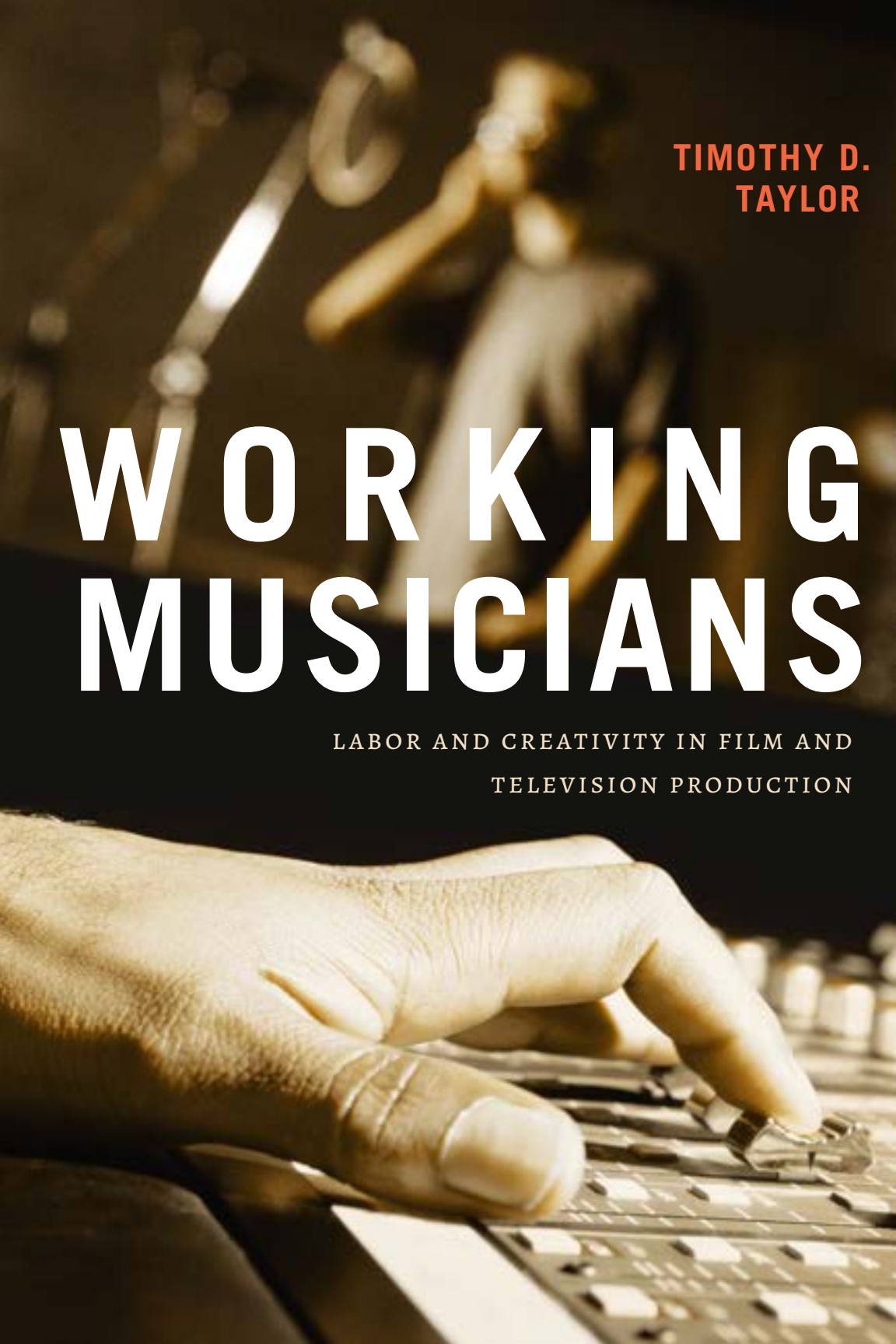




TIMOTHY D.
TAYLOR

WORKING MUSICIANS

LABOR AND CREATIVITY IN FILM AND
TELEVISION PRODUCTION

Working Musicians

BUY

Working Musicians

Labor and Creativity in Film and
Television Production

TIMOTHY D. TAYLOR

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
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*For Sherry, as always,
and in memory of my mother,
Jane Lundeen Taylor*

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Everyone on a studio lot has two jobs: their own, and music.

—ALFRED NEWMAN (from Robert Kraft)

It's a director's medium. If a director tells you to use a kazoo and a washboard to do a love scene, you have to do it, you know; there's nothing you can do.

—RANDY NEWMAN, *The Frame*, KPCC, August 9, 2018

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WORKING MUSICIANS

This book is an ethnographic study of music workers involved in film, television, video games, and streaming programs—not stars, but people who work every day to bring us the music we hear every day. Theirs is largely a precarious existence in a cutthroat industry. What everyone talked about was getting work, doing the work, and getting paid, endeavoring to acquire or increase or improve the social and symbolic capital they possessed that they hoped would lead to more jobs, better social and symbolic capital, and more economic capital.

