"A BIG, BEAUTIFUL MESS":

COLLECTIVITY, CAPITALISM, ARTS & CRAFTS AND BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE

by

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“A Big, Beautiful Mess”: Collectivity, Capitalism, Arts & Crafts and Broken Social Scene

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Abstract: The aim of this thesis is to critically examine the emergence of new forms of collectivity in Canadian independent popular music. A case study was conducted centring on the Toronto-based collective Broken Social Scene and its label Arts & Crafts, and original interviews were conducted with Stuart Berman, Charles Spearin, Jason Collett, Jeffrey Remedios, and Brendan Canning. An analysis of the major labels and a history of the sensibilities of independent artists establish the habitus of an independent artist at the end of the 1990s. The particulars of Toronto’s music scene show the organic origins of the band’s collectivity to be in process-based composition and performance. Broken Social Scene’s political economy and internal dynamics suggest that Arts & Crafts acts as an aegis for the group’s membership and processes. Finally, Broken Social Scene’s metaphorical self conceptualization revealed the important structuring role the paradoxical affect of love plays for the group.

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Introduction

some boys I know
they speak with broken mouths
I have to sit inside their stomachs
to find out what they're really about
-"Stomach Song" (*Feel Good Lost*)

Write, form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialization, extend the line of flight to the point where it becomes an abstract machine covering the entire plane of consistency.
-Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (11)

To introduce Broken Social Scene, the Toronto-based independent rock music group, it is perhaps best to begin with a moment – a window upon the collected musicians. On November 8th, 2005, after an interview on KCRW's *Morning Becomes Eclectic* radio show,[1] the band began preparing to perform an acoustic rendition of their song "Ibi Dreams of Pavement (A Better Day)." Kevin Drew, one of the co-founders of Broken Social Scene, wipes his brow and lets out a heavy, sigh-laced "OK, here we go," as the band fiddles with its instruments: "gonna count it in." Someone whistles in the background, imitating the opening guitar distortion on the recorded version and gets a few laughs. Drew looks around, "should we shut the door? It's bothering me that it's open." As the door clicks shut, Drew's voice jumps up and a quick "here we go" flies out, punctuated by a few staccato notes coming from a piano, after which he begins the count. However Drew, whose count is supposed to lead the group into a unified burst of all the instruments, cannot bring himself to start on his own time. He tries only to stop short: "one,

[1] The interview with Nic Harcourt on the Santa Monica-based station was fortuitously captured on film by KCRW and is currently available for streaming online.

two... wait wait wait, can someone count it in? I'm kinda going crazy." Brendan Canning, the other co-founder of Broken Social Scene, gently murmurs "this is my count," and then repeats a single low G on the piano in time as Drew counts with his notes: "one, two, three, four." But at the end of the first full count, Canning plays the opening chord while Drew keeps counting, and only a piano and a guitar are heard launching into the song. Drew's count dissolves into a big grin and a chuckle, as Canning asks "didn't anybody get my count?" All the band clangours with laughter and teases "awww" as Drew responds "that's OK, I...," but he is cut-off by Canning beginning a new count, "one, two," which the rest of the ensemble responds to by chiming, in choir unison, "three, four!" Finally, on that joint, communal count, the eight present members of Broken Social Scene are able to begin the song in unanimity, without a hitch, while echoes of the laughter can be heard beneath the first few chords of the song as they play.

In this moment, we see the workings of what the press has labelled – and to a certain extent, what various groups have self-labelled – a popular music collective. Though a rather imprecise moniker, the term 'collective' is typically used to denote a few specific features. A collective refers to bands that employ an expansive, multitudinous and inclusive membership, dwarfing the traditional rock paradigms of the solo singer-songwriter or three to five piece rock group. However, members are typically also involved in other side or solo projects simultaneously, which means that the collective uses a more accommodating, fluid, carousel-type approach to writing, recording and touring music. In other words, artists come and go from the folds of the group, creating a constant flux which results in no single, definitive iteration of the band. Collectives also characteristically take a more open-ended, democratic and group oriented approach to decision making and revenue sharing, though to what extent certainly varies between each specific instance. Although collectives differ in that they can be centred on a

particular band, scene, or label, and though they are certainly capable of producing a wide range of music and styles, what unites the form is not a particular sound or location, but rather communal sensibilities and processes, articulated in all facets of the collective's cultural production. It is a form of variegated iterations and constant renewal.

Critically, an examination of collectives in Canadian independent popular music is long overdue. Over the past decade, the Canadian music scene has produced an inordinate number of successful rock bands in this form. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, bands such as Godspeed You! Black Emperor, The New Pornographers, Arcade Fire, and Broken Social Scene emerged from cities across the country, demonstrating various degrees and articulations of the collective approach. Their success has drawn significant thematic attention from the popular press[2] (Ladouceur 2004; Chong 2005; Barton 2006; Quart 2006) but has yet to draw any attention from academic studies of popular music. To approach the phenomenon critically, I limited my focus solely to one collective, Broken Social Scene, and its record label, Arts & Crafts. Methodology specialist Robert Yin recommends the case study approach when "the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident... believing that [contextual conditions] might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study," and here a significant point of interest is the ineluctable context of the music industries (13).

Founded in 2000 as a joint venture between Brendan Canning and Kevin Drew, Broken Social Scene began as only a duo, recording their debut album *Feel Good Lost* (2001) on a borrowed 8-track desk while isolated in Drew's basement. As time passed, however, Broken

[2] It is worth noting that this attention has come from both the national and international press, with the CBC being joined by the likes of *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* in their interest in the collective phenomenon.

Social Scene began to exhibit a collective model, sprawled to some sixteen[3] members and innumerable other collaborating musicians, and founded the label Arts & Crafts with Jeffrey Remedios, effectively assembling many of Broken Social Scene's side projects and associated bands under one roof. Additionally, Broken Social Scene and Arts & Crafts operate under the auspices of revenue sharing for both recording and touring, and they take an extraordinarily democratic approach to collective decision making. In short, Broken Social Scene is suited for a focused study not only because they exemplify the collective approach but also because, on first glance, they seem to have actively and consciously undertaken collectivity as a musical project, though this will emerge as an interesting point of contention and further discussion in the pages to come.

The rise of collectives, however, involves more than a simple expansion in membership and, in studying Broken Social Scene, a great deal more was revealed to be at play. In the end, this is a study of the concords, contradictions, sounds and affect of innumerable relations. Collectives, capitalism, the music industries – each is built upon a multifarious and continually evolving set of relations, as is music itself, and so Broken Social Scene, being an intersection of all of these elements, is a similarly constituted phenomenon. Within these relations, conflicts and contradictions abound; they vary in scale and quality from the quintessential capital-labour relationship outlined in Marxian theory and prevalent in the music industries, to the possibility, at any given time, of divergent individual interests within Broken Social Scene's considerable membership. But concord too is powerfully abundant, perhaps best exemplified by the fusion of

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[3] This number is more of an approximate average than a precise quantity; depending upon which source you use and from when that source dates, the number can vary anywhere from eight to twenty. In the end, it is best to treat Broken Social Scene's membership as somewhat uncountable, or rather, think of the precise figure as a red herring. Consider Kevin Drew's caveat to an interviewer asking why they expanded to sixteen members: "Well, fourteen, twelve, whatever" (Harrison par. 6).

individuals perceptible in Broken Social Scene's live shows, which can be a transcendent spectacle of tens of friends and musicians crammed onto a stage for a single performance. More accurately, this study attempts to examine a criss-crossing web of political, economic, social, technological and interpersonal relations, which are to varying degrees both discordant and harmonious, and which morph as the surrounding circumstances and relations shift about it. Generally, the soundscapes of Broken Social Scene mirror this essence beautifully, where multiple, layered hooks and instruments are constantly in play, some falling into discord while other sections arrange into complimentary segments, and then often unifying thunderously, only to have a small piece or two or three tumble out of unanimity. The site of Broken Social Scene, then, is one where relations and sound are bonded in both harmony and dissonance, held dynamic in flux, and found expressed in the collective's musical production and cultural output.

As this study progressed, it became clear that these variegate relations were precisely what was obfuscated by the shorthand use of the collective as a concept.[4] Furthermore, the term collective comes with so much cultural baggage[5] and unintended meaning that it is fair to question whether it is even the appropriate description of the phenomenon at all. It seems that a better way to understand the collective in the setting of popular music is not as a definable strategic entity or endpoint, but as a commitment to music as relations and inclusive processes. It is less tactics and more genuinely felt political, economic, and interpersonal conditions flowing into a formation. The collective is movement and affect, or what Brian Massumi refers to as

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[4] Especially in its more histrionic phrasings lampooned by writer Ibi Kaslik, writing about her character Rize in *The Angel Riots*: "Even with all the clippings rolling in, even with the abstractions in the music magazines that contain the phrases like 'serendipitous shamble' and 'Canadian obscurantism,' he finds it brings him no closer to any solid definition" (170).

[5] Kevin Chong suggests that in popular culture, the term is more likely to conjure up images of Soviet propaganda posters and Borg from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* than anything to do with rock and roll (par. 1).

“dynamic unities” (8). And so it is Drew, a little off balance from the rigours of promoting music, finding himself unable to start the next song and turning inwards to his friends for support. And it is the organizational nightmare of getting everyone on the same page, of interpersonal navigation and unification, of miscounts and false starts. And it is all the anxiety, fun and love released in the chuckles of collective laughter when there are missteps. And it is every material and affective condition that leads to a communal count, each of which facilitates the production of music for individuals facing significant challenges in the field of cultural production. And it is absolutely how the collective expands and recedes, how artists join into the music or fall out of its time, and the new evolutions, configurations and creations that flux produces over an extended duration. The collective, being a form based upon multiplicity and dynamic principles, unequivocally demands that it be studied as such, on its own terms, using a methodology capable of mapping the vibrato. As a result, Broken Social Scene presents a unique challenge to analysis, and so to be effective this case study must take a theoretical approach sensitive to the dynamics of collectivity.

In this study, a significant amount of theory will be drawn upon to illuminate the collective. However, the theory mobilized will not act as a shorthand crutch, nor will it be used as a tool designed for one way application and dissection. A case, through its lambency, gives as much breadth to theory as does the theory to that case. Theory, then, is not a question of application, but a question of cross breeding, of encouraging inter-discourse that results in a progeny who can potentially speak volumes about its origins. As is reflected in its prose, this study draws great theoretical inspiration and guidance from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and Brian Massumi’s *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Broken Social Scene demonstrates striking similarity to

the *rhizome*, Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual framework invoked to effectively theorize multiplicity and movement. The term, borrowed from botany, denotes the horizontal, decentralized root structure of many plants, particularly weeds. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome represents a rejection of the Western tradition of understanding the world with arboreal metaphors which employ a hierarchal and dialectical "system of thought which has never reached an understanding of multiplicity" (5). The rhizome exists, grows and alters based upon principles of infinite interconnectability and heterogeneity. According to Deleuze and Guattari, because the rhizome is without foundational roots its ruptures are asymbolic, meaning that its breaks or discontinuities, rather than being destructive and possibly fatal, are absorbed and incorporated within an essentially networked and flexible system; a weed is pulled, sixteen more grow around it. Just how closely Broken Social Scene resembles a rhizome and what rhizomatic complications and contradictions are illuminated by the collective will be later topics of discussion, but for now I wish to stress how Deleuze and Guattari instruct analysis to approach a rhizome. The fifth principle of the rhizome is cartography, by which is meant:

> The rhizome is altogether different, a *map and not a tracing*. Make a map, not a tracing ... What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields ... It is itself a part of the rhizome. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation. It can be drawn on a wall, conceived of as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a mediation. Perhaps one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways ... A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back "to the same" (12).

The analyst's goal is to form a map with their subject of study, to survey and explore its multiple entryways, to document multitudinous perspectives from inside and out, to plot the relations which connect and flow through every node within a heterogeneous, never-quite whole. Deleuze

and Guattari instruct that "to attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively constructs it," and so each chapter here examining Broken Social Scene will attempt to seek out another entranceway and thus flush out another dimension of the collective, connecting each chapter to another and leaving the chapters amenable to further connections (22). This is a project of critical cartography because the subject matter demands it, especially since, for Deleuze and Guattari, "RHIZOMATICS = POP ANALYSIS" (24).

Concurrently, Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics also includes a call for nomadology, that is a history that is "the opposite of history," based upon the principles of movement rather than rooted, sedentary analysis (23). Nomadology is not an abstracted history which simply tracks the motion of nomads across state powers, but rather is a history from within, based upon the tribal principles of motion and relations which serve to create and maintain the cultural formation. Brian Massumi has a similar interest in injecting motion into critical studies, but his theoretical project has quite a different origin. Rather than roaming nomads, Massumi's development of motion stems from a desire to reintegrate considerations of the body into analysis. For Massumi, the body does two things: "It *moves*. It *feels*" (1, original emphasis). Most importantly, these two features are ineluctably linked. "Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation whereby each immediately summons the other?" (Massumi 1). Any study interested in motion, then, must also be sensitive to the power and structure of affect. After relating a story from the Clinton administration, where both potential health care reform and a waffling politician resulted in a diving market, Massumi stresses that oftentimes affective factors have far more material effects than real economic conditions. "The ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist

system, as infrastructural as a factory" (Massumi 45). To understand Broken Social Scene, motion is integral, and Massumi's work shows that as a result, so too is affect; this study will thus be engaged critically with both.

In the end of their introduction, Deleuze and Guattari state that rather than the verb 'to be,' which has been key to ontological studies, "the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and... and... and...'" (25). Accordingly, the rhizome is always in the middle, but it would be wrong to understand the middle as a common, or so-called middle ground:

> The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle (25).

Broken Social Scene, with its sprawling membership, is not an average of all its members but the result of infinite addition and subtraction of those members, an indefinite flux that flows into production, creativity, and music while seeming to deny and challenge borders; the parallels between it and the rhizome call attention to the aforementioned authors' insights, and they will be indispensable guides to the case study.

This is not to imply that analysis will be replete with post-structuralist abstraction. On the contrary – material, grounded methods will always primarily guide and inform analysis, constantly linking back any contention to source materials. In fact, some chapters consist entirely of political economic, historical materialist analysis, because the realities of both the commodified setting of the music industries and the economic exigencies of survival for artists cannot be denied their evident influence. Broken Social Scene emerged in a very precise time, within unique material conditions, limitations and histories; in part, they were the result of each of the previously mentioned flows. That being stated, however, I do not agree with Nicholas

Garnham's causal contention in "Contribution to a Political Economy of Mass Communication" that "the economic is the determinant under capitalism" (21). On the other hand, I do think he is quite right to insist on political economic analysis which realizes that "capitalism is a contradictory process, not yet complete" (38). Garnham paints capitalism as an imperial system, one that is ever expanding its commodity logic into traditionally non-capitalist sectors such as the arts, a process that results in negotiation and struggle, and often leaves contradictions which remain unresolved while the overall system functions. Strong political economy attempts to detect contradiction and struggle, along with its functionality, while also never forgetting the capital and power which animate the system. In this study, Broken Social Scene, and particularly Arts & Crafts, illustrate another chapter in these issues, and so political economy will neither be buried nor forgotten.

On that material level, it was important to cast as wide a net as possible to maximize the case study's validity. Yin stresses that a case study "relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (14). In that spirit, all medium of cultural output from Broken Social Scene was considered for analysis: their music, lyrics, album jackets, merchandise, promotional materials, music videos, live performances, music journalism, books about them,[6] and interviews with them. However, these elements, while revealing and compelling in their own right, can be somewhat approximate and abstracted compared to the self reported experiences of those involved with Broken Social Scene and Arts & Crafts. For example, music journalists' interviews can oftentimes be an interesting source in many respects, but the questions are often framed in a manner that only grazes upon the issues pertinent to this

[6] Including *The Angel Riots*, a novel written about a fictitious indie collective by Ibi Kaslik. The author was involved in the Toronto scene, went to school with Kevin Drew, Leslie Feist, and Amy Millan, and helped the band on its first tour. The song "Ibi Dreams of Pavement (A Better Day)" (*Broken Social Scene*) is named for her.

study. Sara Cohen has issued a call for more ethnographic approaches in popular music studies which, in her opinion, would be greatly improved by a "focus upon social relationships, emphasizing music as social practice and process" (123). Ethnography, Cohen stipulates, allows "dynamic complexities" obscured within abstracted, armchair analysis – and, I would add, catchy journal-isms like 'the collective' – to emerge directly from a researcher's interaction with practitioners and their social context (123). Since it was precisely these processes and context-based relations which I thought to be indispensable, I took advantage of my location in Toronto, contacted the Arts & Crafts label, and organized a series of interviews with those members available and willing to speak to me about their involvement with Broken Social Scene. However, this served to be a personal lesson in the difficulties of organizing time with the members of Broken Social Scene, and limits such as work and recording schedules, geography, and the temporal realities of the project meant I was only able to interview the following: Jeffrey Remedios, Charles Spearin, Jason Collett and Brendan Canning.[7]

To introduce these individuals, I want to first use Broken Social Scene's discography to give an abridged version of their history, in order to set the basic stage for my interviews and this project. The band's first album, *Feel Good Lost*, was recorded by only two people, Kevin Drew and Brendan Canning, in a basement on a giant, 8-track desk. It was an ambient, experimental record, but when it was released independently both Drew and Canning knew they wanted their live shows to be more vivacious than what was recorded. For their local gigs, they began inviting friends to write music with them before the show and then join them on stage for the performances. Depending on who was in town or available to play, each individual show would

[7] The appendix provides a numerical catalogue of time, location, and length of those interviews, and they will be cited by their interview number.

take on entirely different dimensions; as a result, they never played a single track off the original album in the year after its release. All these collective sessions were eventually recorded as *You Forgot It In People* (2002), a ramshackle rock record which, after a favourable review from Ryan Schreiber on the influential website *Pitchfork*,[8] snowballed into general critical acclaim, and made them a success overnight – not just Broken Social Scene itself, but also many of the associated acts in its peripheries, such as Stars, Metric, Jason Collett, Apostle of Hustle, Feist, etc. As a result, the next few years were incredibly busy for the collective, both touring *You Forgot It In People* but also recording and touring for their side projects. A b-sides album named *Bee Hives* was released in 2004, but the real push was to record a new album and the only way to do it was piecemeal, in little shards, as people came and went, leaving producer Dave Newfeld to assemble and play with those shards in the interim. The result was the eponymous *Broken Social Scene* (2005), an album that was originally slated with the title *Windsurfing Nation* until the band re-titled it because, to quote Kevin Drew, it "ended up being what is just a big, beautiful mess, which represents the idea of who we are" (Harcourt). There was incredible duress experienced during that period, and there has been no 'proper' Broken Social Scene album since, as other members have been largely concentrating on their own work. In the meantime, two solo records were created by Drew and Canning under the moniker 'Broken Social Scene Presents:' released in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

[8] The album received an impressive 9.2 rating from the notoriously stingy and cruel website, which closed with this lofty and effusive praise: "I wish I could convey to you just *how* perfectly this record pulls off that balancing act, how incredibly catchy and hummable these songs are, despite their refusal to resort to pandering or oversimplicity. I wish I could convey how they've made just exactly the kind of pop record that stands the test of time, and how its ill-advised packaging and shudder-inducing bandname seem so infinitesimal after immersing yourself in the music. And I hate to end this saying, 'You just have to hear it for yourself.' But oh my god, you do. You just really, really do" (Schreiber, par. 9, original emphasis).

Jeffrey Remedios, as previously mentioned, was a co-founder of Arts & Crafts but previously worked for six years at Virgin Music Canada.[9] He is now the label's president and CEO, and so he largely directs Arts & Crafts' day-to-day operations. Charles Spearin's history with the collective stretches back to its first iteration, the band K.C. Accidental which he founded with Kevin Drew in 1998. He has been a consistent member of Broken Social Scene since its inception while balancing work in his band Do Make Say Think, and most recently released a solo venture entitled *The Happiness Project* (2009). Jason Collett too began playing with the collective in the era of K.C. Accidental and has played and written with Broken Social Scene throughout his career. His *Motor Motel Lovesongs* (2003) was the second release of Arts & Crafts[10] after Broken Social Scene's own *You Forgot It In People* (2003). As previously stated, Brendan Canning co-founded Broken Social Scene when he and Kevin Drew recorded *Feel Good Lost*. Most recently, he released a solo record interestingly entitled Broken Social Scene Presents: Brendan Canning's *Something For All Of Us...* (2008), the second in the 'Broken Social Scene Presents:' series. While their perspectives were ineffably illuminating, and while they certainly present an interesting cross-section of the various figures involved with Broken Social Scene, having only four interviews for a membership so inclusive presented some potential limitations on the case study.

Fortuitously, another project about Broken Social Scene was coming to fruition just as I was beginning mine. In May of 2009, Stuart Berman, current editor of Toronto's *Eye Weekly* as

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[9] Virgin Music Canada has been owned by EMI since 1992.

[10] Collett continues to publish his music through Arts & Crafts to this day.

well as a long-time friend with many members of Broken Social Scene,[11] published *This Book Is Broken*, an oral history of the band that brought together interviews which Berman conducted over a two year period for the book, while also drawing upon interviews he had archived from covering the band over his journalism career. His book, which focuses largely on the formation of the collective and its various iterations, along with the contextual moment of its creation, has been an invaluable source about the Toronto music scene in the 1990s, as well as a source for supplemental interviews from voices I was unable to reach because of the previously mentioned limitations. His book aims to give an exhaustive account of Broken Social Scene, which I must stress is not my project – rather, I am looking to explore the collective processes within that history. Berman too agreed to an interview for this study and so his input and new book, combined with the interviews I personally conducted with the band, provided a significant pool of first and second hand ethnographic data. For all participants, interviews were recorded and transcribed, and follow-up questions were done by e-mail when necessary.

In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Pierre Bourdieu argues for a relational understanding of the arts, one which comprehends the artist as "the result of the meeting of two histories: the history of the positions they occupy and the history of their dispositions" (61). The first two chapters represent an attempt to map out the first of those histories in two parts, so together they illuminate the positional history from which Broken Social Scene and Arts & Crafts emerged, with which they must constantly negotiate, and which arguably they now have affected. However, neither the band nor the label will be mentioned directly, the aim being to present any general forces as such, though material from my interviews will certainly be used to

[11] Stuart joked to me that he was in "literally on the ground floor," since he met the band while living on the ground floor of an apartment where Jeffrey Remedios, and for a short time Kevin Drew, lived in the basement, and his roommate was best friends with Brendan Canning (Interview 1).

buttress arguments. **Chapter One** examines the political economy of the major labels, key players because their extensive vertical and horizontal integration grants these companies control over a large majority of the music industries, and as a result their business practices structure and shape the terrain with which any artist must negotiate if they wish to sell their music commercially. **Chapter Two** concerns itself with the dispositions of independent artists and the evolution of their sensibilities regarding creating, distributing, promoting, and selling music, along with their historically oppositional relationship with the behemoth that is the major label oligopoly. I hope that by laying these two chapters as groundwork, the peculiarities and intrigue of Broken Social Scene will become more apparent, particularly the historical relations and power structures native to their position.

Following the first two chapters, I examine the specifics and dispositions of Broken Social Scene, the second necessary half of Bourdieu's vision for social art history. For a collective with such a wide membership and ten year history, an exhaustive history is simply not possible. Instead, each chapter explores a particular aspect or moment in Broken Social Scene's history, through which I will try to discover the origins, workings and processes of the collective. **Chapter Three** takes up Broken Social Scene's creation, focusing on the period after *Feel Good Lost* during which Broken Social Scene rapidly expanded its membership, eventually culminating in the recording of *You Forgot It In People*. The chapter thus concerns itself with the realities of *Canadian* popular music in the 1990s, taking the broad forces outlined in chapters one and two and seeing how they were articulated in Toronto's music scene. In doing so, the goal is not only to see why these musicians came together, but also why they did so in the form of the collective. **Chapter Four** examines the specific political and economic model of Broken Social Scene, and is particularly concerned with Arts & Crafts. Here, the interest is the *particular*

form of collectivity in Broken Social Scene: what problems it solved, what new issues it raised, what dynamics resulted, and in what ways it is indebted to the two histories discussed in chapters one and two. Finally, **Chapter Five** attempts to come to terms conceptually – by both theoretical, conceptual metaphors and the discursive, self reflexive metaphors used by the members of Broken Social Scene – with the contradictory motion, affect and processes of Broken Social Scene, flowing from the forces and forms delineated in all previous chapters. The focus of that chapter's inquiry is comparative, using *You Forgot It In People* and *Broken Social Scene* as albums that reveal polar aspects of Broken Social Scene, drawing on affect for insights into the seemingly paradoxical nature of collectivity.

