

Art Worlds, Collective Action
and Music Production in the Digital Age

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Introduction

It is very common to view art creation as the work of the individual whose name is attached to that art. While this person, the artist, is certainly one of the most important factors in the creation of this art, art is inherently a collective action that is not possible without the combined effort of many different parties, some very directly involved and some not so much. For example, when I make a beat on my computer, nobody physically helps me; I choose the sounds, melodies, drums and arrangement. Most would probably view this piece of art as created by me alone; however, there are many things already existing, already put in place, that allow me to create in this way. I have software programs full of sounds that are ready for me to use. Somebody had to create those sounds and make them accessible enough for me to be able to download and use. Whoever created these sounds had to have some knowledge of what sounds are considered “good” in the modern music production context.

The style of beats that I make (usually a sad/melancholic upbeat “trap” beat) is a prevailing trend in 2020 in rap music. While I love this style of instrumentals, and would like to think it’s my original creation that I discovered on my own, I would be very naïve to not acknowledge how societal and musical trends have informed my taste and my creativity. Different art mediums rely on different institutions and groups in order to function. For example, a concert pianist must have an audience of people willing to watch their performance. This is essential to what they are doing. In a similar way, I need there to be rappers and singers who need beats in order for what I’m doing to become fully realized. This idea also ties back into the influence of the current musical trends because, I, being so

immersed in the music production art world, already have a pretty good idea of what kind of musical styles are desirable right now and which ones aren't. The most desirable styles of beats are the ones that are topping music sales charts every week. Artists want to make songs that fit into those popular categories in hopes of gaining some commercial success. This point exemplifies the prominent role economics plays in the creation of songs and in the overall landscape of music.

Just like any other group of people united by a common interest, music producers share characteristics, processes and skills that make them a unique group. Music producers are perceived to be the problem solvers in the studio. At the base level, the producer might make the beat or gather musicians together, but there are many other things a producer does that are not necessarily known to the general public. The producer is seen as a coach in many ways, steering the direction of the project and being experienced enough to realize and understand when something is not cohesive or should be changed for the benefit of the song. Producers gain this experience and knowledge of what to do in certain situations because of all the different musical situations that they find themselves in, over many years, while they are practicing their craft. The ways producers solve problems and make decisions can be best understood if viewed through the lens of sociologist Howard Becker's art worlds paradigm (1982). I have also occasionally drawn from French sociologist, Emile Durkheim's theory of collective consciousness, which I see as related; however, there are major differences between the two. Durkheim's theory was focused primarily on how the division of labor helps to increase productivity in a society and create a feeling of solidarity among its people; his theory applied to the entire society. Becker's theory, on the other hand, is focused more narrowly on specific, established cultural industries and how they are

shaped by social trends or tastes. These industries produce their own culture or symbolic elements and the process that makes this possible is the backbone of his theory. It is this “production of culture” that allows art worlds to succeed, both financially and artistically. In short, Durkheim focused on large-scale processes within the entire society; Becker focused on specific cultural industries or art worlds.

Contributing to the production of culture is economics: artists must consider what will make them money, and then, once some new element has been created and added into the culture, it becomes yet another part of the established art world environment that affects everything else that’s produced; the economic system is just one of the many systems in a society that help to shape its culture, and what its members will consider good art. Producers make decisions based on a multitude of factors, including what has worked in the past, what is “standardized,” what is considered to be “good” or “artistic,” what will be lucrative, and much more. The decisions and processes of record producers arise from their collective action, rather than from the taste of a single individual. The systems that produce culture are always at work in the music world, helping to shape new music even when the artists and producers who create that music think they are working alone. It is, therefore, always a collective action of the many people in an art world that is ultimately responsible for the music it produces (Becker, 1982).

Music and art have been crucial to the functioning of society for as long as recorded history. Rhythm and song, as well as symbolic physical art like drawings, existed in the earliest of civilizations. Music and art are both influenced by the cultures they come from, and they reflect the values and mindsets of that culture. As music creation progressed into a more technologically driven process, the music producer was born. The music producer can

carry out many jobs, including programming or playing the actual music in the song, providing advice or feedback, dictating the direction of the music, sound design and much more. This individual acts as a director to the song-making process, but is not limited to a directorial role alone. The music producer can also foster a creative environment for the artist to get the most they can out of the session. It is often a producer's job to organize, structure and carry out certain ideas the artist already has. It is a collaborative process; in fact, the producer can be just as important as the artist in setting the direction of the song or putting down ideas. The music producer can be thought of as an event planner in this context. All the materials (artists, instruments, software) are usually already there; it's up to the producer to organize and structure all these different ideas in a cohesive way.

The notion that music, just like other art forms, is created by people who share a cultural framework, one that comes with certain standardizations and expectations, has been explored before by sociologists, most notably Becker in his book, *Art as Collective Action* (1982). As the title suggests, Becker approached art as "collective action." In his 1982 book *Art Worlds*, Becker talks about the collaboration among many individuals that is necessary to create art. Without the people who produce the needed materials, no art would be possible. He also discusses how the division of labor plays a role; many individuals contribute to the production of the tools and participate in the routines used by the artist (Becker, 1982). Interestingly, in his book *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) Durkheim initially used the term collective consciousness in reference to social class and politics, focusing a good deal on the increased autonomy of the individual that came about through the need for new and specialized jobs in a more technological society. In Becker's art worlds paradigm, the emphasis is taken off of the individual and explains creativity

through a shared cultural framework comprised of established rules and standards that inform all the decisions of those involved. From this perspective, collective action can be seen as somewhat related to collective consciousness because they inform each other; more specifically, collective action is an iteration of collective consciousness at work within a particular cultural industry -- in this case, music production. When new music is created, all the actions that are taken are, in a way, taken “collectively,” a kind of collaboration, even when artists or producers have no one physically with them while they are working. There are many previously agreed-upon, long-established institutions, though invisible, that are controlling the choices and actions of those belonging to this particular art world. Becker has much to say about this, and I have explored some of his ideas in greater depth a bit later on in the paper.

There have been many changes in the world of music, especially in technology. But even with all these changes, the idea of collective action has not changed. Specifically, this paper explores the effects of collective action on music producers and artists in this digital age of music in which we now find ourselves. Of course, this includes “mainstream” musicians like Drake, but it also includes anybody who is integrated enough within art worlds for their content to be available for study. The digital age has made it possible for a much greater variety of people to be both recognized and influential; who makes it into “the one percent” these days has been greatly expanded. But, no matter what content we are examining, it must be kept in mind that the influence of collective action is always at work; even when the people making the music think they have been working alone, it is always there, a consistent, long-established influence, permeating everything they do.

The following section, Literature Review, is broken up into subsections, the first of which is entitled Standardizations and the Music Producer. In it, I have explored one of the primary components of collective action: the development of standards, over many years, that eventually become established as the parameters that will guide the decisions and actions of artists and producers making music in present and future art worlds.