Music (and other) workers don't simply labor and make a living (or attempt to), however—they work in capitalist businesses. Studies of cultural organizations as capitalist industries began, famously, with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's consideration of "the culture industry" in the mid-twentieth century (2002). For them, the culture industry wasn't just a capitalist industry that produced commodities; these businesses warranted scrutiny because doing so helped shed light on a new stage of capitalism that these authors referred to as "late capitalism," a capitalism in which use-value had been eclipsed by exchange-value, in which cultural commodities had become commodities like any other: mass-produced, standardized, serving to reinforce the dominant culture rather than critique it.¹

There is, however, only so much one can learn about capitalism by attending solely to commodities. Capitalism or any mode of production is more than some sort of giant spaceship hovering over earth determining everything, or, to employ to classic Marxian language, it is more than a base that determines a superstructure, creating commodities in its own image. Capitalism is a social form, it is people, social beings who are entangled in

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their own cultures, racial groups, ethnicities, class positionalities, sexual identities, generations—people who also possess different amounts of various forms of capital, pursuing different projects (Ortner 1996; Taylor 2007). If we are to understand capitalism, we need to study not only its products but its producers, its agents, its managers and workers, as many studies after Horkheimer and Adorno have done.

But Horkheimer and Adorno and many others after them do not rely on ethnographic studies of what people actually do, so the orientation here is more informed by Pierre Bourdieu. My ethnographic data reveal that workers in these fields are very much positioned by the amounts of the various forms of capital they possess. And since composers are at the beginning of the music supply chain in these fields, many other music workers who populate this study view their job as protecting the composer's time and helping them realize their vision. But it is composers who embody the most conflicted and contradictory aspects of these fields. They speak sometimes bluntly, sometimes bitterly, about how they have tried to negotiate creative decisions with those above them in the hierarchy. As one said, sometimes "you have to check your purely artistic self at the door."² Surrendering one's creative desires to those of people in charge is part of the job, as I will discuss. But what composers are most concerned with, as are all the music workers, is getting hired and getting paid.

The ethnographic data also show that while economic precarity may be an effect of neoliberal capitalism in many areas of today's economy, it is not new to the cultural businesses, though it is becoming a more chronic condition.³ However, some workers, particularly composers, actively choose their precarity, which is their privilege, as it was for the nineteenth-century bohemians studied by Bourdieu (1993). The workers in the cultural businesses who populate this study are no different, frequently coming from middle-class backgrounds (especially those at the top of the heap, composers). Composers, more than the other workers in this study, have made a choice to knowingly pursue a precarious career and they possess the cultural capital, and often the economic capital from their parents, to engage in this pursuit. Because of the middle-class makeup of the majority of the music workers and the importance of social capital, the world of the production of music for film and television production is largely a closed system, which makes it difficult for everyone to break in, but especially women and ethnic minorities. Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) music workers are perhaps even more underrepresented than those who work in other areas of film and television production (see

Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramón's annual *Hollywood Diversity Report* 2021 for data on above-the-line workers).

By examining the production of cultural goods in today's cultural businesses (I prefer this term to "cultural industries" or "creative industries," as I detail later), we can learn not just about today's capitalism (generally called neoliberal), but how capitalism more broadly understood is intermingled in complex ways with other forms of the production of value, including earlier capitalist forms. Capitalism not only adapts to the present; it finds ways to appropriate the past—the idea of creativity, for example, has been with us since the nineteenth century—but capitalism freshens it up, finds new uses for it. Capitalism is enormously adaptive, infiltrative; it doesn't just devour or displace noncapitalist modes of the production of value; it can incorporate them or work alongside them without necessarily destroying or displacing them (see Meillassoux 1981; Taylor 2020; and Tsing 2015). It can coexist for years with other forms of the production of value, then some small trigger or change, such as a technological shift, can alter the relationship of the various modes of the production of value. Such sparks can come from anywhere; it is important to bear in mind John T. Caldwell's exhortation that the organization of production in the cultural businesses can take different forms and is dependent on legal, economic, union, historical, and institutional factors, not just internal organizational dynamics or interpersonal relationships (Caldwell et al. 2013, 398; see also the introduction to Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009). *Working Musicians* shows how neoliberal capitalism has sped up production, increased income inequality between music workers and their bosses, and introduced greater demands for managerialization so that composers are as much entrepreneur-managers as musicians.

The production of music for a film, episode, or video game is a complicated process that becomes more complex as budgets go up and more workers are involved. All this coordinated labor consists of many different supply chains, which, taken together, result in an intellectual property commodity. These supply chains work only because of the exercise of power in these fields, which compels workers to discipline themselves, to do as they're told or get out. Capitalist management techniques have infiltrated these supply chains, sometimes quite recently. Harry Braverman's famous argument about labor processes under monopoly capitalism carries over into the realm of cultural production, where so-called creative workers must do what they are told by producers and directors, the division of labor such that "*the unity of conception and execution may be dissolved*," the director

(in film) and the showrunner (in television) possessing the right to conceive, leaving everyone else to execute: “the idea as conceived by *one* may be executed by *another*” (1998, 35; although, see Ryan 1992). Except in rare and well-known cases of established relationships of producers or directors with particular composers, most music workers—including composers—are viewed as interchangeable and disposable; there are countless stories in the business of a producer or director or someone else with authority deciding they don’t like the score a composer delivered and ordering another one at the last minute, like replacing a defective part.⁴ Most composers are providers of abstract labor in Marx’s terms, people who are hired simply for their capacity to work, doing what they are told.