Of course, because of the firmly bordered nature of a case study coupled with the focus of the last three chapters, the conclusions reached by this thesis are thoroughly anchored in the universe of Broken Social Scene and Arts & Crafts, and therefore are not necessarily generalizable to other musical collectives. In the conclusion, I evaluate what the case of Broken Social Scene and Arts & Crafts reveals about collectivity and independent popular music in general. The conclusion is a chance to answer the repeated question of "Handjobs for the Holidays" (*Broken Social Scene*), one that must be asked of my own attempt to understand collectivity: "has it brought you closer to this?" And the appropriate response, in the end, may well not be a direct answer to that question, but the 'response' provided by the song's next line and repeated chorus, an evasive shift to be sure, though it speaks plainly to the *process* of this project and Broken Social Scene itself: "we've got eyes that lead us to places we don't see."

Chapter One: The Music Industries and Major Labels

I'm all hooked up

-"Major Label Debut" (*Broken Social Scene*)

Today, wherever there is music, there is money ... Music, an immaterial pleasure turned commodity, now heralds a society of the sign, of the immaterial up for sale, of the social relation unified in money.

-Jacques Attali, *Noise* (3-4)

It is uncommon for the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) to meet setbacks when exercising its litigious strength but surprisingly, in September of 2008, the first conviction of a consumer for music file-sharing was ordered into retrial. In that case, *Capitol v. Thomas*, the jury had originally delivered a verdict against single mother of two Jammie Thomas for sharing twenty-four songs over the person-to-person (P2P) network KaZaA, and ordered her to pay a sum of $222,000 US to six record companies. However, Judge Michael J. Davis overturned the case, stating that it was "a farce to say that a single mother's acts of using KaAaA are the equivalent, for example, to the acts of global financial firms illegally infringing on copyrights in order to profit in the securities market" and encouraged legislators to change existing copyright law to avoid these egregious, out-of-proportion damages (Associated Press, "Judge"). Furthermore, Davis' ruling was based on a groundbreaking legal interpretation, establishing that as a plaintiff the RIAA must prove not simply that music was made available, but that distribution actually occurred in order to win their litigation. The ruling added up to a rare defeat for the record industry, but one that was to be short lived. No new legislation came

and in June of 2009, even with Davis' new instructions, a jury found Thomas-Rasset[12] guilty of copyright infringement and, despite Davis' comments in the last case, fined her an incomprehensible $1.92 million US – or $80,000 US per song. Considering the astronomical figure and the means of the defendant, it is clear Thomas-Rasset cannot afford to pay this fine. As a result, the RIAA continues to offer an undisclosed settlement to her, though Thomas-Rasset has indicated that she is unsure whether she will take their proposal or pursue an appeal (Associated Press, "Jury").

Capitol v. Thomas is the realization of the RIAA's July 2002 announced "change of strategy," in which the record industry declared its intention to pursue litigation against users, as opposed to the providers, of internet services and programs that enabled file sharing, resulting in some 4,679 personal suits by September of 2004 (Burkhart and McCourt 61). However, these actions also fit into a broader pattern of behaviour; Jammie Thomas-Rasset's case is merely the latest episode in a long history of acrimonious actions taken by an intractable industry struggling to maintain its once cemented oligopoly. Record companies have consistently pursued and implemented strategies designed to maintain undisputed market dominance, control and power, with the simple goal of continuing to realize and exploit music's potential as a commodity to produce capital. This is not to suggest that their actions are the product of devious backroom plotting, nor is it to imply that *Capitol v. Thomas* is the story of an unfairly targeted and penalized victim; rather, the case is the most recent articulation of a long history of industry practice that involves seemingly disparate nodes such as copyright law, MP3 encoding and the transition to digitized music, and the now threatened traditional modes of production and distribution within the music industries. Any single instance must be contextualized within the

[12] She was married between trials.

music industries, with focused attention on the wider practices, business model and political economy of the major labels.

Theoretically, the recording industry's output, processes and behaviour constantly shape and are shaped by what Pierre Bourdieu calls the field of cultural production, which is "a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggle*s tending to transform or conserve this field of forces" (30, original emphasis). John Thompson clarifies that, in Bourdieu's conception, a field is "a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kind of resources or 'capital'" (qtd. in Hesmondhalgh, "Bourdieu" 212). Along with economic capital, social actors – be they artists, producers, agents, executives, etc. – will work to accrue symbolic capital, or the "degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour [that] is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*)," and cultural capital, or "a form of knowledge, an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts," oftentimes sacrificing the accumulation of economic capital for symbolic or cultural capital and vice versa (Johnson 7). All together, the theory presents a method of relational thinking primarily concerned with degrees of autonomy, which recognizes and balances the reciprocal relationship between the ostensible stability found in social structures and the free will, creativity and decision making of individual actors (Garnham and Williams 212). This sentiment is echoed more simply by Keith Negus, who stresses that in popular music "*industry produces culture* and *culture produces industry*" (359). In other words, cultural production is not a consistent relation, but rather a historically shifting plane of forces with evolving revolutionary and conservative interests in interplay. Accordingly, Bourdieu viewed cultural industries as "structured, in the broadest sense,

by an opposition between two sub-fields: the field of restricted production and the field of large-scale production" (Johnson 15). Moreover, cultural production is contained within a broader field of power, with all its political and economic prejudices, and so large-scale production consistently tends to produce material conditions and consequences for the entire field. In Bourdieu's framework, the major labels take the position of large-scale producers; they target a mass audience but have little to no autonomy from the forces of the marketplace and, because of their dominance, their business practices must be navigated or negotiated by anyone wishing to make or sell music, be it large-scale or restricted.

Given his insights, a strange but significant oversight within Bourdieu's work is the lack of detailing and engagement with macro practice and production, a criticism levelled by David Hesmondhalgh: "it is simply astonishing how little Bourdieu has to say about large-scale, 'heteronomous' commercial cultural production, given ... its significance in determining conditions in the sub-field in which he is much more interested, restricted production" ("Bourdieu" 217). This chapter concerns itself with identifying and analyzing the major labels' interests and actions as they affect the many interests and practices within the music *industries*. According to John Williams and Martin Cloonan, organizations such as the RIAA typically attempt to label the recording industry as the singular 'music industry' in order to ascribe their distinct interests to all those involved in the music industries, and academics oftentimes further this subterfuge by addressing themselves similarly to a monolithic entity (305). The singular music industry is a myth, and so this analysis will be careful to address the recording industry and its players as justly separate bodies, while recognizing the wide reach and control dominant factions may have over the many sectors of the music industries.

Writing in 1999, Reebee Garofalo identified three phases, or rather, three formations that dominant capitalist interest had taken within the music industries over the course of the twentieth century:

1. Music publishing houses, which occupied the power center of the industry when sheet music was the primary vehicle for disseminating popular music;
2. Record companies, which ascended to power as recorded music achieved dominance, and;
3. Transnational entertainment corporations, which promote music as an ever-expanding series of "revenue streams"- record sales, advertising revenue, movie tie-ins, streaming audio on the Internet – no longer tied to a particular sound carrier (319).

Clearly, the third stage is still in strong effect nearly ten years later, but over that time the major labels have faced a significant threat to their once commanding dominance: the digital music revolution. This new challenge has demanded novel action from the record industry, and so this analysis must be executed in two parts. First, the relations, structures and practices that have placed the major labels in a position of power will be detailed. Then, the steps taken to conserve this industrial system and allow it to be translated into the digital world, while simultaneously suppressing any and all emergent alternatives, will also be illuminated. The hope is to give a portrait of an industry that is in transition, but still very much invested in its old logics and structures, and consequently engaged in a ferocious struggle for self preservation.

I opened the chapter with Jacques Attali writing somewhat aphoristically and generally that "wherever there is music, there is money," but in the hypercommodified and narrowly owned case of popular music, he is absolutely right (3). John Lovering notes that the development of popular music "has been profoundly influenced by the development of capitalism ... as a result of the social and geographical extension of commodity production," and so it is unsurprising today that we find some of capitalism's strongest articulations in the recording industry (33). In 2005, 80 percent of music sales were accounted for by four companies or 'major labels' (also known amiably as 'the big four'), each of which are owned

and operated under the umbrella of a larger corporation and remain dominant today: Warner Music Group (AOL-Time Warner), Sony BMG Music Entertainment (Sony), Universal Music Group (Vivendi), and EMI (Terra Firma Capital Partners). This represents a historical moment where music ownership is the most concentrated it has ever been, the culmination of a pattern of merger that began when governments began liberalizing laws limiting cross-media ownership (Burkhart and McCourt 24). There are potential aesthetic consequences to this unprecedented corporate control; as far back as 1975, Richard Peterson and David Berger used statistical studies to establish that in popular music, a high concentration of ownership resulted in low musical diversity in the marketplace, although validity of their empirical definition for 'diversity' has been debated in recent literature (Alexander 171-174; Peterson & Berger, "Measuring Concentration" 176; Ross 474-478).[13] Most striking, however, is that industrial concentration is coupled in each of the four major labels with extensive vertical integration, resulting in a few companies having unprecedented control and influence over almost all sectors of the music industries. Each major label owns or is affiliated with "music publishing firms, A&R [Artists and Repertoire, responsible for discovery and development of artists], manufacturing plants, distribution and promotion operations, marketing, record clubs, record-store chains, and digital Internet music sellers" (Burkhart and McCourt 25-26). Patrick Burkhart and Tom McCourt highlight that this industrial organization has four distinct advantages: it maximizes possible sources of revenue, it allows centralized management and accounting, it produces highly integrated release and promotion schedules and, most importantly, it gives its practitioners the power to make potential competitor's entry into the market near impossible (26). Furthermore,

[13] See Peter G. Ross' "Cycles in Symbol Production Research: Foundations, Applications, and Future Directions" for an excellent discussion of the limitations, value and possible future directions for studies founded upon Peterson and Berger's cycle approach.

Lovering highlights that vertical integration produces three distinct types of control for the major labels: control over the musical supply, control over media to secure exposure of the product, and control over the channels of distribution (38). Quite simply, "the major label system dominated the music industry because it owned the means of production and distribution" (McLeod 527). This powerful integration, combined with concentrated ownership and a disproportionate market share, establishes a practical oligopoly; the major labels maintain control by strictly guarding entry into the marketplace by its ownership, and furthermore is capable of pursuing its common interests through various degrees of collusion in practice and strategy, perhaps best exemplified by their joint membership in bodies that act in their interest such as the RIAA. On a pragmatic level, however, Stuart Berman relates that the vast infrastructure makes for "one thing [that] major labels are still good at: shipping mass quantities of records to big chain stores across vast geographical expanses" (*Broken* 97).

Despite these considerable strengths, major labels are competing in a business that is notoriously volatile. In the broadest sense, the capitalist model will naturally have a hard time in music, since music's use value is limitless and thus difficult to affix with an exchange value (Garnham, "Contribution" 38). Specific to music production, Garofalo is careful to stipulate that "while a handful of major corporations may rule financially, it is important to note that this is not synonymous with controlling the form, content, and style of popular music," exemplified for him by the unexpected emergence of rock and roll in the 1950s (342). As for the marketplace, it too seems to lie outside the direct control of the major labels; Burkhart and McCourt note that pop music consumers are inundated by a flood of musical options and products, and that their tastes are fickle, prone to boredom, and difficult to predict (26). Catherine Moore furthers the point, describing music patrons as "individual consumers who have strong faith in their own taste," and

consequently “they are often frustratingly unpredictable” (177). This results in an inordinate amount of risk, especially when compared to other entertainment industries, to which the major labels will inevitably be compared by their bosses in the boardrooms of their synergistic parent corporations. The unfortunate reality for major labels is this oft-cited, anecdotal figure: depending upon who you believe, somewhere between 90 to 95 percent of the albums produced fail to recuperate the money invested by the major label (Klein 475, Burkhart and McCourt 21, Breen and Forde 85, Leyson 187). As shall be demonstrated later, this is more a consequence of the major label business model and scale than a fickle marketplace – independent labels can make comfortable profits selling exponentially fewer albums – but the presence of genuine variability combined with industry practice results in extreme risk, and thus pushes the record industry to take greater and greater measures to manage that risk, hoping to stabilize their earnings and maximize profits (Burkhart and McCourt 17).

The desire to mitigate risk and losses translates into a distinct set of priorities when a major label is recruiting talent. When A&R departments are searching for new artists, they are not searching for those with raw talent who may, over time, develop into great musicians; those chancy ventures in research and development are typically left to independent labels, from which they eventually poach any artists that show commercial promise. As Robert McChesney summarizes in the documentary *Money for Nothing*: “historically, the role of the independents was to take the risks that the majors wouldn’t want to... [and] if one of them hits it, you buy them up.” Rather, the model for major label prosperity emerged in the early 1980s, during the record industry’s first recession. At the time, an industry which had once imagined itself “recession-proof” reacted drastically; some 7 000 jobs were cut by one label alone, rosters were trimmed, new artists were severely screened and limited, and the rate of releases slowed to a crawl

(Garofalo 343). It was in this context that Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1982) became a worldwide sensation and reinvigorated the record industry, selling 40 million copies worldwide and producing an unparalleled seven Top Ten singles. Garofalo elaborates the sweeping effect of Michael Jackson's success on the major labels' business model:

> For the major companies, this became the model for success. In the cost-cutting fever generated by the recession, major companies looked to reap greater rewards from fewer artists. If a single artist can move 40 million, they reasoned, why shoulder the extra administrative, production, and marketing costs of 80 artists moving half a million units each? *Thriller* thus signalled an era of blockbuster LPs featuring a limited number of superstar artists as the solution to the industry's economic woes (343).

New artists signed to major labels are thus on a limited trial run for international superstardom. Money is injected as a short term, large scale, high capital promotion and distribution investment, with each record company praying it has the next big ticket signed to its roster. On the one hand, if the artist makes it big, costs are recuperated early in the sales cycle and consequent sales become almost pure profit. On the other hand, if there is no sign of significant market reception, or even tentative promise in key demographics, the artist is unceremoniously dropped from the label, oftentimes owing money to the label for the costly aforementioned promotion and production. The general result was a greatly shortened developmental time for any one artist on a label and high turnover rates, as agents quickly cycled from band to band searching for the next big sensation. Toynbee highlights that this had the added benefit of reducing risk, since the wider a label's repertoire the more the risk is spread across many ventures (16). Jeffrey Remedios, speaking about his days working at EMI, relates that the industry was "about short-term goals, it was about making the year ... short-term thinking, throw it at the wall, hope it sticks, if something starts to stick, throw more money at it, if it doesn't stick, move on to the next thing," which created "such a short-term life cycle that you ended up just chasing your tail around" (Interview 4; *Broken* 20); Stuart Berman refers to this as "the

quick-hit-or-pink-slip major-label culture" (*Broken* 95). Furthermore, to achieve the requisite high level of sales, the industry became increasingly focused on international markets, since only that scale was capable of producing those sales (Hesmondhalgh, "Indie" 47). The unexpected success of *Thriller* produced a new business model upon which the entire industry organized itself, and meant that artists who did not epitomize the model's ideal, who did not seem like they were going to go big, quick, fell off the radar entirely. In addition, because many, many bands were needed to fulfill this risk management model, many musicians and artists accumulated stories of major label frustration as they were picked up briefly, measured to these standards, and eventually given up upon when they appeared to fall short.

Further accentuating this bias is the internal structure and remote management techniques of the tightly integrated media conglomerate. Negus explains that since corporate boards are not involved in the daily management of the label and perhaps no more than superficially familiar with the music industries, they tend to prefer quantitative over qualitative measures since ostensibly those measures provide an objective, business perspective to which the chairs are accustomed. For management responsible to the board of directors, it is "easier to stand up at a corporate meeting and present the figures than try and explain the way in which artists are being developed" and consequently "getting the figures right becomes a preoccupation" (Negus 367; Negus 366). As a result, artist themselves also go through a process of commodification, which Michael Franti of the band Spearhead describes as becoming "like a stock number" since the label management and its owner only want one question answered: "what is the number attached to this artist's name on the bottom line?" (*Money For Nothing*). The egregious combination of a large scale business model and distance management from an entertainment corporation

boardroom generally results in both the artists and the music they produce being defined by its short term potential to produce capital.

As noted earlier, oftentimes artists end their relationship with a major label in significant debt to the label. This is a consequence of industry standard, highly exploitative contracts, where an artist is saddled with as much of the costs and risk associated with music production as possible. Discussing the issue, renowned rock critic and editor Dave Marsh fulminates: "In terms of the American economy ... the recording industry replaced the cotton industry with exactly the same labour relationship. You know, recording artists are mostly treated like sharecroppers" (McLeod 523). On paper, the relationship looks rather simple and almost equitable – signing to a major label, an artist gets an advance on money to make a record, the advance allowing the band to survive and focus on music while recording (Hesmondhalgh, "Post-Punk" 261); they also get to have their album mass produced and distributed on a global scale; and finally, they receive the benefits of the multifaceted promotions machine and tightly integrated mechanisms at a label's disposal. The latter is particularly valuable given the enormous possibilities for cross-promotion within a synergistic corporation; even in the digital age, an executive of the big four locates his major label's strength in "promotion, marketing and 'breaking' of artists in a way that the Internet cannot do" (Leyson 189). Major label artists also dominate radio play, largely due to a concurrent trend of concentration of ownership on the airwaves and deregulation of radio content. Furthermore, there was a practical instutionalisation of 'payola' practices that were condemned in the 1950s but then resurrected under the new 'pay for play' system, the key (and largely sole) change being that the DJ no longer receives payment for promotion but the corporate ownership of the station does instead. This is carried out by an intermediary system of independent promotion and Courtney Love, in a 2000 speech to the Digital Hollywood Online

Entertainment Conference, does an excellent job cutting to the heart of that arrangement: "independent promotion is a system where the record companies use middlemen so they can pretend not to know that radio stations – the unified broadcast system – are getting paid to play their records" (1). In other words, major labels pay program directors to add a greater proportion of their songs to the rotation, and in the process make it largely impossible for independent artists to get radio play. The major labels' advantages and significant capital make promotions of their scale impossible elsewhere in the music industries.

What an artist must agree to for access to these immense resources is staggering. Toynbee, noting that almost all artists see their relationship with major labels as exploitative, states in a rather self-evident, Marxian fashion that in the record industry "all work must be deemed exploitative because surplus is invariably appropriated by capital" (14). If there was any doubt, the terms of major label contracts and industry practice quickly illuminate this unfair relationship. First, upon signing the major label assumes ownership of all music produced by the artist while on contract and furthermore claims exclusivity privileges, eliminating any possibility of competition from alternative labels. As a form of compensation, artists receive royalties which vary from approximately seven to twelve percent of sales for neophytes, to fifteen percent or higher for a label's international stars (Burkhart and McCourt 18). When they sign, an artist is given an advance that is meant to cover the cost of recording their music, creating music videos for that music, and any other expenses, all of which must be recovered by the record company before the artists receives any royalty compensation (Burkhart and McCourt 19). If the record does not produce enough royalties to cover the debt, it is simply rolled over to the production of the next record.

The costs that artists must cover are not insignificant. For example, the average price for recording a music video is approximately $250,000, and the realities of the power relationship make it a required expenditure, as Dave Marsh explains: "You make a video, it costs a quarter of a million dollars, you pay for all of it, the record company fronts the money but it comes out of your royalties, and if you don't do it the record company says you're not cooperating and then they won't even promote your record" (*Money For Nothing*). Furthermore, major labels indulge in what McLeod dubs "creative accounting" to try and withhold money from its artists, such as charging extra money for CD manufacturing, despite the compact disc actually being a cheaper format to produce (522). Rock and roll producer Steve Albini best sums up the issue: "Royalties are a cost; they [major labels] want to keep them as low as possible. And, whenever possible, if they're going to be paying money to a band, they instead use that money to pay for something else that they [the band] would otherwise not have to cover" (McLeod 523).

What results, after all these subtractions, is that even astronomically successful artists have a nearly impossible time making a living off album sales. For instance, Kembrew McLeod relates the example of platinum rap artists A Tribe Called Quest where each member, despite selling 1.5 million copies of their album *Low End Theory* (1991), actually "made less that year than [they] would have working at a convenience store" due to the inequitable practices of the major labels (524). Love grinds out similar numbers doing what she calls "recording-contract math" for a fictitious band, which is worth quoting at length to get the full breadth of all the additions, subtractions and percentiles (1):

> This story is about a bidding-war band that gets a huge deal with a 20 percent royalty rate and a million-dollar advance (no bidding-war band ever got a 20 percent royalty, but whatever) ... They spend half a million to record their album. That leaves the band with $500,000. They pay $100,000 to their manager for 20 percent commission. They pay $25,000 each to their lawyer and business manager. That leaves $350,000 for the four band members to split. After $170,000 in

> taxes, there's $180,000 left. That comes out to $45,000 each ... The record is a big hit and sells a million copies ... So, this band releases two singles and makes two videos. The two videos cost a million dollars to make and 50 percent of the video production costs are recouped out of the band's royalties. The band gets $200,000 in tour support, which is 100 percent recoupable. The record company spends $300,000 on independent radio promotion ... [which] are charged to the band. Since the original million-dollar advance is also recoupable, the band owes $2 million to the record company. If all of the million records are sold at full price with no discounts or record clubs, the band earns $2 million in royalties, since their 20 percent royalty works out to $2 a record. Two million dollars in royalties minus $2 million in recoupable expenses equals... zero! (1).

As for the major label:

> They grossed $11 million. It costs $500,000 to manufacture the CDs and they advanced the band $1 million. Plus there were $1 million in video costs, $300,000 in radio promotion and $200,000 in tour support. The company also paid $750,000 in music publishing royalties. They spent $2.2 million on marketing ... Add it up and the record company has spent about $4.4 million. So their profit is $6.6 million; the band may as well be working at 7-Eleven (1).

As Love demonstrates, when the financial repercussions of major label contracts and promotional requirements are played out – even in the fictional dream world of a generous label willing to cover half a music video and part with 20 percent royalties – the ledger, over time, ultimately illuminates the exploitation buried in the contractual figures.

The other contentious feature of these contracts is their duration. The industry standard deal is for seven albums, but contracts also include stipulations regarding how quickly albums can be produced and released, largely in the interest of producing demand through scarcity. Since major labels "increasingly limit these releases to one every two years, the 'seven-year' contract often stretches to fourteen years, which is also the average lifespan of an artist's recording career" (Burkhart and McCourt 20). A band can thus be forced to spend their entire careers stuck in a contract with a label without renegotiation or the ability to field offers from other labels. There is one exception to this rule; in California, contracts for all those in the cultural industries are legally limited to seven years. However, since the contract clearly specifies album

production, artists can find themselves in a legal gray area. For example, Jared Leto's band 30 Second to Mars thought they legally terminated their deal with EMI in July of 2008 because it had passed the seven year limit, but since they did not meet the required album production stipulated in their contract, they now find themselves on the receiving end of a numerically-cute 30 million dollar lawsuit, not to mention the 1.4 million dollars EMI claims they are owed for the promotion of the band's previous albums (Liss).

It would seem absurd that any artist would sign with a major label, but many factors play in favour of corporations. First, popular music suffers from what Toynbee terms "a chronic oversupply of labour," meaning that an extraordinary amount of musical production occurs outside the commercially sanctioned confines of the major labels, among which there is no shortage of people who wish to distinguish themselves from their colleagues and so dream of landing a deal, turning their craft into great wealth, and becoming a star (26). Youth also plays into the major labels' hands as many young artists, blinded by their idealistic understanding of music, sign with major labels without being fully versed in its machinations; even Steve Albini admits that "if some big record label had approached me when I was eighteen years old ... I would have signed the first thing that was put in front of me" (McLeod 523). This may be because major label attention can serve as a very strong form of validation; Charles Spearin told me that early on:

> ... in the back of your mind you're thinking 'wouldn't it be great to be picked up by a major,' even though we had known friends who had been signed to a major and gotten nowhere from it. There was still some stupid prestige about being signed by a major label, which was naive (Interview 2).

Brendan Canning also speaks about suffering from a similar naiveté in his early years, one which he recognizes in young bands today[14] (Interview 5). Youthful bands also do not have the benefit of having seen these contracts played out elsewhere. So instead of seeing Love's math buried in their contract, they only see the cash advance without realizing how difficult it will be to repay it (Hesmondhalgh, "Post-Punk" 260). Since these are standard practices in an industry controlled by an oligopoly, the independent systems stand as the only alternative to the major labels. Unfortunately, their rewards can appear paltry compared to the advances that can be tabled by international corporations, and they do not pretend to offer what the major label claims it can give – international superstardom. Ultimately, it is the major labels' power as gatekeeper, with the ability to offer exposure to many potential fans, which can produce a signature. As always, trust Courtney Love to cut to the chase: "Record companies stand between artists and their fans. We signed terrible deals with them because they controlled our access to the public" (5).

