elevate, as opposed to crowd-out, my creativity. By being aware of the demands of our audience, akin to Mozart who "kept eyes and ears fixed firmly on what his customers wanted" (Blanning, 2008:32), I observed that this pressure and awareness of expectations motivated me to create better art, and push myself creatively. For example, on 09.01.12, I was announced as the first ever unsigned act to be placed on the MTV Brand New List (MTV, 2012). The list is an annually compiled assortment of whom the station are selecting as acts they believe are destined for great things that year. A similar list is compiled by the BBC; the 'BBC Sound Of...' List. MTV had been compiling the list since 2009 in various guises ('Spanking New' 2009, '10 for 10' in 2010, and settling on the 'Brand New' name in 2011), and each year the list only ever featured artists signed to major record labels. In November 2011, MTV announced that the 2012 list would, for the first time, feature an unsigned artist. My competition entry was virally shared on Facebook (as of 8.1.12) 38,579 times, and the following day, I was announced as the winner.

During this time, I had been discussing with my newly acquired management team, a plan to release a new music video to capitalise on the MTV win. We met several times and discussed an idea which I had to shoot a music video underwater for the earlier discussed track 'Drowning'. Whilst wary of the potential logistical nightmare which the video could prove to be, they were supportive. On 19.01.12, just ten days after winning the MTV competition, I emailed underwater tank locations to my management with the quote: 'The danger of mankind is not that he will aim too high and fail, but he will aim too low and succeed'. In the days that followed, a variety of problems presented themselves; from the prohibitive cost of hiring the tank, to learning that I would require a full physio (sight, hearing, dental, blood test, fitness) to become a qualified diver. On 22.01.12 I emailed my manager expressing serious reservations about the project. I stated: "I think I may have been over-ambitious with this underwater idea, and I've strayed from my key criterion [sic] ...; SIMPLICITY" (Context, Email. 22.01.12). Later, I received the following reply:

Given the attention that is now being given to the project, we have to make some kind of splash. Anything else could send out the wrong signals... Remember that a lot of people will be seeing/hearing it for the first time because the name will resonate for the first time because of the MTV award [sic] (Manager, Email, 22.01.12)

His assertion was that the pressure was now on. I was nominated on one of the music industry's most prestigious lists alongside acts with large major record label budgets behind them, which would doubtless propel the quality of their product (in marketing terms at least). I was no longer competing with other unsigned acts; I was competing with signed acts. What my manager was essentially telling me was; you've just won MTV Brand New, and the eyes of the music industry are on you - this video needs to be incredible. We were thus creating a video not just for ourselves and the creative fulfilment that would bring, but also, in a sense, creating for others. There was a degree of expectation, imagined or not, and the demands of the marketplace were exerting pressure on us to deliver a product above and beyond what we might have otherwise done without the MTV support.

The cost of creating the video was enormous. Not only economically as explored in earlier chapters, but personally. I had to undertake an exhaustive physical exam to qualify as a diver, was required to learn to scuba dive in under two hours, and then spent ten hours twenty-five feet underwater, coming up to breath naturally, without oxygen support, every thirty minutes. The entire process was unlike anything I had ever experienced. When I arrived onto the set, I only had fifteen minutes of training before submerging into the tank. The first time I removed my mask and oxygen tank at the bottom of the enormous tank to start performing to the camera, I had a panic attack and frantically tried to swim to the surface. The divers had to wrestle me underwater and place the oxygen tanks on me. They said if I had tried to reach the top I might have experienced 'shallow water blackout' and potentially died. On 08.03.12 I went to show the video to heads of MTV programming. They exclusively screened the video eight times on 16.03.12 (08.34am, 8.55am, 09.28am, 2.13pm, 3.30pm, 6.14pm 10.30pm, 02.07am) across both MTV Music and MTV Base with the video going live

online the following day. The result was described by influential website Promo News as: “extraordinary and unique” (Brown, 2012) and was viewed 30,000 times in its first two weeks eventually peaking at Number 14 in the MTV Base charts on 23.04.12.

I felt that the pressure of the MTV win meant that I was making a video as much for them, as I was for myself. As I stated in an interview conducted shortly after the video shoot:

**Context:** Being in the MTV’s Brand New list definitely put pressure on me. When it came to doing the video for ‘Drowning’ I was like: ‘This better be good now!’ I thought if the signed artists have a real big budget video and I go back to MTV with some crap video, they would be like why should we even keep you on this list? So I had to go back with something really good (Cotti, 2012)

My creativity and ambition were in essence elevated via the role of the marketplace applying pressure (imagined or not), in the form of the perceived expectations of intermediaries, as well as my ability to interact with that marketplace and understand what was expected of me. By engaging with the perceived demands of that audience and acknowledging their expectations I was able to fulfil creative ideas that I might previously have shied away from given the immense resources (economic capital, physical exhaustion, etc.) required to realise them. I had responded to the expectations of the market not as per Sylvia Plath,<sup>14</sup> and been ‘frozen’ (Hughes and McCullough, 1982:305), but on the contrary, propelled. It is methodologically difficult to attempt to measure what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘bad’ creativity (although certainly studies have attempted to do e.g. Amabile (1979, 1982, 1985) employing the Consensual Assessment Technique by expert raters), nor to say with any degree of falsifiable certainty the extent to which marketplace engagement serves to improve or detract from an artist’s creative practice. That is to say, in the examples of myself and Genesis Elijah, it would be folly to propose whether or not we would have produced

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<sup>14</sup> See p.61 for earlier discussion

greater creative work in a world where we were free to create utterly removed from the concerns of the market; to fabricate empirically observable dependent variables would be near impossible. However, of interest to note is how we both *feel* that a style of creativity-via-marketplace-engagement helped us to achieve our personal creative visions. In this sense, an entrepreneurial approach towards capital interplay had motivated us to create art which we might not otherwise have. For Genesis Elijah, engaging with the marketplace presented him with new possibilities, whilst for myself as Context, engaging with the marketplace and being aware of my audience, generated a series of perceived expectations which motivated me to elevate my craft. If competition had turned us from artists into entrepreneurs, behaving like entrepreneurs had turned us into better artists.