These sorts of issues are usually spoken of in terms of the well-known antipathy between “art and commerce,” but it’s clear that, at least for bigger-budget films and virtually all games and streaming programs, these are businesses whose bosses’ main concern is profit.⁵ This is the clash of two different conceptions of value, of course—aesthetic or artistic, and capitalist. In such conflicts, forms of economic value usually prevail, which is why Bourdieu’s conception of social hierarchies places those with greater economic capital (and lesser cultural capital) in the group he calls the “dominant dominant,” while those with more cultural capital (but less economic capital) constitute the group he calls the “dominated dominant” (1984). But supply chains in fields of cultural production do not “translate” noncapitalist into capitalist forms of value (or effect some other sort of “translation”; see Taylor n.d.a); artistic or aesthetic values are subordinated to bosses’ conceptions of hoped-for capitalist value.

Threats to the acquisition of capitalist value must be controlled and tamped down at every turn. Bosses in all businesses need to monitor their employees to ensure that they are contributing to the bottom line, but in the cultural businesses, the mystique and allure of the idea of creativity is so powerful (both as a governing ideology and as a sales mechanism) that it continually threatens to escape the control of bosses. Only certain figures are authorized to have access to what I discuss in chapter 2 as the “creative function” (drawing on Michel Foucault’s concept of the author function). In a way, these privileged figures—“above-the-line” workers, such as directors, producers, actors, and writers—constitute the managers on the creative side of these businesses, who enjoy (or suffer) various degrees of autonomy from the business side.

The cultural businesses aren’t just capitalist, they are patriarchal, not simply because they are dominated by white men (at least on the creative

side, my concern here); they are also patriarchal in how they conceptualize and manage creative freedom and the agency of workers (Hesmondhalgh [2019] also emphasizes the importance of creative autonomy). Since the nineteenth century, creativity has been constructed and continually reconstructed as a male faculty, though these constructions have been based on metaphors likening male creativity to nature, or even to women's ability to procreate. The creative personality has been insightfully characterized by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (2013) as a quality coded as feminine—strange, different, exotic. The supply chain that produces the use-value of music desired by bosses patriarchalizes creativity by removing the last vestige of whatever was thought to be feminine in the origins of creativity through various labor processes of purification and rationalization. And these businesses are also patriarchal in their reliance on unpaid women's labor—managing the household, caring for children—since men in these businesses frequently work very long hours, though this is starting to change. Finally, these businesses are patriarchal in their dependence on complex digital technologies, which are associated with male expertise and responsibilities.

I address these and other issues in *Working Musicians* by drawing on extensive conversations and interactions with various workers in the fields that produce music for film, television, streaming programs, and video games. This project takes inspiration from Studs Terkel's classic *Working* (1974) to participate in a recent trend of ethnographic studies of the cultural businesses and cultural production (e.g., Born 2005b; Caldwell 2008; Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell 2009; Ortner 2013) more than it is a study of the music itself.⁶

This book is most closely indebted to American scholars who work in what has become known as “production studies” (Caldwell 2008; Mayer 2011; Ortner 2013) but is influenced also by British studies of the cultural industries, most associated with the voluminous work of David Hesmondhalgh (2019 especially). But *Working Musicians* differs from the British creative industries literature and political economy approaches in that it is much more *cultural* in the American anthropological sense of attempting to learn what is meaningful to the social actors one studies and how conceptions of meanings are organized and systematized among them. I identify and analyze these systems of meanings by using a Bourdieusian practice theory framework.

Working Musicians also departs somewhat from the political economy approaches to the cultural businesses (or media more generally), and while

this book could, I suppose, be considered to be adopting a similar approach, it nonetheless is different from these works in its focus on supply chains and the creation or refinement of value. Capitalism (especially neoliberal capitalism) is no less a central focus in *Working Musicians* than it is in those writings on the political economy of media (e.g., Maxwell 2001; Wasko 2003; Wasko, Murdock, and Sousa 2011), but this book is just as inspired by recent writings on anthropological value theory, especially by Anna Tsing, which consider ways that value can be created or transformed through processes that are not strictly capitalist, even as they exist in capitalism.

Horkheimer and Adorno's argument, that the use-value of a cultural good had been eclipsed in favor of exchange-value under late capitalism, suffers from the rather Romantic idea that the autonomous conditions under which artists created their works afforded them unique positions from which to critique society. For them, the use-value of cultural commodities was the social critiques made audible and legible to consumers; the two authors set aside the sorts of use-value of cultural goods whose consumption marks their consumers' distinction (explored most thoroughly, of course, in Bourdieu 1984). But as we know from Marx, exchange-value can't be realized unless a commodity is believed by a potential purchaser to possess use-values that the potential purchaser desires: that is, one form of value doesn't exist without the other.

It is use-values that interest me in these pages (though not those of the consumer—this is not a reception study). The aim of *Working Musicians* is to examine the complex ways that music traverses a supply chain on a path from what is seen as raw material generated by a composer to its ultimate employment as use-value in a film, episode, or game. Composers produce use-values for their bosses (directors and producers) as part of a music supply chain that is embedded in a complex of supply chains, all of which are coordinated to result in a commodity with use-value for consumers.