Literature Review

Standardizations and the Music Producer

We are all aware of certain standardizations and rules in art; we know what is considered a good picture and a bad one. Neither picture is actually good or bad; however, the picture that is considered to be good is the one that fits more in line with our cultural values and shared ideas of what is good and bad. How does this idea apply to a piece of music? Let's look at musical key as an example. Certain notes sound "right" together, while others are clearly off. However, this key system, which tells us which notes belong together, is a human creation; it is not natural law. This shared structural idea of musical key is so embedded in us that even if someone isn't a musician, they can most likely identify a "wrong note." This same idea applies to the creation of music. Certain genres are expected to contain certain rhythms, tempos and sounds. We use these identifiers because they are so embedded in our shared cultural ideas of music that we see them as natural. Although people don't completely follow standardized guidelines while creating music, the existing overarching structures and what are considered the legitimate musical techniques quietly but definitely inform any decision they make. If a producer is making an instrumental in the style of "trap," there are already many defining characteristics that place that instrumental

into that category – melodic repetition, overpowering low-end bass and crisp, tight hi-hats, to name just a few. If a producer is making an instrumental for an artist that makes “trap” music, then he will follow the guidelines that classify that beat into that style. This doesn't mean that every “trap” beat will have the same drum pattern, melodic structure or composition, but they will all share certain characteristics that have been collectively agreed upon as defining ones by the repetition of this process over many years.

Although there's plenty of existing literature on the sociology of music and the collective action that is its byproduct, there is a big gap when dealing specifically with music producers in this context. One exception is an article by Lefford & Thompson. In it, they discuss the chaos that seems to exist in some music studios, but suggest it is a kind of controlled chaos that yields good results. They put it this way: “creative work is characterized by uncertainty, risk, a lack of clearly definable goals, and in the case of music production, a complex socio-technical working environment that brings together a diverse group of specialized collaborators” (Lefford & Thompson, p.543, 2018). It is expected that the idea of collaboration would come up in any literature that examines music production through the lens of collective action. But even in literature that discusses music in general, without any particular focus, I can often see hints of Becker's ideas, even if that wasn't the authors' intention.

Sociologists examining music often mention things that sound like collective action without giving it that name. For example, Hyacinthe Ravet offers the perspective that music never really exists in and of itself, but only in relationship with its audience. It is an elusive art form, continually “mobilizing the observer, especially since it always needs to be heard

again in order to exist” (Ravet, p.277, 2010). The emphasis on relationship is one I have seen again and again throughout my research.

Peter Martin, a lecturer at University of Manchester, wrote about music making as a collaborative activity and explored the way musicians’ unorthodox, difficult lifestyle often made the public see them as deviants. Martin said that a big part of what stimulated his thinking on this came from Becker himself, who was a pianist in the clubs and bars of Chicago and Kansas City and then wrote about the experience in a book entitled *Outsiders* he published in 1963 (Martin, p.97, 2006). In it, Becker said that the musicians saw themselves as deviants, but not in the usual negative sense of the term. At that time, musicians were considered “bizarre and unconventional” by normal, “square” members of society and as “deviant” by the sociological analyst. For Becker, these “labels” had nothing to do with the personalities of the players or the unusual nature of their activities. Rather, they were “a patterned and collective response to the specific set of problems and contingencies that affect the musicians’ occupational situation” (Becker, 1963). Although their work was low status, poorly paid, and often performed in adverse conditions, the players considered themselves highly skilled and they aspired to be great musicians. Their occupation and lifestyle led them to reject orthodox values and standards and instead embrace the ideals of the musicians’ world. They were developing a way of responding to the specific problems they faced. Becker said it this way: “Culture arises essentially in response to a problem faced in common by a group of people, insofar as they are able to interact and communicate with one another effectively” (Becker, p.81, 1963).

Yet another source that examines music from a sociological perspective is an article by Roy, W. G., & Dowd, T. J. They make an argument, similar to what we’ve already heard,

that music is not a singular phenomenon and so cannot be described by a single definition. They point out that sociologists see the distinction between what is considered music and what is not considered non music as a distinction that is “shaped by, and shapes, social arrangements and cultural assumptions. Given that the construction of what we think of as music is so widely accepted, its socio-cultural underpinnings can oftentimes be invisible.” (Roy & Dowd, p, 6, 2010). They also discuss how music can be thought of as both object and activity. Again, the emphasis on the interrelatedness among members of music art worlds, including audience members, is something I have seen consistently throughout my readings.

As technology in music continues to advance, the producers are becoming even more integral to the creation of the song. Music is becoming more and more digitized; most producers don't even use analog gear anymore. Since most music is made on computers today, it is no longer imperative that an artist to be able to play an instrument or be a truly talented vocalist. This enables and sometimes requires the producer to wear many different hats. A producer might record vocals, play instruments, or handle mixing and mastering, tasks that were once allocated to several different professionals. An understanding of how collective action influences the production process will give us more insight into the music creation process from a sociological point of view.

How does collective action influence music producers? What systems must be in operation for producers to carry out the tasks they need to do? How do producers deal with shifting trends and standardizations in the music production art world? Exploring these questions enabled me to gain a more in-depth understanding of how collective action affects

music production as a whole and how integral producers are to the final product of a song or an album.

In this section, I have seen how the standards of art worlds are shaped and established over many years. Practices that are repeated and agreed upon in music industries such as studios, factories, and performance arenas become so thoroughly engrained that the members of these art worlds consider them “common sense” and make their decisions accordingly. In the following section, I have examined music production art worlds through the lens of production of culture theory. I have shown how niche or even rebellious art is still informed by the overarching culture from which it emerges, no matter how independent it may seem.

Production of Culture

Part of the theoretical framework for my analysis of collective action and the creation of music is informed by the production of culture perspective. This perspective focuses on how elements of culture are shaped, how they are created within the parameters of the overarching systems under which they are formed. Even if something seems to be completely removed from the influence of the overarching culture, it is still a byproduct of it. The main argument of this perspective is that everything we think of as unique or outside of one’s culture – for example, a niche taste in music, which one might view as separate from the overarching popular culture – is actually a product of that very culture. Richard Peterson, a sociology professor at Vanderbilt University, said that even though production systems greatly influence culture, and symbols within that culture, there are other factors involved as well; to name but a few: individual creativity, social condition, taste, and so on (Peterson, 2004). He also points out that the beat and hippy movements of the 50’s and 60’s

arose from youth who refused to embrace American societal values that were already in place. The values and culture of this time period in America were very rigid and unexpressive. The youth of this time felt very restricted by this inflexible culture and actively rebelled by creating their own culture. This is how new culture develops. The overall point is that the beat and hippy movements could not have come into existence without the overarching culture that they hoped to escape from (Peterson, 2004).

This idea manifests in the art worlds of music producers. The term “popular music” is used to describe music that is listened to by the masses in a large-scale, cultural-consumption context; i.e., on the radio, high placement on the Billboard music charts, etc. As mentioned earlier, in many contexts, a music producer’s job is to lay a foundation upon which the artist can build a complete song. Naturally, if a certain sound is dominating the popular music landscape, many music producers will make music in that style in hopes of getting their foot in the door of this commercially successful music world. They mimic the sound of the most successful artists in hope that one of their productions will end up on a popular, commercially successful album.

On the other hand, certain artists, while fully aware of this overarching popular culture, make a conscious decision to work against it; however, even in their most radical departure, they cannot escape its influence. Howard Becker, the sociologist and author of *Art Worlds* quoted earlier, would call this kind of artist a maverick (1982). Jpeg Mafía is a rap artist who also works outside the conventions of this popular music consciousness, he exemplifies Becker’s idea of a maverick. Because of his use of weird sounds, textures, unpredictable drum rhythms and blending of genres like hip hop, glitch hop, rock and punk, it is almost certain that none of his music will ever gain a mainstream appeal or be played on the radio.