It is important here to note that this type of audience-facing creativity is not necessarily anything to do with changing your music to meet the perceived demands of your audience. Indeed, in lyrics and interviews, both Genesis Elijah and Rival strongly stated they would rarely, if ever, changed their musical content to meet the perceived expectations of audiences. Genesis Elijah explains this beautifully in his track ‘My Truth’ when he calmly and poetically states:

For me to change for you is a vision that’s past depressing,  
My art is a cage I’ll let vanity starve to death in  
Genesis Elijah (‘*My Truth*’, 2011)

Instead, these findings concern competitive pressures necessitating a marketplace awareness which exerts a form of quality control over ones output. Artists are now equipped with the understanding that they have an audience, or at least the potential to engage with the marketplace to meet new audiences, and as such their presentation of self should be of the highest standard. They are not performing songs to a few people in a pub; they can broadcast to the entire world if they employ strategy properly. It was in this way that the video for ‘Drowning’ was elevated creatively. The artwork was something I loved; it was my vision and I was not parading myself in front of panel of MTV judges seeking their approval. However, the pressure of the audience and the knowledge that it would

be seen by a large audience, was motivational. As Genesis Elijah articulated with reference to his 'Bootlegs':

**Genesis:** Its something that I love anyway, its my kind of thing. The art is not compromised. But the thought process behind it is still like: 'that could definitely work. That's a track that could go somewhere.'

(Interview, 07/12)

#### *6.2.3. Rival: The Competitive Pressure to Perform*

We might directly contrast the findings presented thus far in this chapter with those presented in chapters four and five relating to how the observed behavioural ramifications of competitiveness are experienced by creative labour. Previous chapters have highlighted intense feelings of isolation and frustration engendered by the competitive marketplace. It has been suggested that trying to maximise social capital and transubstantiate it into cultural capital is intensely frustrating and demoralising for artists anonymised in a sea of content, desperately seeking routes to market. Additionally, trying to maximise cultural capital and 'attempting' to transubstantiate it into economic capital is a financial loss-making exercise typified by insecurity, risk and disillusionment. However, these very processes of marketplace engagement, this entrepreneurial orientation towards capital interplay, can be hugely empowering and motivating. Whilst the behavioural processes of capital interplay are frustrating, demoralising, and typified by risk and insecurity, the *ability to participate in these processes* is conversely empowering and motivating. Artists then are empowered to create simply because they know they can, but are also motivated to produce even better quality work given the perceived demands of their audience. However, this motivation engendered by marketplace engagement is not just conceptual, as per Genesis Elijah (knowing that he can create), nor solely creative, as per Context (knowing that I should create 'better'), but also practical too, as per Rival (forcing him to create).

By observing Rival's release patterns over the course of this research (2010-2013), I was struck by the sheer quantity of music he was releasing. In total, during a three-year span between 2011 and 2013, Rival released 8 videos, and 6 EPs, each of between 8 and 14 tracks. In total, he released 65 songs in 36 months; a staggering quantity of work. As I observed his release patterns online, I wondered what had propelled this huge amount of creativity, and whether it was, to employ the terminology of Amabile (1983), intrinsically motivated by a desire to simply *create*, or if there was a tactical and strategic rationale behind it. In an interview with Rival I asked him:

**Interviewer:** Your work rate over the last few years is ridiculous. There's a huge amount of stuff put out all the time. What's the reason behind this?

**Rival:** ...I feel like sometimes if I don't do something for a week, I feel like 'Oh no' I need to do something or *I'm going to lose relevance*...I look at, once again, the American culture and I see when they do hip hop mixtapes, they are putting them out left right and centre...You've got to keep your fans occupied (Interview, 11/13)

His answer above suggests that he felt that he had to continue to release music to 'stay relevant'; to keep his head above water in a competitive environment and remain at the forefront of listener's minds, both intermediaries and fans. He stated: "I feel like if I don't flood them with music, they ain't really going to pay attention to me" (Rival, Interview, 11/13). In this sense, his awareness of the perceived demands and expectations of his audience was interpreted as necessitating a prolific work rate, and a high-pressure environment predicated on consistency of content.

The extent to which this competitive motivation has been positive or negative for artists is largely subject to interpretation. On the one hand, not only did expectations lead all of us to create more content, but also better content. On the other hand, we felt so pressured to perform at a high level that we punished

ourselves shooting hugely dangerous underwater music videos (Context), or videos out in the snow (Genesis), and relentlessly releasing music for a rabidly insatiable audience (Rival), or at least one that is perceived as such. Technology is facilitating creative practice in many regards, but the strain on artists is incredibly intense in an era of twenty-four-hour contactability where there occurs a work-rate race to the top. In this sense, ‘mandatory entrepreneurialism’ (Fisher, 2014) is creatively motivating, but can be emotionally exhausting:

**Rival:** Sometimes it gets a bit hectic. Sometimes you want to live a life where you don’t do music...I’ve got two phones. One’s literally personal calls only

**Interviewer:** So you’ve got like a ‘music phone’

**Rival:** Yeah and one’s just for ‘life’. It all gets too much (Interview, 11/13)

I too recognise the sheer exhaustion that this entrepreneurialism engenders, tweeting: “I can’t lie, doing everything completely independently is starting to really drain me” (Tweet, 16.06.11, 2.08pm). It is in this aspect of creativity that the boundary between motivation and pressure becomes inescapably entwined. The knowledge that we as artists have the tools, and the motivation, to create at such a consistently high standard, leads to an almost oppressive sense that time cannot be wasted. Genesis phrased this beautifully when he stated: “...The sense of urgency is almost suffocating. Its like be heard or die right now” (Genesis, Tweet, 11.02.12, 12.32am). There occurs a dissolution of permanence: an acknowledgement of the necessity of consistent creation to maintain relevance. There emerges a culture of ‘on to the next one’, where cultural works assume an almost throwaway quality, not aesthetically or artistically, but vis-à-vis their anticipated shelf-life. The pressure is thus two-fold; artists are motivated to produce high quality work as suggested, but they must also do so on a highly consistent basis. There is no mutual exclusivity between quality and quantity; both criteria must be fulfilled.

In mid-February 2011, I noted that Genesis Elijah had released a new track, ‘freestyle’ or video every single week since the beginning of the year. Each time my phone would receive a notification I was relentlessly astonished at how he, like Rival, released brand new, high quality content with such regularity. Bourdieu (1973:83) in his earlier anthropological work on the ‘Algerian Subproletariat’ articulated a philosophy of time whereby it evolved from simply an ‘experience’ for rural peasantry, an enjoyment of immediacy, into a manageable variable following urbanisation: “Entrance into the money economy is coupled with the discovery of time as something that can be wasted, that is, the distinction between empty, or lost, time, or well filled time”. Indeed, this sense of burdensome time and the intense competitive pressure it exerts on artists can be seen in the sentiments of Genesis Elijah, when he states: “I go to bed pissed of [sic] every night. Pisssed off at the fact that I have to waste 4 hours sleeping when I could be working” (Tweet, 11.02.12, 12.34am). Like the Algerian peasantry moving from the countryside to the city, from feudalism to capitalism, so artists have moved from the patron to the market, and are exposed to both the freedoms and motivations the marketplace affords, as well as the pressures the marketplace exerts. The demands and expectations of audiences are no longer the concerns of famous artists alone; creative labour are thrown in at the deep end of a competitive, marketised, cultural pool from the outset of their careers and must respond, as they do, entrepreneurially.