There is a small corner of the literature on the cultural businesses that considers the production of cultural goods through assembly lines (e.g., Caves 2000) or value chains (Rainbird 2004; Keeble and Cavanagh 2008) or "value-creating ecologies" (Hearn, Roodhouse, and Blakey 2007); the point seems to be the elucidation of the structure of these businesses (Fitzgerald 2012 and 2015) through the construction of models and typologies. My focus here is different. I am not concerned with devising models or typologies of how economic value is accumulated or maximized along the way. My approach, unlike that of others in the cultural businesses literature, is (Anna) Tsingian—examining how supply chains create value not

just through the expenditure of labor, but through the refinement or purification of the products of people's labor; in other words, how use-value is created—use-value that leads to butts in seats (or faces in front of screens), which leads (producers and studios hope) to profits (Tsing 2009, 2013, 2015). In the end, *Working Musicians*, following Horkheimer and Adorno, is less about these cultural businesses themselves and more a study of how we can better understand neoliberal capitalism through an examination of the cultural businesses today.

This book builds on my previous books about capitalism (Taylor 2012, 2016) to a certain extent in that it is concerned with what we can learn about today's capitalism by looking at those who toil in it as music and other sorts of cultural production workers, but it is more focused in its interest in the question of value, which has been a recent preoccupation (most writings are collected in Taylor n.d.a). How is value created and refined as it traverses a supply chain in a field of cultural production in neoliberal capitalism? It is in addressing this question that Tsing's work has been inspirational, helping me understand that value is generated outside of capitalist structures but can be "translated" into them, or ignored until a capitalist devises a way to effect a translation, if that ever occurs. To the extent I am employing Foucault on the question of the subject, I am also more concerned in this book with the forms of self-discipline and self-exploitation (drawing on Byung-Chul Han [2017]) that are evident from the ethnography, effects of capitalism I did not explore in these earlier works.

The form of cultural production studied here isn't new because the cultural businesses have relied on different sorts of supply chains since they became businesses. There was a major shift in this form of cultural production starting in the 1970s, however. An ensemble of changes that mark the shift to neoliberalization is a good point of demarcation, though all of these changes were slow. First: the rise of electronic technologies in the 1970s, followed by digital technologies, a slow transformation that took over a decade. When I asked people who had entered the business in the 1970s or 1980s about the biggest shift they encountered, all said that it was the rise of these technologies, which, among other things, have left composers even less time to do their work and have unemployed many live musicians since their playing can be generated by software. Older composers also discussed another major change, the demise of their union, the Composers and Lyricists Guild of America, a dissolution that began with a lawsuit by the Guild against the major studios in 1972, which ended up by destroying the union in 1982. This book begins after these momentous changes, though I will

mention them when necessary for the historical narratives that follow (the earlier period I consider in another book, Taylor n.d.b).

Another major shift has occurred in episodic television. The old system of three major television networks has expanded greatly, first with cable starting in the 1980s and now with a growing number of streaming services, such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+, and others. Bruce Broughton, one of the most successful composers I interviewed, with film credits such as *Silverado*, told me that there are now more composers working in film and television than at any time in the past, mainly because there is more product, not just film and television, but cable, streaming, and video games. Broughton said there is often not enough money to support so many composers because many budgets are so small. There are still big-budget films being made, he said, “but there are a lot of indie features getting by on a \$36,000 budget and much, much less. By the time the picture is ready for music, the money for music has become pretty thin.”⁷

As much as the technological production of music has changed and the demand for content has risen, the culture of these musicians has altered less. Reading sociologist Robert R. Faulkner’s excellent studies of musicians in the Hollywood of earlier generations, *Hollywood Studio Musicians: Their Work and Careers in the Recording Industry* ([1971] 2013) and *Music on Demand: Composers and Careers in the Hollywood Film Industry* (1983), I am struck by two things: how much has changed and, also, how little. The culture of these businesses remains the same: it is heavily male dominated; personal relationships matter greatly in securing gigs and maintaining one’s reputation; there is never enough time to get the work done (even less today than when Faulkner was writing); there are battles over creative autonomy; struggles with one’s bosses (producers and directors); and more. *Working Musicians* offers more than an update, however, since it addresses themes and issues that weren’t covered in Faulkner’s books, particularly gender and diversity, and questions of money (the composers’ union was in the process of disintegrating when Faulkner was writing, though he doesn’t consider this). The theoretical frameworks I employ—from Marx, Bourdieu, Raymond Williams, and Tsing—are also completely different from Faulkner’s, who, as a sociologist, was concerned with addressing questions of the sociology of work.

Working Musicians also differs from Faulkner’s books in its focus on workaday composers and all those who labor with them: music editors, scoring mixers, recording engineers, performers, music copyists,

composers' assistants. I am less focused on major composers, who labor in a comparatively rarefied world that is unlike the working environment of most musicians. A famous composer such as John Williams can enjoy all the studio recording time he wants, hire the best orchestrators and the best musicians, who will drop other gigs in order to record with him. Most of the composers I talked to are rarely able to hire any live musicians. Yet, as composer Christopher Wong told me, for every composer such as Williams making \$1–2 million per film, there are “thousands of guys like me,” working every day, making a living.⁸ They are the subjects of this book (though I did speak with a few well-known composers—Bruce Broughton and Lalo Schiffrin—to learn if their perspectives were much different), and some of the other music workers I interviewed are at the top of their fields, even if they are unknown to audiences.