Jpeg Mafia's end goal is different from the hugely popular artists. Someone like Justin Bieber makes music with the intent of attracting the greatest possible number of people. This kind of "pop" music is usually very inoffensive. It doesn't do much in the way of making the listener have a strong feeling or reaction; it is usually simply catchy and fun. This allows it to appeal to the widest demographic while also generating money. Someone like Jpeg Mafia, however, is mostly interested in his core fan base. He knows that his use of glitchy drones and screamed vocals will probably turn off the casual listener, but, again, his goal isn't mainstream appeal. Art worlds that share his distaste for the mainstream have embraced him. He is viewed as a very artful and a boundary-pushing figure within hip hop culture.

Peterson also comments on the power of new technologies in shaping today's culture: "Technology provides the tools with which people and institutions augment their abilities to communicate, and changes in communication technology profoundly destabilize and create new opportunities in art and culture. The classic example is the role played by the invention of the printing press in overturning the world of the Middle Ages, creating the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation" (Peterson, p.314, 1990). In the same way that the printing press completely revolutionized the production of writing, communicating and sharing of information, the music production world saw extremely rapid growth with the invention and implementation of digital technology. Music producers and engineers found themselves no longer limited by things like expensive tape to record on, track limits on analog gear and extensive/tedious work if something needed to be changed in a song. As digital technology became more and more in sync with the music production world, it became much easier and more efficient to make, record and produce music. This evolution has gone so far that,

today, in 2020, there are music software plug-ins that will generate chords for you, generate drum patterns, use artificial intelligence to choose instruments that it thinks will work with your production, as well as mix and master the record. Many argue that as technology makes it easier and easier to create music, the musicality and skill it used to take to create music is declining. Not only is there technology today that will substitute music theory and rhythm knowledge, but new advancements have made it possible for anyone in their basement with a few hundred dollars to invest can now create music.

It was not always so easy to get one's hands on music recording and production equipment. In the past, artists had to pay for expensive studio time by the hour. In these studios one found microphones, mixing boards, keyboards and whatever else was needed to create music. This created a kind of barrier in music making where an artist would either have to be rich or considered sufficiently talented or knowledgeable to even be able to go into a studio and work with an engineer. Now that practically anybody can produce music on their laptop (without the need for expensive equipment in studios) many of the old barriers to creating music are no longer there. This evolution can be looked at from two different perspectives. On the one hand, it's a turn for the worse: it ties into the point made before about some of the musicality being lost with the influx of all this new technology, since anybody can create music without the approval of a larger institution. There is undoubtedly more amateur music out there than ever before. On the other hand, this can be viewed as a very positive development – especially with the Internet where, again, there is no barrier, and anybody can post whatever they want. Before the Internet, an artist had to already have a record deal, or be very well connected before anyone would be willing to press their music to vinyl. When CD's came around, there was more freedom for

independent artists to put their music out without the support of a larger institution. Now, with the advent of the Internet, literally anybody can post their music for the world to hear. As mentioned earlier, some people think this delegitimizes the music-making process, making it too easy, and some see it as a kind of renaissance where art is freer than it has ever been, an overall good thing for music and art. Whichever side you happen to take, the Internet is here to stay and has become yet another inescapable ingredient in the shaping of our both our overall culture, in general, and the music production culture, in particular.

In this section, I have seen how the overarching systems in any art world shape the way art is produced. I have explored how artists who rebel against the norm, (mavericks), are embraced by art worlds that share their distaste for the mainstream. I have also seen the powerful influence of the Internet on music production. Still, no matter how much things diverge from what occurred in the past, or even from what is accepted as “mainstream” today, new art is still created within the parameters of overarching systems already in place. In the following section, I have discussed Durkheim’s ideas in greater detail and elaborated on how the idea of collective consciousness is related to the idea of collective action. Although the primary focus of this paper is collective action, I intend to show that Durkheim’s older, classical theory sometimes expresses itself anew in Becker’s modern theory.

Collective Consciousness

Durkheim’s theory of collective consciousness was informed by the emergence of industrialized societies in the late 1800’s, very different from earlier, simpler societies that had bonded together through shared religious beliefs. As humans progressed from these simple (Durkheim called them “primitive”) societies to more complex ones, there was a lot

more diversity of activity and work; religion was no longer sufficient as a bond. An agreed-upon system of dividing up the labor became the new glue that held society together, and, as I said earlier, this system helped people to be more productive and to feel more unified. Durkheim argued that this division of labor resulted in the rise of individualism. In light of the specialized tasks required by new technologies, the individual was given more freedom to develop their work. As the specialization increased, so did the autonomy of the individual. All of this led to different points of view and a greater diversity among people. These factors enabled Durkheim to view the self as integrated in a web of social relations that influence a person's actions and thinking. He believed that social forces are sometimes assimilated by the individual so completely that these forces operate on someone automatically, without them being unaware of the effect society is having on them. Durkheim thought that being part of a group is what makes us human and his work demonstrates that, in order to understand the individual, we have to see to see them within the context of the group (all the members of society) and the "collective consciousness" that unites them.

It is not difficult to see how one could apply these ideas to the specialized tasks going on in the art worlds involved in the production of music. Although Durkheim developed his theory as a result of the changes he saw taking place with the rise of industrialized societies, I think much of what he had to say is applicable to the artists and producers who work both as individuals and collectively to accomplish their goals. Artists and producers also operate within a web of social relations that influence them. The individual influences the group, and the group influences the individual. Whether we are speaking of a huge society or just a single music art world, people are working together and affecting each other in powerful

ways. If we widen our lens just a little bit, we can see Durkheim's classic theory at work in the collective action of today's music art worlds.

Creativity is often thought of as being an individual action, a stroke of genius from the mind of a single individual. Cognitive Psychologists Runco and Jaeger recognize the "Standard Definition" of creativity and its two identifying factors: originality and effectiveness. Runco and Jaeger go on to say that if something is not unusual, novel or unique then, by default, it must be mundane or conventional. If it is not original it is not creative. (Runco, Jaeger, 2012). Going by this two-part definition, originality alone is not enough for something to be considered creative. Something that is only original can be completely useless, unique only by virtue of being random or unpredictable. Something must also be considered useful, effective or valuable within a certain context to be considered truly creative. "Originality is vital, but must be balanced with fit and appropriateness" (Runco, Jaeger, p.92, 2012).

Theoretical Physicist David Bohm provides us with a less rigid definition of creativity in his book *On Creativity* (1998). "Creativity in my view is something impossible to define by words" (Bohm, p.1,1998). Just by recognizing that creativity cannot be classified into two identifiers, Bohm has separated himself from the viewpoint of Runco and Jaeger. In *What Do We Know About Creativity?* Professor Jose Gomez of The University of Alabama gives us many lenses through which to view and contextualize creativity. He believes that context is very important in one's assessment of creativity. In education, "creativity is demonstrated by innovation, while in music it could manifest in the form of composition or structure." While these two forms of creativity do overlap greatly, we still contextualize them according to the field they are operating in and make judgments of importance or

validity based on the particular field” (Gomez, p.31, 2007). Later in the article, he points out that creativity is essential for human development and progression and that any evolution or process can be considered a creative step from wherever it first originated.

When we think of creativity as an individual action, we fail to acknowledge the social learning processes and standardizations that influence our creative decisions. Durkheim argued that societal values and standards are “agreed” upon and carried out by people in a society. For example, a standardized college education was not always something so deeply woven into the fabric of the typical American’s understanding of education and capital value. However, over many years, it has been agreed upon by this society that going to college will make one more successful; therefore, people have now embraced the idea that attending college is a very good thing to do.