Entrepreneurialism then does not crowd out creativity; it is the essence of creative practice in UK urban music. It is a style of marketplace engagement necessitated by competitiveness, and which is motivated by the awareness of possibilities, the acknowledgement of perceived expectations, and the pressures of time. It is not that competition *per se* has motivated artists. These findings present a slightly different argument; that competitive forces and technological advancements have engendered a style of artistic entrepreneurialism which forces creative labour to engage with, and be aware of, the marketplace within which they create, and that it is this ‘marketplace engagement’ which is motivational. So, Genesis Elijah is empowered to go out and create art (be it music or music videos) because competitive forces have resulted in him having the technological means with which to realise his creative visions. He can treat

his artwork “as an enterprise”, and therefore know that he can control certain variables and achieve certain goals. Entrepreneurialism becomes empowerment. I as Context was not motivated to create ‘better’ artwork due to competition between artists driving up quality, as per the suggestion of Clydesdale (2006) on The Beatles competing within the group and with others, such as The Beach Boys, to write better songs. Instead, competitive forces within the marketplace had caused me to be aware of the perceptions and expectations of a specific audience, and the importance of that audience, and it was this which was creatively motivating. The same is true for Rival; it is the acknowledgement that competitive forces have structured the marketplace in such a way that it pressures him to be increasingly prolific in order to maintain relevance.

### **6.3. Artists and Technology: Creative Destruction in a Competitive Market**

From destruction a new spirit of creation arises (Sombart, 1913:207)

It is important to note the crucial role technological advancements have played in both necessitating these highlighted entrepreneurial behavioural phenomena, but also facilitating them. By this I mean, the technological developments which have lowered marketplace barriers to entry and created the competitive marketplace saturation which *necessitates* this behaviour, have also, at the same time, made employing techniques to mitigate one’s indistinguishability ever more possible, and created new and exciting ways to capture and maximise social and cultural capital reserves. For example, the processes of feeding information to intermediaries about successes achieved in an attempt to multiply support (chapter 4, section 4.2) is reliant on the operation of terms which have been described, but not explored. For instance, the ability to ‘extract audio’ from a radio play uploaded to BBC iPlayer using a program such as iRecord, and subsequently editing it using GarageBand or Logic. This ‘radio rip’ must then be made into an appropriate H.264 codec video to be uploaded to YouTube. Then one must find out whom to send this information to, and must hunt down the names of journalists and broadcast assistants/producers online. These must then

be contacted by email and contact followed up with press releases, as well as sending the ‘radio rip’ out to fans. These processes are necessitated by a market saturation engendered by technological developments, and yet made possible by those very same technological advancements. These entrepreneurial skills, predicated largely on a mastery of technology, are essential for artists seeking to manoeuvre their way through the competitive cultural jungle. For artists today then, their ability to be creative and thus compete, is predicated on not just musical knowledge, or knowledge of recording technology, but knowledge of their marketplace, and knowledge of the means of dissemination. It is this technological know-how which facilitates their entrepreneurial capital interplay.

New technology is both the villain and the hero of this piece. It assists artists in their ability to maximise social and cultural capital, but simultaneously undermines their ability to transubstantiate it into economic capital. It has decommodified their product, whilst expanding the possibilities for its presentation: sunk the artistic ship in the middle of the ocean, but provided them with the life raft and a light. In an interview with Rival he stated:

**Rival:** Years ago getting played on Radio 1 was massive. You’d get a record label meeting from it. Now it just like it’s nothing. You need it, but then loads more as well (Interview, 02/13)

A special issue of Omni Magazine from June 1990 looked to the future of communications and wondered what the world might look like in the year 2000. Stephens Morris from the group New Order wrote: “The ones who will succeed are the ones who understand technology” (Omni, 1990:49). He was prophetically accurate. Technology has opened up new realms of possibilities, and destroyed the nature of others. As seen in the chapter on cultural intermediaries, I can record a track for very little, nurture carefully cultivated relationships with broadcast assistants at the BBC, and have it played across the their platforms – even daytime playlisted on BBC Radio 1 alongside Rihanna and the Arctic Monkeys. But ultimately so can many other people. This isn’t enough. So, as seen in the chapter on capital interplay, you must go over and above this, spending money and time to travel and promote a craft which earns you little or

no money, despite appearing to be quite successful. Yet, as seen in this chapter on entrepreneurialism, the knowledge that *you can do this*, that you can make your craft and have it heard, propels artists in this endless circle. The same is true of, for instance, having your video playlisted on MTV as per ‘Off With Their Heads’ and ‘Drowning’; what was once the top of the mountain is now where you set up base camp. Or, with reference to Genesis Elijah, his previous artistic career of selling CDs has been destroyed by the digitalisation of music. However, he has been able to entrepreneurially respond to that destruction by employing new innovative tactics to be heard. In this sense, artists are essentially creative in ways that the marketplace demands. They can dream as big as technology allows them to in a world free-from many restrictions, but they must also create in a way that technology forces them to, collaborating and seeking to align themselves with others as they frantically wave their hands in the cultural classroom screaming ‘pick me’. Technological advancements both facilitate and necessitate entrepreneurialism. In 2008, before I had ever considered studying and analysing my own artistry, I released an EP called ‘Liberatingly Oppressive’. It seems that even at that stage of my career, I was instinctively aware that I was being both set free and held back.