Stephan Eicke's *The Struggle behind the Soundtrack* (2019), like Faulkner's books chronicling an earlier era, clearly demonstrate the differences between the big-budget composers he interviewed and the musicians considered in these pages. It is a different world in terms of the amount of money expended. Eicke mentions the film *King Kong* (2005), on which James Newton Howard employed eleven orchestrators; most of the musicians I interviewed can only dream of the opportunity of writing for an orchestra.⁹ Still, even highly paid composers must do as they are told. Eicke also discusses the rise of a business devoted to acquiring the publishing rights of composers' films, which finance the recording of film scores in exchange for ownership of the master and publishing rights (41), but most of the composers I spoke to never brought this up, probably because soundtracks of their music are never released, or, if they are published, it's at the composer's expense.

Now let me offer a brief overview and critique of the creative or cultural businesses literature in order to situate *Working Musicians* in the existing literature. I am concerned in part with the conceptions of creative freedom in these writings, as there is probably nothing as desired, contested, and managed in the film, television, streaming, and video game businesses. While none of the workers I spoke to operates under the assumption that they possess total artistic autonomy, there are degrees of artistic freedom available to composers who are managed by their bosses—producers and directors. Composers, in turn, manage the creative freedom of all of those who work for them (the music editors, orchestrators, mixers, and more).

In recent decades, however, discourses of creativity have escaped the relatively enclosed realms of artistic production and the cultural businesses and have become commonplace in societies around the world; discourses

of creativity are everywhere. In the 1990s, policymakers around the world began to realize that an important sector of their economies was derived from the creative or cultural sectors—among them, ABBA in Sweden, the Beatles and Shakespeare and Harry Potter (among other) “industries” in the UK—and governments began to pay more attention to this sector. In Europe, where universities must be more responsive to national governments than in the US, since education is funded by central governments, studies of the cultural businesses and their role in the economy have proliferated (see McRobbie 2016; Reckwitz 2017). Some years ago in Stockholm, I found myself in conversation with the former rector of the University of Stockholm, who, once he learned I was a music scholar, told me, with some bewilderment, that, post-ABBA, the Swedish economy made more money from exports of popular music than from exports of steel.

The growth of discourses about creativity has been diagnosed and analyzed in two main ways that are polar opposites: as a negative as well as an extremely positive symptom of neoliberal capitalism (the latter being what one might call creativity triumphalism). (There is also a more sober perspective somewhere in the middle represented by the authors listed above whose work I hope this book builds upon.) Let me tackle the two extreme perspectives, starting with the first.

Some argue that the influence of the state, specifically its validation of the creative economy, is a symptom of neoliberal capitalism, the proponents of which conceptualized people’s skills and labor power as “human capital” (see Becker [1964] 1994 and Schultz 1959 and 1972), and, indeed, there are theorists who understand creativity mainly in this way—as a neoliberal ideology that encourages risk-taking while downplaying the potential for precarity (see Jones, Lorenzen, and Sapsed 2015; McRobbie 2016; Mould 2018; and Reckwitz 2017). Both Angela McRobbie and Andreas Reckwitz refer to creativity as a negative symptom of neoliberal capitalism, but to characterize it this way seems to me to go too far in emphasizing the “darkness” of creativity today (see Ortner 2016). McRobbie provides an example of a young woman who sacrificed a good deal to become a celebrity chef, which is meant to be a case of how neoliberalism encourages people to follow their dreams and risk precarity, but there’s nothing particularly neoliberal about that; people have sacrificed in order to make careers in the arts (or risky fields, such as the restaurant business) for decades—centuries, even—most frequently facing precariousness, and many rural people, including in the Global North, also have faced precariousness for generations. Today’s precarity—a term employed to label the growth of a

“precariat” class group that lives without steady employment—is real but not simply because people have attempted to follow their dreams—rather, because the global economy is increasingly stacked against everyone but the already rich, so people whose occupations might have been safe now face the possibility that their secure jobs could disappear, that they could become part of a casualized labor force or workers in the gig economy.

There is also a strain of creativity triumphalism, a school of thought founded mainly by urban theorist Richard Florida, who champions creativity as the harbinger of a better future. In many ways, Florida’s book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002) set the tone for the burgeoning cultural businesses literature in its unabashed and unquestioning embrace of whatever is thought to be “creative.” He argues that the massive social changes in the few decades preceding his book are a result of “the rise of human creativity as the key factor in our economy and society. Both at work and in the spheres of our lives, we value creativity more highly than ever, and cultivate it more intensely” (4). I would say that this is less a “real” shift than a discursive one, however, and confined to higher class groups who enjoy the economic and cultural capital that permits them to think of themselves as creative.

Florida’s ideas have found their way into more scholarly literature on the cultural businesses, which sometimes echoes his breathlessness about creativity uncritically. For example, the introduction to an edited volume entitled *Creative Industries* says, “The background to this book is the need to respond to the challenges posed in a world where creativity, innovation, and risk are general necessities for both economic and cultural enterprise, where knowledge and ideas drive both wealth creation and social modernization, and where globalization and new technologies are the stuff of everyday life and experience” (Hartley 2005, 1). There is much to unpack in an opening salvo such as this, perhaps especially the separation of “economic” and “cultural,” the uncritical celebration of creativity and innovation, and the remarkable lack of historicity: as if capitalism hasn’t always relied on people’s creativity, innovation, and risk-taking; as if knowledge isn’t always necessary; as if globalization and technologies are new and unprecedented. Volume editor John Hartley goes on to echo Florida’s rapturous account of the “creative class,” enshrining a quotation—“Creativity . . . is now the decisive source of advantage” (1, quoting Florida 2002, 5)—in a box and, later, considering the “new economy” that is based much more on the “creative industries” than in the past.

