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**Jazz musicians and the structuring of the labour market  
in Paris and London\***

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# Working Paper

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**Abstract** — *This paper looks at the way in which collective norms about the material conditions of work form on the labour market for jazz musicians in London and Paris. It shows how norms around price proliferate widely, but argues they are also undermined by their 'internalisation' as individual guidelines rather than collective demands. It also considers how institutional context may affect these dynamics, looking at the role of the Intermittents du Spectacle social insurance system on the labour market experiences of French musicians. It concludes that the similarities are more profound than the differences.*

**Keywords:** Musicians, jazz, labour markets, freelancers, United Kingdom, France

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## **Jazz musicians and the structuring of the labour market in Paris and London**

### *Introduction*

There is increasing interest in the topic of creative work in employment studies and sociology (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Ekman, 2013; Lingo and Tepper, 2013; Townley et al, 2009). Questions which have attracted particular interest include the structuring of the labour market, dominated by project-based or 'portfolio' employment (Gill, 2002; Lindgren et al, 2004) in which social networks are central (Blair, 2001), as well as the nature of the 'creative workplace' itself with its inherent tensions between managerial control and artistic autonomy (Haunschild and Eikhof, 2009; Thompson et al, 2009). In this article I examine the connections between workplace and labour market, considering how the diversity of the former shapes the structure of the latter. Even in the most informalised settings, collective expectations may emerge to regulate freelance employment- either through informal norms or institutional frameworks (Antcliff et al, 2007). This study seeks to offer a more detailed picture of how this process works in creative jobs, where there are often profound tensions between artistic and material objectives in the motivations of individual workers themselves.

Referring to a qualitative data set comprising interviews with freelance jazz musicians in two cities, I seek to achieve this objective through an empirical and a conceptual contribution. Empirically, the article aims to present a nuanced depiction of the proliferating but fragile expectations that structure participants' labour markets. I will show that informal norms among musicians, in particular, can be remarkably widespread, but frequently have weak traction in practice and are continually under pressure. Conceptually, I develop the idea of 'internalisation' as a key dynamic in explaining this weakness. By this, I mean the way that ostensibly collective structuring mechanisms, such as widespread norms around engagement prices, are 'downgraded' to reference points for individuals when deciding which sources of work to pursue. They constitute one among many variables in a highly personalised decision-making process, enabling participants to make educated assumptions about anticipated remuneration when planning diverse portfolios. However, when it comes to actually regulating market prices for live music performance- either when establishing terms for particular engagements with employers or 'responsibilising' other musicians to uphold them- they have very limited strength. Hence although factors like labour market oversupply present obvious threats to conditions

in the creative sector (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009), I argue that the material remuneration on music jobs are also unravelled 'from below', as collectively-defined standards are made into guidelines rather than demands through their incorporation into the individual balancing acts of research participants.

Using a comparative approach I also consider how this dynamic is connected to institutional context. In the cases of both London and Paris, musicians' labour markets are variegated, with extremely casualised jobs existing alongside (relatively) regularised ones. The key distinction is that French jazz musicians have potential access to a social insurance regime which minimises the effects of work instability, and which also mandates minimum working conditions. I highlight differences resulting from these institutional variations, but argue that the similarities are more profound. In both cases, internalisation is a critical dynamic, undermining the potential for solidaristic institutions to regulate the labour market. The article proceeds firstly by reviewing key literature on creative sector employment, before discussing the different institutional settings encountered in the research. After a discussion of methods, the empirical data are presented. The article examines the consequences of the French *Intermittents du Spectacle* (IdS) system for the functioning of labour markets for freelance musicians. Finally, there is a concluding discussion in which the implications of the findings are discussed.

#### *Portfolios and 'pull factors' in creative work*

Portfolio careers are a key characteristic of creative sector employment. Many creative workers cannot rely on regularised jobs with ongoing employers, instead needing to construct sustainable careers from multiple, frequently one-off, engagements with diverse actors. The heterogeneity of portfolios should not be overstated. Pilmis (2007) shows how, as workers become established, they can move from 'periphery' to 'core' within scenes, narrowing down a stabler set of work sources. Creative workers themselves may display highly communitarian instincts, cultivating ongoing relationships with collaborators even in a highly transitory labour market (Coulson, 2012). These qualifications notwithstanding, project-based work is widespread, particularly in music, and with it comes a strong discourse of 'entrepreneurialism' (Storey et al, 2005), and ever-greater pressures to network (Blair, 2001).

As Lindgren et al (2014) show, portfolio careers can be highly ambivalent for workers. They must endure worry and uncertainty, but also experience the excitement of getting involved in creatively satisfying

projects. Creative workers therefore possess a particular, ambivalent freedom. They are 'liberated' from regularised relationships with employers, and have the 'opportunity' of a wide range of possible work sources which they can choose whether or not to pursue. This freedom goes hand-in-hand with poor remuneration and instability on many jobs, but it does enable workers to exercise agency over the kinds of employment settings they encounter. There are various relevant 'pull' factors which may shape their decisions in this regard.