While inequitable working relations with artists run rampant within the major labels, the logic of exploiting labour is not the primary way record labels make their money, nor is it the principle around which their business is organized. Simon Frith stresses that the music industry "is not a manufacturing industry but a rights industry; what is at stake is the ownership of titles rather than the exploitation of labour power" (390). Frith goes on to proclaim that "it may well be misleading ... to regard the music industry as a single industry, rather than a series of industries ordered by a *single rights regime*" (390, emphasis added). Power in the music industries is garnered through possession of legal rights, which for the major labels produces:

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[14] Canning describes watching the MuchMusic show *disBand* – a reality show where young bands go through a series of music industry themed challenges and then perform a live gig for industry professionals, only to be told that they will make it or they should disband – as a sort of two-pronged, reflexive experience: "It's kinda interesting hearing these kids talk about getting a record deal and then me saying 'oh god, I can't believe they're so stupid,' and then 'well, what difference is there from me back then?'" (Interview 5).

continuous profits through royalties paid from any use of the track, be it on the radio, in a motion picture, etc.; continuous sales of popular back catalogue titles, especially as consumers buy their old favourites in new formats, such as with the development of compact discs (Garofalo 344); and continuous opportunities to licence a song commercially, both bringing in immediate profit and sometimes injecting new life into the sales of a dormant artist. For example, when Nick Drake's song "Pink Moon" was used posthumously in a VW commercial some 30 years after his last recording, his annual sales escalated from 6,000 copies a year to a dramatic 74,000 overnight (Moore 182). With older artists these revenue streams are sheer profit, as the recording companies long ago recovered any costs associated with production. The longer a label controls these rights, the more possibilities they have to reap the benefits of these pure profit sources. And so copyright, the legal protection of this major label linchpin, emerges as a key locus of struggle for the recording industry.

Music copyright, as Garofalo illuminates, derives from literary copyright and so is firmly based in the European tradition of individual authorship and focuses on the aspects of music that can be notated, such as lyrics and melody (323). In the United States, The Copyright Act was established in 1909,[15] which required two cents in royalties be paid to publishers for every mechanical reproduction – records, or the then more dominant player-piano roll – and Burkhart and McCourt note that it "enabled publishers to gain a stake in the new media" (22). Furthermore, Garofalo sees the origins of vertical integration in this act, since it "opened the door for collaborations between publishers and recording companies which had not existed previously" (327). In the modern recording era, major labels have lobbied heavily and rather successfully for two trends. First, they have fought hard to instate a 'pay to play' cultural

[15] Similar copyright legislation did not occur in Canada until 1924 (Vaver 23).

environment for their recordings, meaning that every performance of a recording would be subject to a royalty charge. For example, jukeboxes were exempt from royalties until 1976, when the U.S. Copyright Act was extended onto jukeboxes in the form of an annual royalty fee (McCourt and Burkhart 23). To this day the project continues, as the major labels are currently embroiled in a lobby war with AM-FM broadcasters in the United States over proposed bill HR 4789, which would impose a new royalty fee on stations that would go directly to the major labels (Kravets). Second, major labels fight to keep their profitable back catalogue as a revenue stream by lobbying for extensions to copyright protection. In the United States, the government has been extremely accommodating, allowing the RIAA a major role in crafting the language and terms of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and the aptly-titled Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, which were both passed into law in 1998 (McCourt and Burkhart 7-8). Copyright for a specific work of music now lasts the author's life plus 75 years in the United States, and the author's life plus 50 years in Canada. In a broader perspective, these shifts are consistent with the disintegration of the state as a protector of consumer rights, instead becoming "an enforcer of intellectual-property rights" (McCourt and Burkhart 118). All told, it is in the major labels' interest that copyright be applied to as many sources as possible and last indefinitely, and this interest is especially reflected in the copyright law of the United States.

This is the recording industry – a highly integrated oligopoly, macro in scale, based on a regime of rights ownership and exploitative labour relations. It derives its power from mediative control and demonstrates all the traits of an officious gatekeeper. A major label's goal, "like any culture industry in a market economy... is fundamentally to transform its cultural products into financial rewards" (Garofalo 318). This is not to suggest, in an Adornian fashion, that to try to earn any money from music renders it a commodity where "every detail is substitutable; it serves

its function only as a cog in a machine," as a means towards more capital (Adorno I.7). All subjects interviewed for this project stressed in different ways, as Stuart Berman did, that to sell music was "not an evil thing" (Interview 1). Rather, it is the scale of the profits pursued, the strategies of power and control used to maintain dominance over those profits, and the business model designed to take advantage of its artists to achieve those profits, which gives the major labels the justly poor reputation they have today.

Yet in music, the processes of capitalism are ineluctably tied and responsive to technological advancement, for technology establishes the possible forms in which music will be produced, disseminated and consumed. When the major labels introduced the compact disc in 1982, they could not have anticipated that only five years later collaborative work between Germany's Fraunhofer Institut Integrierte Schaltunger and Dieter Seitzer from the University of Erlangen would result in a compression / decompression algorithm (codec) that could further compress the digital CD recording to sizes that were easily transferable online. That codec later developed into the MPEG 1 – Audio Layer 3 (MP3) software, which to the major labels' chagrin lacked any intrinsic guard against copying. As internet speeds increased and home computer hard drives expanded exponentially through the mid to late 90s, many online sharing communities were founded and subsequently flourished.[16] They operated as gift economies, circumvented the major labels entirely, and thus posed a major threat as an alternative distribution system that might directly link artist and consumer. File sharing constituted a challenge to the major labels' business model by "threatening to render their greatest strength, distribution and promotion, obsolete" (Burkhart and McCourt 44). The major labels appeared to hesitate, as if they were uncertain as to how to handle the new technology, or were perhaps arrogantly dismissive of its

[16] Napster, KaZaA, MP3.com etc.

potential, and writers such as Marcus Breen trumpeted the triumph of "disintermediation" and predicted the demise of the major label's dominance (Breen and Forde 80).

Whether the pause was a deliberate strategy or simple hubris is unclear, but the new utopian visions it allowed to rise would soon be confronted by the industries' old structures and powers. According to McCourt and Burkhart, "the Big Four's delayed entry into Internet distribution was the first of several calculated risks that the music industry took to ensure control over its new distribution platform" (136). Regardless of whether the delay was in fact strategic, the digital challenge was understood as an affront to the major labels' oligopolistic control of distribution, since "online is simply a new distribution channel" (Moore 84). Major labels knew that, as Nicholas Garnham summarizes, "*cultural distribution, not cultural production ... is the key locus of power and profit*," and to gain this desired control in cyberspace and maintain their traditional advantage required two steps ("Public Policy" 161-2, original emphasis). First, the major labels needed to challenge the online gift economy by taking hard legal action against all those committing or enabling Internet piracy. Second, they had to develop a secure method for online distribution that would be adapted by consumers but would limit acts which cost them sales such as copying and file sharing.

The logical starting point for litigation was the biggest P2P client, Napster, and in December of 1999 the RIAA launched legal action. The RIAA claimed that the file sharing client was cutting into their profits and violating copyright law by facilitating pirating. Napster argued its program was being used for "substantial non-infringement purposes," citing legal precedence in the 1984 Betamax case *Sony Corp. v. Universal Studios*, but ultimately the judge rejected the argument, ordered an injunction, and Napster declared bankruptcy (Burkhart and McCourt 55-9). Emboldened by the positive outcome, the RIAA continued to pursue equally successful lawsuits

against similar entities until they came up against KaZaA, a P2P that had learned Napster's harsh legal lesson. To prevent litigation, it was purchased by Sharman Networks Limited, a company which was "incorporated in the South Pacific island of Vanuatu and managed from Australia. Its computer servers are in Denmark and the source code for its software was last seen in Estonia" (qtd. in Burkhart and McCourt 66). International courts stymied any further litigation and so, in order to make an example or two – or over four thousand – the major labels began the spat of personal suits detailed at the beginning of this chapter, largely targeting KaZaA users.[17] To further exasperate the situation, agents for the major labels began "spoofing" KaZaA, "posting to peer-to-peer services decoy files that contain noise, static, or loops of a song segment in order to frustrate users" (Burkhart and McCourt 68). They also began a nasty public relations campaign, issuing press releases that associated KaZaA with child pornography rings. In the end, KaZaA users were frustrated or scared away, but many largely simply switched to new systems of downloading.[18] Clearly, the battle was won by the major labels, but a war remained. If the RIAA wants their strategy to produce its desired results, they must indefinitely continue aggressive legal practices in order to remove, or at least push underground, any alternatives to their potential system of distribution.

With the time bought by extensive litigation, the major labels began developing their own models for online distribution and concurrently attempted to implement technology to prevent digital copying and ripping of their recordings. One frequent strategy was to buy out established music sharing platforms, usually after they had been weakened by venomous litigation, and then

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[17] Defendants using AOL as an internet provider, however, were conspicuously absent from the lawsuit (Burkhart and McCourt 70).

[18] Bittorent, eDonkey etc.

attempt to use their brand and infrastructure to launch industry backed pay sites. Though largely unsuccessful, the process has tended to create strange bedfellows. For example, EMI actually financed Napster more than 100 million dollars to develop a secure system that would involve compensation to the major labels while concurrently suing Napster for infringement (Burkhart and McCourt 59-60). Furthermore, significant investment has been made in Digital Rights Management (DRM) software, with the aim of controlling and capping unfettered transfer and sharing of digital files. The grandest of these schemes began in 1999, when the major labels pooled resources with a consortium of two hundred members of the business community (such as Microsoft, IBM, Samsung, etc.) for a project they titled the 'Secure Digital Music Investment' (SDMI). The project's goal, while extremely ambitious and laughably unrealistic, was deceptively uncomplicated; in phase one, the uncontrolled MP3 was to be replaced with an industry backed format that would be security encoded and digitally controlled, and in phase two all new music players on the market would be made so that they were only SDMI compatible. The irony of the various companies coming together behind the SDMI project was that it was, in part, their conflict of interest that originally gave digital music a chance to grow and thrive, particularly the internal conflicts within the parent, synergistic corporations of the major labels. The technologies that encouraged MP3 use, such as blank CDs and CD writing drives, had the potential to generate significant profits and were a market no corporation wanted to be shut out of. Of course, a CD burner in every computer, or available at every computer store, was not in the best interests of the major labels. But within a synergistic corporation, where music profits form only a miniscule portion of the whole,[19] the interests of other hardware and computing

[19] In 1990, author Frederic Dannen wrote that "Americans today spend about the same amount on breakfast cereal ... as they do on compact discs, tapes and records" (qtd. in Kruse 33).

divisions trumped theirs. In this light, SDMI was an attempt for the corporation, as a whole, to have its cake and eat it too (Burkhart and McCourt 105-107). However, after a huge investment of time and money that was plagued from the start, SDMI found its encryption was actually painfully audible on the music tracks it protected, and also discovered that "any reasonably sophisticated hacker could circumvent the technology"[20] (Burkhart and McCourt 109). In the end, the project was abandoned, but new DRM technology continued to be researched and developed by many groups for a significant period, usually only to be briefly deployed and hacked.

Ultimately, the most successful ventures online combined, at their outset, both rights management and existing online networks, but were realized by third parties with strong footholds in the computing industry such as Apple's iTunes Store. The iTunes Store was developed as an integrated part of an already prevalent program, Apple's iTunes, requiring only a simple update to be easily accessible, and every track was limited to five copies through its Fair Play encoding. This, of course, was not a perfect system – Fair Play encoded in AAC format which is widely incompatible beyond the iPod and, like every encoding system to date, it had been hacked – but iTunes had grown to sell over five billion songs by June of 2008. However, Apple announced on January 6th, 2009, that they were dropping DRM from their songs, following the pattern of more recently launched digital providers; for example, Amazon.com were without DRM at their launch in 2007 and managed to sign all major labels onto their

[20] Jeffrey Remedios related the circumstances under which Arts & Crafts experimented with DRM and why the ordeal was eventually abandoned: "... we nearly went and copy protected all our records when we started. That was the whole thing then, these copy protectable disks that only worked twenty percent of the time. Like Apples, for example, would be fine, and half the time it would encode you could just hear the digital clicks and pops and stuff. All the majors were doing it, you should do this da da da ... We actually pressed five hundred copies copy protected and then scraped them and realized this is ridiculous. What does this have to do with us serving fans?" (Interview 4).

service within a year (Associated Press, "Apple"). While it is doubtful that new players like Apple or Amazon.com were initially desired by the major labels, who would have originally cast themselves in that role, the steady flow of royalties generated by the now largest legal online music distributor is certainly a much easier pill to swallow for the major labels than the gift economies which circumvented them. However, even this relationship already seems somewhat strained; when the Copyright Royalty Board considered increasing royalties by six cents per song in October of 2008 after significant lobbying from the RIAA, Apple immediately began a public relations and lobbying campaign which declared that it would shut down iTunes if such a change came to pass (Van Buskirk). Though this time the board decided against the increase, the table appears to be set for increasing struggle for profits between legal online distributors and major labels.

While the major labels are certainly still in the process of adapting and experimenting, the evidence and strategies presented suggests that the essential traits of the major labels remain intact as they continue to pursue their two-step project in cyberspace. Though digital music is certainly still a contested forum and locus of struggle, the considerable legal and monetary resources of the major labels have been mobilized to introduce and cement the oligopoly's authority online. At this point, it is important to stress that while online challenges have generated a great deal of interest, "music online exists side-by-side with music offline *and* side-by-side with cultural and industrial practices and processes offline," all of which still furnish major labels with great efficacy and influence (Jones 229). This chapter began with the case of *Capitol v. Thomas*, and Jammie Thomas-Rasset's case should now clearly emerge as a symptom of the larger story of an industry – one which derives tremendous power from its business practice and political economy – exerting itself to assure its survival and dominance in the future

of the music industries. Despite the RIAA claiming that they would file no more litigation in December of 2008, they in fact filed 62 more lawsuits in the month of April 2009 alone (Sullivan). This would be unsurprising for Jason Collett, as he informed me that the industry now sees litigation as a legitimate source of revenue (Interview 3). And as Love notes, these settlement revenues have the added bonus of falling outside royalty agreements: "Why on earth should MP3.com pay $120 billion to four distribution companies, who in most cases won't have to pay a nickel to the artists whose copyrights they've stolen through their system of organized theft?" (6). As should be clear, the field of power largely remains intact, but the major labels are currently embroiled in a struggle to try and conserve a once strong hierarchy, one that has largely been irrevocably affected by the digital revolution.

But long before these digital changes, many individuals aware of these political economy issues were toiling tirelessly to construct an 'alternative' approach, taking a position which attempted to eschew mass distribution and mass appeal for increased autonomy in the field of cultural production. What Bourdieu labelled 'restricted production' traded economic capital for symbolic capital, flowed directly from a rejection of the major label system, and produced what I would describe as distinct independent sensibilities. These approaches came with their own unique benefits and challenges, while producing their fair share of successes and failures. The endeavours, history and evolution of these sensibilities are the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Independent Sensibilities

they all want to love the cause
they all need to be the cause
they all want to dream a cause
they all need to fuck the cause
-"Stars and Sons" (*You Forgot It In People*)

*When we speak of a **field** of position-takings, we are insisting that what can be constituted as a **system** for the sake of analysis is not the product of a coherence-seeking intention or an objective consensus ... but the product and prize of permanent conflict; or, to put it another way, that the generative, unifying principle of this 'system' is the struggle, with all the contradictions it engenders.*
-Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (34, original emphasis)

Independent – or 'indie' – is *the* hazy, protean concept of current popular music. The term has been employed in countless ways, each case often more imprecise than the last, but the usage can be broadly broken down into two categories; either the term is an aesthetic shortcut, aiming to capture and describe a particular indie sound, or its use is meant to reflect an artist's independence from some form of corporate capital, such as the major labels or the advertising industry. Since it can refer to a style of music or a system or production, the exact meaning of indie is fairly indefinite, if not desultory. This chapter, however, is not concerned with discovering an exact definition, and will not attempt to dictate what sound or political economy is 'genuinely' independent. That approach would be, without a doubt, a slippery slope at best, given all the subjectivity and grey area involved in the concept, and would produce many questions that could not be answered adequately or critically without being arbitrary. For example, how would artists that began on independent labels, had a major influence while there,

but eventually signed with a major be qualified (i.e., R.E.M., Death Cab for Cutie etc.)? Or artists who began on a major label, achieved international success, but subsequently left for their own independence (i.e., Radiohead, Nine Inch Nails etc. [21])? Does a particular 'sound' define indie regardless of corporate involvement (i.e., Weezer, The Killers etc.[22])? Do any and all interactions with major labels disqualify a band or label from indie status? Depending on the person, place and period in music history, you would get infinite delineations of what would qualify as independent and what would not; Ryan Hibbett furthers this point by noting that "particular notions of 'what is indie' are closely bound to personal experience, as well as age and social class" (59). Rather than attempt a genre definition or try to create hard and fast rules about which artists and labels meet the criteria for the moniker, this chapter will explore what I term independent *sensibilities*, which refers to the cultural instincts of artists, fans and producers which construct the discursive 'indie', an intuition which can inform both the political economy and aesthetic choices of artists. My interest is in the discourse that allows independent artists and labels to differentiate and identify themselves, and also in what actions and perceptions these understandings guide. Independent sensibilities are inextricably relational, as any independent artist or label is constantly aware of the major label model as they define themselves against it. Moreover, for this project it is essential to examine how these discourses began and have been shaped over the years leading up to Broken Social Scene's emergence in the late 1990s and early

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[21] The original release of Radiohead's *In Rainbows* (2007), online as a pay-what-you-want download, and the free online release of Nine Inch Nails' *The Slip* (2008) certainly explore new, independent models for distribution, though arguably their effectiveness relies on the exposure each band received – and the fame they thus achieved – while signed to a major label.

[22] Author John Sellers, in debating what exactly indie is, refers to Weezer as a band "that seems to be an independent band created in a major-label-funded laboratory experiment," while The Killers are subject to endless online debates about their indie credibility, perhaps because while every album has been put out by a subsidiary of Universal Music Group, their songs contain lyrics such as "it's indie rock and roll for me, it's all I need" (10; "Glamorous Indie Rock & Roll," 2004)

2000s – the history of the dispositions. We will find that these sensibilities are far from consistent, having mutated and evolved significantly from their roots in post-punk, particularly in response to the various successes and failures of independent artists and record labels.

Many critiques and chronicles have been written about independent music which will serve as examples and guides, but a degree of critical caution must be exercised whenever engaging with writing on the subject. Matthew Banister notes that many accounts, because they are written by fans, "tend to make absolute claims for the value of the music – that it is avant-garde, postmodern, subversive, or radical" (77). Again, the framing of this chapter should dodge these credibility issues; I am not concerned with what value can be attributed to independent music, but rather what discourse is mobilized to find value. Stephen Lee, in studying independent record companies, has asserted that "the slipperiness and multiple definitions associated with the term 'independence' indicate that the term and its related social concept operate as a powerful site of cultural negotiation" (29); this chapter looks to articulate the context, terms, developments and results of that interminable negotiation.

Before continuing, however, it is absolutely essential that a time frame of interest be specified. The importance of independent labels in the early rise and development of both jazz and rock and roll has typically been recognized, but then subsequently bracketed away in any studies of modern independent music (Hesmondhalgh, "Post-Punk" 256; Lee 13). In order to limit the scope of this chapter, as well as allow it to speak precisely to the influence these dispositions would have had on the positions taken by Broken Social Scene, this chapter will bracket its focus as most histories of indie music do, and so focus on the discourse that emerged from post-punk bands and labels in the late 1970s, when the practices that would come to be known as indie by the early 1980s began to emerge (Fairchild 21).

The first building block, at the root of early independent sensibility, is found in the imposing presence of the major label system, coupled with the macro focus of the major label business model. For Michael Azerrad, independent approaches began "simply because there were great bands that would never be signed to major labels. In true capitalist tradition entrepreneurs recognized a need, however small, and catered to it" (6). The major labels' interests are limited only to the large, both in scale and capital, a tendency that only became more accentuated with the development of international markets and adoption of the *Thriller* model in the 1980s. Economics aside, Azerrad qualifies that "doing an end run around the Powers That Be will always have an inherent ideological spin" (6). In terms of discourse, this became a rejection of the major label system and its effect on the music it produced, mounted on terms quite similar to those articulated by the Frankfurt School.

Writing in 1941, Theodor Adorno famously proclaimed in *On Popular Music* that popular music's essential characteristic was standardization, meaning "the whole is pre-given and pre-accepted," and therefore "regardless of what aberrations occur, the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced" (I.5; I.3). Adorno proposed that the process of commodification produces music which is homogenized and aims at standard, uniform reactions. Furthermore, any detail or track that appears novel or divergent is merely an example of pseudo-individualization, a process designed to provide stimulating novelty and the appearance of diversity, deluding the listener from realizing that the music in fact reflects an unvarying, consistent whole (Adorno I.21). "Every detail is substitutable; it serves its function only as a cog in a machine" (Adorno I.7). Adorno makes a forceful case that all popular music, because it is first and foremost a commodity, suffers from

severe, insidious and irredeemable limitations on form and content, negating individual creativity and rendering it both mechanical and, in the final analysis, essentially unvarying.

Proponents of independent music, for their part, have launched similarly conceived attacks against major labels. The major label system is seen as one that stifles artist creativity and authenticity through its interference and marketing strategies, the result of which is a standardized product designed only to appeal by convention and cliché. Within the independent discourse of both musicians and label management, Robert Strachan notes that "there is an assumption that the organizational structures of the recording industry necessitate that creativity suffers," and their comments suggest "that signing to a major label is a disempowering or corrupting experience for musicians" (249). Elsewhere, Bethany Klein writes quite simply that "the major label system, driven only by profits, discourages art and encourages standardization" (475). However, while Adorno attributes these effects to a broader maintenance of power and relations by the ruling class, advocates of independent music simply ascribe standardization and repetition to the major labels' explicit allegiance to unfettered capitalist principles, namely to maximize capital and minimize risk; they stick to tried-and-true formulas to appeal to the most people possible, and if a fad arises they jump in quickly to get in on the new potential profits. Of course, this is not the only discrepancy between Adorno's position and the discourse of indie; even the possibility of popular music retaining artistry while simultaneously being sold as a commodity would have been dismissed outright by Adorno. But the various niche market, limited release, experimental endeavours typically created through independent labels contradict Adorno entirely; as Richard Middleton highlights, the very existence of an avant-garde commodity pokes a considerable hole in Adorno's totalizing theory (43). Instead of commodification, it is crass commercial manipulation of music and artists which raises indie ire.

Independent music sensibilities would suggest that Adorno "draws the net too tightly," and that it is the major label system which is guilty of the egregious violations Adorno wishes to attribute to popular music in general (Middleton 43).

Ultimately, the self proclaimed goal of independent music is to create a space autonomous of the major labels to allow for creative expression to flourish unfettered. Independent music thus fits quite accurately into what Pierre Bourdieu terms as the field of restricted production. In Bourdieu's model, restricted production's "economy of practices is based, as in a generalized game of 'loser wins', on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economics" (39). Restricted production attempts to convert a disadvantage in the economic field into an advantage in the cultural field, rejecting the axiom 'business is business' in favour of 'art for art's sake' (Bourdieu 62). To do so, it reverses the structuring values and processes of the dominant system it defines itself against, found in independent music's case in the large-scale production of major labels. Hibbett, drawing on Bourdieu, expands in the case of indie rock:

> Indie rock is part of a dichotomous power structure in which two fields – one (A) having a large audience and producing an abundance of economic capital, the other (B) having a much smaller audience and producing little economic capital – operate in a contentious but symbiotic relationship: while resisting the conventions of A, B acquires value through its being recognized as 'not A' ... indie rock exists largely as an absence, a nebulous "other," or as a negative value that acquires meaning from what it opposes" (57-8).

By forsaking a mass audience, the argument goes, the restricted field of production gains autonomy from the compromising influences of the market, but in doing so sacrifices economic capital for symbolic capital. As a result, independent music is, at its core, self-defined by negation and opposition, and consequently views large scale production and restricted production as mutually exclusive entities. Strachan notes that independent producers, to preserve this distinction, self-conceptualize as fans involved in a collective project, ones who derive their

rewards from engaging with the artist and helping promote their untethered artistic vision (250). In the end, most independent sensibilities can be traced back to roots in the desire to negate the destructive and alienating practices of the major labels.