For Hartley and the other creativity triumphalists, everything is new or, rather, NEW. Another passage (this time the words are Hartley’s) is placed

in a box: “The idea of the CREATIVE INDUSTRIES seeks to describe the *conceptual and practical convergence* of the CREATIVE ARTS (individual talent) with Cultural Industries (mass scale), in the context of NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs) within a NEW KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY, for the use of newly INTERACTIVE CITIZEN-CONSUMERS” (5).

Such emphases on creativity in the scholarly literature represent, I think, an attempted corrective to the Horkheimer and Adorno position, that the production of “mass culture” was derivative and inherently uncreative. So, the Birmingham School’s rejoinder to the Frankfurt School on cultural consumption has been mirrored in subsequent studies of the cultural businesses by simply swinging the pendulum back from an assumption that the cultural businesses and their products aren’t creative to an assumption that they are (see also McRobbie 2016 for a lengthier treatment of this point).

One of the most frequent themes in the creative and cultural businesses literature concerns the question of creativity itself. Again and again, assumptions are made that workers in the cultural businesses perform creative work, whatever it is, and that what they do is qualitatively different from others who are not thought to be creative or who work outside the creative or cultural businesses. The cultural businesses are creative by definition, as opposed to businesses that manufacture more quotidian goods like automobiles or microwave ovens (see also Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011).

Neoliberal capitalism has brought with it new usages and meanings of *creativity*. It has been a particularly spongy term since the nineteenth century but recently has become a potent component of discourses about the entrepreneurial self under neoliberal capitalism. Most of the people I spoke to didn’t bring up the term since many don’t often view their work as creative. Nonetheless, the discourses currently in circulation about creativity and the cultural businesses—discourses that circulate both in and out of these businesses—are symptomatic of a neoliberal emphasis on the concept.

One of the goals of this book is to problematize the Romantic conception of creativity in the existing literature, which often posits the sort of labor that cultural businesses workers are engaged in as “creative” (or “immaterial”; e.g., Hardt and Negri 2000 and 2004). Other authors offer characterizations and classifications of the products of the cultural businesses, arguing that they are special sorts of commodities, different from everyday commodities (e.g., Miège 1989). But it seems to me that creating taxonomies of businesses or labor or its products goes down the wrong

path (see also Graeber 2006), provoking endless and fruitless debates about where something goes in a particular taxonomy or if it belongs there at all. The cultural businesses are in the business of producing commodities, and the workers' labor is productive in Marx's sense—they create surplus value for capitalists. The task should not be to taxonomize businesses, labor, or commodities—which only produces more and more complex taxonomies and endless quibbles over them—but to think more ethnographically about how workers and bosses themselves conceptualize capitalist businesses, why workers devise the sorts of classifications of labor that they do, why some of those forms of labor are valued over others, and how consumers value such commodities in the ways they do.

I address these and other issues in *Working Musicians*, for which the following is a brief overview. I view the cultural businesses as patriarchal and capitalist businesses and those that labor in them, workers. Composers are seen as laborers whose creativity is culturally coded as feminine and whose products are seen as a natural resource, acquired through accumulation by dispossession and managed by their bosses—directors and producers. The product of composers' work undergoes various labor processes and moves through the music supply chain—itself embedded in a complex of supply chains—refining it and defeminizing it for its ultimate use-value of supporting what is on screen. Music doesn't move in a supply chain from one disconnected group to the next, but within an interconnected group whose members view social and symbolic capital as paramount: who you know, with whom you have worked, and your credits are the only forms of capital that matter. Directors and producers hope that the use-values generated by music workers will be those desired by consumers of their commodities, producing exchange-value and ultimately surplus-value for the studio. Group production predates neoliberal capitalism, but this form of capitalism has shaped this mode of production in the past few decades in three important ways: it has introduced digital technologies—culturally associated with men—which have effectively increased the speed of production, put many live musicians out of work, and made possible the outsourcing of recording to cheaper locales, especially in Eastern Europe; ushered in new pay structures in the form of the package deal, which brought the rise of the composer-as-entrepreneur-manager; and busted the composers' union in the early 1980s. Finally, since creativity is thought to be a masculine quality and most of these music workers are men, there is a discussion of gender in these patriarchal businesses.

After this introduction, the next chapter begins to theorize how to understand cultural production not by individuals, but by groups, employing approaches from Raymond Williams on group production, Pierre Bourdieu on fields of cultural production, Marx on use-value and the collective laborer, and Anna Tsing on supply chains. The raw material of the composer is refined by orchestrators, music editors, and others as the composer's work slowly wends its way into the final version of the film, episode, or game. This chapter also discusses the forms of capital that circulate among workers in these fields; social and symbolic capital are paramount: no one cares about musicians' economic capital or cultural capital (including if, or where, they went to college). One's past performance and who one knows are all that matter.

Chapter 2 historicizes and problematizes the Romantic conception of creativity that exists in these fields and, in some studies of them, that is employed both to honor and justify the management of those who are thought to be creative, endowed with what I call, drawing on Foucault, the creative function. The creative work of composers is treated as both a natural resource—a raw material in need of refinement that is acquired through accumulation by dispossession—and a critical component of a complex cultural product that is made to order. This chapter also examines the Western construction of creativity as an exclusively male faculty, an idea promulgated since the nineteenth century that continues into the present even though creativity is a human faculty. We also hear from my interlocutors in this about how they view their own creative freedom and agency.