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has proposed that the behavioural ramifications of competitiveness might be characterised as an entrepreneurial orientation towards creativity. It suggests that this entrepreneurialism largely serves to help creative labour given the way in which it impacts motivation in three ways: conceptually, artistically and practically. The findings here do not support proponents of ‘crowding-out theory’ (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007), but are instead more aligned with those who have found that artists conceptualise their engagement with the market, and an entrepreneurial awareness of themselves as part of a marketplace, as beneficial towards their creativity (Skov, 2002; Molloy and Larner, 2010). Over twenty years on from the work of Cohen (1991), the artists in this study no longer solely think ‘in terms of the market’, the marketplace is in many respects their artistic catalyst, informing the nature of their creativity as seen in the

processes of necessitated collaboration in chapter four, and its motivational implications in this chapter. They articulate the strife the marketplace engenders in their lyrics, and reflect the behaviour the marketplace requires in their practice. Observing the emergence of a competitive, 'entrepreneurial order' was not unique; instead, it was ascertaining the ways in which this entrepreneurialism is experienced by creative labour i.e. as a motivational experience.

These findings then have illuminated the psychological impact that entrepreneurialism has on artists vis-à-vis their motivation. What is interesting in these findings is that they illuminate not how motivation impacts entrepreneurship (Shane, Locke and Collins, 2003), nor how competition impacts motivation (Amabile, 1979, 1982; Clydesdale, 2006), but how an entrepreneurship necessitated by competitive forces impacts motivation. The findings suggest therefore that competition demands entrepreneurship, and that this entrepreneurship motivates artistry. These findings must be understood within the context of findings in the previous chapters, specifically with reference to the frustration caused by relentlessly trying to be heard by cultural intermediaries, and the disillusionment at the unsustainability of creative practice. In this sense, entrepreneurialism is not entirely beneficial on artistry; it can be enraging, demoralising, painful and exhausting. At the same time however, there is an important sense that being part of a marketplace can bolster an artist's confidence, and they feel that if they can master the right skills, the possibilities are within *their* grasp.

There is a suggestion that artists can only be creative, and pursue 'independent work' (McRobbie, 2002), when they are free from the marketplace, free from 'sociality' (Fisher, 2014), free from the 'necessaries of life' as Archduke Rudolf wrote in his letter on Beethoven's need for patronage. Is creativity predicated on autonomy? Fisher (2014) suggests that cyberspace's ubiquity of urgencies, combined with the lack of unpressured energy in the wake of the collapse of the machinery of social democracy which could shield creators from the vulgar mundaneness of daily life, necessarily engenders creative exhaustion. Neo-liberalism then undermines experimentation and artistry, as the time and space required to 'create' has been eroded. However, his argument reads akin to a

philosophical articulation of depression and a personal distaste for a cultural reality which he does not, and will not, appreciate. How can technology and an engagement with the marketplace kill creativity when the individuals experiencing this pressure – this pressure to create, this pressure to network, this pressure to survive, this pressure to be entrepreneurial – are creatives? They will, as artists always have, respond to the challenges of the marketplace they operate within. As Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel with the Pope exerting pressure, so Context, Rival and Genesis Elijah communicate their experiences of their contemporary lived reality - the strains of modern artistry - with the marketplace exerting pressure. This is not to draw parallels between our work of course (!), but to suggest that creativity occurs within both constraints and freedoms, and romanticised privileging mechanisms which debase the ingenuity or relevance of contemporary creativity given that it occurs within the confines of a marketised, pressure-intensive environment serve to discredit the innovative methods by which contemporary artists are seeking to mitigate their indistinguishability and anonymity within a ferociously competitive marketplace, create new works which communicate their experiences of modern life, and seek to have this work heard.

## **7: Conclusions: The Competitive Experience**

**Interviewer:** Some people say this the best time ever to be a musician...

**Rival:** Yeah, but it's also the worst time...

(Interview, 11/13)

This thesis has sought to explore how a competitive market is experienced by creative labour in the context of UK urban music. It has shown how modern conditions of creativity within a competitive environment are a complex duality between disillusioning frustration on the one hand, and empowerment on the other; between risky fiscal unsustainability and exciting creative opportunity. It has suggested that in a competitive digitalised environment, the mobilisation of social capital in the form of a collaborative creative practice becomes of central importance as an artistic distinguishing mechanism. This social capital can be acquired, maximised, and ultimately transubstantiated into cultural capital as artists seek to grow their profile. In this sense, there is a fascinating collaborative response to competitive forces. However, these processes are not only astronomically frustrating for artists drowning in a sea of content, but necessitate a double investment of economic capital which artists struggle to recoup. Despite the use of social capital resources to attempt to mitigate this pecuniary disadvantage, this difficulty of secondary transubstantiation to render creativity fiscally sustainable places creative labour at an economically disadvantageous position in the field of cultural production, and engenders feelings of disillusionment and insecurity in an environment of risk. However, this thesis argues that this capital interplay represents an entrepreneurial orientation by artists engaging directly with their marketplace, a behavioural orientation which is conceptualised largely in terms of creative empowerment, despite the contradictory impacts of the heightened pressure on artists. Thus, whilst technological developments have anonymised creative labour in a marketplace of abundance which frustrates and discourages, they have conversely equipped artists with the tools to entrepreneurially realise their creative visions and mitigate an indistinguishability dilemma, motivating them. We might synthesise

the numerous findings of this research project into four main contributions to knowledge concerning the competitive experience:

1. In the debate highlighted in the literature review between those who suggest that cultural intermediaries will come to play an increasingly important role in the cultural economy (Bourdieu, 1984; Featherstone, 1991; Seabright and Weeds, 2007; Thompson, 2010), and those who disagree (Kovach and Rosenstiel 1999; Solomon and Schrum, 2007; Keen, 2007; Knobel and Lankshear, 2010), this research has produced evidence which sides with the former. It is suggested that this is due to intermediaries having the perceived ability to act as both a distributor and a distinguisher in a competitive context which anonymises via abundance.
2. Within this competitive marketplace, instead of competition breeding combative rivalry, it in fact engenders a collaborative approach to artistic practice. This is largely in response to the perception of indistinguishability engendered by marketplace proliferation. Of particular interest however, is that within this marketplace, co-operation and self-interest are not oppositional, as artists work collaboratively but for largely individualistic reasons
3. Artists are able to acquire large amounts of institutionalised and embodied cultural capital, largely by maximising and transubstantiating social capital reserves. However, they find it incredibly hard to achieve secondary transubstantiation and monetise this apparent success. It is thus suggested that the contemporary nature of capital interplay within cultural markets is illusory for the manner in which it masks the reality of the struggle for survival which creative labourers face.
4. Finally, in the debate highlighted in the literature review between those who view an entrepreneurial approach to creativity as aiding artistic practice (Cowen 1998; Skov, 2002; Blanning, 2008; Molloy and Larner, 2010) and those who see it as hampering or ‘crowding out’ (Cohen, 1991; McRobbie, 2002; Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007; Fisher, 2014), this research has produced evidence which largely sides with the former. It is suggested that this is predominantly due to manner with which

entrepreneurialism motivates creativity. However, the emotional distress in these artists' careers highlighted in this research must not be overlooked, in particular, feeling of frustration, anxiety and disillusionment.