Similarly, Charles Fairchild traces indie's oppositional origins to "punk rock [which] declared an active opposition and negation of the society in which it was enmeshed," and in his opinion, these roots still set the parameters for independent music's idiosyncratic quandaries (19). Perhaps the representative indie dilemma, demonstrating both its oppositional values and mutually exclusive viewpoint, can be found in the discourse surrounding the 'sell-out,' shorthand for artists who "abandon previously held political and aesthetic commitments for financial gain" (Hesmondhalgh, "Indie" 36). Dave Laing further explicates in *One Chord Wonders* that the notion of selling out requires "something to 'sell out' (a cause, a vision, a pact with the fans) and somewhere to sell-out to (the record industry, occupying a separate space from that of the original pure creation)" (106-107). In Bourdieu's conception, the field of restricted production is doomed "to have an ambivalent attitude towards sales and their audience," viewing any kind of success as suspect and treating any attempt to garner that success as a compromise of artistry (50). Likewise, any interaction with corporate capital, especially with the major labels, or any indication of mass popularity can quickly result in an artist being labelled a sell-out, which essentially vitiates their work of the symbolic capital it had accrued. In the end, independent logic is simple and exclusive, as demonstrated by Fairchild: "it is not possible to assert autonomy, counter-hegemonic practice, and that elusive conceptual integrity while working for the big six[23], either directly or indirectly" (28).

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[23] When Fairchild published, in 1995, the big six referred to the major labels before mergers whittled them down to the current big four.

Implicit in independent discourse is a romantic conception of the artist (Lee 13). Bands and musicians are seen as inspired geniuses behind their work; in other words, they do not require any artistic tinkering or intrusion, but simply need a conduit to connect and distribute their vision to the public. Independent sensibilities dictate that those involved with the business and management aspects of the industry not interfere with musical production or the artist, instead focusing solely on promoting and distributing whatever music is created. Their goal, plain and simple, is to get their bands heard.

Returning to Adorno, a further sensibility that he and independent music share is a belief that the processes and conditions under which music is made matter, and those conditions have aesthetic consequences audible in any piece of music. According to Hesmondhalgh, independent discourse "sees aesthetics as an almost inevitable outcome of certain institutional and political positions, whereby maintaining an institutional separation from corporations, or a place on the margins, is felt to guarantee aesthetic diversity and stimulation," a position he later describes "as *classicist* and as *aestheticist*" ("Indie" 36, original emphasis). This results in a concern, or even obsession, with the origins of any piece of music, and this knowledge forms an indispensable part of any judgement of the music's quality. Hibbett claims that in such an aesthetic worldview "not only is it determined unfair to criticize the recording without bearing in mind the circumstances of production; those circumstances are in fact what make the album something to be appreciated" (61). Indie, rather than reifying a finished musical product, understands music as the result of a *process* of production, and so fans are concerned with "*how* things are represented, not just *what* is represented" (Hibbett 67, original emphasis). How a band produces its music is as important as how they sound, and in fact independent sensibilities insist that the latter is inseparable from the former.

This sensibility is perhaps best articulated in the 'Do It Yourself' (DIY) ethic and the low fidelity (lo-fi) aesthetic in independent music. What was inherited from punk was a recasting of popular music as an art that could be created and disseminated without a corporate bankroll; Hibbett, drawing on Azerrad's writings, states that DIY "performs the valuable function of demystifying the record-making process as that belonging exclusively to and within the invisible space of major corporations" (61). To further, Hesmondhalgh writes that independent music's goal was a *democratisation* of the medium, aiming to achieve greater participation and access for artists in an industry built upon gate keeping and imposed scarcity of resources ("Post-Punk" 255-256). An important corollary with this goal is the increased availability and affordability of technologies that made home recording possible. Of course, these technologies were not capable of the same gloss or complexity as a recording made in a studio with a professional gear and a producer, and these aesthetic differences were easily audible to any listener. As a result, independent music qualities such as "low production values, lack of overdubbing, cheapness and DIY amateurism become the marks of authenticity, because they mark the recording as being uncommercial and therefore uncompromised" (Bannister 83). DIY and lo-fi, coupled with the distrust for the machinations of the music industry, thus also fed the perception that mainstream, high-gloss production is designed to standardize music and obscure its lack in substance or art (Hibbett 62). The imperfection of the recordings is trusted as a sign of authenticity and suggests that there is less mediation between listener and artist; using Lou Barlow's band Sebadoh as the epitomic example of lo-fi, John Sellers notes that "because home recording is so immediate, music in the genre tends to be quite personal, and many of Sebadoh's early songs are the equivalent of Barlow picking at scabs" (133). Recently, DIY has also been appropriated somewhat by major labels; the production is easily imitable, a style that can be inexpensively

emulated across the music industries, even used as a gimmick to gain credibility. Ironically, in a sense DIY itself has thus become fetishized, since the social processes have become detached from their signs through the reverie of lo-fi conventions. However, it must be remembered that DIY has its root in the realities of making music independently with little funds and few resources, after which it gained its popularity under a very distinct independent discourse which valourized those processes of music making.

Finally, independent sensibilities are built upon some notion of locality, often referred to as a scene. Holly Kruse opens her book on the subject by stating that what is "recurrent in narratives of indie pop/rock is the conscious geographical and ideological positioning of the 'peripheral' local sites and practices of indie music production and consumption in opposition to the 'centers' of mainstream music production," and again indie's definition by negation is prevalent here, this time articulated on spatial terms (1). Locality is absolutely essential to independent sensibilities, understood both socially and spatially to include the network of relationships with people in a place along with the network of locations they typically frequent, such as concert venues, record shops, cafés, etc. (Kruse 113-114). Furthermore, people who cohabitate a scene are loathe to see themselves as competitors, creating a more communal atmosphere where most are friends who self report sharing the same interests, knowledge, and institutions (Kruse 136). Narratives of an independent artist's development inevitably make reference to a scene in these senses, and the people and places that make a scene are seen as irreplaceable elements in the whole process.

These are the basic tenets that compose independent sensibilities. First and foremost a rejection of the major label system, independent music claims to forsake economic success in order to better encourage art and authenticity from its artists, traces its roots and support to a

local scene, and tends to foreground or even fetishize the process of music making – both by making it audible in its production and revering the sounds of "the hiss, the pressing of buttons, technical glitches, [and] distortion" in its consumption (Hibbett 62). It was these sensibilities that informed the creation of many independent labels, who struck out on their own to create an alternative mainstream, independent of the major labels' control and dominance. These attempts were often mired with difficulties and struggles, and many labels ended up either bankrupt or bought out by a major label. The complications of independence have led to an indie discourse of the 'burn-out,' which Hesmondhalgh claims implies "that institutional alterity can only be maintained for a short period before human and financial resources run dry" ("Indie" 36). Unsurprisingly, tenability and survival are constant concerns for an independent label, since so many labels have come before and not succeeded in achieving long-term stability or success. The trials and tribulations of independent labels have received a great deal of attention from academic writers, and the conclusions they reach regarding labels that either were bankrupted, bought out, or succeeded against the odds merit consideration, especially as these cases would partly inform a transformation in the independent sensibilities that would come to be prevalent in the 1990s and run into the new millennium.

Independent labels are often formed and run by a small community of friends, typically inexperienced in business or the music industry, and this can magnify the strife and pressure found in these organizations (Hesmondhalgh, "Indie" 42). This makes many labels trial-by-error endeavours, with the neophyte managers and staff attempting to build infrastructure while concurrently learning how to produce, promote and distribute albums every step of the way. This also means that independent labels are more reactive entities without much ability to anticipate potential pitfalls because of their lack of experience, particularly in instances of expansion and

surprise success (Hesmondhalgh, “Post-Punk” 270). The business model, then, is oftentimes quite indicative of independent sensibilities, tending to better reflect what they do not want to do or become (anything associated with a major label), and offering collective ideals of what they should do rather than concrete plans. For example, equity was one such ideal, and so royalty models are more commonly based on a 50:50 split of total profits with the artist as opposed to a royalty rate per unit, a much better deal than the majors offered (Hearn 5). Of course, this deal is not as perfect or as it appears on paper; Hesmondhalgh notes that since independent labels could not afford to give substantial advances, nor give any split until half of the costs were earned back, artists inevitably face significant financial hardship before their record sells any copies (“Post-Punk” 261). Oftentimes, musicians would pick up work with the label itself, such as working the warehouse at the label Rough Trade, in order to make ends meet, and would find themselves resenting their ‘partners’ working in management at the label for their stable salaries (Hesmondhalgh, “Post-Punk” 262). But this relationship swung the other way too in success; Hesmondhalgh’s interview with an ‘artist-manager’ at Factory Records revealed that “in retrospect, he felt that the company had been far too generous to their artists ... it was the bands that mattered, but they were taking him for a ride” (“Post-Punk” 261). Furthermore, the same ideal of equitable treatment informed other moves such as sharing profits with less successful acts during the early 1980s recession; when Rough Trade attempted this, it alienated artists such as the Smiths and eventually sent them to a major label, particularly damaging because it is the more successful, well-known artists that allow a label to survive a recession (Hemondhalgh, “Post-Punk” 263). This is all to suggest that, while independent sensibilities may be based in ideals that are well meaning, they can have imperfect results in practice and are not necessarily consistently deployed.

Independent labels have a tendency of trying to grow too big too fast, of trying to tackle a scale that is bigger than they could ever support given their infrastructure. If a label pursues high ambitions, the immediate drawback is that it places itself in direct competition with major labels, which can be especially destructive in a marketplace that favours the majors and often leads to "a common indie malady: talent flight" (Lee 15). When an indie band or label keeps a low profile and does not attempt to beat the majors at their own game, it is quite possible to find success. An example can be found in Chris Fairchild's case study of the band Fugazi, and their label Dischord Records, where the band's strict adherence to independent principles has produced a tenable business model. Fugazi, rather than building infrastructure to compete with the major labels, maintained a decidedly micro scale where every aspect of their engagement with the music industries was handled internally (29). Dischord is without commercial financing or distribution, and they sell all their records by mail order or by direct interaction with record shops and still manage to move 100 000 copies of many albums, relying on the local scene and word of mouth for promotion and eschewing what Fairchild labels "industrial-media-combines," such as mainstream magazines or television (28-30). For Fairchild, their success was furnished by what he terms 'self-definition', which "is making those who might exploit you either work on your terms or ignore you all together" (30). For independent sensibilities to remain uncompromised, Fugazi and Dischord illustrate that goals must be kept modest and controlled, to the point of isolation from the music industry at large.

However, the case of Fugazi is not representative; independent labels often seek more success and exposure then a local scene can afford. For independent labels with ambitions to create a new mainstream, such as Rough Trade in the 1980s, expansion often oversteps expertise and infrastructure, ultimately resulting in their bankruptcy. Focusing on Rough Trade,

Hesmondhalgh writes that "the ambitious attempt to challenge the majors, by diversifying across all principle types of record company activity, was to clash with the piecemeal planning approach derived from the (politicised) bohemian origins that formed the roots of the company" ("Post-Punk" 266). There were organizational missteps in finances (especially account management), an upgrade to an expensive computer system that did not work, new warehouse space bought in expensive London before the old had been leased, and the five million pounds poured into a American branch, all done by those with little to no experience on this scale who were learning as they went (Hesmondhalgh, "Post-Punk" 266-270). Hesmondhalgh also notes that it was argued in *Music Week* that Rough Trade was unable to react as quickly as demanded in the music industries, for example in offering deals to new artists, because they insisted on a collective, committee based process for decision making, and so were unable to move fast enough to beat out the major labels. Looking at the timelines, Hesmondhalgh concludes that though it is unclear what role collective decision making played in Rough Trade's demise, it is clear that it "had enormously outstripped its original ambitions" ("Post-Punk" 270). In the end, Rough Trade tried to go too big too quick, and was bankrupt by 1991,[24] a familiar and recurring story for independent labels.

Stephen Lee's case study of Wax Trax! Records provides an interesting instance of both ruin and buy-out, as the label which began as a record shop filed for bankruptcy in October of 1992 before being purchased by TVT Records. Analogous to Rough Trade, Wax Trax! began to move more records in the early 1990s which resulted in the label facing "chronic cash shortages, often convoluted distribution operations and, importantly, a fundamental lack of understanding of even basic marketing theory and practices" (Lee 16). Consequently, Wax Trax! began

[24]Subsequently, it was relaunched in 2000 only to be bought out by EMI two years later.

exploring production and distribution (P&D) deals with major labels, with the notion of exchanging distribution rights of their albums for capital to aid with cash flow difficulties. After several suitors, Wax Trax! had to give up equity for the deal, leading Lee to argue that independent labels cannot exist without some interaction with the capitalism of the music industries – what he termed "the inevitably thesis of capitalism" (21) – and so eventually the majors' methods of production and distribution appeared to independent labels as ineluctable and necessary. Larger record companies, according to Lee, are capable of exerting pressure in three ways:

> (1) A major can buy out the indie label.
> (2) The major can force the indie label out of business.
> (3) The major can convert the indie label to its own ideology of 'proper business practice', thereby encouraging consolidation and eliminating competition.[25]
>
> The third option is the cheapest – its appeals come with the morning paper and on the evening news and everywhere else. In other words, the ideology of capitalism works not so much at the company or industry level as at the societal level (26).

As a consequence, Lee claimed the distinction of independent had outlived its usefulness, or was in desperate need of reinvigoration along different lines than its original articulation (29). The exclusive, negating notions of independence are clearly operating in Lee's argument, but I would suggest that the elements he points to, these new relations indies were striking with major labels, were precisely the new articulation of indie Lee professed to be lacking.

Hesmondhalgh's "Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre" details the similar economic crises of the independent British labels One Little Indian and

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[25] In the case of Wax Trax! Records, Lee relates how the label, when faced with financial difficulties, brought in consultants to help make recommendations and restructure the company, which resulted in a slow adoption of capitalist logic and business practices by the label. Lee argues that that "the company's employees lacked the necessary means to critique or resist the seemingly 'implicit' logic of the market" (25); the ideologies of capitalism were presented as natural and unavoidable by the consultants and so the label accepted the recommendations, which then paved the way for their subsequent buyout.

Creation in the same period of the 1990s, and like Lee, he notes the influence of the major labels which resulted in P&D partnerships with commercial capital. On this change, Hesmondhalgh writes:

> In coming to work with the major corporations, One Little Indian and Creation were reflecting the failure of the post-punk [indie] challenge to the structure of the music industry. In an era of pragmatic acceptance of collaboration with major capital, there is a need to (re)develop a case against the majors which does not rely on a simplistic romanticism ("Indie" 53).

And later on concludes:

> It proved impossible to reconcile being 'outside' the music industry with producing a new mainstream, because the terms of that new attempt were dictated by the capitalist economics which make the majors dominant. Indie represents the pragmatic 1990s response to that dilemma: a tendency towards classical pop aesthetics, and 'arm's length' institutional ties with the corporations ("Indie" 57).

What is being chronicled here is an epistemic change in the approaches and sensibilities of independent music, a reaction to the financial failures of those past, resulting in a new indie culture that is less paralyzed by oppositional definitions and fears of selling out.

In Bourdieu's framework, this evolution could be described as a change in the *habitus* of the independent artist. Randal Johnson, in his introduction to Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production*, defines habitus as "a set of dispositions which generate practices and perceptions" (5). Though the independent artist formerly subscribed to antagonistic and inimical sensibilities towards capitalist production, the failures and short lives of independent labels produced a change in the field of forces – which Bourdieu stipulates is always "also a *field of struggle*s tending to transform or conserve this field of forces" (30, original emphasis) – which consequently resulted in a necessary modification in disposition and shift in the strategies taken by artists in the production of their music. The result of indie's new relationship to the major labels is not necessarily a deterministic appropriation of independent music into mainstream practices, an apostasy forever dooming independent music as implied by former independent

sensibilities. Instead, this structural shift simply poses new dilemmas for independent artists and thus demands new strategies from them, primarily centred on the difficulties of engaging with the structures of capitalism and making a living while simultaneously maintaining artistic autonomy, integrity and control of their work. In Bourdieu's work, much like original independent sensibilities, this position is not treated as a possibility because of his "overly polarized picture of autonomy versus heteronomy," but the current status and strategies of independent musicians and labels suggests that it is a reality (Hesmondhalgh, "Bourdieu" 222).

One locus of the music industries where these new independent sensibilities are particularly pronounced is in licensing. Formerly, licensing any piece of one's music for advertisements, television, or film was considered a clear instance of selling out. However, due to the deregulation of commercial radio, concentration of ownership, and a so-called independent promotions system reminiscent of payola, independent labels and artists were being shut out of the airwaves. Now, they have ironically turned to the "lottery ticket" of advertisements on commercial radio, film and television for the mass exposure that is denied them (Klein 474). This marks a dramatic change in the oppositional discourse of independent music, one that did not occur overnight. However, with significant success stories where licensing had clearly broken the artist, such as Moby's *Play* (1999), "slowly, the shame attached to 'selling out' and commercial affiliation was replaced in the press by declarations of new marketing approaches and victories for musicians locked out of radio" (Klein 269). Leslie Feist, a member of Broken Social Scene, took a similar route to solo success when the track "1 2 3 4" made her a major star after being featured in an Apple iPod commercial in 2007, but she has still remained somewhat of an indie darling. Robert McChesney best summarizes what a large change this has been, not just for independent sensibilities, but in a broader, cultural sense:

> I think that for people in their twenties or in college who're young, it might surprise them to hear that as recently as fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years ago, this was an outrageous practice and certainly thirty or thirty-five years ago the idea of music being used to sell products this way was considered a real affront to people's sense of the sanctity of music and culture. Now it's just a given and it's a real reflection of the hyper commercialization of our culture and the bankruptcy of our culture" (*Money For Nothing*).

McChesney's sententious value judgements aside, it is important to note that artists do not enter into these contracts blindly, but rather licensing choices become a complex, idiosyncratic matter of considering the benefits and drawbacks of each case. For example, Jason Collett told me that early on Broken Social Scene had been offered $70,000 for a Hummer commercial when everyone in the band was in need of the money, but that they turned it down on moral grounds (Interview 3). New attitudes towards licensing suggest independent sensibilities are no longer operating by negation and seclusion but are more like a precarious tight-rope act, attempting to balance art and commerce without sacrificing either.

The quandary for independent sensibilities at the end of the 1990s was no longer how to create music completely isolated and autonomous from the commercial sector, but was rather how to use institutions such as the major labels while keeping them at arm's length, preserving a band or label's personal and artistic integrity. How do you use a system without being used? And an answer might well be that in such navigations, there is strength in numbers.

Chapter Three: The Formation of a Collective

don't get high on what you create
it might just steal ya'
-"Ibi Dreams of Pavement (A Better Day)" (*Broken Social Scene*)

This makes social authorship much more complex than expression ... to select voices but also to ***integrate*** *them, even as they are reverberating one against another. At times, such integration appears spontaneous; it is done quickly and without much time for reflection. At other moments it is a more studied process. But in either case, what counts is the ability to collate voices in a chorus which is redolent with utopian possibility.*
-Jason Toynbee, *Making Popular Music* (52-53, original emphasis)

Stuck to the cellophane wrapping of every copy of *You Forgot It In People* distributed by Arts & Crafts is a small, rectangular promotional sticker. Sitting atop the praises of the album from *Pitchfork*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Flaunt*, separated by a thin black line, there is a short paragraph written without indication of an author. It reads:

> *You Forgot It In People* is a pop record designed to remind us that music still has room to be recreated. It flows like a compilation of sounds for the wounded[26]. The last record [*Feel Good Lost*] was constructed for lover's (*sic*) in bathrooms... this is for the one's (*sic*) who leave their homes looking for hope (Image 1).

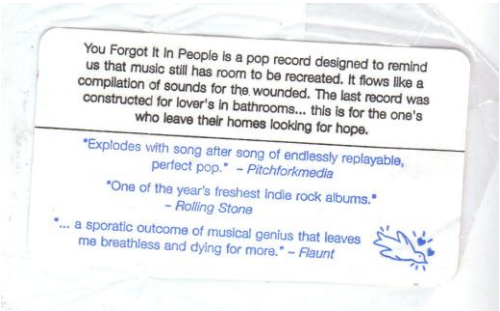

Image 1: Sticker from the cellophane wrapper of *You Forgot It In People*

[26] These first two lines are also a part of the album's description on the Arts & Crafts website.

The transition from the nascent *Feel Good Lost* to the *You Forgot It In People* sessions is of particular importance to this study of collectivity because it was during this period that Broken Social Scene morphed from an ambient duo into an expansive, inclusive rock outfit. From the tag, it is evident that Broken Social Scene's evolution is self recognized as a move away from isolation towards the people and places of the scene, just outside one's home. It also suggests that the change is audible in both the tone and appeal of the music. Furthermore, the statement that the album is a reminder that "music still has room to be recreated" and is meant as "a compilation of sounds for the wounded" points to an origin where music felt stagnant and to conditions in the music industries that inflicted genuinely felt injury upon its practitioners, a contention supported by the state of the Toronto scene in the late 1990s. This chapter's prime concern is those original contextual forces and influences that can account for the change in Broken Social Scene's form and approach, or more specifically, *why* Broken Social Scene first left their homes to come together in collectivity *when* they did. Broken Social Scene emerged from a very particular time and place in the music industries and independent sensibilities, and so the first step in this chapter must be to look at how major labels were operating in Canada, particularly in Toronto, in the late 1990s, and query the conditions and experiences they were imposing upon small-scale artists that could cause such wounds.

The Canadian major label system is made up of a series of subsidiaries to the parent, international major labels who were detailed in chapter one. As of today, the Canadian articulation of a major label usually consists of simply affixing Canada to the end of the major label's name: Warner Music Canada (AOL-Time Warner), Sony BMG Canada (Sony), Universal Music Canada (Vivendi), and EMI Music Canada (Terra Firma Capital Partners). Each Canadian major label's headquarters are located in Toronto, and their business model is largely the same as

their counterparts, but with an insular twist because of their relationship with their multinational counterpart. A Canadian major's primary interest is to develop artists which target the Canadian mass market. If an artist looks as though they could potentially move *Thriller*-scale records on an international stage, then and only then will the parent label consider international distribution for their subsidiary's signing. Stuart Berman describes it as the following cycle: "sign commercially viable Canadian artists, build them a domestic audience, then export the most successful ones to their international parent companies for worldwide release – and pray for the best (or at least another Loverboy)" (*Broken* 13). However, the power to give these projects exposure is not in the hands of the A&R agents who have signed them at the Canadian affiliate. The possibility of extra-Canadian distribution is determined by those at the multinational labels, well removed from any direct contact or investment in the artist, meaning the major label practices of risk management are even more enunciated in the decision-making process and those at the Canadian label have little influence on the matter. Jason Collett recalled that as an artist, it was "a frustrating time trying to get anything happening outside of Canada, finding anybody in the industry in Canada that had any real connections or was willing to hustle outside Canada" (Interview 3). With the internet still a few years off from becoming the powerful new model of international promotion and distribution which would directly challenge the major labels' system, few Canadian artists garnered exposure beyond the national level and the very few exceptions that did were selected from the Canadian major labels for their broad commercial appeal.

Besides the obvious effect this process had of denying most Canadian acts mass exposure overseas and in the United States, this system had further adverse effects for Canadian acts attempting to garner exposure in the field of restricted production. Canadian music, through the

major label promotion machine, had largely become associated with imitative pop stars such as Celine Dion or Bryan Adams. Ohad Benchetrit, a member of Broken Social Scene as well as Do Make Say Think, somewhat bluntly remarks that "back then, Canadian music was Bryan Adams. Canadian music was shit. Canadian music was something we had to excuse" (*Broken* 48). For that reason, Berman recounts that "in the alternative press, the college radio circuit in the U.S., Canadian bands were almost a joke, no one took the country seriously," and consequently they received little consideration, airtime, or exposure[27] (Interview 1). In fact, Stuart Berman's career reflects this gap of coverage – *Pitchfork* originally had nobody covering the Toronto scene, but after their editor read a piece Berman had written about Broken Social Scene they hired him to keep the influential website abreast of developments in Toronto, "indicative of the fact that the U.S. media started paying attention to what was going on in Canada" (Interview 1). The reputation of Canadian acts abroad, a result of the structure of the two-tier major label system, frequently denied smaller-scale Canadian artists working from Canada any attention from an independent infrastructure that had been built precisely to help artists in their position.

Taking a step back, the way the Canadian major label system is structured is certainly designed to mirror and take advantage of the protectionist Canadian Content legislation (CanCon), introduced in 1971, which required that thirty percent of broadcasts by commercial radio stations in Canada must be of Canadian artists[28] (Barclay, Jack, and Schneider 23). In the Canadian music industries, the legislation created a demand, on radio and later on television with

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[27] There are certainly exceptions to this phenomenon, such as The Cowboy Junkies and Mary Margaret O'Hara who both achieved independent success, but these exceptions had to take foreign avenues to garner support. It was Virgin U.K. that signed O'Hara to put out *Miss America* (1988) and The Cowboy Junkies signed with RCA in the United States when Canadian majors showed absolutely no interest in *The Trinity Sessions* (1988) (Barclay, Jack, and Schneider 234; Barclay, Jack, and Schneider 411).