The next two chapters lay out just what it is these workers do, since very little is known outside of this world about these workers' labor (save for the very few composers who have gained enough fame to be interviewed in the mainstream media). Composers write the music requested of them by their bosses, raw material that, if it is notated music, then enters an analog supply chain, first going to an orchestrator and then to a music contractor who hires the requisite number of musicians for a recording session. The digital files generated by the composer (if no live musicians are involved) or recording engineer (if there is one) must also be refined, entering the digital portion of the music supply chain that includes mixers and music editors. Chapter 4, which considers workers below composers in the supply chain hierarchy, also addresses issues of the transformation of work as these businesses neoliberalize.

Chapter 5 addresses the challenges faced by workers in these fields, challenges generated by the diffuse nature of group production. This sort

of production often results in confusion about who is in charge; despite long-established hierarchies and chains of authority, music workers frequently say it isn't always clear to whom they answer, and they are often given multiple sets of sometimes contradictory instructions. These workers must learn to cultivate a kind of ethnographic sensibility in order to discern whose directives to follow. For them, the questions are about who is in charge, which order to execute, and how, if at all, they will be allowed some creative autonomy. Another frequent complaint, and challenge, concerns communication with nonmusical bosses about music.

The next chapter focuses on the gendered nature of cultural production in these fields. Workers (mostly male) toil in an adrenalized culture in which everyone works too fast and too hard, frequently relying on wives and girlfriends to take care of quotidian matters. Most male composers work in what are essentially man caves, elaborate home studios full of computers and other electronic gear, though one person told me that having children necessitates moving the studio out of the home in order to be able to work without being disturbed.¹⁰ I also interviewed a number of women musicians to learn about their experiences and found something of a generational divide between older women who maintained that they forged ahead and persevered and a younger generation whose attitudes were more militant in the era of #MeToo.

While, as I said earlier, there are many ways in which music production remains unchanged over the decades, the advent of neoliberal capitalism hasn't just shaped cultural production by joining with other forms of the production of value; in some ways, it has utterly changed how music is produced, and how musicians are paid, developments considered in chapter 7. One of the most significant shifts, commented on by everyone I spoke to, has been the rise of digital technologies. Many of my interlocutors articulated great ambivalence about these technologies for having obviated some mundane tasks performed by humans, offering workers new ways to exercise creative freedom. But virtually everyone commented that digital technologies have also resulted in people working longer and harder, as, unlike in the past, their bosses know that changes can now be demanded and effected at the last minute. These technologies can also be strategically employed to limit others' creative options downstream in the supply chain. This chapter also examines how musicians are paid, which was the most frequently recurring concern of everyone I spoke to. Composers are paid by the studio, but in recent decades they have frequently been given a kind of block grant, usually referred to as a "package deal," out of

which they must pay not only themselves, but their music editors, any performing musicians, and others involved in the production of their music, a payment scheme that has essentially turned composers into managers. This has resulted in composers making less money, so some have also begun to take on many more jobs than they can possibly handle themselves, hiring teams of composers, thus introducing a sort of entrepreneurial-capitalist mode of musical production by groups.

The concluding chapter steps back to reflect on the usefulness of the eclectic theoretical approaches this book has taken, its combination of classic Marxian perspectives with more recent arguments about how value is created or refined through supply chains, as well as thematizing issues of patriarchy and gender. The use of these approaches shows how neoliberal capitalism can infiltrate, work alongside, and cooperate with other forms of the production of value, not necessarily subverting or overwhelming them, even as it becomes increasingly hegemonic. And there has been another, familiar, shift with the arrival of neoliberal capitalism: those at the very top earn more; everyone else, less.

Finally, a note on methodology. This study is based in Los Angeles and is not comparative, however tempting (though impracticable) such a study might be.¹¹ I am not only US-based, but Los Angeles-based, and this study concentrates on these cultural businesses as they exist here. I began interviewing in 2012, then needed to attend to other obligations before resuming interviews in various periods between 2017 and 2020. The gap in time from the first interviews to the second helped me gain a somewhat more diachronic perspective, as much had changed in the interim, in particular, the meteoric rise of streaming services and changes in attitudes toward gender and diversity, all of which I discuss in the following chapters. Since I allowed all my interviewees to review their quotes, it also proved to be interesting that several asked me to change masculine pronouns to inclusive pronouns; two men asked their wives to edit their quotes; one person asked his publicist to read over his.

It's also necessary to say what I mean by *ethnography*, for a study such as this faces constraints that obviate the possibility of a more *classical* sort of ethnography in which one lives with one's interlocutors and enjoys virtually unfettered access. But restricted access doesn't foreclose the possibility of an ethnographic study. Even though the pace of change of theoretical frameworks and orientations seems to be faster than ever, I still see no reason to abandon Clifford Geertz's insistence that ethnography should be

about what is meaningful to the people we study, that meanings are shared by members of the same culture and are organized, to varying degrees, in systems (1973). There are those, of course, who might object to Geertz's understanding of the systematicity of culture, and it is certainly more difficult to discern as cultural forms traverse the globe ever more quickly. But people, even if remote from one another, still make meanings, and meanings are organized in various ways, shared, and contested. The main point is to attempt to discover what is meaningful to the people we study, not induce them to tell us what is meaningful to us or impose our synthetic frameworks on them.