With reference to the first two findings, discovering that competition fosters a degree of co-operation (epitomised in the increasing importance of cultural intermediaries) appears counterintuitive, semantically at least. However, the co-operative nature of artistic production of course is not. Collaborative necessity underpins the work of Becker (1982) on *Art Worlds* when he conceptualised artistic creation as collective action. What is unique in my analysis are three things. In the first instance, it is the realisation and methodology behind this collectivity and collaboration in the digitalised marketplace which is novel; that is, the ways in which artists cultivate their online networks. Secondly, it is the rationale behind it which is interesting; artists are collaborative less for creative reasons (Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999), but for practical reasons, in an attempt to be seen and heard and advance their creative careers. Thirdly, it is the way in which this collaboration is entirely the responsibility of artists themselves, alone. For the artists in the 'music industry' world of Negus (2011b), co-operation is the responsibility of intermediaries, acting on behalf of the artist. For Becker (1982:362) "all the co-operation which produces art works, then, also produces the reputations of works, makers". This remains the case, but it is now the artists who are the orchestrators of this co-operative reputation-making. Certainly, independent artists have always managed their own careers and attempted to promote their image, from recording demo tapes and sending them to John Peel, to making promotional T Shirts (Finnegan, 1989; Cohen, 1991). But for today's artists, there is more than this going on. They are formulating complex promotional methods to maximise their routes to market and subsequently achieving regular national, mainstream radio success, as well as cultivating a wide network of relationships with press agents and journalists and achieving exposure in the widest terms imaginable from the largest media-outlets in the world. They are their own advertising executive, radio plugger, and publicist. This is their entrepreneurial orientation. The artists working in the field that I have examined are forced to engineer their own careers, and can achieve great

perceived success. They are fiercely independent, struggling in a world of mandatory entrepreneurialism where their success or failure is socially constituted and individually fought in a complex world of competitive collaboration.

With reference to the penultimate finding, it is hoped that this thesis has served to illuminate the illusory nature of the music industry for unsigned artists. Allow me now to make a detour via metaphor to explain how we might understand the nature of capital interplay today. In Japan, the Royal Family has historically shielded itself behind a 'Chrysanthemum Veil' (Fritz and Kobayashi, 2005). This phrase refers to the way in which they have been able to cultivate a public image of themselves via a degree of media control not afforded to the Royalty of the West, such as Britain or Spain. The public only see what the Imperial Family want them to see through orchestrated press releases, or what can be guessed via media speculation, gossip or hearsay. They are able to project an image which masks their reality via a specific presentation of self. This projection of a specious reality can be seen in the findings presented here as 'the illusory nature of capital interplay' whereby artists appear to the world to be incredibly successful; a projection which masks their reality as they get played but not paid. I have attempted to lift the cultural veil to a certain extent, and highlight the nature of artistic capital interplay, communicating the struggle which hides behind the Platonic cave wall of success; the transubstantiated economic capital which carries institutionalised cultural capital akin to a bloodied and cloaked Atlas, triumphantly presenting a trophy to a public unaware of the exhausted figure cowering beneath. In this sense, my findings contribute towards what Scott (2012:251) calls; "a more detailed typology and verification of capital mobilisation and conversion practices".

Alongside the four main findings suggested, this research makes two further, more general contributions to knowledge concerning both competitiveness itself, and how we understand the lives of creative labour. The competitive cultural world we inhabit as artists, and the way we experience it, both behaviourally and emotionally, is complex and multi-faceted. This research has sought, if only in a modest way, to contribute towards a growing body of research which seeks to

understand the artistic lives of creative labour, using competitiveness as an illuminative lens. Certainly, the lives of artists are more than an agglomeration of their experience of competition. However, as the field of creative labour research grows, this research project can be a piece of the puzzle to more fully make sense of how artists live their lives, as well as how and why they make the creative and commercial decisions they do. It is a brick in the wall alongside the other studies of creative labour referenced herein which collectively, can begin to inform our understanding of the ‘Lives of the Artists’ in the absence of Vasari to assist us. By the same token, competitiveness, and the competitive experience, is more than the experiences of musicians operating within UK urban music, and the problems of generalisation are well discussed in this thesis. However, if economists, cultural sociologists, or policy makers, are to fully understand the nature of competitiveness, and its impact on producers in particular, this project can contribute towards that understanding. Competition in the marketplace can deliver wonderful things, notably for consumers, but it is prudent to appreciate that producers are people; people who will experience that competitive marketplace both behaviourally and emotionally. It is in these two senses that the importance of this research is perhaps best understood i.e. as contributing towards our understanding of both creative labour (and creative industries), and competitiveness itself. Indeed, it is hoped that by contributing to knowledge in this way, it can be seen why a research project of this nature has both been worthwhile and important for researchers across a variety of interrelated disciplines, who’s shared interest, be it explicit or not, in competitiveness, I have attempted to speak to in this project.

Perhaps we might reconsider competitiveness itself. We are all consumers, and we all want the best ‘deal’ for consumers. However, at the heart of supplying consumers and maximising their welfare, are producers, and not all producers are Amazon or Starbucks. Competitiveness impacts their story, and their ability to produce. Whilst this can be positive for the ways in which it might spur innovation and motivate producers (indeed, this has been seen in the findings presented herein), it might not be an entirely pleasant experience in the way that it is for consumers, who reap the benefits of lower prices, increased product variety, improvements in service provision and quality, and better information.

Instead, as has been suggested here, a competitive marketplace has a wide range of psychological impacts on producers who, whilst experiencing motivation certainly, feel exhaustion, disillusionment, and frustration as the competitive vice tightens its pressurised grip. The “deleterious effects of excessive competition” (Dempsey, 1989:21), a rhetoric aligned with a now-maligned brand of protectionism, or notions of ‘ruinous competition’ are rarely spoken of. It may be that in our neo-liberal age, being sceptical of the paradigm which asserts ‘competition-as-panacea’ is not fashionable.