[28] This figure was further increased to thirty-five percent in 1998 (Henderson 309).

the launch of MuchMusic in 1984, for Canadian artists which the majors then set about filling, but with an eye no further than that national scale. Scott Henderson argues that "the immediate era following the introduction of the Cancon regulations primarily produced generic artists who integrated the Top 40 and whose work was largely indistinguishable from the American artists who dominated the charts," more or less simple imitations to fill out the required airtime (310). Then, according to Henderson, a new, second era began approximately in the late 1970s and stretched into the late 1990s; it was "a direct result of the first, where the confidence gained from the success of the industry allowed for the development of Canadian bands whose success could be determined in Canada, not internationally" (308). I would further this point by suggesting that in the Canadian major label business model, artists were being developed to specifically target the market created by CanCon but with no intent of promoting them outside of Canada's borders, where the costs and understood risks of a Canadian artist outweighed their perceived potential for success. For example, Berman points to the Tragically Hip as the "classic case of the Canadian syndrome, where they're superstars in Canada but they've had to fight tooth and nail to get any crowd in the U.S." (Interview 1). CanCon had created a market that was worth uniquely targeting through affiliated Canadian major labels, but this did not mean that those bands necessarily had the appeal or were worth the risk to promote abroad, a reality which created a fallow scene with frustrated bands who were not necessarily expecting international superstardom, but who were looking for the chance to at least be heard beyond Canada's borders.

In turn, CanCon policies also produced an effect on how Canadian consumers – and by extension artists, who are always also consumers – understood Canadian music. Writing in 1998, Jody Berland purports that popular music in the Canadian context demanded we understand "the contradictory nature of location as both context and effect of cultural consumption" (145).

Arguing that the combination of Canadian cultural policy and international capitalist production placed listeners in an incongruous position of being within and without Canada simultaneously, she states that "the goal of musical 'authenticity' refers no longer to a point of origin (for this is no longer possible) but to a site of reflexivity in action" (145). By extension, the effect of the new CanCon demands on broadcast consumption meant that Canadian music found itself defined by its involvement and promotion in the Canadian music industries. Promotional and music tours were booked at great expense to cross Canada's vast land mass, as artists self conceptualized as being involved in a Canadian scene which paralleled their place within the major label system: made for Canada until told otherwise. These Canadian elements combined into what Jeffrey Remedios dubbed "an invisible border," where small-scale, Canadian artists acted and felt as if they were isolated in a Canadian diaspora within the music industries (Interview 4).

Unlike other Canadian cities, however, where artists who were overlooked by the majors seemed to have developed independent sensibilities and were thus operating together in what Robert Strachan has termed a "challenge ... taking place through a collective project," Toronto was remarkably fractured. The community and scene present in other small Canadian cities simply was not existent in the same sense in Toronto because of the large industry presence, rendering each group a potential rival for a major label signing rather than a potential collaborator. In Holly Kruse's examination of Athens' 1980s independent scene in the United States, she points out that Athens' distance from the recording industry hubs such as New York and Los Angeles enabled the bands in the town to collectively build a vibrant scene (20). To contrast, Jason Collett remembers being envious of other scenes in Halifax or Guelph[29] where,

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[29] In *This Book is Broken*, Stuart Berman highlights the movement of the label Three Gut Records from Guelph to Toronto as one of the catalyzing moments for the scene, bringing with it "boldly unconventional promotional strategies and a stable of endearingly off-kilter artists, including Gentleman Reg, Jim Guthrie, and Royal City" (56).

"because of the scale of the scene, they were, out of necessity, really community oriented ... there's been a wedge against that happening in Toronto, partly because Toronto has the highest concentration of industry in Canada, so it's more of a competitive thing here traditionally" (Interview 3). For most artists, according to Berman, "Toronto was starting to feel like a big city saddled with small-town barriers" and so the result was endless toil "trying to bust through this glass ceiling" (*Broken* 14; Interview 1).

The membership of Broken Social Scene is littered with stories of this nature, as many are veterans of the music industries who tried their luck with major label deals and got nowhere. A formulaic narrative was emerging from each artist's experience, as related by Berman:

> ...release a couple of promising records through small local imprints; pique the interest of a Canadian major label hoping to cash in on the post-Nirvana alternative rock boom; and then count your losses as that ineffective major label fails to get you onto increasingly regimented Canadian commercial radio playlists or facilitate your entry into the tough U.S. touring market (*Broken* 2).

Future Broken Social Scene members such as Andrew Whiteman, Jason Collett, Bill Priddle and Leslie Feist all underwent varieties of this experience on the Toronto scene in the 1990s. Perhaps emblematic of these struggles were the tribulations of Brendan Canning, a veteran of many, many bands in the Toronto scene that all began with promise and ended with dead ends and stagnation, including his shared time with Feist in By Divine Right. Canning had had smatterings of success with many of the acts he was involved with – varying in kind from winning $100,000 with his band hHead through Toronto's CFNY to make a record, to appearing on Len's hit single "Steal My Sunshine" (1999). Ultimately though, by the end of the 1990s Canning was turning to DJing[30] to make a living because of the disappointment and the dead ends he had run into, as his

[30] At the time, many venues in Toronto were cancelling live music nights in favour of DJs to take advantage of the electronica trend (Interview 1).

bands just could not break through: “hHead, Len, Spookey Ruben, and By Divine Right ... I was a part of all those [Canadian music industry] infrastructures at one time or another and playing the game of ‘Oh, this guy’s interested and that guy’s interested...' By the end, it really made me nauseous” (*Broken* 33). This sentiment was shared by most, who felt they had been chewed up and spit out by the system in place.

In a similar vein, the 1990s also marked a remarkable time of buyouts and mergers, with major labels especially going on “an unprecedented spending spree, buying indie bands, labels, and distributors, using them as a cost-effective in-house ‘farm team’ supplier to the major leagues” (Fairchild 27). But this occurred alongside the fallout from the hyper inflated expectations of CD sales,[31] meaning that majors were concurrently buying up the independent competition for credibility but also downsizing their signed bands and A&R agents to eliminate costs and maintain profits (Lee 16). For new and emerging Canadian artists trying to make an album, this combined with the Canadian major label system created a Sisyphean cycle which Jason Collett illuminates:

> In the mid to late ‘90s, what was happening everywhere, with so many of my peers, was you would be dealing with an A&R agent who was into you, and then the company would fold and would get bought up by a larger company. And then they would lose their job, you would lose your deal, they would inevitably land on their feet somewhere else, sign you again, and then the whole thing would happen again. I know a few bands that happened to three times. So there was a lot of banging your head against the wall at the time. And then there was a lot of calculating trying to figure out ‘well what the fuck do they want?’ because that was a time when you still really needed to please the larger machinery to have anybody back your thing, to work, to tour, to release records (Interview 3).

[31] Up to this point, record companies had made significant profits from selling the back catalogues of their artists in the new format of the compact disc, which was mistook for a permanent revenue stream: “They just thought this was the new era and there was so much money to be made. They just thought it would go on forever” (Interview 3).

Collett certainly experienced this strife firsthand in his first solo outing which became the band Bird with Andrew Cash, when he circulated a tape of his own album in the Toronto music scene. Despite Toronto's *NOW Magazine* getting extraordinarily excited over the record, generating some good buzz and preliminary label interest, Bird could still not secure a stable deal long enough to get a CD produced. These circumstances weren't necessarily unique to Canada either – Emily Haines and James Shaw, two Broken Social Scene members who also form a part of Metric, later had similar experiences with their first album *Grow Up & Blow Away* (2007) in the United Kingdom. Originally recorded for Reckless Records in 2001, the album was lost in legal entanglements when Reckless was bought out by Rykodisc; in fact, it was only available by illegal download or bootleg until it was finally bought back for the band by Last Gang Records and released in 2007, two full LPs into Metric's career. Amy Millan, member of the Stars and Broken Social Scene, points out that this was not an isolated event for Metric; they were a band who "had all these other deals – they always seemed like they were ahead – but then they kept getting dropped or their labels fell apart" (*Broken* 59). Turmoil at the label level was stymieing emerging artists, denying them the chance to get their music exposed.

Of course, this is not to suggest that this was an entirely bleak time. There were two bands that Broken Social Scene identified as inspirational because they had managed to uniquely triumph over the previously stressed challenges of Canadian insularity and its congruent major label system, albeit in strikingly different ways. The first was Hayden, the Canadian singer-songwriter who began on the independent label Sonic Unyon where his debut full-length album, *Everything I Long For* (1995), initially sold quite well by independent standards – 20,000 copies. He subsequently signed a major label deal with Outpost Recordings, a subsidiary of Universal, to put out the album *The Closer I Get* (1998), but when the album failed to move big numbers, he

was bought out of the remainder of his contract by the label. For Kevin Drew, the end result of Hayden's story was that he achieved "everyone's goal: artistic freedom with a [financially comfortable] life ... in this country [he] is always going to go down as a Leonard Cohen, as a Neil Young, because he was the first one to achieve the independence of doing what he needed through a major-label system that was just about to die" (*Broken* 19). In other words, Hayden's trials with the major labels had inadvertently resulted in a solution to the predicament of independent sensibilities posed in the mid 90s, for he now found himself with both complete autonomy from the major label system and the means from his buyout to self publish and promote through his own label, Hardwood Records. Hayden had achieved the goal of every emerging artist in the Toronto scene, one certainly shared by the people who would fill out Broken Social Scene in due course.

The second act to capture their collective imagination a few years later was Godspeed You! Black Emperor, formed in Montreal, whose recordings were published by their independent label Constellation Records. Aesthetically, aspects of Godspeed's sound have had audible influence on Broken Social Scene's works; Ryan Hibbett notes that a multimember band (nine in Godspeed's case), use of expansive and varied instrumentation and effects, and ardent employment of multitracking and layering were all key aspects of Godspeed's post-rock sound, all of which are present in Broken Social Scene (65). Strikingly, Godspeed's long songs (generally 15 minutes plus) and unconventional sound was clearly not designed to appeal to a mass audience and, in the Canadian understanding, that meant the band should get no exposure and sell no albums internationally. Unexpectedly, Godspeed garnered significant recognition overseas, toured successfully internationally, and the albums *F#A#∞* (1997) and *Lift Your Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven* (2000) received critical praise with a sound unique from any other

band, thus challenging Canada's aforementioned reputation for derivative acts. In *This Book is Broken*, Kevin Drew and John Crossingham both expressed how much the band meant to them, and Ohad Benchetrit sums up aptly what Godspeed You! Black Emperor signalled for Canadian bands:

> It wasn't until Godspeed that we felt we could honestly make the kind of music we wanted to make – for the sake of making music – and actually have it go further than your community, have it take you to places like Europe and maybe even Japan or Australia. Watching a Canadian band get to Europe and get success both critically and commercially, and seeing the eyes of the music press were now turned toward Canada instead of Canadians turning outward ... that gave everybody a bump, like our music was legit and we could actually see this through (*Broken* 48).

Stuart Berman argues that Godspeed inspired because, rather than signing to the many labels who were interested at the time, they did it all themselves on Constellation; Godspeed You! Black Emperor not only brought attention to Canada, but also demonstrated that an independent Canadian band is "able to go out and tour the world ... [and] that you could create a business yourself and sort of control your own destiny like that" (Interview 1).

Despite the few inspirational stories, by the end of the 1990s the conditions of the Canadian music industries had largely made it apparent that bands were more likely to be heard and appreciated if they left the confines of Canada. Certainly, there were basic economic reasons for this; Berland notes that, in that era, "it costs ten times more to produce an indigenous product than to import a similar product from the United States. Thus a recording artist usually needs to succeed in the U.S. to be heard in Canada" (136). Artists also blamed Canadian audiences, who chronically overlooked their own country's art and vitality until it was recognized overseas, a sentiment upon which Collett elaborates:

> It is a fundamental flaw in our character to not recognize our own talent. We've got a legacy of this that goes back to Joni Mitchell, and goes back to film. We don't watch our own fucking films. So much of that, our whole history, was that you've got to go away to be celebrated, before you'll be recognized here (Interview 3).

Most importantly, the experiences of many on the scene had clearly demonstrated that the Canadian label system was not capable of providing any sustainable success, and so an exodus of Canadian artists began. Evan Cranley, part of both Broken Social Scene and the Stars, remarks that "The Canadian music industry in 1998-1999 was abysmal; it didn't nurture musicians or talent in any way. And that's why people left" (*Broken* 59); a reaction which Stuart Berman labels as a "knee-jerk response to the sorry state of affairs [in Canada]" (*Broken* 55). Feist eschewed touring her debut *Monarch (Lay Your Jewelled Head Down)* (1999) in Canada, opting instead to tour and promote the album across Europe. Both Metric and the Stars fled Toronto for Williamsburg, New York, with Metric later relocating to London in order to pursue the Reckless Records deal in the United Kingdom. However, there were others who had not lost complete faith in the potential of the Toronto scene but still felt the need to flee. For example, Cranley regularly commuted between Toronto and New York, in order to work with both the Stars and be involved with what was to become Broken Social Scene.

But for those who did stay in Toronto, the end sum of all the isolation, dejection and frustration was a new development which Jason Collett termed "a turning inward" (Interview 3); since artists were not getting any exposure, they began to turn to each other and the local scene for support, building a more connected, collaborative environment from the ground up. While this turn of events may seem potentially political in nature, Collett highlights that it emerged more from a simple desire for recognition and validation flowing from the affect produced by the conditions of Toronto:

> But I think particularly, it was the turning inward of the musicians to seek out community, not even consciously, but simply to validate the work we were doing. Releasing our own records not even on any labels, but handing them out to stores by hand, putting up posters by hand, putting on little shows... All you really want, as a musician coming up in the world, is the chance to be heard and judged... All of that history is partly what made us turn inwards for validation amongst

> our peers as well. When you do that, you start to build a community out of necessity (Interview 3).

It was not simply artists who were turning inwards, but also music connoisseurs and consumers in Toronto that began to focus in on and appreciate the scene in their city. Jeffrey Remedios relates how, while working for EMI around the beginning of the new millennium, it felt as though he and all other Torontonians began to also turn inwards towards the city's cultural works:

> Toronto stopped looking externally for validation. It started to just go "we're into our own." What kind of music are you into? The music that this guy I know, that I see on the corner, makes. Who do you want to make your videos? You're not pulling a name out from nowhere, you're pulling stuff locally. And it started to be like "it's OK." Local validation. It started to come from within, and it was exciting. There I am working with these random pop superstars that have no reflection on my life, but all my spare time is being spent going to see local bands, and realizing that there is this amazing community coming up and maturing here (Interview 4).

It is important to note that this turning inward could just as easily have resulted in artists receding into solo efforts, isolating themselves not unlike Drew and Canning did to create *Feel Good Lost*, for which there was strong precedent in independent music. By the mid 1990s, many independent artists had largely receded into self-reflexive seclusion, as Azerrad emphasizes: "Punk confrontation was largely gone from the indie world; in its place was a suffocating insularity, whether it was Cat Power's depressive mutterings or Pavement's indie rock about indie rock, however beautiful or evocative they might have been" (499). As noted earlier, the presence of the major labels in Toronto had further rendered musicians competitors instead of collaborators. This also furnished insularity, since "The Toronto scene was splintered into little social cliques that were barely aware of each other's existences" (*Broken* 63). As the *You Forgot It In People* promotional sticker highlighted, and as the title of that album further suggest, this turning inwards was coupled with a turning outwards, an opening up to the *people* around and the *processes* of collaboration which ultimately culminated with the recording of that record.

In Broken Social Scene's case, a similar evolution can be traced through the band's history: beginning with their first iteration as Chares Spearin and Kevin Drew's band K.C. Accidental, then shifting and becoming redefined as Broken Social Scene in *Feel Good Lost*, and finally completely embracing open membership and collective processes in the *You Forgot It In People* sessions. Both Berman and Spearin agree that the seeds of Broken Social Scene were in K.C. Accidental, formed by Drew and Spearin in 1998. Mirroring Broken Social Scene's creation and eventual evolution, K.C. Accidental began as a two-piece abstract, instrumental group, exploring soundscapes similar to Spearin's other band, Do Make Say Think, of which Drew was a huge fan. Ohad Benchetrit notes the unique method by which Drew went about imitating the band he loved:

> ...when you come across something you really like and you're inspired by it, it's hard not to imitate in a certain way ... imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. But Kevin's a smart guy. Instead of just ripping something off, he'll actually grab the people that do it. So if K.C. Accidental sounded like the Do Makes – well, fuck one of the two members is in the Do Makes! (*Broken* 51).

In K.C. Accidental we can see that music and style was already understood to reside within the people who create it, making invitation and collaboration a natural and necessary extension of admiration and imitation. Furthermore, Spearin became involved in K.C. Accidental while still remaining an integral part of Do Make Say Think, meaning he needed to come and go from the effort and balance his time between both, creating the conditions that would play out in the motion and flux that would later come to define Broken Social Scene. At this point, however, K.C. Accidental was a small-scale and self enclosed endeavour, hand packaging their first record *Captured Anthems for an Empty Bathtub* (1998) and selling exclusively through the Toronto record shop Rotate This, where the one hundred copies available sold out quickly.

K.C. Accidental derived its name from Drew and Spearin's first initials prefixed upon 'Accidental', a word which Spearin liked both because it "encourages the unexpected, which is what we were going for at the time" and because he knew that "in jazz-nerd talk, an accidental is a note outside the scale"[32] (*Broken* 48). The naming here suggests a commitment to the process itself of creating music, rather than a finished product or vision, and further implies an embracement of the happy accident as an essential aspect of their style, tenants that would become cornerstones of the Broken Social Scene approach. For example, Jason Collett reflects on what he learned from collaborating with Kevin Drew in the era of K.C. Accidental, where he witnessed for the first time Drew's stream of consciousness style of writing songs which later developed into Broken Social Scene's general approach:

> He [Drew] used to, at the time that this was all evolving, he used to come over to my house and just for fun go "hey, let's write a song!" And I'm like "what do you mean, let's just write...?" "Right now!" And he would just blather out stuff. But what I learned from him is how in the way artists tend to get. They're clunky. And that never happened this way, because he's so stream of conscious, and not trying to figure out what he's trying to say. It's very emotive, and actually quite sophisticated. It was quite a good learning experience for me, I think ultimately in a lot of ways ... I've learned to be a lot more free and spontaneous in the studio, I've learned to value that the real magic is the stuff that often is *accidental*. You need to be wide open when you're in the process, and not so filled with preconceived ambitions of what you need to accomplish. Because it's all the stuff that hit you sideways that you weren't expecting, those are things you should be ready to chase down in the moment. If you're not open to that shit, you're not going to find any real magic (Interview 3, emphasis added).

This type of collaboration demands a commitment to such a method. To be sure, if an artist can be clunky, tens of artists can be impossibly so; Collett's comments reveal a method which eschews that potential pitfall and points to the 'real magic' of the formation. The collective's essence lies in its process-based approach.

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[32]Though Spearin stipulates that Drew was not aware of the latter at the time.

As Toronto entered the new millennium, the music community began reflecting this focus upon process too, with weekly events like Wavelength at Ted's Wrecking Yard and Radio Mondays at Rancho Relaxo. Wavelength's intent, as described by founder Johnny Dovercourt,[33] was to "celebrate our own music, celebrate our rich history which goes undocumented, celebrate the cool stuff that's going on here under the radar," to create the affirmation and recognition that was lacking in Toronto (Barclay par. 17). Meanwhile, Jason Collett began hosting Radio Monday, a chance for artists to give a sneak peak of a song, improvise on a song, or build on a song with those who were around for the half-workshop, half-performance affair. For Collett, the event was about exposing process, so that "the audience would get a glimpse of the more vulnerable, intimate parts of artists that would normally be on display in the comfort and privacy of their band," the result of which was "less of a performance oriented thing and more 'let's just see what happens when we put 5 people on stage and keep it wide open'" (*Broken 65*; Interview 3). As K.C. Accidental evolved into Broken Social Scene, these two regular events – one focusing on the community of Toronto, the other making the creative processes between musicians its act – would inform both their focus and approach when they eventually began to expand their membership and sound beyond *Feel Good Lost*.

The recorded project of K.C. Accidental was clearly founded in two people, the K. and the C., but this was a border that quickly gave way when the group began to perform live. Future Broken Social Scene collaborators such as James Shaw, Emily Haines, Jason Collett, Evan Cranley, Bill Priddle and Justin Peroff all worked with K.C. Accidental at various points and in

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[33] Dovercourt is best known for his involvement in the 'Torontopia' movement, which sought to foster creativity and pride in the city of Toronto with events such as Wavelengths in the late 1990s. For more information, read Michael Barclay's series of interviews documenting the phenomenon, starting with his interview of Dovercourt himself ("Torontopia, part one: Jonny Dovercourt").

2000 they put out a second record, *Anthems for the Could've Bin Pills* (2000), on Noise Factory Records (*Broken* 43-44). That summer produced a series of concerts which featured what Stuart Berman terms "nameless aggregates," which Spearin clarifies simply meant there was no band name but just a list of the people who would be present on the poster (*Broken* 68; Interview 2). To not choose a name was to suggest that every night would be different depending on who was playing in the ramshackle assembly, exactly the connotation that the band name Broken Social Scene would come to embody. But at the time, Spearin was still equally committed to Do Make Say Think, for which he was busy writing, recording and touring, and so he was not always present for these sessions. However, Drew was concurrently inviting many other friends over to his home to collaborate constantly, and it was during one Do Make Say Think tour that he borrowed Spearin's giant, 8 track desk, which was stored in his basement, and began writing and recording what was to become *Feel Good Lost* with his new friend, Brendan Canning, in the process inviting other friends such as Bill Priddle, Evan Cranley, Leslie Feist, and Justin Peroff to appear as guests. Charles Spearin and Ohad Benchetrit mixed the album and Noah Mintz, Canning's former bandmate from hHead, mastered the recording. All these new contributions meant that, despite the record having a somewhat similar feel to K.C. Accidental's two albums, those involved believed that it should no longer have the same name, which Spearin delineates:

> As we started rehearsing we couldn't figure out if the album was going to be by K.C. Accidental or Broken Social Scene. We decided in the end that it couldn't be a K.C. Accidental project, because the contributions weren't just [being] made by Kevin and Charlie anymore. And Broken Social Scene seemed to fit the description of what we were doing more accurately (*Broken* 70).

Artists, all on a scene that had felt broken, now had a strikingly self-referential name under which they could start to come together.[34]

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[34]Although at first glance, the name can seem overwrought and dramatic. Ryan Schreiber of *Pitchfork*, in the review that lauded the band and largely brought them mainstream exposure and success, began by noting his unfortunate

While the corresponding people involved on *Feel Good Lost* and *You Forgot It In People* may suggest that the first album was analogous to what Broken Social Scene would become one year later, there are some important details that separate *Feel Good Lost* as a stepping stone from which the incipient collective processes would emerge. First, it is important to note that guests on the album were entirely directed; Canning made clear that he and Drew "steered the good ship *FGL* ... all the guests came in and did what they do with some direction from us – we were not a band at that point" (Interview 5). On *Feel Good Lost*, the move to invite friends to play derived from a desire to fill out the sound, and it was accomplished by simply calling on friends to lend a hand to the production. As Canning stresses: "We are friends first, then bandmates. That has always been our ethos, and is what allows us to keep our sanity" (*Broken* XXIII). Stuart Berman further explicates what he felt was a "pretty gradual, organic approach" (Interview 1):

> [*Feel Good Lost*] was literally Brendan and Kevin making quiet, electronic, ambient instrumentals together. And then there was this very natural process of "hey, this song could use a vocal, let's call in our friend Leslie Feist. We need a drummer for this track, instead of a drum machine, let's call this guy Justin Peroff" ... I think the root of this is that these are very close friends ... within the band relationships go back twenty years ... It's just when you need help with anything, whether it's moving, or painting your house, you call your friends. In this case, they called friends to make music together (Interview 1).

For Broken Social Scene, the origins of the collective is clearly in friendship, a natural extension, meaning it is not accurate to describe the band as having consciously undertaken collectivity as a musical project. It was simply a natural impulse to rely on friendships, one which would snowball into an inclusive membership when it was time to perform *Feel Good Lost* live.

In the year that followed, Broken Social Scene shifted from an ambient duo to a sprawling band of "psychedelic lover's rock" (Berman, *Broken* 68). Performing largely at Ted's

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reaction to the name: "No one wants to admit that they like a band that goes around calling themselves this ... How could they *not* be the most unimaginative, bleak, whiny emo bastards in the whole pile?" (par. 2).

Wrecking Yard, the idea was simple, to quote Leslie Feist: "Let's book a show. We'll write a few songs for that show, and we'll play each other's songs and see who's around and wants to do it. Let's just start it as a winter project" (*Broken* 75). Logistically, with people coming and going from Toronto as a result of the music drain of the era, this philosophy was perfectly suited for the situation. Kevin Drew charts the various iterations of the band over that period:

> ...back at that time no one was living in one spot ... What sort of happened was, we sort of put on different shows with different members, whoever was round in town. We had one show that was Feist, Andrew [Whiteman], Justin [Peroff], Brendan [Canning] and myself. And that was our first show. And in the next show we had Emily [Haines], James [Shaw], and this gentleman John Crossingham, Justin and myself. And in the next show was everyone. And then Feist was back because she was going to Berlin and Paris a lot at that time. You never knew who was going to be around. But in doing that, we accumulated a lot of songs (Kastrup 2-3).