Firstly, there are obvious issues of material concern: is a job well-remunerated? Is the employer or client trustworthy? Moreover, there are indirect material incentives: will a job lead to new contacts providing future opportunities? The latter is particularly important in creative work, given the value of personal networks in generating work engagements (Antcliff et al, 2007, Townley et al, 2009). But there are other factors to consider, which are of especially pronounced importance in creative work. For example, ideological factors may legitimise self-exploitation (Ross, 2008). There is the bohemian allure, particularly for young workers, of bypassing the grind of regularised work (McRobbie, 2002), in favour of 'cool jobs' (Neff et al, 2005) in the creative world. Then, there are other pull factors rooted in the qualitative nature of the labour process itself. Workers may prioritise engagements enabling them to develop collaborative relationships and shared projects over 'business' objectives (Coulson, 2012). Another important pull factor is the idea of autonomy at work: workers may prioritise jobs where they have more of it, even if there are better-paid ones available offering less (Umney and Kretsos, 2014).

Given the complexity of these competing pull factors, and how rarely they may align favourably on jobs, project-based creative careers may come to resemble a balancing act. Workers may seek to construct diverse portfolios incorporating both artistically and materially rewarding engagements (Umney and Kretsos, 2013). This balancing act is likely to be influenced by multiple considerations including the presence of family support networks and willingness to tolerate income instability, and hence it seems reasonable to argue that the process of constructing portfolios is highly individualised, dependent on many background contingencies. But the atomisation of the musicians' labour market should not be overstated. As noted, some writers (e.g. Coulson, 2012; Stebbins, 1968) have emphasised the communitarianism among musicians which counteracts individualising logic in the sector. Other studies show the continued importance of collective norms around

the conditions of work that may be maintained- however informally- among freelancers even in the most casualised labour markets (e.g. Antcliff et al, 2007). In what follows I explore further the tension between these individualising factors and the social regulation of creative labour markets.

#### *Work expectations and institutions in the creative sector*

Studies of creative workers suggest that they are often prone to fatalism about their material conditions of employment (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009). This may reflect various factors. One may simply be the recognition of a labour market skewed to the supply side. Another may be an influx of young people to creative professions, often considered more prone to exploitation and less union-friendly (Payne, 1989; Standing, 2011). Ekman (2013) suggests that the 'seductive fantasies' experienced by both workers and managers in creative work serve to obscure the division of material responsibilities on either side. Added to this are the pull factors discussed previously, providing qualitative dimensions to creative work that may lead workers to downgrade the relative priority of material conditions.

In this context it is difficult, but not impossible, to envision collectivised standards that can structure the expectations creative workers have about the material conditions of work. Trade unions representing creative workers may issue guidance on fees for particular kinds of job (Gregory, 1993). The Musicians' Union (MU) in Britain, for example, has recently launched initiatives including the 'Work Not Play' campaign and the 'Fair Play Guide', aiming to inform freelance musicians about the expectations they should have vis-à-vis working conditions and remuneration. Such tools depend on a particular kind of solidarity in which, rather than taking action in support of a collective contract agreed by representatives, workers are 'responsibilised'- in other words, asked to ingrain certain expectations into their own individual decisions about whether to accept a job offer and how stringently to negotiate. Given this, perhaps a more powerful mechanism than union guidelines is the 'moral economy' potentially emerging among creative workers (Banks, 2006). They may be spurred by counterparts to reject flagrantly exploitative working conditions and adhere to widespread informal norms over fees (Umney and Kretsos, 2014). The latter may well be common among freelancers, enabling them to challenge employers (Antcliff et al, 2007). However, they may also serve to pressurise workers into tolerating poor conditions (Rowlands and Handy, 2012).

So collective standards may help to structure material expectations in creative labour markets, though the preceding discussion necessitates caution about how much they can achieve. They may be undermined, for example, by the relative importance of other pull factors, and this is a process I explore in detail below. I will also consider a second question: how does the existence of a solidaristic institutional framework, providing at least the potential to mitigate precarity and, in principle, legally-mandating minimum terms of work, affect these issues? Arguably, there is a shortage of literature geared towards this question. Certainly, traditions like comparative political economy have, relatively recently, started to focus more on the co-constitutive relationship between national institutions and the normative ideas people have about the functioning of the economy (see Hauptmeier and Gordon, 2014). Writers such as Lewis and Smithson (2001) have drawn connections between national institutional frameworks and the sense of 'entitlement' among workers. We might speculate, therefore, that French jazz musicians may have different ideas around material conditions than their British counterparts. However, the case study presented below raises particular issues that may impact profoundly on the connection between institutions and expectations: these include the widespread importance of casualised, project-based labour markets, and the qualitative pull factors that are of heightened relevance on creative jobs. I will show how these qualities severely limit the capacity of institutional frameworks to profoundly alter the structuring of the labour market.

Hence in the following I show that the French institutional framework does have some important consequences for the structuring of the labour market, but that ultimately the similarities are more profound. I hope to bring out both the widespread proliferation but also the extreme fragility of material norms among musicians in both contexts. The process I term 'internalisation' - the way collective expectations are nullified as demands or responsibilities, and come to constitute reference points in the complex balancing act of constructing a portfolio career - means that collective norms are important, but more as a guideline than as a lever for protecting standards. Before continuing, I outline the institutional frameworks for musicians in Britain and France.