### *Implications of Findings*

By empirically assessing how a competitive market is experienced by creative labour, a competitiveness largely engendered by intense technological change as suggested by the economic literature which began this thesis, this research has acted rather inadvertently as an exploration into the nature of the relationship between artistic creativity and technological advancements. In particular, it has been a treatise on the relationship between artistry and the Internet. It has been proposed that whilst technological developments have, as outlined in the literature review discussion on economics, increased levels of competitiveness in the contemporary field of cultural production, and created an indistinguishability dilemma, it has conversely provided artists with the methodological tools to seek to mitigate this problem. Thus, whilst they experience frustration and disillusionment at their struggle for attention in a saturated marketplace, they also adopt an entrepreneurial orientation to creatively seek to combat this. This technological duality might be conceptualised in Schumpeterian terms as a type of ‘creative destruction’. Certainly it is not creative destruction as Schumpeter explicated, but the phraseology is useful; technology has destroyed old methods of creative labour, but created new ones. Perhaps destructive creation might be more apt to employ Nietzschean phraseology? The earlier suggestion of Andersson, Lahtinen and Pierce (2009:4) appears to be epitomised in this research: “the Internet functions as an enabler as well as a threat simultaneously”.

It is particularly interesting to note the extent to which, despite the fact that the music industry has undergone profound structural changes to its composition, and that artists are employing new and innovative behavioural techniques to manage this competitiveness as has been explored in this thesis, still, there is a degree of historical continuity to their behaviour. That is, Bourdieu and Nice (1980:268) noted that entrepreneurialism needed conceptual reconfiguration given “the opposition between ordinary entrepreneurs seeking immediate economic profit and cultural entrepreneurs struggling to accumulate specifically cultural capital, albeit at the cost of temporarily renouncing economic profit”. At the time of this writing, in a pre-digital age, devoid of the extreme external pressures of the artistic marketplace, artists were entrepreneurial in a distinct sense; struggling to maximise cultural capital and failing to earn money, and this remains to be true today as this research has shown. Indeed, the literature of Cowen (1998) and Blanning (2008) examined for their contribution to the debate on the impact of entrepreneurship on creativity, are littered with aforementioned examples in the history of artistic marketplace engagement, from Haydn, Wagner and Beethoven, to Dali. What is novel in the findings presented herein however, are the *ways* artists are undertaking these processes of accumulation, the illusory nature of capital interplay today, as well the assertions relating what these process mean for artists. Today’s musicians are the latest in a line of artistic entrepreneurs; it is the nature of their entrepreneurial orientation which is new.

It would be naïve to not feel a certain degree of worry for the future of creativity however. Each of us – Context, Rival and Genesis Elijah – can only exist and create given a specific set of circumstances. The indirect funding for arts which, while no longer ubiquitous as they once were in the age of universal university grants (Fisher, 2014:13), certainly facilitated the creativity of Context and Rival. Specific living arrangements act as neo-patrons of sorts for the artists studied here – be it historic conceptions and profits given a previous era of commodified creativity, the welfare state and pseudo-‘gift economies’, or flexibility afforded by higher education. However, as neo-liberalism and capital endlessly tightens its fist on the mechanisms of the state, exemplified in the recent astronomical increases in tuition fees and engendered levels of student debt, how long can this reality be sustained? I note that even when I attended university as an

undergraduate I paid no tuition fees, while just a few years on they stand at £9,000.00 per annum. Similarly, Genesis Elijah's creative practice was, to a certain extent, predicated on his ability to survive on the basis of what music used to be. In a decommodified digital age where would his security have come from? I hope that these findings can contribute towards a debate about how we might look to sustain creative arts, notably given that creative labourers who are not fortunate enough to have such a privileged living arrangement undoubtedly will struggle to compete in the contemporary digital marketplace, and be unable to articulate experiences of alternative realities. Societally, we must evaluate the extent to which we value the communication of lived experience, and appreciate how this artistry is, as suggested herein, incredibly difficult to sustain in an environment of high costs, and negligible returns (in the short term at least).

However, with reference to the requirement to provide, for instance, government support for the arts, would creative artists even want it? As Leadbeater and Oakley (1999:11) observed in their study on a group of creative workers they referred to as 'The Independents', their struggle to survive "does not mean they see themselves as artists who deserve public subsidy. They want to make their own way in the market". Indeed, the argument I have attempted to articulate throughout this thesis is that creative labourers are just that: creative. They respond to the challenges they are presented with, and create according to the restrictions and freedoms afforded to them by their reality. Despite my worry, I cannot help but be optimistic that as the reality of artistic creation evolves, so too will the ability of artists to respond creativity to their new restrictions, and new freedoms. Competition is a process of survival, and artists will always find creative ways to survive, and to be creative.

### *Research Problems/Deficiencies*

In hindsight, when I began thinking about this research project, I was seeking to make sense of my creative career, as well as looking to find a way of expressing my artistic reality outside of the sphere of music itself. I wanted to try and untangle the messy lived experience which being an artist is, to make sense of

how I had been living my life as an MC, and to communicate this experience. At the beginning I didn't know what I wanted to say, or how I wanted to say it. I just knew that I, and other artists within my genre, had a story to tell, and music alone was an insufficient medium to convey the entirety of that experience. In many respects, this research project may have been insufficient too. How can I convey the utter anguish of spending years trying to contact a small number of radio DJs, the pain of driving for 13 hours to a gig to perform for no money only to arrive and find no one had turned up, or the joy you feel when you see an edit of a music video for the first time? Or the utter elation of driving home one day and having my oldest friend call me screaming to put BBC Radio 1 on because my music was being played for the first time? Or taking up drinking during the day as battles between my lawyer and Sony/EMI took months and depression stopped me from leaving my bed? To then spending thousands of pounds taking my long-suffering partner to Paris and eating in Michelin starred restaurants after signing my publishing deal? These are facets of *my* experience of competition, and whilst I have, via the autoethnographic method, peppered this research project with autobiographical stories of my artistic life, perhaps it is an inevitability that any study on creative careers can never fully convey these experiences in their entirety, or in the way that the artist-as-researcher hoped or intended. However, as a researcher, discovering autoethnography and the suitability of it as a methodology, was wholly liberating given the way it was able to synthesis the scientific presentation of sociological processes alongside the expressive, almost literary, presentation of lived experience.