It was the motion innate to the scene at the time that produced the revolving door of musicians that performed as Broken Social Scene. Immediately, it also gave the project a temporary, untenable feel; Drew notes elsewhere that "it started to become known that we'd always said it was our last show, because some of the people we were playing with live in London, some in Montreal, some had moved to LA, so we didn't really know if we were going to be able to get this group of people together" (Harrison par. 6). The end result was that no tracks were ever played off *Feel Good Lost*, and within a year they were playing with tens of performers (including a horn section) on stage for their shows and had developed a catalogue of songs and ideas that would evolve into *You Forgot It In People*. The shows exuded the processual, intimate and local aura that was championed by both Wavelengths and Radio Monday, so much so that Berman remarks "If Broken Social scene shows during this era featured all the shambling structure and accidental genius of a practice-space jam, it's because they were essentially practice-space jams – the stage being the only practice space big enough to accommodate them" (*Broken* 68). When I asked Brendan Canning what drove the impulse to expand, modify their

approach and somewhat abandon *Feel Good Lost*, he replied "that first album was more of a sketch, or a concept ... two guys on stage was only going to be so exciting. It was just sort of 'OK, that part of the series is over'" (Interview 5). Challenged by the vitality of the collaborative scene, where "the sight of two guys onstage playing brooding instrumentals just wasn't going to cut it," but restrained by the flux produced by the exodus and sporadic return of artists from the limiting Canadian music industries, Broken Social Scene embraced the moment of convergence and the process of collaboration therein, and the form that emerged organically was the collective (*Broken* 68).

Closing his 1977 book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali anticipates a utopian era in music which he names "Composition." Overall, Attali argued that music is "a succession of *orders* (in other words, difference) done violence by *noises* (in other words, the calling into question of differences) that are *prophetic* because they create new orders, unstable and changing" (19). The modern, commodified era of music was labelled as "Repetition,"[35] which produced a musical form rooted in reproduction and standardization, in some ways echoing Adorno's sentiments regarding popular music made many years earlier. However, Attali closed his book claiming that music was entering a new era, that it was becoming composition based, and the utopian terms upon which he defined that stage have striking relevance and value in considering the early collective of Broken Social Scene. In composition, Attali states:

> The creative labour is collective: what is played is not the work of a single creator; even if an individual's composition is taken as the point of departure, each musician develops his own instrumental part. Production takes the form of one of collective composition, without a

[35] Attali's purview in the whole book is actually much wider, scoping out the entire history of Western civilization, and suggests two eras preceded repetition – sacrificing and representation. According to Attali, each stage of noise organized society remarkably differently: "when power wants to make people *forget*, music is ritual *sacrifice*, the scapegoat; when it wants to make them *believe*, music is enactment, *representation*; when it wants to *silence* them, it is reproduced, normalized, *repetition*" (20, original emphasis).

> predetermined program imposed upon the players, and without commercialization. The groups stay together only a short time, dissolving when their members rejoin repetitive life. This music is creating a new practice of musical production, a day-to-day and subversive practice (141).

The plurality, the ongoing commitment to process rather than product, the flux and temporality of each iteration, all these aspects of the collective seem to be anticipated here. This is especially true of these early days of Broken Social Scene since, as Jason Collett highlighted, "there was no money, and we were all used to there never being any money" (Interview 3). Attali later continues:

> Thus the social form for the recreation of difference – assuming it does not fall back into the commodity and its rules, in other words, into representation and repetition – presupposes the coexistence of two conditions: *tolerance and autonomy*. The acceptance of other people, and the ability to do without them. That being the case, composition obviously appears as an abstract utopia, a polar mode of organization that takes on meaning at an extraordinary moment of cultural climax (145).

In Broken Social Scene, people come and go, are done with and without, in a situation where autonomy had been thrust upon a scene by a major label system that had no interest in it. For Attali, this "embryonic form ... heralds the arrival of new social relations," and it is tempting to make utopian claims about Broken Social Scene's emergence in Canadian popular music as a propitious harbinger of the future.

But I do not mean to suggest that we necessarily must accept Attali's simultaneous presupposition and conclusion of music's prophetic nature in Broken Social Scene's case. Rather, I want to simply stress what a utopian feel and image the collective must have had as it emerged, first in a broad historical perspective such as Attali's, but especially in a foray of such intense 'repeating' as the Canadian popular music industries. But as Broken Social Scene recorded *You Forgot It In People* and continued to produce music for the last seven years, what provides a stronger opportunity for critical analysis is not their utopian elements, but their pragmatics and the realities which they created. We need to be mindful of the prevailing

independent sensibilities of the time; however utopian Broken Social Scene may have first appeared, the ethos of the time was not one of negation but rather of navigation, attempting to make use of the music industries without being consumed by them. This certainly meant engaging with a record label, along with writing and recording records, publicity, touring, etc., all of which are uniquely affected by Broken Social Scene's collective structure. In other words, the political economy of the collective is the next necessary step in this analysis and so it is the subject of the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Four: The Political Economy and Dynamics of a Collective

why did protection burn down your home?
the smoke was so rich that they gave you a throne
we're turning cruel hands into some rice
three times a charm, three times you pay the price
-"Safety Bricks" (*Spirit If...*)

People loved the music, but they also loved the idea of us: twenty or so musicians onstage all sleeping and fighting and playing together. We cut a romantic image, I suppose, for outsiders. But inside it was different.
-Ibi Kaslik, *The Angel Riots* (148)

When Kevin Drew and Jeffrey Remedios first met at Ted's Wrecking Yard in the late 1990s, introduced by their mutual friend Brendan Canning, their very first exchange revolved around post-punk's idiosyncratic, age-old argument: independent versus major labels. Remedios was working at EMI at the time and he remembers the encounter thusly:

> Kevin is sort of super brash and judgemental, and I'm sort of a wallflower, and we sort of just got into it. He made some comment like "all the music I love all comes out of indie labels, it has nothing to do with majors." And I was like "how can you be so closed minded? So much music comes out of big companies, just because it's on a big company doesn't make it [bad], you just don't associate with the company, it's something in the music." We had a pretty spirited discussion about it. It ended with "wow, that guy's pretty opinionated, I kinda like that guy," and I think he had a similar take on me (Interview 4).

Perhaps their budding friendship was a reflection of the independent sensibilities of the time, a conversation and convergence that mirrored the habitus of the era – people considering and working out a framework not of major label repudiation but of measured compromise. Or perhaps it was simply the attraction of finding another person equally impassioned by music and the business of the music industries. Whatever the case may be, Drew and Remedios became

friends first, roommates in 2000 for six months, and eventually launched the label Arts & Crafts together in 2002, where today Remedios is the CEO and Drew handles A&R and promotion.

Begun first as non-profit, multidisciplinary community venture, the unexpected success of *You Forgot It In People* gave Arts & Crafts the opportunity to become a self-sustaining record label, while concurrently creating an umbrella under which the motion and flux of Broken Social Scene could thrive. Arts & Crafts' was formed to promote Broken Social Scene and, in its early days, grew with the band and its members; the label's first ten releases were all acts associated to various degrees with Broken Social Scene.[36] For many in the collective, Arts & Crafts was the institution through which they engaged with the machinations of the music industries, and it proved to be an invaluable agent and buffer which lent tenability, stability and success to the myriad of associated acts and artists. Stuart Berman, arguing that any discussion of Broken Social Scene inevitably demands an address of Arts & Crafts, notes that "the thing that people always remark about Broken Social Scene is the fact that they have so many other artists that have their own careers, a lot of that was facilitated by A&C. They became a home base for a lot of those bands" (Littlefair par. 26). The political economy of Broken Social Scene can be traced to a large extent through Arts & Crafts' model, and so the label will inevitably be a focal point for much of this chapter's discussion.

However, a political economic analysis of a collective should not only concern itself with its label and its broader dealings with the music industries; it must also address how the politics and economics of the collective shape, encourage, restrict and inform the cultural production of

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[36] They were *You Forgot It In People*, Jason Collett's *Motel Motor Lovesongs*, Stars' *Heart* (2003), the eponymous *Valley of the Giants* (2004), a re-release of *Feel Good Lost*, Broken Social Scene's b-side album *Bee Hives*, Feist's *Let it Die* (2004), Apostle of Hustle's *Folkloric Feel* (2004), Stars' *Set Yourself on Fire* (2004), and Jason Collett's *Idols of Exile* (2005).

Broken Social Scene. Vincent Mosco defines political economy as "the study of *the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources*," and I would argue that the internal dynamics of collectivity are precisely the type of social relations upon which effective political economy must focus, especially in a form where members have taken measures to gain power in their engagement with the music industries yet eschew a degree of power and control when operating creatively (25, original emphasis). This chapter, then, has two loci: the label Arts & Crafts and its broader dealing with the music industries, and the internal dynamics of the collective which distinctively affect how Broken Social Scene writes, records, tours and makes a living in music. What will emerge is a picture of how the collective operates and survives, governed by its peculiar political and economic forces.

When Remedios first imagined Arts & Crafts, it was a project of collective unification which was not based solely in music. The original vision was a non-profit organization, whose goal was to draw attention to the cultural renaissance in art happening in Toronto and create a network of support for those in the scene. It was broad and inclusive, as can be seen in the original idea for Arts & Crafts articulated by Remedios: "I told Brendan and Kevin 'Look, you come from this incredible circle of musicians, actors, filmmakers, photographers and videographers ... if you were to pull them all together into one talent pool, the whole would be greater than the sum of the parts'" (Jennings, par. 2). *You Forgot It In People*'s release was simply the first step in this project, and so Remedios approached the new, small label Paper Bag Records to publish the album, even personally paying for the album's pressing so the budding label would have money to promote it. However, as the album became popular, it became apparent that involving Paper Bag was a misstep; Spearin relays that it became obvious that

"through our own connections, we were able to do much more for ourselves than they could do for us and it became awkward very quickly" (Interview 2).

At this point, it is important to stress that while Broken Social Scene's formation was largely organic, emerging from the contextual conditions of the era, Arts & Crafts was created more from conscious decisions reacting to elements of Broken Social Scene's emergence, which Remedios calls "key defining moments" (Interview 4). For Remedios, one of those moments was the result of *You Forgot It In People* starting to gain popularity, a discomfort with a non-profit model, and realizing his strength lay in the medium of music:

> I'd never worked not-for-profit and the levers are different when you do that. It didn't make as much sense. And when the music side started to really happen and I didn't really know anything about the other art forms – I just thought it would be utopic and inclusive – I realized we needed to define this a little further. Being not-for-profit may not be the right way to go, we should focus on music, we should focus on music coming out of the city, we should focus on our friends. So I went back to Kevin and Brendan and said "listen, I really think we can make a go of this, you seem to want to work with me and trust me to work with your music, so if you're into this, I'm in one hundred percent. I'll quit my job, we'll start this company, I want to do this, what do you think?" And they were like "let's do this!" So yeah, key defining moment (Interview 4).

Broken Social Scene and Paper Bag then mutually backed out of the deal,[37] turning the album over entirely to Arts & Crafts. Even with their new, narrowed focus, Arts & Crafts ambitiously sought to bring together many musicians in a single business entity which, while it certainly would not qualify for the moniker 'collective' in a strictly Marxian sense, was certainly a novel collective approach in the commodified realities of the music industries. Neither Arts & Crafts nor Broken Social Scene has ever claimed to challenge or subvert commodified music, which is

[37] So that there was no ill will about the split, Kevin Drew acted as Paper Bag's A&R representative for a period afterwards (*Broken* 96).

why Stuart Berman stresses that it is more accurate to "think of Broken Social Scene as a group of friends that got into a small business together" (Interview 1).

This chapter opened with Drew and Remedios' first conversation because the philosophical seeds for Arts & Crafts business model are detectable therein, particularly Remedios' belief that "anytime you choose to sell art you choose to enter the business of art ... the music business is not pure, it's commodified, but I think that there are degrees to that commodification" (Interview 4). While working at EMI, Remedios became frustrated with the short term, big hit narrow-mindedness the major labels were displaying at the time. For Remedios, it eliminated any opportunity for artist development and he felt less and less like a conduit between artists and their potential fans. Furthermore, he witnessed as "new technologies came around and disrupted the status quo, and the plan was to do everything you could to maintain the status quo ... it was a slow erosion of a love for what I was doing" (Interview 4). So when Remedios chose a name for the label, he wanted to reflect the rethinking he thought was necessary: "I named it Arts & Crafts as I was trying to show that we mixed art and commerce, and that commerce was going to hold up its end of the promise. I had witnessed the machine ... I wanted to rebel well" (Quart 45).

The founding principle of Arts & Crafts, then, was not a negation of the major labels but a commitment to finding a better partnership between artists and their labels, using the best of both worlds. This is precisely the reason why Stuart Berman refers to Arts & Crafts as "a post-indie label" (*Broken* 96); it was an iteration of modern independent sensibilities which no longer viewed commerce as necessarily compromising. For Remedios, his nuanced understanding and willingness to engage with these aspects of the music industries had everything to do with his background in major labels:

> There's this old argument, indie versus major ... that first argument I had with Kevin was indie versus major. It's this old thing, it's the DIY, punk rock aesthetic over here, and the man, corporate thing over here. I grew up in a major label system but I don't feel corrupted. I didn't feel like my ideals were ever compromised. So to me, I never had any concerns where a new idea came from, or who was best for the job, thinking about their politics or their approaches. I just went, what is best, what is the core goal? Work with great, interesting, artistic music and get that out to people who might enjoy that in any way, shape, or form possible. So I cheated, and I stole, and I took the best ideas from everyone. If they were major labels or indie labels, I didn't care (Interview 4).

One such idea was a distribution deal with his former employer, EMI, because of the major labels' effective oligopoly in the field, making Arts & Crafts an early adopter of this strategy; another was a willingness to sell their records in corporate chains such as HMV. These are mutually beneficial arrangements, as Remedios explicates:

> The major labels have a stronghold on distribution; HMV has a fifty percent market share. He with the most product gets the most attention, and it just becomes a logistics gig. Frankly, we will use the majors in the same way they use us. We've become an alternative volume of stuff that goes through their systems, without them having to do any of the artist development. I've never had any qualms about that (Interview 4).

This perhaps explains why, after Remedios quit EMI, the major label offered a distribution deal to Arts & Crafts without having heard any music, provided free of rent offices in the excess space of EMI's Mississauga building, and furnished rolling advances to help with any cash flow difficulties – distribution deals provide a low risk investment opportunity without A&R costs for majors threatened in a digital age.

But there are lines to be drawn too; just as Broken Social Scene would not do a licensing deal with Hummer, there were things that Arts & Crafts was not willing to do with major labels. Jason Collett tells a story about a major label approaching Arts & Crafts, wanting to take advantage of their 'indie cred':

> A few years ago there was a reverse poach sort of thing going on, where some major labels were approaching Arts & Crafts to see if they would release the first five hundred copies of a major

> label artist to appear like they were indie. And part of it was going to Arts & Crafts to see if they would run the publicity campaign for a major label artist because this would give the appearance that this was an indie artist, and they naturally would get way more indie press for it. I mean, really cynical shit right? And we were just like "how do you have the fucking nerve to come and ask this question?" People don't get it, still hustling themselves into a fucking grave, major labels (Interview 3).

It is important to realize that the 'post-indie' label does not blithely comply with every major label partnership that may be mutually beneficial; the new independent sensibilities dictated navigating a space between the two with a strong political compass. In the case of distribution, however, there were significant benefits to the arrangement that helped guarantee the sustainability of Arts & Crafts. Logistically, completely independent distribution for a new label would be incredibly consuming, as Stuart Berman explains:

> From day one, Broken Social Scene have had major label distribution because in this day and age, major labels, the only thing they're really good for is putting records in stores and shipping them across Canada rather than, if you were to run your label completely 100% independently, you'd be the one on the phone with the mom-and-pop record store in Vancouver saying "you need 60 more copies of that?" Let EMI take care of that (Interview 1).

On other fronts, Remedios speaks about how, even when some success started to manifest and they could possible afford their own office, it made more sense to buy a van considering all their vehicle rental expenses, which they did instead. Arts & Crafts, according to Remedios, "caught one of the last rung or two on the old fashioned ladder and used the old fashioned system to place us in a good position for the new world," a great boon for the label at the outset (Interview 4).

In an important way, Arts & Crafts was also post-Canadian; not in that they denied a Canadian identity or that Canada was not integral to their success, but rather that they let go of the imagined, enclosed Canadian music market implied and cultivated by CanCon policies.

Broken Social Scene has been identified by Scott Henderson as being a part of a third wave of Canadian music, one coinciding with the digital era which:

> ... does not seem reliant on being identifiably Canadian, and unlike the initial post-Cancon era, these newer bands do not rely on imitative chart success. Instead, their ability to emerge as a 'scene' of sorts, and to gain international notoriety seems tied to a new confidence in which the notion of nation does not necessarily matter, even though it is arguably vital to their success (308).

While I think Henderson is quite right in identifying a third wave in Canadian music, his analysis misses the aggravation that the sequestered Canadian scene was causing artists in the late 1990s. Broken Social Scene's success in the United States was not a simple product of the confidence built from a vibrant Canadian scene. Rather, it was a consciously and intelligently sought after result with the previous decade of mistakes made by Canadian artists and labels in mind. The first step towards this was to open an Arts & Crafts branch in the United States and get an American distributor, the rationale for which Remedios explicates:

> ...when we started as a Canadian record company, as one of our services, we said "well, what's the best thing we could be as a Canadian record company?" Well frankly, an American record company. You have all these major labels in Canada who would sign bands and couldn't get them released in America because their affiliates wouldn't release them. I don't need to convince someone else to care as much as I care, I care! Look at Sub Pop out of Seattle, or Merge out of Chapel Hill, these are not New York, L.A., Chicago labels, and yet they're massive and reputable. Toronto is a bigger town than these towns, how can we not just do this? And so we went "let's be an American record label, let's get an American distributor." I can call the *New York Times* as easily as I can call the *Toronto Star*, I can call *Rolling Stone* as easily as you can call *Chart Magazine*, so why wouldn't you? (Interview 4).

In a sense, there is a heavy emphasis here on a new DIY ethic, whereby in doing the work and making the connections themselves, Arts & Crafts assure they get what they need from the music

industries while maintaining healthy control and insulation for the artists.[38] Touring also needed to be reimagined, as Remedios recounts:

> Not to mention geography. We're a Toronto band, there're thirty million people within a ten hour drive of Toronto,[39] whereas Winnipeg is twenty-four hours away by car, so why wouldn't you work America? But no one did! It was an invisible border (Interview 4).

To his credit, Henderson does note this reorganization in touring practice, though insists on likening it to a sort of fearless pillaging by confident Canadian bands thanks to CanCon legislation (313). Though I would agree that CanCon has helped many bands achieve a level of maturity, the history of Broken Social Scene and Remedios' comments suggest these moves derived more from a frustration with the imagined Canadian music market and were calculated to break through Canada's 'invisible border' onto a broader horizon. For Remedios, the impetus was simple: "we had to start in the U.S. and not do what the Canadian majors were doing – building a band in Canada and then exporting them abroad" (*Broken* 100).

From its beginnings, the other significantly divergent element of Arts & Crafts' business model is what is now referred to in the industry as 360 degree artist contract, which Stuart Berman describes as "a novel but sometimes complicated arrangement wherein labels serve their artist not just through distribution, but also through management, merchandising, and publishing" (*Broken* 97). Arts & Crafts see bands not as simply album sales, but a business unit

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[38] The value of which was not seen immediately by the label. When it came time to distribute *You Forgot It In People* overseas, Remedios recounts, they signed Broken Social Scene to a major label (Mercury Records, based in the United Kingdom), were paid what they thought was a lot of money (later it turned out to be the smallest deal the major did that year), and were on and off the label quickly after the album failed to sell: "We went totally against our way of thinking ... we got caught up in the system I just left. We did the deal in June [2003], they put the record out in September, and we were off the label by Christmas" (Interview 4). With that lesson learned, in 2006 Arts & Crafts opened a European branch in partnership with City Slang Records and then, in 2008, continued in that same vein by opening their own branch in Mexico.

[39] Elsewhere, he notes that 25 million of those people are across the border in the United States (*Broken* 100).

with multiple streams of revenue from all aspects of the music industries: album sales, licensing, touring, merchandising, writing, remixing and so forth. According to Remedios:

> We participate in every possible avenue of income that is open to an artist. We don't do that as a demand, we do that as a service that we provide. For example, your music gets streamed on a site like Last.fm, or on YouTube your video gets played, we make sure we're in the corners collecting that money and that money is flowing back to our artists, and we take a percentage of that (Interview 4).

While there is a potential conflict of interest between having both an artist's management and recording label housed in the same institution, Remedios insists that if business is completely open and equitable, "transparent on all income minus costs and then some factorial of us splitting everything," along with including some artist legal representation, then the arrangement can work (Interview 4).

The end result is a significantly streamlined and synergistic operation, which has benefits for both those in the industry and the artists. Dan Cutler, one of the first recruits to Arts & Crafts from Remedios' days at EMI, points out that those looking to licence music come back to the label regularly because of how painless the process is, largely because Arts & Crafts own the master and synchronization rights for almost all their artists[40] (Jennings par. 8). As for the artists, they get the benefit of having all their needs taken care of in one place by a group of people with whom they are close and trust; Brendan Canning likes that "it's all under one roof and we know the people who are working our music. Basically we're all in it together" (Jennings par. 7). The 360 degree contract has since become much more common, particularly for the epic, nine figure, long-term deals signed by international superstars such as Madonna, Nickelback, Jay-Z and U2 with LiveNation, where the opportunity for LiveNation to get a cut of every revenue stream

[40] The only exception is Feist, who publishes worldwide with BMG and only in Canada with Arts & Crafts.

commands a deal worth hundreds of millions of dollars. But in the case of Arts & Crafts, 360 degree contracts are not a required part of a deal but a service in a transparent partnership, the label's task being to seek out every way possible for both the artist and label to make a reasonable living from the music.

The lynchpins to this arrangement are transparency, equity and trust, from the perspective of both the label and the artists. Certainly, the drama in Ibi Kaslik's *The Angel Riots*[41] turns on the opportunity such an arrangement provides for people to take advantage of each other's idealism, and if the novel can be described as having a 'villain' it is certainly Kellogg, the character who is the band's manager, starts a label, and literally asks for trust of those involved only to betray it. In Arts & Crafts' case, many steps are taken to afford a better arrangement for artists. Amy Millan – who is a member of both Broken Social and the Stars, as well as having her own solo career, all of which is published through Arts & Crafts – notes that record deals that typically would be built upon an 80-20 split with majors have been 50-50 in her experience with Arts & Crafts (Jennings par. 7). Remedios nuances that position by clarifying that "it depends on the project, deals aren't all the same, but they're all based on the same utopic approach that depends on the role we're playing, on the risk we've put in, but in almost all cases they're partner deals" (Interview 4). Furthermore, Remedios indicates that the partnership only remains as long as it is beneficial for both parties, meaning artists are not locked into deals as they would be at majors:

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[41] Whenever engaging with the tragic novel, it is important to keep in mind that *The Angel Riots* is fictitious and not analogous to Broken Social Scene or Arts & Crafts, a point Kaslik stresses often in the press. Stuart Berman, comparing Kaslik's book to his own *This Book is Broken*, distinguishes the two by saying "Ibi's is hardcore fiction and mine's soft-core truth" (Interview 1). As a result, the best way to approach the material of her book is as revealing an element of dystopian possibility – granted a highly dramatized one – in this arrangement or form.

> I'm a firm believer that you can't make a caged bird sing. If someone doesn't want to be with us, they're free to go, whether we have contracts or not. If the best place for a band is on a major label, they should go. If the best place for them is here, then that'll be obvious. I really find that when you peel back the layers of stealing, poaching, inner interests, and you really just focus on the music and delivering music to fans, those answers become pretty apparent (Interview 4).

Jason Collett further illuminates the amount of trust and close relationships involved in these deals from an artist's perspective, since those are precisely the reasons he chose to work with Arts & Crafts:

> ...it was easy for me to sign with Arts & Crafts cause it's all in the family, it's a handshake deal. So there's a good deal of trust involved. I know they've treated me very well and they've had my back the whole time, taken care of my family in a crunch or two. So it is like a family business (Interview 3).