In both countries, there is a highly variegated labour market for musicians. In Britain, certain sectors including West End theatre or orchestral work tend to be organised under guideline contracts agreed between the MU and employers' organisations; comparable to those organised with unions like Equity and BECTU

representing other stage performers and technicians. For jazz musicians, however, work is typically far more casualised, comprising small-scale engagements in restaurants, clubs or bars, often alongside ‘function’ gigs such as weddings and private events. While it is difficult to compare precisely, the heterogeneity of these jobs likely surpasses those found even in other creative sector professions, for example in the theatre, where engagements with particular employers could last much longer. As self-employed workers British jazz musicians have access to standard tax credits and other general allowances, but aside from these there are very few institutional resources available to them. While the MU publishes guidelines, for example regarding minimum fees for different engagements, it generally assumes a servicing role, providing legal or financial advice, and discounted public liability insurance. Most performances for jazz musicians are based on verbal contracts. On function gigs, where intermediaries such as booking agents are regularly involved, there may be a contract between agency and bandleader, but typically the rest of the band would rely on verbal agreements with the leader. In these settings, there is no formal regulation of minimum fees or conditions. However, for functions in particular there are strong informal norms among musicians concerning fees, as explained below.

In France, the creative sector is ostensibly regulated by the IdS system. This is an adjunct to the wider social insurance regime specifically adapted to ‘intermittent’ workers in the creative industries. It was created in the 1930s for workers in cinematic production, but was extended to include musicians in 1969. When creative workers do a job, they and their employer (should) also pay social contributions, providing a basic income to workers while they are between jobs. IdS acts as an important protection against the unpredictability of incomes in project-based employment, but may also subsidise perpetual underemployment in certain environments (Menger, 2012). To qualify, workers must undertake 507 hours of work over ten months; ‘declarations’ from employers for one performance are normally considered as 12 hours’ work. This also means there is a legal minimum rate for individual creative jobs, calculated by multiplying these 12-hour segments by the rate of the *Salair Minimum Interprofessionnel de Croissance* (SMIC- 9.53 euros per hour at time of writing). The 507 hour requirement was, until 2003, to be met in twelve months. Its tightening, negotiated by MEDEF and leading unions in response to financial pressures on the system, precipitated an artists’ strike wave which shut down cultural events across France, and which some see as a key stage in the

development of a French 'precariat' movement (e.g. Bodnar, 2006). MEDEF recently called for the suppression of the status entirely, and there are likely to be more measures to tighten the system in the near future.

On first appearances there are major differences between the labour markets facing participants in London and Paris. But the contrast is greatly complicated by the issue of 'undeclared' or 'black' work, which is extremely common in French jazz; i.e. informal engagements which are not declared to *Pole Emploi* and where social charges are not paid. These engagements do not count towards IdS qualification, and imply no minimum conditions. Among Parisian jazz musicians, the majority of gigs would be undeclared for most. The small-scale venues typically engaging jazz musicians are often unable or unwilling to pay contributions, and so it is relatively common to find workers offering to pay employers' taxes out of their own pocket to gain 'declarations', or else saving up to purchase *post hoc* declarations via mechanisms such as the *Guichet unique du spectacle occasionnel*. This situation has been exacerbated by the declining funding for publicly-subsidised or non-profit venues, which were previously a more significant source of above-board work for French musicians. Hence, there are many striking *de facto* similarities between labour market conditions in both countries, particularly in the equally extreme casualization normally characterising 'undeclared' jazz gigs. However, there is also the striking difference that in France there is at least the potential to gain access to a relatively powerful institutional support mechanism which both mitigates precarity and provides a legal framework for working conditions. I will argue that this factor has important but limited effects. Below, I offer a relatively brief discussion of British musicians, building on previous publications drawn from the same dataset (Umney and Kretsos, 2014), which is used to set terms of comparison with the French case. The latter is considered in greater depth, as the differences and similarities in participants' construction of portfolio careers are examined. Before this, there is a note on methods.

### *Methods*

This study is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with 50 participants, collected in two waves. The first 30 participants were jazz musicians in London, approached between December 2011 and December 2012. Data gathering employed snowball sampling, seeking to contact jazz players who had entered the London scene to build careers as professional musicians. No participants earned a living solely from playing jazz- the



number of people falling into this category in Britain would be minute. Instead, they took on differing portfolios of work, encompassing freelance jazz performance alongside playing engagements in different settings, and other music-related jobs like teaching. Interviews typically lasted between one and two hours, and were fully-transcribed and manually coded. They had two main priorities: firstly, to encourage participants to describe in their own words their working lives, their playing priorities, and their future objectives. Secondly, to probe more specifically on the 'material' questions surrounding work; in particular the kinds of material conditions they would expect, and the recourse they would have if these were not met.

Following initial publications based on this data, this research model was integrated into a wider project funded by the European Research Council, which sought to replicate the London research design in four other countries. The budget for the project allowed for interviews with a further 20 musicians in each participant country, and here I integrate the findings from the French case. While the second wave of research in France therefore comprised fewer interviews than the British one, the basis provided by the latter meant that a comparative framework had already been induced and a set of questions and codes established. The main substantive difference was that participants were probed on the way in which the IdS regime- either its attainment for those that benefitted from it, or its *potential* attainment for those that did not- affected the decisions they made and the expectations they had about work. All interviews were conducted in the participant's native language. When this was French, interviews were translated into English by myself. In the UK case almost all interviewees fell within the 25-35 age range, though the French sample was slightly wider. This reflected the fact that, while the UK study was consciously focused on those musicians in the process of building a career, in the French case I was also interested in speaking to those who had been established on the IdS system for many years.