Looking back, I suspect that Tweets were a slightly less rich and detailed source of qualitative data than I had anticipated at the outset. The Tweets themselves were crucial as a form of self-generated data, and certainly yielded fascinating insights, most notably in times of high passion/anger/frustration, when the device appeared to be being used as a 'venting mechanism'. However, when analysing the tweets and coding them thematically, a huge number were simply 'chatter', relating to TV shows such as the Eastenders (especially Rival), or were political rants (notably from myself and Genesis Elijah). Indeed, I wondered to what extent did their silence on particular matters methodologically speak to their apparent salience or lack thereof in their lives. In future research, whilst I will

certainly incorporate social media where appropriate to relevant research questions given that certain statements facilitated a valuable insight into participant perspective, I will try and incorporate slightly more detailed diary-like methods of documentation where relevant.

Containing the scope of this research project was challenging too. Almost at each turn, a fascinating area for further investigation presented itself, from the history of artistic systems of patronage in my work on the sustainability of creativity, to the ways in which producers perceived and interpreted copyright regimes to inform their practice in my work on neo-intermediaries. In many respects, the ways in which competitiveness is experienced by artists is so rich and complex that it would be arrogant to assume that a small project of this nature could reasonably propose that it illuminates, explains, evaluates and interprets the competitive experience in its entirety. Nonetheless it has been, as suggested, a contribution towards the overall understanding of how competitiveness, as a phenomena, is experienced, both behaviourally and psychologically/emotionally. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the extent to which the findings presented in this thesis are restricted in many senses by the genre within which enquiry has focussed, namely UK urban music. Indeed, despite the triangulation of data in order to facilitate generalisation of sorts, it must furthermore be noted that within the genre there too are behavioural variations and fluctuations. In this sense, not *all* artists will be responding to competitiveness in exactly the same way, and even within the case studies herein we find certain a degree of behavioural divergence. I am certain that various artists even within UK urban music might read these findings and propose that they respond to competitiveness differently, both behaviourally and emotionally. Nonetheless, there are certain ‘truths’ which it might be reasonable to assert that many experience, and it is these which I have offered as the most crucial findings in the opening section of this conclusions chapter.

### *Areas for Continuing Research*

To a large extent I hope this thesis can act as a new ‘call to arms’ of sorts to other creative labour researchers who are artists themselves. That is to say, replication of the research design used herein could be fascinatingly employed by artists/researchers, particularly those in other genres. From researchers in rock bands, jazz musicians, or dubstep/house/drum and bass producers/DJS, it would prove incredibly illuminating to learn whether or not they experience competitiveness in the same way as the artists studied here. Artists in other sectors too, such as illustrators or painters for instance, might wish to explore their own creative practice via the prism of competitiveness and capital interplay. Additionally, it is important to note the extent to which the research questions generated by the exploration of the literature conducted in this thesis are by no means the only questions to explore with reference to how creative labour understand competitiveness, or more broadly, their artistic careers generally. Therefore, if we want to develop an even richer, deeper and more multi-faceted picture of how competition is experienced, we may be dependent on other creative labour researchers not only studying the questions generated here in greater detail, but also by studying alternative questions relating to the experience of competition generated as this field increases in scope and complexity in the future. Indeed, a research project of this nature cannot possibly hope to capture the entirety of what it means to experience competition. Whilst, as proposed, the respondents were chosen in order to be representative, there is certainly a degree of both gender and geographical bias in the research design. That is to say we cannot ascertain whether, for instance, female creatives might respond to the demands of the market differently, nor whether geographical determinants, such as urban high-density living in England, might be factors influencing behavioural patterns and approaches to creativity (Porter, 1995; Leadbeater and Oakley, 1999).

To further this project, it would be fascinating to continue the autoethnographic reflexive examination of practice as I continue my journey as a signed artist and hopefully become more successful. Indeed, at the time of submission of this

thesis, I had been offered a five figure record deal by Capitol Records (Universal) which was still being negotiated by my legal team. To chart the evolution of the competitive experience from an unsigned artist, to one dealing with the institutions of the music industry, might contribute towards, and deeper our understanding of, the competitive experience for creative labour across stages of their career, and whether their behavioural responses to competitiveness evolve. Certainly, having a ‘successful’ artist within this research project to allow for comparison would be fascinating, not least methodologically given that, for lack of better phraseology, there might have been a degree of selection-bias in that all three of us are, to a certain extent, ‘failures’ of sorts.

Furthermore, to more deeply enrich our understanding of the intermediary-artist relationship, a separate project which builds on the findings presented herein, but which incorporates data generated by engaging with intermediaries themselves would be illuminating. This would allow us to more fully make sense of how intermediaries understand, experience, and respond, to the behaviours illuminated by this research project. Negus (2002) discusses how there can exist a certain distance between producers/creative artists and consumers, despite the role of intermediaries being the apparent mediation of this divide. He outlines how designers might think little of production-line workers who make their ‘vision’, and how retailers might be unaware of the genealogy of the clothes they sell. In this competitive cultural marketplace, to what extent does there exist a distance between artists, and the intermediaries they interact with? It may seem contradictory to propose that relations between artists and intermediaries have become ever closer and more important, and yet the distance between them is vast. Certainly intermediaries have a complex and difficult task in sifting through the reams of content submitted to them, however, to what extent do they appreciate the work of the artists who appear, perhaps rather abstractly, in their email inbox? And indeed vice versa? Much of the discussion in interviews on the intermediary-artist relationship, as outlined here, centred on the extent to which it was demoralising, frustrating, and how these people were ‘blackballing’, and self-important. In my own experience as an artist, I sense that the careers of artists and cultural intermediaries are similar in many ways – young, struggling, artificial representations of success – and yet professionally, they profoundly and

perpetually misunderstand one another. It is hoped that by communicating the competitive experiences of artists in this research, one side of the supply-side dialogue has been elaborated. In this sense, I propose that this research is important for scholars interested in the role of cultural intermediaries in creative industries by informing them of how their role is perceived from the perspective of artists. It would be of great benefit to understand in more detail, the experiences of intermediaries themselves within UK urban music to counterbalance this work, and generate a larger project exploring the operation of the supply-side of underground creative markets.

### *Final Thoughts*

To reiterate, I propose that this research project has made the following contributions to knowledge:

- Contributing towards an academic debate amongst cultural sociologists and creative labour scholars surrounding the role cultural intermediaries play in competitive cultural markets, by showing that they are increasingly important in the lives of artists for their perceived ability to both distribute and distinguish cultural products.
- Demonstrating that competitiveness can breed collaboration. However, this co-operation often takes place for self-interested reasons, challenging the apparent oppositional dynamic between self-interest and co-operation.
- Highlighting that processes of capital interplay can be misleading as artists can acquire large amounts of institutionalised cultural capital, but struggle to achieve secondary transubstantiation. In this sense, this work serves as a contemporary example of Bourdieu's theory of capital, and an illustration of how technological changes in the marketplace have changed processes of transubstantiation.
- Addressing an academic debate within creative labour research surrounding the impact of entrepreneurship on artists, by suggesting that whilst it can have damaging emotional implications evidenced in frustration and disillusionment, it largely helps creativity for the way in

which it motivates artists. This finding is furthermore beneficial for economists with an interest in entrepreneurial orientation ('EO').