I am thus thinking of the production of film and television broadly, as a kind of cultural system, and the production of music as part of this broader system. What interests me is what my interlocutors find to be meaningful in what they do. Learning that doesn't require the sort of access that ethnographers were once (more) freely given.

It is also important to emphasize that ethnography in the Geertzian sense is a perspective as much as it is a method; conducting fieldwork isn't necessarily conducting an ethnography. One can be an ethnographer while working in an archive. And one can be an ethnographer as a reader; the trade press, which I perused extensively, was useful both for information and for the insights it provided into the cultural system of film and television music workers.

I found my first interlocutors through personal connections: family, neighbors, friends, spouses of friends, all of whom were happy to make recommendations of additional people to talk to. I told my interviewees I could meet them whenever and wherever they liked, which often resulted in offering up some ethnographic data. I met some in their home studios, which gave me a glimpse of how they lived (though studios in Los Angeles often occupy former garages, so I didn't always get a look inside the house). I met some in cafés, from Starbucks to hipster establishments. I socialized with a couple of my subjects, mainly because they were neighbors. What I didn't do is accompany people in their work, since most of them labor alone most of the time. There are only a few instances when these workers might not be left alone: spotting sessions (when they meet with those in charge to hear what sort of music and where it should be placed, though these sessions had become as rare as face-to-face meetings even before the COVID-19 pandemic) and recording sessions, which aren't that common among the musicians studied here because most of them work with limited budgets

that preclude the use of live musicians. Most of my meetings with these musicians were in person (until the pandemic). I followed up with some via email or telephone.

Some of my interlocutors said things that they later thought were too sensitive and didn't want attributed to them; one person didn't want their name used at all; and another never got back to me after several attempts to get them to edit or delete their quotes. So I have devised a way of referring to all of these individuals in an effort to respect their wishes. The person who didn't want their name used is given a pseudonym, and the date and place of our interview is in the notes; the same for the person I never heard back from. The remainder are referred to by their real names (with the place and date of the interview in the citation); for their sensitive quotes, they have their own pseudonyms, and the citations list only the year, not the precise date or place of the interview.

Most people I contacted were happy to meet with me, since this study is not about famous musicians whose time and access are extremely limited. This is not a study of film and television (and video game and streaming) composers, but a study of those who work on music. Its value is both empirical, shedding light on what little-known musicians do, and analytical, using ethnography to make an argument about how value through various musicians' creative and technical labor is created through a music supply chain.

But the main point in this discussion of ethnography is that ethnography and, indeed, the sort of work I try to do no matter the methodology centers on what is meaningful to my subjects. Geertz (1973, 15) wrote, "Nothing is more necessary to comprehending what anthropological interpretation is, and the degree to which it is interpretation, than an exact understanding of what it means—and what it does not mean—to say that our formulations of other peoples' symbol systems must be actor-oriented." *Working Musicians* begins and ends with this premise.

The result, I hope, is a study that usefully pulls together insights about supply chains and the creation or refinement of the value of cultural goods, which begin as the "natural" products of composers' creativity, which is culturally understood as male but with such culturally attributed "feminine" qualities as unpredictability and moodiness. Composers' work is refined and rationalized through the music supply chain at the same time it is defeminized in this deeply patriarchal system.

Introduction

- 1 See also the chapter “Culture Industry Reconsidered” in Adorno 1991.
- 2 Ben Decter lecture at UCLA, March 13, 2017.
- 3 There is now an abundant literature about the precarity of workers in the arts fields, including classical music (see Ritchey 2019), though more visibly to most people in the realm of popular music (see, for just a few examples, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011; Sakakeeny 2015; and Umney and Kretsos 2015).
- 4 Gergely Hubai (2012) has compiled many of these stories in a book examining the phenomenon of the replacement score.
- 5 See Negus and Pickering 2004 for a discussion of creativity and commerce in the media industries.
- 6 For studies of the music itself, see Burlingame 1996; Deaville 2011; and Rodman 2010 on television; Cooke 2008; Prendergast 1992; and Wierzbicki 2009 on film; and Cheng 2014 and Miller 2012 on games.
- 7 Bruce Broughton interview by the author, Los Angeles, July 31, 2013.
- 8 Christopher Wong interview by the author, Los Angeles, July 20, 2012.
- 9 The Internet Movie Database lists eleven credited orchestrators for *King Kong*, plus one more uncredited.
- 10 A trade press article (Rodd 2011) offers advice on how to build one’s own studio.
- 11 For useful studies of music in other global film industries, see, among others, Booth 2008; Morcom 2007; and Slobin 2008.

Chapter 1. Group Production, the Collective Laborer, Supply Chains, and Fields

- 1 Thanks are due to Anna Morcom for recommending the Prasad book.
- 2 Paul Dwyer rehearses the writings of those who have argued for different historical modes of media production (Christopherson and Storper 1986; Storper and Christopherson 1987, 1989; Storper 1989, 1993), an earlier one that was more Fordist and a more recent one that is more flexible (Caldwell 2008). Dwyer offers a critique of those authors who view film and television production as a form of Fordist production (including Staiger in Bordwell, Staiger,

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