The London and Paris comparison was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, both cities are the undisputed hub of jazz music in their respective countries, and most participants in both cases were not native to them but had relocated in search of the most work opportunities and the most vibrant creative scenes. Hence interviews were focused sharply on the process of developing portfolios from scratch among people who had often entered a particular labour market as an adult, rendering participants' discussions of this process particularly

vivid. Secondly, the fact that the institutional settings feature both notable contrasts and important similarities made them ideal for the purposes of a comparison along the lines outlined above.

Jazz musicians are paradigmatic examples of project-oriented creative labour. The typical jazz ensemble features 4-5 instrumentalists, normally comprising a rhythm section (drums, bass and piano or guitar) and 1-2 'frontline' players (most commonly saxophone or trumpet). While jazz musicians may maintain particular bands for extended periods, they tend to play in many different ensembles with a network of different collaborators. Moreover, they very rarely make a living exclusively from playing jazz, tending to diversify into a wide range of playing settings, ranging from jazz club gigs where they can showcase their own creations, to 'function' events such as weddings where the labour process is highly regularised. This diversification is possible because they tend to be extremely highly skilled and versatile (Pineiro and Dowd, 2009; Stebbins, 1968). Hence their workplaces are extremely fluid and heterogeneous, in terms of both work environment and the colleagues they encounter. To succeed as a jazz musician requires simultaneously a high degree of individual virtuosity and strong relationships within an extensive network. These factors make jazz an ideal setting for studying the decisions musicians make in constructing portfolios, balancing different and sometimes conflicting pull factors which could be material or artistic in nature.

### *The London case*

Interviews in London demonstrated the relatively clear compartmentalisation of different kinds of jobs encompassed in participants' portfolios. While they encountered an extremely diverse range of settings, the two poles around which engagements most commonly clustered can be roughly designated 'original' and 'function' gigs. The former refers to performances where musicians can exercise a high degree of control over the labour process, choosing their own repertoire and playing style. This could be at a jazz festival, for example, but, more commonly for those outside established elites, in clubs or bars, or even in venues hired out by the musicians themselves for self-publicised concerts. 'Function gigs' refers to private parties and events, typically weddings or corporate functions, where the labour process would usually be more restricted. A client would specify a particular repertoire, which bands would be expected to deliver in a relatively standardised way. Of course there is potential for overlap- for example, a wedding client may

request music in line with the musicians' own original project. However, it is nonetheless an empirical distinction that came across very clearly through interviews.

In both settings, arrangements would be extremely informalised, based on verbal contracts and a chain of individual relationships between client, bandleader, and individual band members. On functions, there may also be a booking agent linking client and bandleader. For all kinds of performance, the MU publishes guidelines on expected fees, but virtually no participants professed to adhere to them. However, almost universally, interviewees cited £150-£250 as the expected price range on function gigs. Indeed, one participant (Alex, trumpet) referred to 'that old saying: "it's gotta be £150!"' Clearly, this was an informally proliferated norm rather than an enforceable law. It is particularly important for new scene entrants who may be unsure what to charge when approached for work for the first time. The latter is a common problem which can be a source of severe worry for participants on the labour market, especially so given that musicians are so often asked to name a price by potential employers without any expectations or contextual information being offered. They then need to come up with something that will neither sell themselves too short nor repel the other party. One anecdote from the UK case, for example, concerns a participant who had been asked to perform with a ten-piece on the other side of the UK and told to suggest a price. The participant considered how to respond before suggesting a figure which was accepted with suspicious speed. The participant almost immediately began to agonise about the figure, calculating (too late) that he should have asked for twice the amount agreed to provide his band members with a respectable return. Widespread fee norms help to avoid these kinds of situations.

So fee expectations have real importance as a reference point and they proliferate so widely for this reason. However, there was also a sense of responsibility towards them among some participants. One interviewee (Emily, saxophone) who worked as a bandleader on function gigs described being careful to protect her musicians from 'insulting' fee offers. Another (Harry, trumpet) referred to the ostracising of a musician who had set up his own agency, and had sought to push prices way below expectations:

'He was a guy who did very, very low paid gigs. Crazy... I'm talking a wedding outside of London, including travel- so people were walking away from the gig with £40... Once a bass player on the scene got an email asking if he'd do it for £80... He emailed back politely asking why he'd agree that

fee- it's a terrible fee. Anyway, this guy got back... saying some horrible things. "If you won't do it I'll get some other mug to do it". Really showing his hand as a guy that exploits young up-and-coming musicians, who need the work. One of my friends suggested that he put it on Facebook to expose him. So he did, and the comments! 60-70 comments, people saying "yeah I did a gig with him, he paid me £60 and treated me like shit!"... Just brutal. Great!... Fuck him. It's good that people know about that. Musicians are vigilant. People still do these gigs but they're ashamed of them and don't want to be seen with those people. So their life does become difficult eventually'

However, explicit community denunciations such as the above were unusual, and much more frequently the response among participants to these situations was simply to avoid working with certain employers or bandleaders again. Participants almost never saw scope for meaningful negotiations with employers, instead describing either the blind offering of a fee described above, or else a flat 'take it or leave it' offer. Moreover, any such structuring expectations were weakened further and often completely disintegrated on 'original' gigs. The interviewee quoted above was later asked if the same reaction would apply to musicians on original projects that expected very low fees.