Collective consciousness is a process that drives humans in a society and allows them to feel part of something bigger than themselves. It is the very process by which we collectively agree. This process can be seen across many different mediums including religion, spirituality, morals and any other field of shared human endeavor. These societal rules and standards were not born in nature or created by some dictator. They are the product of hundreds of years of human sculpting and repetition. While the production of culture process taking place in art worlds is quite different from the evolution of society-wide values and standards in American education, we can still make the claim that standards (what has come to be considered “common sense”) exist in every field of human endeavor and they come about through shared agreement over many years. Granted, Durkheim’s theory was about the entire society and the processes at work in the art worlds of music production involve a very small segment of society; but the general idea still applies: people

create standards and buy into shared beliefs that help their group to thrive ... whether that group is one of Becker's relatively small art worlds or Durkheim's entire society.

In view of these ideas of shared agreement and standards, it is reasonable to assume that the art already existing within an art world must have been legitimized by the gatekeepers of that art world at some point in time. However, with the rise of the Internet, gatekeepers are less important than ever. A piece of art can hit the mainstream without endorsement from someone who is powerful within their art world. The act of "gate keeping" is now accomplished through the perception of that particular piece of art on the Internet. This is not just a question of how many people like or dislike a piece of art; it is more a question of how perception is shaped by the many influential voices heard on the Internet. For example, when an artist comes out with an album that gets unanimously bad reviews on the Internet, this completely shapes the narrative and perception of that album going forward – even if those reviews are coming from a specific demographic that is not representative of the wider audience of the artist. Even with the rise of the Internet, there are still people whose opinions matter a great deal and inform what comes to be accepted and successful. Becker had this to say about those who decide what constitutes "art": "Our analysis of the institutional theory adds some nuances to the description of art worlds. We see that art world officials have the power to legitimate work as art, but that power is often disputed. As a result, the aestheticians desire for definitive criteria by which to distinguish art from non-art, criteria congruent with the actions of the art world officials, cannot be satisfied" (Becker, p.163, 1982). Put simply, this means that there are so many voices able to speak up and be heard for what they consider to be legitimate art that it is no longer possible these days for just a few individuals to monopolize that influential power. Art

worlds involve many people engaged in many activities. These activities are informed by established standards that have evolved over many years.

In this section, I have seen how Becker's theory of art worlds and the collective actions their members engage in is quite similar to Durkheim's theory of collective consciousness, though the former is aimed at the very particular group of people creating art while the latter encompasses the whole of society. In the following section, I have explored the importance of context. In particular, I have seen how the work of Sutherland sheds light on the centrality of context in our perception and understanding of music.

Context

Context is crucial in music. What people might consider desirable in one context they might find inappropriate in another. According to Sutherland (2007), a musicologist operating within a sociological paradigm, music is an activity, not a physical thing. He goes on to argue that music is essentially meaningless in and of itself; it only acquires the meaning that people ascribe to it. He refers to Nicholas Cook, a musicologist who saw music as both a process and a product, in the following quotation: "Using ideas from theater studies, Cook moved from philology-focused musicology to performance-focused musicology by advocating the consideration of the score as script, effectively involving music's social context; the score is only one part of the overall event and is joined by the sonic world it appropriates and the social context in which it is performed" (Sutherland, p.12, 2007). Sutherland is elaborating here on the idea that music is relatively meaningless in and of itself, that music can only take on meaning in conjunction with the audience that is listening to it.

Philology refers to structure and composition while performance refers to physical performances such as singing, dancing or playing an instrument. The idea of context can be applied to producers that make beats in hopes of an artist's using them. The beat created by the producer will gain way more societal value once an artist decides to put lyrics to it. There are even specific differences in how producers operate across different genres. Hip-hop and R&B producers, for the most part, are not releasing their music under their own names. They are making instrumentals as “canvases” for an artist. These instrumentals will usually be fairly simplistic and repetitive, giving the artist a great deal of “room” to maneuver in a number of different directions. However, in electronic music, it is much more common for producers to release songs under their own names without an artist's lyrical addition. Electronic production has far more intricate details and layers. Here, the instrumental is not a canvas for lyrics but is thought of as a song on its own. This means that producers can get as inventive as they want with drums, melodies and transitions without worrying about how artists will fit their part of the creation into the overall composition. The intentions of these two production styles are very different and Becker’s idea of collective action allows us to understand these distinctions. I am able to see the way context plays a significant role in the choices artists and producers make while creating music. The context that informs the creative process of making a new piece of music, which can be seen as collective action, is always at work. Without context, one would be ignoring the wider environment that contributes to the shaping of music.

In the previous section, I have seen how the power of collective action is always at work in the creation of new music; in a way, collective action can be viewed as the newest context in an ongoing process. Production of culture never stops. Old standards get refined or new

ones evolve to a point where they are accepted as fixed or established. In the following section, I have shown how Becker's theory of art worlds is applicable to music production. I recognize that particular people doing their jobs within these art worlds are all united and influenced by collective action, no matter how independent or reclusive they seem to be.

Art Worlds

Art worlds are made up of social structures, actors and ideas within particular fields of art. A producer who just started making music two months ago would never expect to be hired to work on a motion picture soundtrack. Producers must climb the ladder of experience and gradually become more integrated into producer art worlds before that kind of success can be achieved. Studying art worlds, especially from the perspective of Howard Becker, who is not only a sociologist, but also a musician and an artist, can help us better understand why certain processes are constant across genres and styles. He points out that "conventions known to all well socialized members of a society make possible some of the most basic and important forms of cooperation characteristic of an art world. Most important, they allow people who have little or no formal acquaintance with or training in the art to participate as audience members – to listen to music, read books, attend films or plays, and get something from them" (Becker, p.46, 1982). As an example of how standards are formed and agreed upon over time, consider this: it is common practice when mixing a song to take some of the lower frequencies out of instruments like guitars, pianos or horns in order to leave room in the low-frequency range for the bass element. This allows the tonal frequency balance of the song to be more pleasant and avoids frequency overlap in that low end. Frequency overlap and clashing can cause "muddiness" and take away from the clarity of the song. This practice was developed by musicians over many years, agreed upon, and

implemented as standard procedure. It was not a rule suddenly put into place one day. Now, anyone who is “well socialized” in music, as Becker calls it, is accustomed to hearing tonal balance and so would perceive it as unpleasant if the bass frequencies were clashing with the frequencies of other instruments.

In the same way that audience members have adopted conventions and derive meaning from them, producers and musicians must interact with the conventions of their particular field as well. This is an example of the way that normative practices and techniques are formed in art worlds, or in any world for that matter. “Rules” like these also help identify when somebody isn't very integrated into a particular art world. If the tonal frequency balance of producers' beats are very off and therefore unpleasant – unless they are going for some kind of experimental effect – it is safe to assume that these producers haven't become integrated enough into that art world to perform this task; they are simply not yet capable of meeting the “industry standard.” The particular technique or ideology is strengthened each time it is agreed upon or carried out until we find ourselves with a system that is so embedded into our understanding of that art world that we consider it natural. Again, this perspective of art worlds allows us to look at what has become acceptable and even trendy in all fields, however different those fields may seem to be from one another; in addition, it allows us to see connections between them on a macro-societal level (Becker, 1982).