This faith can have its risks; Stephen Lee's examination of Wax Trax! Records fingers their policy of not signing contracts with artists as a contributing factor to the label's eventual downfall (18). For Jason Collett, however, it is precisely these personal relations and trust that can prevent major labels from poaching acts away from Arts & Crafts:

> There were other labels, there was another label in particular ... [the label] was telling me not to go with [Arts & Crafts], this is a good size Canadian label, saying "not to go with them cause I've heard bad things about them and they're going to be terrible." And I was like "what are you talking about? These are my friends you're bad mouthing" (Interview 4).

While these could be construed as risky business practices, the fact that Arts & Crafts is a part of Broken Social Scene's circle of friends, a part of the collective ethos, has lent the label a great deal of success and stability, which they in turn have provided back to the collective.[42] Naturally, launching a label with a collective like Broken Social Scene is excellent business, producing

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[42] Metric are a notable absence from Arts & Crafts and it was actually the friendships that kept them from signing on, as Emily Haines relates: "...the deciding factor was a really candid conversation James [Shaw] and I had about how the friendships were too fucking important. It's too risky ... the ultimate decision was, 'We're already part of [the family]. We just don't need to have our purse strings tied to it'" (*Broken* 103). Metric ultimately signed with Enjoy/Everloving Records, though today Arts & Crafts has released their latest album, *Fantasies* (2009), in Mexico.

auxiliary acts that are talented and will draw an audience by their association with the collective. This is precisely why Arts & Crafts' first ten releases were from the folds of Broken Social Scene, and why going outside the group for the first time with the band Most Serene Republic was a big deal that required "a collective decision," with all the members of the community excited by their music (Interview 4). The ethos of friendship, like in many independent outfits, has also furnished a philosophical perspective on the music industries that promotes cooperation over competition, perhaps a reaction to the previously discussed Toronto scene, where major label presence rendered every band a competitor for a deal rather than a potential collaborator. Remedios explains:

> There's always a core to us that's collective driven, everyone's supporting each other, everyone's trying to realize that as you fight for an entertainment dollar, you're actually not fighting each other. It's like individual trials of flipping a penny, every time you've got a fifty percent chance of getting heads, there's no competition really. So people have rallied around each other and supported each other in that system, which has been amazing (Interview 4).

The mutual support seems a logical extension of a label that is built upon a high level of trust and intimacy.

In the end, Arts & Crafts succeeded in bringing together a scene of restricted production into one unified business entity. In *Making Popular Music*, Jason Toynbee labels such a scene a proto-market. According to Toynbee, for culture to be commodified it must create "a radius of creativity, that is a space in the economic field where precisely non-economic goals are pursued," clearly drawing upon Bourdieu's field of restricted production where non-economic capital is valourized (3). These spaces are proto-markets which are "relatively autonomous zones and difficult for record companies to colonize," largely because the overabundance of supply makes it difficult to find good music investments and because they typically operate on an economy that is not based on economic gain (29). Major labels, looking for new talent, send

A&R representatives to these proto-markets to try and find the next big act, elevate them from the scene, and sign them to their label. Toynbee conceptualizes popular music as defined by two axes: "one is horizontal and links music makers organized in small scenes, or proto-markets ... the other is vertical and connects proto-markets to the heavily capitalized packing and distribution sector at the apex of the music industries" (32). Arts & Crafts' business model has succeeded in effectively setting up at the nexus of these two axes, engaging with the vertical axis on behalf of those in the proto-market and so being a buffer and aegis for the collected musicians of Broken Social Scene. By mediating the machinations of the music industries, Arts & Crafts provides a viable strategy for the modern indie habitus, while concurrently providing an autonomous home base for a proto-market by precisely being a part of its close-knit structure. Arts & Crafts preserves the collective as a proto-market and so lets Broken Social Scene's own internal dynamics play out without being completely torn apart, as so many bands have, by the basic mechanics of commodified music. Quite simply, the model of the collective, says Kevin Drew, "wouldn't survive in a major label" (Quart 46).

When Broken Social Scene first started in the Toronto scene, collectivity allowed more people to use the limited resources that were available to artists in the field of restricted production. Johnny Dovercourt summarizes this impulse well: "the collective spirit happened as much out of necessity as ethics... there never has been much money, so people cram into the recording studio and collaborate to survive" (Quart 45). Broken Social Scene certainly was no different, getting a cut rate deal[43] on their time in producer David Newfeld's studio Stars and

[43] *You Forgot It In People* cost just $8,000 to produce, which broke down to an incredibly inexpensive $140 a day. "You pay more to do a karaoke tape than you do to work with me," their producer Dave Newfeld joked (McBride par. 12).

Sons[44] as a multitude of people came and went for the making of *You Forgot It In People*. Being stuffed in that studio, operating in a collective form based on principles of motion and flux, creates new political and economic circumstances, conditions which must be navigated by Broken Social Scene's membership and have continued to rearticulate themselves over the past decade. With Arts & Crafts acting as a mediator for the more severe aspects of the music industries, Broken Social Scene presents a case where we can see a little more clearly how collective processes affect cultural production such as writing, recording and touring, as well as how these forces play out over an extended duration.

Since, as previously explored, Broken Social Scene is such a process-based band, writing music in the studio is hammered out by similar means. In creating an album, Drew reports:

> "Pre-Production" is a term that we do not understand at all. We have never done "pre-production" in any of our records. We have just gone in, pressed record and figured out the song half the time while we were recording, if we did not already know it by playing it live (Kastrup par. 4).

Writing, for Broken Social Scene, is a process that occurs while engaged with other people in a studio or at a gig, without preconceptions; in other words, songs are found *between* people. Songwriting in this mode thus demands concession and compromise, along with a healthy dose of patience. Thinking about his Quaker friends' endless parade of committees, to which Charles Spearin parallels Broken Social Scene and his other band Do Make Say Think's writing process, he recounted:

> ...we have a lot of band meetings, and then we talk ourselves into circles and it gets pretty exhausting and sometimes it would be nice to just have one, clear voice, saying what to do, but that's just lazy. Maybe it's not so good for the band, but it's better for the people working together cause you have to work with each other's shit (Interview 2).

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[44] At the time, the windowless studio also served as Newfeld's home – he slept in the boiler room.

However, Spearin distinguishes between his band and the collective by suggesting that Broken Social Scene's size produces more ideas and more directions, which Brendan Canning furthers:

> We just have many different ideas floating around, that's what it comes down to. If you have four, the body of work will get pulled in four different ways, but if you have six people, well it'll get pulled that many different ways, or eight different ways even (Interview 5).

The interest in embracing the many people and ideas involved, along with the requisite compromise implied by that interest, means that no single individual can account for the finished track. This certainly demands a consciousness of everyone else's sensitivities; Evan Cranley points out that "everyone's really good at not stepping on each other's toes – you can't teach that" (*Broken* 88). I asked Spearin if it was acceptable for someone to step forward and take the reins in songwriting, to which he responded:

> No, it's not OK. I mean, it is OK, but you still have to be sensitive. Generally that's what you're doing, you're trying to lead in the direction you think it's going. But if somebody's trying to take it in the opposite direction, you end up with an average ... it's almost like haggling. It's like "I'll let you turn up the guitar to 2dB if we can edit that part of the song." There's this real give and take, a barter system going on to create music. The end result is it's nobody's vision, you end up with a record that nobody would call their own, so it's this funny sort of average of all the people (Interview 2).

In other words, the writing process is a negotiation between individuals, each of whom is trying to seize upon all the influences and ideas in the room and imagine where they might naturally and profitably lead. There are thus two stages of negotiation in the process – the first by each individual of all the ideas in the room, the second between each individual's version of the agglomeration of those ideas. Aesthetically, this seems to result in a wide variety of styles between the songs produced, a reflection of the wider scope of influence and style that comes from involving so many people. When *You Forgot It In People* was completed, there was some worry that it might sound too much like a compilation record because of the variety of styles present. With so many songwriters and such an awareness and intensive focus on the space

where they might all meet, it is unsurprising that any finished product cannot be attributed to any one person's pre-existing vision, influence, or style.

This process is beautifully mirrored by the visuals in the music video for "Almost Crimes" (*You Forgot It In People*). In the video, all the band members are filmed as black silhouettes on a brightly backlit screen, but their outlines appear to be multiplied *and* each multiple shadowed by digital effects and some sparse front lighting (Image 2).

Image 2: Still from music video for "Almost Crimes" (*You Forgot It In People*)

The outlines mix and mingle indiscriminately, members pass in, out, and through each other, creating the effect of an abstracted, collective space with no hard boundaries between individuals. At 2:45, the camera pulls out from one mess of outlines, but then in sequence passes through and reveals several new, two dimensional articulations of the group, each separated by a section of white space. The effect seems to imitate a Broken Social Scene record, each unique group of overlapping and interacting silhouettes being a track on the album, passing as songs would in sequence but each accumulation of shadows and figures being different than the last, despite being made of the same people. Much like the visuals in the music video, Broken Social Scene's songwriting process produces a dynamic, negotiated mix of everyone involved, all doubled and overlapped upon each other, captured in an entity where, while individual contributions may be lightly discernable, they more importantly have been collated and layered with the contributions of others beyond singular recognition.

Broken Social Scene's creative dynamic goes a long way in explaining its philosophy regarding songwriting credits and royalties. Simply put, if an individual is involved with the collective give-and-take that produces a song, then they are considered a songwriter. Using "Anthems for a Seventeen Year Old Girl" (*You Forgot It In People*) as an example – the track has ten songwriting credits – Brendan Canning articulates Broken Social Scene's perspective:

> ...we really believe that songwriting goes beyond just the lyrics and the melody. There are so many melodies going on that you can't really pin it down to one thing. And we have an excellent horn section, so their contributions can't be overlooked either (Jennings par. 10).

Recognizing these variegated contributions in the songwriting credits is an extremely significant gesture, especially with such a sprawling group of musicians, since this means royalty cheques are divided substantially more than in other bands. Musicians are also compensated by a ratio of how many songs on the album they played on. By doing so, Broken Social Scene defies the principles of authorship and control upon which the music industries are organized. Jason Collett reveals how against the grain this songwriting philosophy is in the music industries:

> [Broken Social Scene] had a really strong indie ethic about if you were in the room when something was recorded, you wrote the song. And as a person that came up as a Toronto singer-songwriter, that's not what I was taught. You've got to protect your songs ... [Kevin and Brendan] could have taken that moment, like so many people have in the history of rock and roll and said "I own all of this." He could have pulled a Robbie Robertson, you know, "it's all mine," cause that's what we're all told, "I'm the songwriter, I own it." But he's approached it completely differently, and in that sense, Kevin, I would never say he's being consciously political, but that's a very collectively minded thing and he comes about it in his own natural way (Interview 3).

I would argue that Broken Social Scene's approach to songwriting credits is greatly informed by how they write their music. Much like the collective itself, here a phenomenon that could be construed as overtly and consciously political seems to have more organic origins relating to the form of collectivity.

This is not to suggest it is statically so, without struggle – Collett told me that this was something "everybody's had to wrestle with further down the line, particularly Kevin and Brendan, seeing so many people take so many slices of the pie"[45] – but Broken Social Scene seems to continue to subscribe to the same principle even in their pseudo hiatus with the 'Broken Social Scene Presents:' series. For example, half of the songs on Broken Social Scene Presents: Kevin Drew's *Spirit If...* have shared songwriting credits on what was ostensibly a solo record. The moniker "Broken Social Scene Presents:" then, beyond being a way for Drew and Canning to still use the band name for marketing, reflects that these processes are still ongoing, albeit on a smaller scale. For Canning, the rationale was simple: "I was still working with other individuals on that so the same rules apply to a certain degree. It was more just that I would have the last say, for better or worse" (Interview 5).

With so many people involved in this process, two roles emerge that are absolutely key within the collective. The first is the producer, which in both *You Forgot It In People* and *Broken Social Scene* was Dave Newfeld, who is so important to the band that he is consistently referred to as a full-fledged member of Broken Social Scene. As a producer, his primary role is to unify all the disparate influences, ideas and tracks into an album, to "collate voices in a chorus which is redolent with utopian[46] possibility" (Toynbee 53). In a band with so many voices, how they are harnessed is absolutely essential, and so it is no wonder Jason Collett referred to him as a "key personality" (Interview 3). Whether in *You Forgot It In People* (where he was a part of the processual fray) or in *Broken Social Scene* (where people were coming and going constantly,

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[45] Unfortunately, Brendan Canning declined to answer my questions on financial issues.

[46] Or in *Broken Social Scene*'s case, dystopian may be more appropriate, an issue of anxiety that will be addressed in chapter five.

leaving him to assemble the shards largely with Kevin Drew), Newfeld had a significant hand in Broken Social Scene's sound, which I would argue was demanded of him by the collective structure of the band. It is important to note that in the collective this role is not necessarily filled by only one person and is typically subjected to the same give-and-take as collective composition, as Charles Spearin revealed to me speaking about *You Forgot It In People* (*Broken* 88). However, in Spearin's account of the making of *Broken Social Scene*, it appears Newfeld and Drew may have violated the collective's understood processes:

> In recording the self-titled record the challenges of working with our producer Dave Newfeld became too much for most of the band and subsequently the album was mixed basically by Kevin and Dave, leaving a lot of us feeling a bit left out. For me, one of the most exciting parts of being in a band is the recording and mixing stage of making a record, and it became clear that there were too many cooks already. And nobody wants to be the one not invited to the party (Interview 2).

While the role of producer is clearly integral to the collective's form, Spearin's statement suggests that it is understood as properly functioning as a part of the same collective composition processes.

The other role this expanse of people seems to demand is someone who concerns themselves constantly with the egos and interpersonal issues of the collective. With so many individuals, so many relationships, it is easy for rifts to emerge or for people to get lost in the mix, which can potentially poison the collective's processes. Someone needs to concern themselves with the social relations and sensitivities of those involved. As Stuart Berman describes, that role is filled by Kevin Drew:

> He's like the social lubricant. Bill Priddle, one of the members of Broken Social Scene, calls Kevin the glue of the band. Like that's his instrument – he doesn't play guitar, he doesn't play piano he's the glue, he's the one that bring everyone together (Interview 1).

Charles Spearin describes what Drew does as a form of leadership, contrasting it with other potential paradigms:

> There's three different kinds of leading. One is a king, you're leading this charge into battle ... the second one is a ship captain, where you're all going together, you're running the ship but you're all getting there at the same time, you're all leaving at the same time, you're all working together. And then the other kind of leading, which is maybe more like what Kevin does, is kind of like a sheepdog, when you're just making sure all the stragglers and everybody is doing OK, get everybody together, constantly running back and forth and checking up on everybody. And Kevin is doing that, he's always checking up with everybody, making sure they're satisfied with what's going on. If there is a problem, he knows what he should be focused on, he's very respectful of it ... I think generally in terms of leading a band, he's more leading from the back (Interview 2).

While ostensibly a collective has no singular leading figure, Drew, by working consistently to keep relations strong within the group, maintains a necessary cohesiveness between the tens of people who would not necessarily remain intact otherwise. Stuart Berman surmised that a major benefit of the collective for many was not having to be the person with the worries and responsibilities for the entire band, a relief to be able to go with the flow without the stress that, in this case, is shouldered by Drew. How Broken Social Scene is organized demands strong figures in the roles of 'glue' and producer, both of which were clearly identified in my interviews.

Along with the expansive membership,[47] Broken Social Scene is quite unique from other bands in that, as Charles Spearin paraphrases, "it's understood that people come in and out," usually to spend time on their side or solo projects, but also to simply take some space from the collective for familial or personal reasons (Interview 2). In *Band Together: Internal Dynamics in U2, R.E.M., Radiohead and the Red Hot Chili Peppers*, Mirit Eliraz explores the bands in his book's title with a traditional three to five person line-up, and notes regularly that they find their

[47] In his interview, Canning stressed that "the number we have playing with us, it's not this ground breaking thing," citing Erykah Badu using five producers or other eras where having twenty or twenty-two people on a record was standard (Interview One). In his opinion, the reaction to Broken Social Scene's membership has more to do with a stagnant status quo in pop music, where three to five piece bands have become standardized.

creative strength in the stability and consistency of their relationships with their band mates (59-61). A particularly noteworthy issue to this discussion is what Eliraz terms "Wavering Committment," where he describes the extreme duress that a band undergoes when they lose a member,[48] or even when a member is simply considering leaving for a period (103-105). Furthermore, line-up shifts are periods of great strife for these bands, producing a destabilizing feeling that make activities such as songwriting difficult (227-230). Eliraz also details the contradictory relationship these bands have with side projects; while they are often appreciated for broadening the bands' horizons, publicly they are seen as pernicious sign of splintering and a harbinger of the imminent break-up of the band (195-200). These four bands have been the paragon of longevity and success in rock and roll for the last three decades, and their stability has largely set the standard for how other rock groups think they should organize themselves.

By contrast, for Broken Social Scene the animating principles and status quo are just the opposite: motion and flux, side projects and line-up changes. The only time someone 'quit' the band was John Crossingham, after recording *You Forgot It In People*, and he relates it was because he did not quite understand Broken Social Scene's collective form:

> The reason I quit was my wife, Lesa, was nervous about me going away ... [she] was faced with her boy going away and touring with not just one but two bands.[49] And Broken Social Scene needed an answer, like, "What kind of commitment can you give us?" In hindsight, it was more like, "You didn't have to say you had to leave. You could've just said 'I can't do this tour right now.'" But I wasn't used to bands working that way. I felt if I said, "I just can't do this right now," they would say, "What the fuck do you think this is, some kind of choose-when-you-want-be-in-this band?" What band works that way? Aside from Broken Social Scene, no one (*Broken* 90).

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[48] The best example of this would be Michael Stipe likening R.E.M. to a three-legged dog upon drummer Bill Berry's departure, meaning the band needed to relearn how to walk again on three feet.

[49] Broken Social Scene and Crossingham's other band, Raising the Fawn.

Quite simply, Crossingham did not realize that Broken Social Scene has, to quote Brendan Canning, an "open door policy where people don't have to show up if the moment doesn't suit them" (Interview 5). But as should also be clear from Crossingham's story, most members are constantly straddling between a side or solo project, their own families, and Broken Social Scene, a balancing act which both Jason Collett and Charles Spearin described to me in similar detail.

As an independent artist, there is also a financial exigency to having so many side projects and consistently touring with each of them. In an interview with Jian Ghomeshi on the CBC Radio One program *Q*, Torquil Campbell – who has performed with Broken Social Scene, is a lead singer for the Stars, and had just announced on air the formation of another band, Dead Child Star[50] – was asked "how many bands do you need to be in?", to which he replied, tongue-half-in-cheek, "as many bands as it takes for me turn earn $50,000 dollars a year... another four, five bands should do it." For an independent artist to simply make a respectable living, they find themselves working in many different groups in rotation, if not simultaneously.

In addition, many members also enjoy the creative space outside of the collective, where they were operating long before Broken Social Scene arose; for example, Jason Collett notes that Broken Social Scene cannot always be in operation "because of egos like mine ... I need to go and do my own thing" (Interview 3). In collective discourse, side projects and Broken Social Scene itself are understood as necessary outlets, which allow members to be creative in different

[50] Dead Child Star is a band with Julian Brown of Apostle of Hustle, and the announcement came at a time when both he and Torquil had been temporarily abandoned by their band mates. While Apostle of Hustle had just released a new album, the band's lead singer and guitarist Andrew Whiteman had planned only a short tour before he would write and record a new album with Broken Social Scene, and Amy Millan of Stars was currently working on a new solo record. In many ways then, each new phase of pursuits for all these bands can be simply a rearrangement of the same figures, adjusting and reacting to the pursuits of others in the network.

ways. Broken Social Scene is appealing to many members because it provides an opportunity to take on a different creative or performative persona, as Stuart Berman explains:

> [Leslie] Feist comes from a punk rock background; she makes quieter, folky pop songs now, but when she wants to rock out she goes with Broken Social Scene. Emily [Haines] is kind of the opposite, she leads Metric – which are a very aggressive, glam-rock band – but when she needs quiet, more introspective, psychedelic side of her, she goes to Broken Social Scene (Interview 1).

This is complimented by a similar, if half-jokingly conflicted view from within Broken Social Scene of the other solo and side projects, which Kevin Drew demonstrates:

> I don't intend to keep everyone together at all. Anybody can come and go as they please. They have to be or it won't work. I mean, I wish that I could say to Evan [Cranley] and Amy [Millan], "Quit Stars! You don't need them, you need us, let's do this!" But then what about the others you know? What about Stars? People need Stars! I mean, I can't tell them to stop the band. [*Shifty Eyes*] Even though I'd *love* to... [*Laughs*]. No, no, they need that outlet. Because if they don't have that outlet, they wouldn't have that with us ("Austinist" par. 33-4).

Broken Social Scene, then, is inclusive but does not command exclusivity, in order to give space for artists' economic and creative needs that could not be met by the collective alone. And so both recording and touring are always a question of schedule and availability, a severe restriction on the cultural production of the band.

For the majority of members with solo and side projects, involvement in the collective positively affects those side projects' fortunes. In many ways, Broken Social Scene acts as a showcase for the individuals it is made up of – be it in the recordings, announced as they appear on stage, or by mention in press kits and interviews.[51] Stuart Berman told me that this in fact was

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[51] There is a strange way that a combination of the collective's sprawling nature, the popular press, and the necessities of promoting a new album can combine to misconstrue membership and entangle other friends, as Murray Lightburn of The Dears experienced. After being invited by Kevin Drew, he came into David Newfeld's studio to lay down a few vocal tracks – one a harmony part for "All the Gods," and the other some caterwauling and chaotic noise which he thought would never be used – for *Broken Social Scene*. When the album was released, he discovered that "All the Gods" had been made a b-side and his wailing was buried in the mix of one of the tracks, but somehow he was being labelled as one of the members of Broken Social Scene in all the press coverage, something he found quite disconcerting: "That's probably what they wanted – to snare another character in their web. It was a really bizarre experience: I'm looking at the track list and I don't recognize anything and somehow

one of the originally intended effects of the collective; after coming from a scene where so many people were being overlooked, Broken Social Scene presented an opportunity to bring the pre-existing acts a wider audience. Kevin Drew once described that his dream was "to see a tree in some rock magazine, of who plays with who, showing all these people who lived within a thirty-two blocks of each other and all their albums" (*Broken* 93). For the most part, they have been successful; as Jason Collett notes, "it's kicked the door open for all of us, for all our solo projects internationally" (Interview 3). Of course, this effect also has its detriments; the collective can overshadow the side acts as well, or even imply they are part of the same project, as James Shaw of Metric discovered when, after many delays, *Broken Social Scene* was released the same day as Metric's album *Live It Out* (2005): "I open up *SPIN* magazine and both records get one review together, which was irritating. That's the last time we'll do that!" (*Broken* 135). An interesting side note, it appears that the female members in the group are the ones who best convert this exposure, likely because they make largely vocal contributions, an easily discernable and fetishized role. It was because the female singers such as Emily Haines (Metric and Solo), Amy Millan (Stars and Solo), and Leslie Feist (Solo) were so consistently unavailable, an indication of their broader success, that the band hired Lisa Lobsinger to tour with the band and sing those parts. All in all, Broken Social Scene's form has indubitably brought extra attention to its members, which in turn has also provided Arts & Crafts with a solid base from which to build a label.[52]

I'm still on the record? I remember writing an email to Jeffrey Remedios saying, "I feel totally misrepresented here. I'm clearly not on the record and yet I'm all over the press release" (*Broken* 129).

[52] Differentiating between Arts & Crafts and Broken Social Scene in this manner is somewhat problematic, since Kevin Drew owns half the label and yet is a member of the band and Jeffrey Remedios owns the other half of the label while also being the band's manager. What is clear is that the overall, mutually beneficial nature of the relationship makes these duplicitous positions possible, even though it may demand that Drew wear, in his father's words, "schizophrenic hats" (*Broken* 103).

With all the extra interest and demand for the solo and side projects generated by the collective, coupled with the economic and creative needs of the artists, members often have precious little time for the Broken Social Scene itself. Kevin Drew sings in the bittersweet *Broken Social Scene* b-side "All My Friends,"[53] a song that in performance he states "is for us" (Harcourt): "all my friends in magazines / got addicted to the word 'leaves'" (*To Be You and Me*). It is important to note that the only members without major side projects of their own are the two co-founders of Broken Social Scene, Kevin Drew and Brendan Canning. Stuart Berman indicated that it put them in a peculiar position, because on the one hand they were the founding and organizational centre of the Broken Social Scene, but when others went to their solo or side projects, they were getting left on the peripheries, frustrated:

> I know they've had moments where they want to do Social Scene stuff, but everybody else is busy doing Apostle of Hustle, or Feist, Stars, Metric. So I know sometimes they're in this funny position where, on the one hand, they're the team leaders and it's all about the group effort, but on a personal level there are things that are frustrating. Sometimes they just wish they were in a normal band that could tour when the band wanted to and operate normally (Interview 1).