'It absolutely wouldn't. Everyone knows when starting an original project that you have to be into the project because there ain't going to be any monetary reward... People are happy to do that- that's why we're into music. We were doing that stuff for fun when we were learning music. But when you're doing a function that very much feels like work- you're not being paid to be creative. You're being paid to dress smartly, behave appropriately, to play a prescribed repertoire. Whereas doing [my own original project]- I never expect to make money about that, even though it takes up days of my time in writing, hours of my own and other musicians' time in rehearsals. I'm very grateful for them for that, but they know I'd do the same as well.'

Indeed, regarding original projects, participants were often reluctant to venture any fee expectations at all, or at least be prepared for strong downwards pressure on supposed minima:

'That floor has to be shifted depending on your current situation, and who is on the gig- who you might meet. You have to weigh up is it worth it? You've always got something at the back of the mind, "let's not let anyone take advantage", but at the same time you haven't really got the choice.'

If someone says “oh we’re doing a gig, it’s quite local why don’t you come down? It’s only £40 but we’re playing fun music- there’s no list of criteria to fulfil and we’re playing jazz”. And you see it as just a chance to have a play with other musicians who might be quite good... I have [worked for free] once or twice. What a lot of musicians in London do is whenever they’re free, they go and play with each other anyway. If you have a day free you’ll say let’s hook up and have a play. That helps you make contacts, and play with people just for fun because it’s practice as well. You might see it as just a practice’ (Simon, guitar)

Various pull factors therefore normalise working for very low pay or even for free on ‘original’ gigs. One is the potential to network, which serves both a material and a creative purpose. This is joined by other factors connected with the nature of the labour process on the gig. Other interviewees spoke of the need to keep busy- to have something productive to do on a given day however poorly remunerated. As the above quote indicates, a lack of criteria imposed on playing style is another important consideration, as is the ability to take control of one’s own musical development- the idea that certain gigs are like a practice, or a ‘paid rehearsal’ (Mark, drums). Finally, there is the attraction of deepening relationships with trusted collaborators. As one interviewee (Bryan, bass) says of an admired musician with whom he had recently started working ‘he just calls me up and asks if I want to play. I don’t even ask if there’s any money involved’. Commonly, in these settings, ‘door split’ events could be organised, leaving musicians with £10 or even less at the end of the night. ‘For a while you have to do that. As a musician, you have to learn to play that music, we need to get the music sorted... it would almost be like a rehearsal’ (Connor, guitar).

This is only a brief sketch of the two kinds of work most commonly undertaken by London jazz musicians, but it illustrates the unevenness of expectations about the conditions of work connected with different labour processes. Structuring expectations are directly undermined by the presence of strong artistic pull factors. Hence in function work there were at least some informal expectations which served to structure the labour market. Where artistic pull factors were strong, they were virtually non-existent, and there was almost no floor under fees. The important point is that participants had to plan out their own individual portfolios that would balance these factors. In this process, the existence of guideline fee norms was very important. For instance, when asked about future objectives and the potential for the development of a family, most

participants referred to the need to take on increasing quantities of more 'stable' jobs such as greater numbers of function engagements or larger amounts of private tuition. 'I would like to settle down and if I did that I'd have to take a conscious decision to do more teaching' (Rob, piano); 'I do want all of that [family] stuff at some point. I'll cross that bridge when it comes to it. If I have to hustle for more function gigs, so be it' (Tim, saxophone). 'Stability' in this context is not so much contractual formality or a regularised relationship with a particular employer but the ability to capitalise on relatively reliable fee expectations in particular kinds of engagement. But this shifting equilibrium between material and artistic concerns as the life-course progresses would, for the great majority of participants, only go so far. Most wanted to gain enough 'stable' work to support themselves while minimising the extent to which they had to give up more autonomous labour process settings. Inevitably, therefore, this balancing process is highly personal, depending on participants' capacity to tolerate uncertainty in their material arrangements, and their willingness to prioritise creative autonomy above other concerns. Note that also important here, though beyond the scope of the current paper, is the extent to which they can draw on support from other sources, specifically family (see Kretsos and Umney, 2014).

Hence, expectations around fees come to be most relevant in providing individuals with rough guidelines about the earning potential for different jobs, rather than as a demand to rally around or a solidaristic responsibility. For most participants, the existence of stronger norms around function work meant that these kinds of jobs could be relied upon as a more stable source of income to balance more precarious work elsewhere. But there was little commitment among participants to the idea of trying to enforce these norms through collective pressure either on other musicians or on employers, other than relatively rare denunciations of particularly egregious offenders. If a norm is violated, then the individual has to choose whether to take or leave the offer, depending on how the gig fits into their own portfolio. A collective expectation is 'internalised', downgraded from demand to reference point, and accordingly the responsibility a musician might otherwise feel towards defending it is weakened. Interviews indicated that people undermining norms might be criticised, but only very rarely would work offered be turned down.