This idea of the larger structures within which people operate is central to Becker's theory. There is a great deal of literature about these systems, but there is relatively little about the people whose collective activities actually create them. Becker puts it this way: “Much sociological writing speaks of organizations or systems without reference to the people whose collective actions constitute the organization or system. Much of the literature on art as a

social product does the same, demonstrating correlations or congruencies without reference to the collective activities by which they came about, or speaking of social structures without reference to the actions of people doing things together which create those structures” (Becker, p.767, 1974). The above quotation exemplifies the focus of my project. My intention is not so much to define art worlds within which music producers operate, as it is to look at the actual processes, decisions and standards that allow these art worlds to function in such a unified yet “creative” way.

Because of the prevailing societal notion that creativity is an individual feat, many people fail to consider how many different players and actions participate in the creation of a particular piece of art (Becker, 1982). When Drake releases a Billboard Number 1 hit, the public immediately praises him for his vocal contribution to the song. While Drake’s creativity is certainly one of the most important factors in making the song what it is, we rarely look at art creation from a social or collective standpoint. Perhaps we might acknowledge the contribution of the individual who produced the Drake record, but rarely are the many other people that contributed to the song even mentioned, i.e.: songwriters, engineers, session players, managers, other artists, and many more. The recording studio is an example of a relatively small art world at work. The artist will be the center of attention. Everyone from the producer to the studio owner to the intern who goes to the store to buy blunt wraps and snacks for the artists knows their place within this particular art world. This doesn't mean that, in a different context, they couldn't play another role; it simply means that the power structure in the studio is something that evolved over time, is a product of repetition, and is now fixed in place, just like any other social development. In addition, and perhaps

most important: everyone involved has bought into the idea that their shared work has the greatest potential when the studio is run in this way (Becker, 1982).

Becker defines different types of artists in relation to their ties to art worlds. The first type of artist described by Becker is the integrated professional. This is somebody who follows all the conventions of the art world and never surprises anyone; the artist or art is acting in exact accordance with the conventions of that particular context. Background music at a restaurant is a great example; it is simply there, doing exactly what it is supposed to be doing. The intention is not to evoke strong feeling but simply to exist and serve the most basic purpose. The next type of artist described by Becker, one I mentioned earlier while discussing Jpeg Mafia, is the maverick. A maverick is somebody who, at one point, operated within the confines of an established art world, adhering to all its standards and norms, but, somewhere along the line of their own artistic development, became fed up with the limitations of this kind of work and made the decision to start operating outside those confines. They still maintain a connection to art worlds but refuse to let it dominate their practice. This can make it difficult for the maverick to make it into spaces run by integrated professionals.

Both the integrated professional and the maverick are clearly influenced by their respective art worlds. Although their differences put these two types of artists at opposite ends of a spectrum, they both operate within the overarching culture articulated in Becker's theory.

In this section, I have seen some of the specific ways in which Becker's ideas manifest in art worlds. I recognize that even the audience members of art are part of an art world. I see that, because people become what Becker terms "well-socialized" in music, they perceive sounds as "pleasant" or "unpleasant" based on that socialization. I have also discussed how the actions of people working together create structures that contribute to

establishing normative practices and techniques. In the following section, I have presented the methods I used to analyze content such as lectures, podcasts, and interviews in order to find consistencies which I have then applied Becker's theory of art worlds. By studying the stories and habits of successful producers, I show how Becker's ideas manifest in the digital age of music production. In particular, I show how collective action informs all aspects of music production.

Methodology

For this project, I conducted a content analysis of online media dealing with music producers and finding examples of how trends and norms inform decisions and standards in the field. Content analysis is the best way to study music production in 2020 because the music producer community and everything that strings it together is predominantly content based. Although the particular lectures, podcasts, interviews, and informational videos that I analyzed seem to be quite disparate, their content ties them together. This holds true for almost anything that lives primarily online. I analyzed content from many different sources, including interviews from Recode and Producergrind; lectures from Ted X and Oxford; and podcasts from Ocean and Illmind. I have chosen these particular sources because they show different vantage points of Becker's ideas in action. I have studied the specifics of producers' rise to success and the ways they became integrated into their respective art worlds. I have also explored how modern-day music producers make decisions and how they operate, generally, in this relatively new digital marketplace. These forms of producer-specific content have allowed me to draw parallels and conclusions about music producer

art worlds that they describe. I have found consistencies in the stories and habits of these successful producers and applied them to Becker's theory of collective action.

One potential drawback of a content analysis approach could be that, by not doing my own interviews for this study, I might be missing out on crucial first-hand information. Although I have analyzed many professionally conducted interviews of producers, engineers, and executives, I have not conducted any interviews myself. My research here is limited to those producers and artists whose work is already accessible. Another potential drawback of this approach is that anyone who has participated in a professionally conducted interview, or has any piece of online content, will most likely be someone who already has built something of a name for themselves. Ironically, this means that I will be leaving out the demographic of all the people out there like me -- relative beginners who are making music and hope to one day be integrated into music production art worlds, but aren't quite there yet. This shouldn't be too much of a drawback, however, because this demographic isn't really influencing overall music production art worlds in the same way that people who have already "made it" are; newcomers have not yet formally participated in music production art worlds and so do not affect it much.

My information came primarily from interviews and podcasts covering a wide range of issues that come up for artists and producers during the creative process. These include the difficult and often-changing line between making money and maintaining artistic integrity, copyright infringement concerns, adherence to trends, and striking a balance between collaboration and autonomy. With the emergence of the Internet, new opportunities became available for people to build their own platforms and rely far less on formal institutions like record labels. Because today's artists don't need these institutions as much as they once did,

the record labels have no choice but to become more flexible with artists and their needs. All of this has an impact on the development of musical communities and is reflected in the new and innovative ways musicians and producers are managing their careers. Studying things like interviews, trends and technology has allowed me to gain a better understanding of how, specifically, all of these things play into the ever-changing standards, practices and unwritten rules of music production art worlds.

I looked for similarities in the things that music producers say and do and interpreted them using Becker's art worlds paradigm. For example, once a music producer has their song featured on a major album, the public, in general, and their fellow members of the music community, in particular, will perceive them in a whole new light. This is a significant form of validation because it is clear to everyone that a successful artist liked the producer's song enough to want to record vocals on top of it. This is also one of the primary ways that producers fully integrate into this art world. My information came not just from interviews, but also from simply observing how people become accepted and successful in music worlds. For example: imagine that a producer nobody has ever really heard of suddenly scores a hit record with an artist from his city. Now, we start to see their name pop up everywhere, from blogs and publications, to the production credits of huge albums. I used many different forms of media to my advantage in looking for particular examples that illustrate connections between the established art worlds of music producers and Becker's idea of collective action.

In my research, I looked for consistencies across people or genres that exemplify the power of collective action. My main goal is to provide a better understanding of how Becker's theory of art worlds manifests in music creation and production, how music

production as a whole is informed by this powerful but not-so-obvious reality. I looked at music producers that have been integrated into music production art worlds because, as I mentioned earlier, these are the producers that already have some form of media content to be analyzed. This does leave out up and coming producers and those who have not yet been established; however, as I suggested before, there is not much of a drawback because their integration within the music world is too incomplete to yield any measurable connection between their work and the wider art world/collective consciousness forces shaping music production.

One potential obstacle in my research is that I am a music producer myself; therefore, it's impossible for me to be truly objective. I am already integrated into this art world to a certain extent (though not yet professionally) and so I might have elected to pass on certain things that came up in my research because I considered them too obvious to include. However, I tried to remain objective and keep in mind that the person reading my paper will probably not be a music producer and so might not be aware of things that are basic knowledge to those in the field. Another potential obstacle in my research is that there isn't much written specifically about collective action as it relates to modern music creation and so I had to draw from areas outside of music to explain my findings; however, this isn't necessarily a bad thing -- as Becker said, viewed through a collective action paradigm, we begin to see similarities among many apparently different fields. Still, more literature on music and sociology as they relate to collective action would certainly have been helpful to me with this project.