- Contributing more generally to a wider body of academic literature which collectively is highlighting the ways in which creative labour operates in advanced markets.
- Finally, expanding our understanding of competitiveness by exploring how it is understood from the perspective of producers, assisting both economists and policy makers to consider the ramifications of processes/policies which might increase competitiveness.

In undertaking this research project, I was involved in a wonderful journey. Academically of course, learning about a subject area in such depth as doctoral candidates all do. As a researcher too, refining my craft vis-à-vis synthesising and presenting information, as well as research skills themselves. However, I evolved professionally too. That is, I began my research in 2010 as an unsigned, relatively unknown artist, and by the end of the research in 2013, I was signed to the biggest global publisher in the world for a sum of money which many would consider astronomical. Reflexively, autoethnographically evaluating my own creative practices and lived experiences, as well as those of the case-study artists Genesis Elijah and Rival, allowed me not only to experience my artistic career in a unique and wholly fascinating way, but also to allow my research to continuously evolve. My artistry and that of the case-studies relentlessly challenged my assumptions about the nature of creative practice and led me to reconsider not only how competitiveness is experienced, but also, *what it means to be an artist today*. Indeed, I hope that in this sense this research can be illuminating to other unsigned and aspiring artists, especially those at very early stages in their career, in highlighting and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of how myself, Genesis Elijah, and Rival have approached our practice, and the relative degrees of success we have been able to attain. And so, I return to the statement which began this research project, and ask: has there *really* never been a better time to be a musician? This research would suggest that never before has it been: easier to realise your creative visions but more difficult to be seen; easier to convince the world that you are successful but more

difficult to make this projection a reality, and; easier to find your voice but more difficult to be heard.

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## Discography

Context:

- ‘Breathe In’ feat. Nico Lindsay (November, 2010)
- ‘Off With Their Heads’ feat. Vertex of Marvell (February, 2011)
- ‘Listening to Burial’ feat. Slof Man (April, 2011)
- ‘Drowning’ (March, 2012)
- ‘1.4 at 12’ (March, 2013)

Genesis Elijah:

Singles:

- ‘Watch What I Do’ (December, 2010)
- ‘Mike Lowry’ (Freestyle) (January, 2011)
- ‘Battle Cry’ (January, 2011)
- ‘Reign of Fire’ (November, 2011)
- ‘My Truth’ (December, 2011)
- ‘Psalms (Lana Del Rey – Video Games)’ (January, 2012)
- ‘Falling’ (January, 2012)
- ‘Father’s Day’ (June, 2012)

EPs/Mixtapes:

- ‘I Ain’t Even Charging Bruv’ (May, 2011)
- ‘Painkillers and Pilkington’ (January, 2012)
- ‘An Emcee’s Worst Enemy’ (March, 2012)
- ‘I Ain’t Even Charging Bruv 2’ (December, 2012)

Rival:

Singles:

- ‘Lock Off The Rave’ (March, 2011)
- ‘Talk That’ (November, 2011)
- ‘They Said’ (November, 2011)
- ‘Plan A’ feat. Lioness (Narration by Logan Sama) (November, 2011)
- ‘Just a Dream’ feat. Dot Rotten (January, 2012)
- ‘Rival’s Rush’ (March, 2012)

*'Headshot Season'* (May, 2012)

*'Late Nights, Early Mornings'* (September, 2012)

Rival: EPs/Mixtapes

*Risky Roads Presents – Rival: Laugh Now Hate Later EP* (February 2010)

*Return of the Rivz* (November, 2010)

*Rival vs Nytz E.P* (March, 2011)

*Biscuits E.P* (July, 2011)

*Lord Rivz EP* (November, 2011)

*Party Rings E.P* (April, 2012)

*Rivz N Shine* (December, 2012)

## Appendix 1: Consent Form



### **(Working Title) The Economics of Culture and Renegotiation of Capital Acquisition**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this research project. My project aims to look at how musicians in UK 'urban' music, such as you, experience a competitive marketplace, with a particular focus on (but not limited to) your experiences of engaging with intermediaries or 'middle-men' such as DJs, journalists etc, as well as the role of money in your creative life. I will also be looking at the extent to which artists such as yourself operate in ways which we might understand as entrepreneurial or business-minded, and any impact you feel this may or may not have on your art.

You are free to not answer any questions if you do not want to. You are also free to leave this research project at any time if you want to either now, or in the future.

*I consent to being interviewed in this research project: Yes / No*

*I am happy to be quoted in this research project: Yes / No*

All of your answers will be securely stored in a password protected file on my computer and will only be read at this stage by myself, my university supervisor, and when being marked, my VIVA panel. However, In the future, some part or all of this project may need to be read by friends or professional colleagues for advice on my writing, or may be published and thus enter the public domain.

*I consent to be being named in this research project and do not wish to be made anonymous: Yes / No*

As well as the information exchanged in our interviews, I will also be seeking to draw insights from both the lyrics of your publicly released songs, as well as from your publicly available tweets. I will be asking if you are happy to archive your Twitter history for analysis. You are free to refuse this.

*I am happy to provide my archive of 'Tweets' from when I started using the service, up until the conclusion of data collection period in 2013/4: Yes / No*

Signed by research participant:

Dated:

Many thanks,

George Musgrave

Signed by researcher:

Dated:

## **Appendix 2: List of Figures**

Fig. 1: Genesis Elijah's YouTube Uploads

Fig. 2: Genesis Elijah and Ricky Gervais Tweets

Fig. 3: A Feedback Mechanism

Fig. 4: Context: Alignment Via Tweeting

Fig. 5: Context: Alignment via Email

Fig. 6: Multiplying Support by Email

Fig. 7: Continuing to Multiply

Fig. 8: Genesis Documenting Radio 1 Support

Fig. 9: Genesis Documenting Ricky Gervais Support

Fig. 10: Contemporary Capital Interplay

Fig. 11: Socio-Cultural Transubstantiation

Fig. 12: Cultural Business Model

Fig. 13: Context: EMI/Sony/ATV Signing