With these points in mind, the near-universal status of the £150 figure for functions merits two remarks. Firstly, it demonstrates the importance as a source of information for both new and existing scene members

of informal norms which are discussed and proliferated by musicians themselves. But secondly, its 'reference' role also gives it a static quality. In other words, musicians describe it being passed on from experienced professionals to new scene entrants, but there is no sense of a critical collective engagement with it- for example, should shared efforts be made to discuss and raise these figures over time? This is not something most participants ever discussed. Given this, it may be unsurprising that many observed that the £150 guideline had remained the same throughout their careers, and were largely the same in London as in their hometowns, despite substantial increases in the cost of living. My argument in this paper is that the internalisation dynamic greatly exacerbates this weakness, by integrating fee norms as only one among many variables in the individual work portfolio planning of participants. The discussion of French musicians seeks to develop this idea further.

### *The Paris case*

It is important to neither understate nor overstate the implications of the IdS regime in France for participants. This section shows that there are some substantial differences with the London case, but will also suggest that the potential of IdS as a means of structuring the jazz labour market is undermined by the same factors.

The distinction between 'function' and 'original' gigs is equally clear in Paris as in London, perhaps even more so. The IdS system, by providing its recipients with a stable basic income, may (though not inevitably, as shown below) reduce the importance of material factors relative to artistic ones for French musicians. Receiving IdS payments affords musicians opportunities to specialise in a particular artistic niche, taking time away from 'jobbing' work to develop self-directed projects. Robert (saxophone), a French interviewee who had spent several years working as a musician in London before returning to France and gaining IdS status, describes the main differences in his experiences of the two cities:

'The economic constraints linked to the way of life in England necessitates accumulating a lot of work, and playing a lot, to get by. [In France], work is much more structured around long-term projects. There are less 'sideman' projects- the 'jack of all trades'- in France than in England. The effects on the music is that people are a lot less versatile, less adept at doing lots of different things in Paris and in France more generally. Musicians are much more likely to concentrate on a set of projects'

The interviewee also commented on the more distended nature of the labour market, as groups of musicians doing 'original' and 'function' work consequently became more distinct: in his words, 'I don't know a single person that works [on functions] here. I don't know who plays at weddings here!' Other *IdS* beneficiaries (Guillaume, bass; Leon, drums) spoke about how their concentration on original jazz projects had taken them well off the radar of leading figures in function work. In this sense *IdS* provides a material safety net enabling participants to strengthen the relative importance of artistic pull factors in the construction of portfolios. This suggests that the French institutional framework may have a profound impact on the way creative workers negotiate labour markets. However, it is not clear how generalisable these experiences are, as the rest of this section will show.

In Paris, only a minority of performances are 'declared' under the *IdS* system. Many participants far exceeded 507 hours' work in a ten month period, but failed to obtain *IdS* payments because so much of this was '*au black*'. Significantly, functions are declared far more regularly than 'original' gigs. The small bars and clubs dominating the latter are often reluctant or unable to meet the commitments of the *IdS* regime. Aside from simply offering 'black' work, where pay would be very similar to equivalent London engagements, these venues may be able to shunt the responsibility for declarations onto the musicians' own associations (the latter are small non-profit organisations, often run by musicians themselves, which act as their employers and which handle the administration of the *IdS* regime). If a venue can sign a contract with an association to provide one of its bands in return for a door split, then in the (highly likely) event that there is insufficient money to declare all band members, the association is responsible and may pay declarations on its own account. Otherwise, musicians often try to save up money from previous gigs in order to be able to pay employers' social charges out of their own pocket, thus gaining declarations.

The divide between original and function work was therefore deepened even further than in Britain, by the fact that declarations would normally be expected in the former, and only rarely in the latter. The division between declared and undeclared gigs, and the potential rewards if enough declared gigs can be attained, means that the *IdS* regime adds an extra layer of material considerations for musicians when building portfolios. Hence at the level of the individual musician seeking to sustain a career, it becomes, much like the fee norms discussed in relation to the UK case, one pull factor among many others; indeed one of uncertain



importance. For some, certainly, it was strongly and explicitly prioritised. For example, for both Pierre (drums) and Cyrille (piano), being able to somehow gain a declaration was more of a priority than the actual fee offered. But others did not give as much weight to gaining access to IdS, as the below will show.

In fact, the IdS system is highly ambivalent in shaping musicians' negotiation of the labour market. Other participants such as Emilie (drums) presented directly opposing perspectives to the one offered by Robert. She recounted that after first qualifying for IdS payments, it had become widely accepted among her circle that, far from specialising, she would then have to start pursuing 'shitty gigs' (i.e. functions), in order to retain the status in future years. This apparent contradiction exemplifies how the effect of IdS on the construction of portfolios within the jazz labour market is highly variable, pushing people towards material or creative priorities depending on how assured their status is. If a musician is struggling to make the requisite declarations, they may need to veer towards function work. If they have already exceeded their quota, functions may disappear entirely from their portfolios. The need to do more functions in order to gain the status in the first instance meant that other participants were fatalistic about whether they benefitted from it or not. One interviewee (Olivier, saxophone) spoke about his history of coming on and off the statute, and his lack of interest in changing his playing priorities in order to maintain material security: 'It's more a metaphysical question. If all you want in life is money, you can have it'. Another (Steve, guitar) was asked about qualifying: 'I wouldn't mind but I want to do it on musical terms... I do music for the artistic side as well as the pragmatic side'.