In the previous section, I have given my rationale for the sources I have chosen to analyze. With the emergence of the Internet, new opportunities became available for people

to build their own platforms. By studying producers and artists who have already “made it,” who have already been integrated into music production art worlds, I had at my disposal access to a wealth of media content to analyze. By studying online media, trends and technology that focus on music, I now understand, specifically, how these facets of art worlds contribute to creating the ever-changing standards, practices and unwritten rules of music production. In other words, I have gained a better understanding of how collective action is always at work in the production of music. The following section, Data Analysis & Findings, is broken up into several subsections, the first of which is entitled, New Technology and DIY Music. In this subsection, I show that producers like Diplo and Dave Cobb confirm everything I have been saying about the impact collective action has on music production, even though some of today’s tools for producing music are far different from the ones used back when Becker first brought out his theory.

Data Analysis & Findings

New Technology and DIY Music

In an interview with CBS, superstar electronic music producer Diplo had several insightful things to say about his integration into music producer art worlds and about the music production landscape as a whole. When asked to describe the electronic dance music world to somebody who isn't familiar with it, he said, “Any kid can just grab a laptop and make music; it’s kind of like when garage music was happening in the 60s: it’s accessible for any young kid in America” (CBS, 2015). This highlights the major technological and cultural shifts in making music that have taken root in the modern age. Diplo went on to say

that he can't really play traditional instruments; however, his knowledge of melody, rhythm, sequencing and arrangement, along with all the technology he has at his disposal, allows him to create a full song without needing to rely on other musicians. This do-it-yourself approach to producing music is exemplified everywhere in music production worlds of today. Producers have an independence and power that was never possible before. They rely on different institutions today than they did in the 80's and 90's. At that time, producers needed big studios, expensive gear and approval from gatekeepers. Today, most modern producers rely more on software companies that create the sounds they use, as well as the Internet and social media in order to have their content reach as many people as possible.

When asked about his working relationship with a huge star like Justin Bieber or Madonna, Diplo said, "As I get further in my career, I think I have more leverage with these artists. They have a lot of respect for me; they know my history. When I started out, it was busy work, whatever I could do to get my foot in the door as a producer" (CBS 2015). This exemplifies the integration process in which producers engage as they become more and more part of music art worlds. Based on one's accolades and experience, as well as talent, a producer is "taken seriously" by colleagues, artists and collaborators. Diplo goes on to say that, when he first started out, he knew maybe three people that made a living being a DJ. Today, there are thousands of DJs making a living off of their music as a result of how art worlds have changed since then, especially because of the advent of new technologies and new ways to distribute and market content.

Oak Felder is a songwriter and producer who has worked with huge artists from Nicki Minaj to Alicia Keys. In a video by Recode titled Oak Felder's Guide to Producing a Viral Song, he mentions how art is often fueled by life, by the things that actually happen to us.

He goes on to say that “technology bridges the gap between life and music” (Recode, 2018). The technology we use today in music production is considered standard; it is just as much a part of the collective consciousness of music making now as an individual on guitar used to be. Music producers understand this. The technology has become such a big part of how we make music these days that we consider it normal, just as we consider the musical key notation normal. Producers must operate within the institutions of this new technology to be able to compete in today’s music production landscape. In a recent radio interview, successful rock producer Dave Cobb touched on the importance of being part of “a scene” and of a network of musicians. “I find out about new artists from other artists I’m working with; I think having a scene is so important” (NPR, 2018). Although Dave’s role in production has nothing to do with the instrumentation of these songs, he has established himself as somebody who can create a “vibe,” someone who can get different people together in a studio to foster an environment conducive to creativity. Cobb clearly believes that it is very important to have a network of people coming together in order to create something great. He says that the most important thing is community: “There is strength in numbers” (NPR, 2018). Cobb recognizes that music production happens best when it is based on a culmination of people and networks, not just on the mind of one individual. When asked about the Internet, he says that even somebody from a small town with no opportunity can use it to get themselves heard all around the world. As I have shown, many artists agree that this kind of opportunity was never possible before these new technologies completely changed the landscape of music creation; the way information spreads today has had a radical impact on culture in general and on music art worlds in particular.

In his new YouTube podcast, Ocean discusses with Matty Beats how they, as online music producers, are viewed in this new online context. Matty is known as someone who makes unique videos of himself creating beats; he is extremely animated and energetic in them. This has allowed him to become well known within both the producer and the artist communities. He says that the popularity of his videos establishes a personal brand that enables him to reach out to artists and to be taken seriously. Any artist can see Matty's value just from looking at his Instagram page. In the current online music production landscape, there are thousands of faceless producers making Drake "type beats." While these type beats can get many views, they don't do much in the way of building up the personal brand of the producer who made them. Matty was able to legitimize himself in music production art worlds by putting a face to his name through his online content.

Later in the podcast, Matty and Ocean discuss the overall music production community and how it has changed since the early 2000's. Matty points out that everything one could possibly need to know regarding music production can be looked up today on YouTube. This has created an ecosystem of online content that was never available before. Producers coming up now experience growth and integration in ways quite different from those who came up before this huge wave of online content was available. Not only has this shift affected the ways music producers learn and interact with content, but it has also created a new route for more experienced music producers to make a name for themselves via tutorials and how-to videos. Today, with more people trying to make music than ever before, the demand on informational music production content is becoming more and more popular. This online web of content has now cemented itself as a significant part of the collective action at work in the music producer community.

On Grammy-winning-producer Illmind’s Blapchat podcast, he interviews Murda Beatz about his rise to success. Like Matty Beats, Murda recognizes how much the music producer community has grown in the last five to ten years. He says that, in 2013, there were about 100,000 people pursuing beat making as a career. In 2020, that number has increased to about 10 million. This has everything to do with the new online web of content producers have at their disposal. Through this online producer content, more and more people are realizing that a laptop and some software are enough to make good music. This gives everyone an opportunity to create, but it also means that, inevitably, there will be more relatively low-quality music out there; it will therefore be harder for a producer to break through the saturation of the market and make a living off of producing. Murda, like Matty, recognizes the importance of differentiating yourself from what most producers are doing. “When I first started, every producer had a graphic with their producer name as their thumbnail on YouTube. I started posting what I looked like because I knew it was different and would help put a face to the name” (Blapchat, 2020). In the past, it was innovative to have a cool cartoon as the thumbnail for a beat; now this has become such a norm that producers must find alternative ways to differentiate themselves.

In an Oxford University lecture, Diplo, the producer I quoted earlier, talks about how beneficial it is for producers to have access to this online database of information and content. People who have grown up with the Internet cannot imagine what it was like before. “Any kid can go on YouTube and look up a style they like and get good at it. I had to physically go to Brazil to learn about the music they were making there. We have access to everything now” (Oxford, 2018). This easy access to music and information has

completely changed how producers go about learning and making music, effectively changing the collective actions normally associated with music production art worlds.

In a conversation between legendary producers Pharrell and Rick Rubin, Pharrell discusses the relative importance between the collective and the individual in music: “We are not responsible for our success; millions of people are” (GQ, 2019). Pharrell goes on to say that some producers have big egos based on how many records they’ve sold or how successful they are; however, they fail to understand that this success is a collective action involving the participation of many different people.

In the previous section, I presented several artists and producers, each one articulating their particular perspective on their work and what is required to do what they do. In spite of their different positions in their respective art worlds, I clearly see an interrelatedness, a collaboration going on, though so indirect at times that it is not easily apparent. In the next subsection, I focus on copyright infringement issues and show how difficult it can be to determine the definite point where creativity ends and copying someone else’s work begins. This area is one in which the idea of collective consciousness fits nicely with Becker’s idea of collective action. Nowadays, with everything so accessible online, it has become much more common to appropriate the work of others; however, this doesn’t necessarily make it right.

Copyright Infringement Issues

In this section, I examine how disagreements over ownership sometimes come into play in the world of music. Although collective action involves a lot more than just making music, when people argue over a song’s originality or ownership they are, in a small way,

exemplifying the idea that nothing is really original. People don't always agree about which parts of the wider culture belong to everyone and which do not. Although most artists and producers would certainly agree that we are all influenced by the collective consciousness of the entire society, they would not all agree on the precise point at which that "influence" would more properly be called "theft" in the more particular domain of music art worlds. In the interview just mentioned above, Pharrell and Rubin discuss the infamous court case in which Pharrell's song, Blurred Lines, was found to have violated copyright infringement laws. Although many artists and producers acknowledge that musical styles are available for anyone to tap into, these court cases clearly show that disagreements sometimes occur over exactly where to draw the line between what is individual creativity and what is plagiarism. Unfortunately, even when producers and artists have the best of intentions and believe they are creating original material, they sometimes run into trouble.

In the case mentioned above, the court decided that Pharrell's Blurred Lines was far too similar to Marvin Gaye's song, Got to Give it Up. The ruling stated that Blurred Lines copied certain musical elements from Gaye's song, but what made the lawsuit really infamous was that Blurred Lines does not share similar lyrics, music (notes and chords) or arrangement. What the songs do have in common is a "feeling," mostly their tempo and rhythm. The fact that the court agreed this was copyright infringement has major implications for our definition of a song, or what can be deemed as copyrightable within music. If a "feeling" can be copyrighted, then, as Pharrell points out, every artist that made a Motown-style song or even something resembling reggaeton (after these styles were first introduced) can be sued for copyright infringement. This puts artists in a very fearful and compromised state. "Everything is inspired," Rick Rubin points out (GQ, 2019). He goes on

to say that all great art comes from a place of inspiration, from a culmination of people, ideas and experiences. This process can't just come from the mind of one person; it comes from many other influential factors (GQ, 2019). It's clear that Rick Rubin would agree with the idea that collective action takes place within every art world, and it is this expansive collaboration that is behind the production of any and all music.

In another big conflict over who “owns” what, Lana Del Rey and Radiohead battled over similarities between her song, “Get Free,” and their 1993 hit, “Creep.” Del Rey said that Radiohead had demanded one hundred percent of the publishing revenues from the song. She added that, while her song “wasn’t inspired by Creep,” she had offered up to forty percent of the publishing to settle the matter. Radiohead’s publisher, Warner/Chappell Music, responded: “It’s clear that the verses of ‘Get Free’ use musical elements found in the verses of ‘Creep’ and we’ve requested that this be acknowledged in favor of all writers of Creep” (Aswad, 2018).

A settlement was eventually reached between these two litigants, which is typically what occurs in these disputes. What these court cases show is that creativity is a very fluid thing and not limited to one time and place. Although the parameters of collective consciousness at work in the collective action of art worlds are far wider than any single copyright infringement case, I now see the difficulty of finding a definite point where creativity ends and copying someone else’s work begins.

Today’s technology allows everyone’s work to be more accessible than ever before, but plagiarism is still plagiarism. People are always being influenced by the music they hear. The almost unlimited accessibility today is an accepted reality and producers and artists all benefit. However, sometimes, when people feel that a line has been crossed, musicologists

are called in to decide what is truly original and what is copied. Two songs may sound similar to the untrained ear, but a musicologist can sometimes show that the few places of similarity are really quite insignificant when one considers the songs in their entirety, and so the new song, though similar to the older one, can go forward without litigation. The idea of collective consciousness, the feeling of solidarity that evolves among people and that helps them to be more productive is an ever-present reality, affecting people in art worlds engaged in collective action no less than it affects those in the wider society. Unfortunately, how much of one's work is wholly original and how much arises from what's in the "collective air" can no more be pinned down than artists can pin down the exact moments that inspired their art.

In the previous section, I have shown how artists and producers of music sometimes get into trouble when their work sounds too similar to the work of someone else. The point at which individuality ends and collaboration begins is difficult to calculate and just because people belong to the same art worlds, engaged in collective action, does not entitle them to steal each other's work. Collective action doesn't mean that everything created within music art worlds becomes collective property. In the next section, I explore the balancing act artists must perform between their desire to make money and their desire to remain true to their artistic vision.

The Relationship Between Success and Making Art

There is always a bit of a conflict between remaining true to your vision as an artist and craving popularity and/or financial success. But these two extremes are not mutually exclusive. Our society requires us to care, at least somewhat, about making money; at the same time, those who have made it big have not necessarily completely lost their integrity.

There are plenty of people out there who become popular without “selling out” at all. All artists and producers must find their own balance between their need for money and their desire to remain true to their art. In that sense, they’re no different from anyone else who finds they have to sometimes sacrifice a little bit of their idealism to succeed. What follows are just a couple examples of producers who have managed to find the right balance for themselves.

In a recent lecture (TEDx, 2018), DJ/ Producer Julian Jordan speaks about the importance of artists being aware of their brand at all times, that they can’t just do anything they want. At one point, he says, “I can’t just do crazy things every day and post whatever I want; this will affect my brand” (TEDx, 2018). Musicians working in today’s digital spaces have to be very conscientious about how what they are doing or saying is coming across on a macro-societal level. This awareness and caution will allow them to please as many people as possible, which, in turn, makes them more popular and brings them more money.

In an episode of the Producergrind podcast, popular music producer and entrepreneur Kato speaks about how saturated the online beat-selling market is and how he knew he could never become successful if he merely followed the crowd. He quotes Warren Buffett as a way of explaining what he, Kato, wants to do in music. Buffet said he “prefers to invest in things that have no competition” (Producergrind, 2018). Kato puts this in a modern music production context by saying that, since everybody is going the route of trying to sell beats online, it might be economically smart to differentiate yourself in a way that is unique to you or, at least, leaves you with less competition. He believes this is the way to maximize your chances of gaining status within the community and becoming financially successful. While I’m sure he would also agree with the counter argument of “doing what works,”

(following what's already popular) Kato seems to be focused more on longevity within art worlds than on quick money or fame.

In an interview on CBS with Drake, one of the biggest music stars of the modern era, he is asked what success means to him and why he strives to be so successful. He replies that he has given up so much time working on his craft that this has forced him to sacrifice relationships and have almost no personal life. Because of this, he feels that he has to “push this thing as far as it can go” (CBS, 2013). He has given up so much for his work, that he feels an obligation to be as successful as he possibly can be. Hip hop has always been a competitive genre and it is not uncommon for an artist to aspire for the top spot. However, Drake seems to be more interested in holding the top spot from a commercial standpoint rather than being considered the most lyrical rapper or best songwriter. To do this, he has successfully branded himself in such a way that everything he does is consumed on a global scale. His record sales are miles ahead of any other modern-day hip hop artist and his name is perhaps the most recognizable, as well.