Indeed, in some cases participants were quite hostile to the system, tying it to a culture of 'institutionalised' music supported through public subsidy: a kind of '*jazz d'Etat*' (Andre, guitar). Pierre (drums), while not sharing these sentiments himself, recalled disputes among musicians during the 2003 strikes:

'Lots of people consider that to be declared is to be a *fonctionnaire d'Etat* and lots of people have a very anarchist vision... The state is horrible, it's taxes, the police, prison. So Intermittence for them is a kind of prison... There are lots of people that thought that to be an intermittent, is the death of music. To fight for hours is to forget what one is doing, to not concentrate on art. As many musicians will say, to talk about politics is to not talk about art'

Consequently, IdS does not affect musicians' labour market decisions in a particular direction. Instead, IdS declarations are integrated as another pull factor which may or may not outweigh artistic concerns depending on individual circumstances. As in London, this does not mean that the jazz scene is simply atomised. Participants often spoke of a great deal of solidarity- 'a climate of mutual aid' (Andre, guitar)- within the scene which blunts the obvious scope for competition. Indeed, from interviews in both cities, it was generally observed that while there may often be jealousy or rivalry between musicians- most clearly manifested at jam sessions<sup>‡</sup>, which both sets of participants tended to see as competitive and macho- this remains between musicians themselves rather than engendering economic competition for the favour of potential employers. Someone perceived to be undercutting, for example, would likely be stigmatised in both scenes. One recurrent example of material solidarity arising from the vagaries of the IdS system is musicians' responses to situations where gigs are partially declared. In other words, where the money on a concert- either the lump sum offered by employers or the result of door takings- is only enough to declare part of the band. Musicians who had had to negotiate such situations tended to describe how bandleaders may distribute declarations according to need- for example, is there anyone in the band that is struggling to retain the IdS statute? If so, they will likely be prioritised for declarations. This is a solidaristic way of dealing with problems raised by the prevalence of 'black' work. However, note that it does not involve a direct negotiation with an employer over the latter's commitments; rather, it re-allocates among recipients what the employer has already offered. Just as participants were reluctant to confront each other in explicit economic competition, so they were also reluctant to confront employers over economic questions.

The salient point here remains that IdS declarations are a pull factor varying in strength from individual to individual. In this context, there is little scope for wider collective enforcement of expected standards and it is accepted that conditions will be extremely diverse. The 'take it or leave it' approach to gigs with poor conditions is largely as prevalent as in London, and musicians are expected to make these decisions depending on their own circumstances and priorities. Given this, there is only limited room for rigid norms. 'The common agreement among musicians is that you play every situation as different. You play it by ear' (Steve, guitar). Another interviewee (Pierre, drums) spoke of his frustration at the failures of musicians to

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<sup>‡</sup> Open-mic nights, in which there would usually (though not always) be a house band, which would be joined by a range of other volunteers to play on stage for a song before the line-up rotates again.

present a unified voice in demanding more declarations. In fact, he suggested, the existence of the statute had had the reverse effect, providing every musician with a personal decision rather than a collective lever: 'the pernicious effects of intermittence is that it has atomised everyone, all artists; everyone for his or her own dossier'. An ostensibly solidaristic institution becomes another variable to consider in an internalised balancing act, as a consequence of the structuring of the labour market through portfolios and of the multiple competing pull factors at work.

Unsurprisingly, given the prominence of the institutional framework, French participants were often more explicitly political in their interviews than British counterparts. All were aware, for example, of recent calls by MEDEF, the French employers' federation, to abolish the IdS system outright, and many had personal recollections of the 2003 strike, though very few had participated in it. Anecdotal evidence from participants suggests that involvement was much greater among film or television workers, given the much higher proportion of workers in these settings that would receive IdS payments. Indeed, despite a widespread interest in political debate around labour market institutions, participants described discussing the terms and conditions in their own workplaces even less than British counterparts. Only two out of twenty French participants were union members (though this of course also reflects low unionisation rates in France more generally), for reasons either of administrative support (Jean, saxophone) or abstract political principle unconnected to working life (Martin, bass). Therefore, even more so than British counterparts, many of whom recalled contacting the MU for advice following problems with employers, French jazz musicians rely on themselves. One interviewee, for example (Emilie, drums), referred to physically snatching a bar owner's iPhone and threatening (successfully) to smash it if her band were not paid. Alternatively, as in the UK case, they may badmouth bad employers, deterring others from working with them in future. Indeed, as Emilie and Leon (drums) both argued, given that unions may criticise undeclared and low-paid gigs, and given that in jazz there are critical pull factors which attract musicians to them, unions and jazz musicians may engage on totally alien terms to each other.