Artists who have achieved any degree of mainstream success influence the collective actions of everyone making new music. Often, new artists and producers are not even aware of this influence; but, sometimes, they are, and they utilize it quite intentionally. Producers who are looking to make money often try to create what are called “type beats,” instrumentals that are styled after popular artists and/or sounds. Type beats have become so accepted by the various music worlds within hip hop, that, sometimes, the artist who inspired one will actually find an iteration of it online and create a song with it. A\$AP Rocky, in an interview on Hot 97, acknowledged that he has done this before: “I typed in ‘A\$AP Rocky-type beat,’ and Fine Wine (which later appeared on his 2015 album

AT.LONG.LAST.A\$AP) was what I found. It wasn't named that at the time ... we went into the studio, added some drums and there you have it" (Hot 97, 2018).

Some artists and producers, however, don't like this trend; they feel it is unoriginal, boring, and results in a watering down of the craft. Alex Tumay, a very successful mixing engineer, voiced his opposition when he tweeted, "Making music is more accessible than ever; any sound is available with a keystroke, and people still choose to make type beats. In a recent publication, Illmind, a Grammy-winning producer, also voiced concern when he said, "What this does, is open you up to the kind of artists who are looking for Drake-type beats rather than doing something original." He says this kind of imitation promotes a "cheapened transactional nature of the craft, which homogenizes sound and holds producers with mainstream ambitions back" (Genius, 2017).

There are many different points at which artists and producers draw the line between making money and remaining true to their vision. Some people are completely in this business for the money and some are so focused on their art that money seems to be a distant consideration. And then there are people at every conceivable point between these two extremes. Most people, including every single artist and producer I studied for this project, are part of that in-between group: they never forget completely about money, but, at the same time, they are not willing to completely compromise their artistic integrity either. They are simply doing their best to achieve some kind of balance in a very competitive business. In addition, they are always part of a larger group engaged in collective action. Because of this ever-present reality, they can never enjoy complete autonomy; they must, instead, find a way to work harmoniously with the other actors and institutions who, collectively, produce music.

In the previous section, I showed that artists and producers who wish to become successful within an art world need to be aware how every single thing they do will appear on a macro-societal level. Julian Jordan spoke of the importance of one's brand and Drake explained how he drives himself relentlessly to justify all the sacrifices he has made working on his craft. Money is not everything, but neither can it be completely ignored by those who produce music. In the final section, Conclusions, I reflect on the entire journey of this paper. Howard Becker's idea of collective action has been the primary thing driving *me*, and it was gratifying to find how well his theory of collective action finds expression in the many art worlds of music production today.

Conclusions

In the past, before the digital age, there was usually a separate person for each part of the production process; each one had a specialized task. Nowadays, more than ever before, producers are doing their own advertising, graphic design, audio mixing, and public relations. I think the role of the producer will continue to expand in this way and allow/require them to wear even more hats.

When I first started working on this paper, I did not fully grasp how all-encompassing the production of culture theory actually is. Just as I learned that the hippie movement was born out of the seemingly unrelated conservative values of that era, I now see that the practices of modern producers are a reaction to the values and standards of producers of a previous generation. As a producer and a student of sociology, it is my hope that this paper will add to the understanding of how production of culture theory functions within contemporary YouTube and Internet producer art worlds. My application of this theory, as well as

Becker's theory of art worlds in this context, can allow all members of music production art worlds to function in a way that benefits the collective action in which they are engaged. I envision my work contributing to a better understanding of production of culture theory as it pertains to music production in the digital age.

I firmly believe that a sociological analysis of modern Internet producer communities (who have recently seen rapid growth) will enable academia and the general public to view these art worlds through a different perspective, one they might find enlightening. My work could also add legitimacy to the newer music production art worlds discussed throughout this paper that are still not taken very seriously by the more fully established ones, in existence for decades. Now, more than ever, producers are embracing collaboration on all fronts; they are more cognizant of the collaborative nature of the institutions within which they are working. The theories discussed in my project will support the evolution of music producers because they stress the necessity of a collective approach to making art. Of course, this means much more than physical collaboration between artists; it also means the influences of the institutions, standards, and practices that contribute to that collaboration. The framework through which I have analyzed music production art worlds allows for a more collective understanding of the production of music, one that recognizes the myriad workings of art worlds that are often overlooked.

Future sociologists should focus more on the great majority of artists and producers (like me) who have not yet made their mark in any established art world. By conducting interviews and doing surveys, perhaps the perspective of those people outside the gates can yield a less privileged point of view of these well-established art worlds. I'm confident that the ideas of these artists and producers will provide a more realistic picture of how art

worlds are perceived instead of relying solely on those who have already attained success within them.

Howard Becker argued that the “conventions known to all well-socialized members of a society make possible some of the most basic and important forms of cooperation characteristic of an art world.” (Becker, p.46, 1982). Although Becker’s writings focus on art in general, I have shown how his ideas certainly apply to the art worlds responsible for music production as well. I have explored how trends and norms in music influence decisions and standards made in that field. I have shown how collective action influences music producers and artists. I have come to understand how certain systems must be in operation for producers to carry out the tasks they need to do, and I have shown how producers work within these systems to deal with shifting trends and standardizations in music production art worlds.

Becker’s theory of collective action is very much alive in music production today. So many different voices, all of them from music art worlds, echo his ideas: Sutherland, the musicologist, said music is essentially meaningless in and of itself, that it acquires only that meaning which people ascribe to it. Jpeg Mafia, the rap artist known for breaking conventions, has been embraced by art worlds that share his distaste for the mainstream. Matty Beats, the producer, saw the popularity of his unique videos establish a personal brand for him, one that solidified his place in an art world and enabled him to reach out to artists and be taken seriously. Rock producer Dave Cobb believes strongly in the importance of being part of “a scene” and of a network of musicians. “There is strength in numbers,” he said. Pharrell, who is both an artist and a producer, spoke of the relationship between the group and the individual in music production: “We are not responsible for our success;

millions of people are,” he said.” Legendary producer Rick Rubin declared that all great art comes from a place of inspiration, from a culmination of people, ideas and experiences, and that this process cannot just come from the mind of one person; it comes from many other influential factors.

Every one of these people is part of a music art world and every one of them participates in collective action. Their surrounding environment influences all their choices and that environment includes both the present and the past; it is an environment that is sometimes visible to them and sometimes invisible, but it is always at work. It is an environment that includes what Durkheim called collective consciousness, but it is far more than that. Primarily, it is the particular art world environment, including all its institutions and entrenched systems, in which its members collaborate; each one contributing to the collective action that creates new music.

There’s an old expression: “there is nothing new under the sun.” It’s true. Although today’s artists and producers, like creative people throughout history, would like to *think* that the new music they bring into the world is completely their own doing and unlike anything that has come before, it is, in fact, shaped by the many people and subtle forces who, together, make their collective action possible. These forces inform everything they do. They comprise the soil from which all music, however seemingly innovative, must grow.

The people creating new music today belong to art worlds that allow them to have at their fingertips technology that was unimaginable just a few years ago. But, even with all these advances, every single one of them is still working within an art world, each one a unique culture that is continuously being shaped and then reshaped by what they do every day.

Culture continues to evolve and the artists and producers working within the art worlds of the current digital age are the newest drivers of that process. Becker's theory has been borne out by my research: art, including the production of music in the digital age, is a *collective* action. Artists and producers are highly creative people, but they are never working alone.

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