Hence despite a stronger political engagement in general terms, the issue of musicians being unsure about pricing in their own working lives was arguably- though it is hard to measure this exactly without a wider quantitative study- more severe in Paris than in London. One participant (Martin, bass) who had also lived in

New York attributed this to cultural factors; a stereotypical reluctance to talk about money in comparison to the 'Anglo-Saxon' world. I argue that this may also be connected with IdS declarations. In terms of material priorities, the 'yes or no' question of declarations is often seen as taking precedence over the actual fee on the gig. This interviewee- the only participant across both samples that was also a committed left wing activist- was atypical among French participants in picking up quite explicitly on the idea of musicians' own responsibilities when agreeing fees: 'I think we're in a profession where we don't have the right to not be able to evaluate ourselves financially'. He had established an association which was relatively unusual in that it was not geared towards the administration of declarations or organising events. Instead it was intended as a space for critical 'collective reflection' on these questions- for example, how can going rates on concerts be defended in negotiations? How can the level of going rates be progressed? The participant described widespread non-comprehension or even hostility to these efforts, which were often seen as an incongruous over-emphasis on material factors by many of his contemporaries. Moreover, my argument here has been that the 'internalisation' dynamic, where individuals find their own balances between different pull factors, prevents the solidification of fee expectations as a responsibility acting on employers and musicians themselves.

### *Discussion and conclusion*

Above, I have invoked the idea of collective standards being used to structure the musicians' labour market. This is clearly extraordinarily difficult for many reasons, not least the huge and increasing 'reserve army' employers have access to in both the London and Paris music scenes. However, the above analysis shows that the reason participants tend not to pursue this objective is not only because it is hard given the dynamics of supply and demand in the labour market. Rather, I highlighted the idea of 'internalisation' as an additional explanation for the undermining of employment conditions for musicians in both cases. To reiterate the argument, the proliferation of informal norms around fees is uneven but widespread among musicians, helping them to formulate asking prices, most strongly on jobs where artistic attractions are weak. These norms have some limited potential to enforce fee expectations. But, in practice, they are usually 'downgraded' from a responsibility or a demand to a reference point for people to use when planning complex individual portfolios. Inevitably, this means that workers' commitments to them weaken and the

‘responsibilisation’ implicit in efforts to maintain expectations in portfolio-oriented labour markets deteriorates.

I have defined this dynamic as ‘internalisation’ rather than ‘individualisation’. The latter term, while being partly applicable, would oversimplify the analysis by obfuscating the extent to which, however weakly, collective norms do proliferate and endure, and indeed serve an important role in establishing standardised asking prices. Whereas in London these were purely informal, in France there is a more elaborate framework. Nonetheless, in the latter case, IdS declarations became integrated into a wider balancing act much the same as fee expectations in Britain did. Participants tended not to engage ‘actively’ with these structures, in the sense that they never used them as a platform for negotiating with employers, and almost never organised collectively to ensure more regular declarations or the honouring of fee norms. Indeed, there was a widespread ‘take it or leave it’ attitude when it came to material conditions of work. In both cases, participants reported noticeable real-terms declines in gig fees, and fee guidelines were never subjected to critical collective reflection in an effort to counter this.

It remains to discuss the wider implications of this argument. This article has used jazz to explore the structuring of project-based, creative sector labour markets. It has highlighted the widespread proliferation but also the fragility of collective structures. The factors that make them so fragile are not just macro-level ones, but also the internalising dynamics that see musicians downgrading the relative importance of material expectations about the conditions of work. More broadly, while other writers have shown how ideological factors encourage workers to self-exploit, my analysis focuses more on the issue of control over one’s own labour process, and the way in which these within-work tensions have profound ramifications for the structuring of labour markets themselves. This, I suggest, represents a more generalisable lens through which to view creative labour markets than a focus on national institutional difference, given that we can expect the qualitative pull factors operating on creative workers to be comparable in every country.

The paper also offers a contribution to debates within the labour process tradition around ‘creative labour’. Labour process theory has a lot to say about creative work, and its core themes of control and autonomy are clearly important in explaining the experiences of creative sector workers. What I have sought to do here is show how these themes can be extended to analyse the structure of labour markets themselves, before the

workplace is even entered. The desire for more creative autonomy shapes the way in which musicians seek out and construct portfolios of work, and this in turn impacts the social structuring of the labour market. In making this argument, I am centring the agency of workers to a greater degree than is normally expected in labour process theory, but I believe this is inevitable once the focus shifts from the workplace itself to the negotiation of the labour market.

Finally, some comments on avenues for future research. In this paper I have sought to sketch out how norms around material expectations emerge and are undermined within project-based creative employment. This is an important issue that deserves further exploration beyond the confines of jazz musicians. While there is a surfeit of studies showing the qualitative factors that may trade-off against material reward for creative workers, as well as a growing literature on creative sector economic policy, there is strikingly little understanding of the precise ways in which creative labour markets are regulated in terms of the remuneration gained from work. Certainly, we know a lot about how networks emerge to structure the allocation of job opportunities, for example. But we do not know enough about how qualitative factors relating to job quality interact with the issue of material reward- for example how much gigs are paid, how norms around fee minima are reinforced, how institutional frameworks do (and don't) impact the expectations creative workers bring to the workplace. This article is only an early step into this research agenda, highlighting the unevenness and fragility of collective structuring mechanisms in creative employment.

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