However, they cannot begrudge their friends because, as Berman suggests:

> ...one of the things Kevin and Brendan wanted to accomplish with this band, with Arts & Crafts, was to bring attention to their friends that were flying under the radar for so long, like a Jason Collet or an Andrew Whiteman, give them that forum, and give them a stage, and bring them an audience, and they did that. So they can't fault them for wanting to focus their time on it ... That's Kevin and Brendan's philosophy – even though they would like to have all these people at their beck and call, they understand that they've got to do that, and it's those experiences on their own that they bring back to the band, and it just makes the band stronger (Interview 1).

To be at the centre of Broken Social Scene is to be on the periphery of its many side projects in the blink of the eye and, despite the aggravation it causes, this is entirely by design. In 2005,

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[53] The song was placed on the EP *To Be You and Me*, a collection that was included with the limited edition of *Broken Social Scene*.

Drew was happy to refer to this as "a beautiful compromise," despite the fractured duress the band had undergone recording *Broken Social Scene* ("Austinist" par. 38).

As time passed, given the constant ebb of artists to their own projects and the prevalent discourse about those projects being necessary outlets, it seems almost inevitable that Kevin Drew and Brendan Canning would need to find their own outlets. Jason Collett describes the situation after the eponymous album:

> ... people like Whitey [Andrew Whiteman], [Amy] Millan, myself, Emily Haines, [Leslie] Feist, we were all writing our own work before [Broken Social Scene] evolved, but Kevin and Brendan weren't. So what became clear was that we're all serviced by our solo work personally, that personal satisfaction you get, but neither Kevin and Brendan were, because they're facilitating so many other people's influence into what Broken Social Scene was, that led to them doing their own thing. And that and the time that has elapsed has really changed what the band is. But it's just inevitable change, it's not good or bad change it's just things are running their course (Interview 3).

The two 'Broken Social Scene Presents:' albums certainly were a consequence of these movements, as was the expansion of the collective to new recruits, such as Elizabeth Powell, Andrew Kenny, Sam Goldberg, and Mitch Bowden, to tour those albums.[54] The success of the collective has also demanded a tighter, repeated performance, meaning the more exploratory and processual performances of Wavelength days are a thing of the past; much like Collett, Evan Cranley stresses that the change is not tragic but natural, "the band just evolved" (*Broken* 117). For this discussion, what is perhaps most interesting is recent efforts to emphasize a core to the

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[54] The injection of new blood can pose an interesting problem for artists who have been doing their own thing and come back to a familiar yet new, even alienating entity, as Jason Collett explains: "It's weird when there's new people, it's weird to find your way back in, it's the prodigal problem ... but it's also really exciting to see how things have changed, how much better it is musically, way better musically. So I've had very mixed feeling standing side stage and watching things, not sure where my place is. It's weird, maybe it's like meeting an old girlfriend for the first few times, it is kind of uncomfortable but you're happy for them and they're happy for you, that kind of thing. You have very intimate relationships, not only with the people individually, but the whole thing and how your identity is wrapped up in it" (Interview 3).

collective as Canning, Drew, Charles Spearin, Justin Peroff and Andrew Whiteman, which Canning defined as "who we need to make it work ... the essential core" (Interview 5). At first glance, this gesture seems as if it would be one to secure more stability, along with more opportunities to write and record music, but Canning suggests that a core is now more emphasized simply because recently "we really know who the core is," something that has become apparent over time[55] (Interview 5). His comments suggest that, over time, with all the movement and flux, core members have become apparent the way the centre of an orbit becomes apparent only through watching the motion of the satellites relative to the motion of the centre, possible after many observations over an extended period of time. After so much flux and movement, a pattern of position may have revealed a centre to Broken Social Scene which in the early days may not have been discernable because of the novel mass of motion and members.

Planetary metaphors have been used a great deal to describe the collective and to reveal its processes, but so have many other conceptual metaphors – Broken Social Scene has been described by its members as a family, a summer camp, a cult, a movement, and even an army. Academically, there are also conceptual metaphors that may offer great insight into Broken Social Scene's brand of collectivity – Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *rhizome*, Jean-Luc Nancy's *inoperative community*, and Brian Massumi's *paradox of passage and position*. Chapter five will introduce, evaluate, and critically crosswire these concepts and metaphors with the case of Broken Social Scene to see what they may reveal and obscure about the band and its processes; it will be a renegotiation of the term 'collective'.

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[55] There is a very peculiar way that the core, even when self defined, still seems to exude a logic of inclusivity that imposes itself on Canning, since he cannot resist beginning to expand the core before re-evaluating and coming back to his original position: "[The core] is more just me, Kev, Justin, Charlie, and Andrew... and now Sammy [Goldberg], six of us. But then you don't want to exclude Marty [Kinack] or Ohad [Benchetrit], but I suppose, if you really... I would really say it's five of us, it's the core, the essential core" (Interview 5).

Chapter Five: What is a Collective, How is Broken Social Scene?

and I know that you fuck what you love
and you love what you fuck
-"It's All Gonna Break" (*Broken Social Scene*)

Thus love is at once the promise of completion – but a promise always disappearing – and the threat of decomposition, always imminent.
-Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (93)

Critical reception of any Broken Social Scene album invariably makes reference to the band's unique, collective form. Often, the intent is not simply to recount and map the multitudinous members, but to actually link the form to Broken Social Scene's sound. A strain of this discourse typically involves portraying the collective as something that must be overcome, that to take such a form is inevitably a challenge that threatens the quality of the music. Even in the near universal acclaim for *You Forgot It In People*, some compliments seemed to suggest that collectives were typically more harmful than advantageous. For example, Dave Antrobus of *Flak Magazine* commented that, "Considering the line-up, *You Forgot It In People* ... should be a Tower of Babel, but its sounds reach the Promised Land" (par. 1). Fast forward to the release of 2005's eponymous album *Broken Social Scene* and we see a very marked turn for the Toronto collective, one which gave new fodder for the potential collective critiques in the popular press. Unlike *You Forgot It In People*'s very refined, perfected and harmonious sound, the new album was a mess of layers, hooks and voices that seemed to polarize critics. In one camp, there were critics who believed this was an overindulgent, spectacular failure, and their reviews could often be summarized by the adage 'too many cooks spoil the broth', such as Zeth Lundy's review for *Popmaters*: "there're just too many cooks in Broken Social Scene's kitchen" (par. 2). In the other

camp, the myriad of ideas and panoply of sound seemed to exude vitality and, to cite the review in the British magazine *Uncut*, managed "to forge beauty out of the chaos without losing the chaos" (100). The origin of the rift can perhaps be found in a line from the review of the *Broken Social Scene* b-side track "Canada vs. America"[56] by Adam Moerder of *Pitchfork*. For him, Broken Social Scene sounded "like 10 classic indie records played together at once"... insert value judgement here – or beforehand, as Moerder did by preceding his statement with the dismissive word "just."

What I do not think the critics realized was that their reviews were in part evaluating the collective project of Broken Social Scene itself. Self-titling an album released after three other discs – at which point the album is clearly not operating as an introduction to the band itself – is a loaded gesture, one that demands analytic attention, especially considering it was originally titled *Windsurfing Nation*. Here, it is useful to return to Kevin Drew's *Morning Becomes Eclectic* statement that the album was "self-titled not because this is our sound, it was self titled because... this ended up being what is just a big, beautiful mess, which represents the idea of who we are" (Harcourt). Thus, in my mind, the polarized critics were actually reacting to a paradox latent to Broken Social Scene itself. Looking within the album specifically, despite the fact that it draws its power, dynamics and unique character from its collective approach and pluralistic expressionism, the lyrics and media surrounding the release express a deep-seated unease with plurality and the collective. At that time, I would contend that the collective life of Broken Social Scene was characterized by an underlying anxious tension, an anxiety which seems to centre on a concern with the viability of the collective itself.

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[56] The song was also on the EP *To Be You and Me*.

By the same token, we cannot forget the exciting climax which *You Forgot It In People* represented for the band, a culmination of all the contextual and interpersonal forces which are also all an ineluctable part of the collective. Noah Mintz, who has mastered all of Broken Social Scene's albums, stated that "'Collective' is an overused word, but it really defines a type of music ... *You Forgot It In People* was a big collaborative effort that gelled into one piece" (*Broken* 89); and Evan Cranley described that album as having "a magic to it that I've never been a part of since" (*Broken* 88). Later, Cranley would comment that on the next album, *Broken Social Scene*:

> There was definitely a lot more angst involved during this recording, and it was definitely a more personal journey for Brendan and Kevin as bandleaders. And the record's a mess – I like the record, but there are tracks that are almost impossible to listen to. It's true, I'm sorry. There's that track "Our Faces Split the Coast in Half" – that's the sound of anxiety, that's the sound of pressure, that's the sound of things falling apart. There we so many things that were happening in our personal lives that got spit out on that record (*Broken* 130).

Any analysis of Broken Social Scene must be able to account for its paradox, its inherent potential to peak in ecstasy or plunge into turmoil – as Broken Social Scene did with *You Forgot It In People* and *Broken Social Scene* respectively – but somehow still survive, operating today in a liminal state with elements of both.[57]

Brian Massumi, in his introduction to *Parables for the Virtual*, spends a great deal of time reflecting on the ramifications of Henri Bergson's "paradoxes of passage and position" (5).

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[57] This chapter, in a way, is an effort to move beyond the prototypical rock narrative which nostalgically laments a band's pure past before it was destroyed by sex, drugs and the industry of rock and roll, perhaps best epitomized by Ibi Kaslik's *The Angel Riots*: "Others can believe we were once a group of lovers, a family who wrapped up our season in loud bars with swallow feathers sewn to our sleeves in the fragile solidarity of rhythm. *I* know we were just a bunch of children hooked on free hotel rooms and feedback loops. *I* know it was pure until we swallowed our own hype and it soured our guts, turning our private joys into bile. Other people can believe those myths – they aren't our stories or songs anymore" (264, original emphasis). In Broken Social Scene's case, the three years of activity since *Broken Social Scene* suggests that Kaslik's story arc is missing something integral in the nature of the collective.

Thinking about an arrow in flight, Massumi stresses that often theoretical work arrests phenomenon like a target placed in the trajectory of an arrow. While halting the arrow opens up opportunity for ontological inquiry, that mode of analysis effectively eradicates the arrow's motion, obscuring the fact that the position the arrow is captured in was not one in which it naturally rests but was one it was moving *through* before analysis. "*A thing is when it isn't doing*" (Massumi 6, original emphasis). Massumi wants to question and undermine ontology in the hopes of pushing academics to strive for methods which do not suspend the phenomenon and artificially remove its motion from analysis. As discussed in the introduction, movement and affect are implied by each other in Massumi's theoretical work, and since the essence of Broken Social Scene is always moving, shifting and feeling, ontological questions upon collectivity are, in some ways, inappropriate, or at the very least restricting. The question 'what is a collective?' has limited use, but a question like 'how is a collective?' – that is, how does it *move*, how does it *feel*, how is it *doing* – opens up entire planes of intrigue.

In paradoxes, such as that of passage and position, Massumi sees great analytic potential and also a way to introduce much needed inherent indeterminacy, or what he terms *vagueness*, into conceptual and theoretical work. Massumi advises:

> Generating a paradox and then using it as if it were a well-formed logical operator is a good way to put vagueness in play. Strangely, if this procedure is followed with a good dose of conviction and just enough technique, presto!, the paradox actually becomes a well-formed logical operator (13).

In some ways, Massumi could very well be describing Broken Social Scene – people who came together paradoxically in a form that constantly undoes itself, and yet created the collective with both admirable conviction and staggering technique. Without either of these elements, Broken Social Scene would absolutely not still be extant. Consequently, it is of interest to examine closely the metaphorical language Broken Social Scene's members employ to explain and make

sense of their involvement; in other words, how they turn their involvement in a paradox into a well-formed, logical operation. Working with post-structuralist theory, there is always a threat that analysis can spin out into abstraction; by focusing on the discourse of the artists, by using their own paradoxes instead of 'generating' my own, the analysis will rest firmly anchored in Broken Social Scene's understood reality. A few highly pertinent theorists will also be used to complicate and nuance how the collective can be seen from the outside, but in keeping with the ethnographic practice of this research, much direction will be taken from the artists themselves. Furthermore, conceptual metaphors will always be challenged by the case of Broken Social Scene itself, rather than applied blindly to it.

I began this thesis by bringing into play Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's botanical *rhizome*, an infinitely connected and heterogeneous form with asymbolic ruptures and without unitary roots. Deleuze and Guattari commence their discussion of the rhizome by outlining two types of writing that have thus far dominated in the Western tradition. First, there is the *root-book*, which is "the classical book, as noble, signifying and subjective organic interiority ... [which] imitates the world, as art imitates nature" (5); it is dominated by dichotomous thought, the "One that becomes two," and so binaries pervade its form (5). The second figure, which owes its creation to modernity, is the *fascicular-root*. In this construct, "the principle root has aborted, or its tip has been destroyed; an immediate, indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes flourishing development" (5). However, for Deleuze and Guattari this is a false multiplicity because the dualism of the primary root remains intact. In the fascicular-root form, the plea for multiplicity has only been placated rather than honestly embraced, and consequently plurality remains unexplored and misrepresented. "In truth, it is not enough to say, 'Long live the multiple,' ... The multiple *must be made*" (6, original emphasis). Deleuze and Guattari posit that

the rhizome is the structure which is capable of facilitating and embodying this production and presence of the multiple.

I linger on Deleuze and Guattari's discussion and rejection of the tree and fascicular root because Broken Social Scene's iconography demonstrates an interesting embracement of the rhizome's sensibilities. The quintessential rhizomatic entity is the city, whose mass of people, places and movement exudes the rhizome's principles of multiplicity and infinite interconnectability. The city is a symbol with which Broken Social Scene identifies especially, a result of their origins in the urban Toronto independent music landscape. Before the band retitled *Windsurfing Nation* after itself, they also had an elaborate cover art design involving nautical imagery, but with the renaming also came a new design: a scrawled, leaning, almost animated cityscape drawn in crayon upon a fierce vermillion-red sky (Image 3). This image is now also a stained-glass panel inside the Arts & Crafts offices in downtown Toronto, further aligning the collective and label with the city.

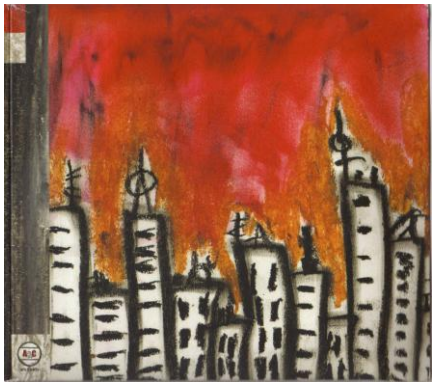

Image 3: Cover art for *Broken Social Scene*

Complimenting this image was a graphic designed for a t-shirt which was produced about the same time as the eponymous album. The silkscreen shows a tree, ostensibly Broken Social Scene as its name dangles from the branches, rooted in an upside-down city (Image 4).

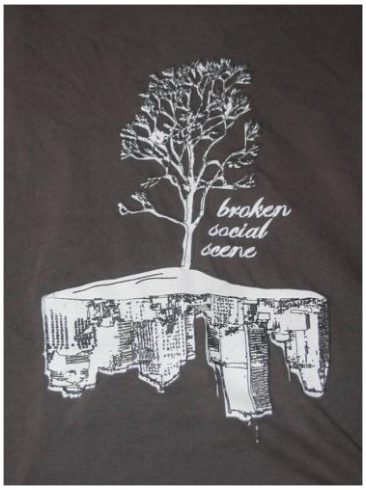

Image 4: Broken Social Scene t-shirt print

The essentially rhizomatic entity of the city, associated with Broken Social Scene's community in the cover, becomes the truly multiplicitous roots for Broken Social Scene itself in the t-shirt's screen, indicating that this is territory beyond a simple root or fascicular-root structure.

The principles of the rhizome – connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography and decalcomania – in many ways do express how Broken Social Scene operates and how members understand themselves in the band. Broken Social Scene shows incessant expansion and is constantly establishing new connections outside the band – guest performances have been as variegated as alternative / indie rock legend J Mascis (of Dinosaur Jr.) to Canadian elder statesman of rock Tom Cochrane to underground Canadian hip hop artist K-OS. Its heterogeneity produces diverse influences which are united in one entity, making *You Forgot It In People* sound like a compilation album and giving the layers of sound an explosive dynamic in *Broken Social Scene*. Broken Social Scene is also a multiplicitous mass of people irreducible to any singular notion of the collective, incessantly asserted by its members motion to and from, in and out of the band. Breaks are not fatal and, to quote Andrew Whiteman, "Quitting is an unnecessary dramatic act," so people come and go as it is convenient, and the band evolves and adapts in response to these breaks rather than coming to an end (*Broken* 90). Kevin Drew's

cartographic dream of having a map of the people who made great music "within thirty-two blocks of each other" is especially rhizomatic (*Broken* 93). Finally, the inclusive, collective model seems to have become a prevalent phenomenon across the Toronto scene, a beautiful example of the image transfer implied by the process of decalcomania. To further this last point, when I asked if the collective mentality had spread across Toronto, Stuart Berman – who has been covering the Toronto scene over the last ten years for *Eye Weekly* – began by doubting if the collective had had that kind of influence but eventually saw the connection through his own commentary:

> I think things are a little more splintered. The irony of a band becoming an ambassador or a scene is that they don't spend any more time in that scene because they're touring the world a lot ... And Toronto's a huge city and there's lots of stuff that's happened in the last few years. I'd say right now the defining characteristic of Toronto night life is more the sort of electro scene that's come up over the stretch, something like Fucked Up, which is not related to anything we're talking about, they came out of a punk scene. But it's funny, they've adopted this kind of inclusive ideology. Their records are filled with special guests from all sorts of different backgrounds ... Fucked Up is a really interesting case because musically they're the opposite of Broken Social Scene. They're very aggressive, they're angry, they're loud, but they've been adopting and displaying a similar, inclusive ideology, where each year they put on shows at Sneaky Dee's where they take over Halloween weekend. They put on four shows and invite everyone from A Hundred Dollars to play to punk bands like Career Suicide, and Final Fantasy. It's got a similar familial feel (Interview 1).

The collective does appear to demonstrate all these rhizomatic traits, which was why I originally embraced *A Thousand Plateau*'s particular methodology.

However, there are two particular elements that are present in Broken Social Scene but seem to be missed, or were perhaps simply not anticipated, in Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual framework. To portray Broken Social Scene as an untainted rhizome, operating in a pure, unfettered realm like the horizontal root structures cited in Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor is inaccurate at best. The members of the Broken Social Scene collective are people, and when they

interact in this rhizomatic fashion typical interpersonal issues arise. There will be fights, falling outs, clashing egos, conflicting visions, scheduling difficulties, distractions by other projects, unmanageability of numbers, feelings of ineffectiveness, motivational deficits, desire for autonomy and space, hurt feelings, jealousy, broken hearts – the list goes on and on. This is not to suggest that this is unhealthy, but rather to point out that affect clearly plays a role in structuring the collective and its output, a point that I will return to shortly but which is clearly lacking from the rhizome.

The second missed element is that there is a tangible centre here; Leslie Feist has referred to Kevin Drew and Brendan Canning as the bartenders in a saloon on the HBO show *Deadwood*: "there's the proprietors working hard to keep it open, with the doors swinging and all these characters coming in and out all the time – it's like a watering hole for us. [Brendan and Kevin] kept it running, but we kept it in business" (*Broken* 117). Moreover, when Drew got ill in February of 2009, Broken Social Scene was forced to cancel a show in Dallas; not a remarkable story, except that it led to online responses that demonstrated that the fans understood the band on rhizomatic terms. However, when an interviewer read Canning one of the blog posts – "What the hell is this, you have 4 guitar players, does it really matter if one of them gets a cold?" – he responded: "Those are obviously just *ill informed* little dweebs with too much time on their hands" (Lankford par. 12, emphasis added). As was revealed by the dynamics discussed in chapter four, there is a centre operating in Broken Social Scene, one that is clearly understood by the band members themselves, but a rhizome does not aptly account for this dynamic in its structure.

This perhaps explains the appeal of the planetary metaphors which appear almost incessantly in my interviews and elsewhere in the popular press. The band certainly differentiates

itself internally in this fashion; Jeffrey Remedios related to me that on tour, they would take breaks by playing soccer, pitting 'core' members against the 'satellite' members who have their own 'satellite bands.'[58] In the media, similar distinctions are made; for example, *Toronto Life*'s Jason McBride delights in making use of planetary language, writing that "the sun around which much this activity orbits is Broken Social Scene" in his appropriately titled article "Big Band Theory" (par.4). There is an appeal to the elegance of the planetary metaphor, where the motion of heavenly bodies produces infinite alignments, new iterations produced by predictable, uniform forces of motion and gravity. But analytically it falls short, first if only because it is too systematic, second because it does not allow for the shifting centres detailed in chapter four, and finally because it gives no means to account for Broken Social Scene's ability to deal with rupture – the break-ups, the hardships, the stress of people coming and going, the human aspect of the collective.

Broken Social Scene is often referred to as an extended family – four of my interviewees used this metaphor in our conversations – and this discourse does seem to try to capture that affective dimension of their collective life. This is also an ubiquitous angle for the popular press; article titles about Broken Social Scene have included "We are Family," "All in the family," and "Just one big happy family, eh?" (Jennings; Siddiqui; Barton). When I asked Stuart Berman if the family metaphor was apt, he replied:

> Certainly. And like any family there are tensions, there are arguments, there is infighting, but you eventually get through it because you're family, or in this case you're really close friends, that you've been through a lot together with, and you know that any tension that arises is ultimately a sort of a blip. Sometimes those blips take a year or two to sort themselves out but eventually everything comes back together. And that's the things I've observed, there're things that have

[58] Remedios would fill in for whatever side needed the extra player, suggesting that the label falls outside this distinction.

> happened with this band where you think "wow, that's really going to change things, I don't know if they're gonna be able to work together again" and a year later it's no big deal (Interview 1).

While there are various incidents Berman could be referring to, all of which would fall under the list of interpersonal issues listed earlier, the gossip-column details are not of importance to this study. However, Berman's comments do importantly point to two key issues. First, the form seems to have been ideally suited to deal with interpersonal issues – in allowing people to come and go, it allows those artists to vary their proximity based on their own needs or the needs of the group, a sort of emergency vent that can be used to relieve strife, whereas a traditional, tightly structured band without this failsafe would typically explode or fall to shambles under similar conditions. Most importantly, Berman's comments suggest that affect, overlooked by both the rhizome and planetary metaphors, is crucial in the cultural production and dynamics of Broken Social Scene. If we do want to include these features that other conceptual metaphors miss, if we want to properly probe what Jason Collett has referred to as "an experiment in intimacy," then we absolutely need to talk about affect, taking heed of Kevin Drew's reminder in "When It Begins": "don't forget what you felt" (*Broken* 143; *Spirit If...*).

Between my interviews, Stuart Berman's *This Book is Broken*, and the plethora of interviews members of the collective have done with the music press, three affects arise time and time again: fun, anxiety and love. In a review of *You Forgot It In People*, Vanessa Meudu detected an interesting, undeniable vibe in Broken Social Scene's music: "There's a very noticeable energy that permeates all the songs, driving one into another, an energy that could be lamely summed up as 'fun,' although not in a foolish sense" (par. 4). This was confirmed for me by Jason Collett, who stressed just how much fun it was to be a part of the collective around the release of *You Forgot It In People*:

> ... we all got swept up in how much fun it was. The key was just fun. Touring with that band in that era was like summer camp that didn't end, if you can imagine that kind of thing. It was a built-in party. The numbers brought it up to a constant touring party. We didn't need anybody else to make it go over the top (Interview 3).

Mary Kinack, Broken Social Scene's sound man since 2003, furthers the point:

> In terms of partying, Broken [Social Scene] goes to eleven. In some bands there might be one or two who are always ready to go. But in Broken you can always find a handful of people. Especially when we're on a bus – any other band, the party ends when the bus has to leave and you kick off all your friends and girls and stuff, but for us it's like, "All right, we've got twelve people, the bus is full, we're rolling down the highway, cranking the reggae!" (*Broken* 117).

While this affect of the collective was at its most pronounced in the era of *You Forgot It In People*, it certainly remains an integral part of its appeal and form to members like Collett to this day.[59]

By the same token, Broken Social Scene's structure can also breed a great deal of anxiety and tension. Using the same metaphor as Collett did previously, Brendan Canning comments that "Over the years there's been such emotional tumult ... like being in summer camp" (Barton par. 9). Echoes of the early days, where at each show they were uncertain if it would be their last, Broken Social Scene does seem to have issues with sustainability. Suffering from a constant fear that things will all fall apart, Broken Social Scene often seems exasperated by the unstable nature of collectivity. This anxiety was most pronounced when *Broken Social Scene* was being made, as evidenced by the words scratched across the liner notes for different songs on the album: "write

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[59] Broken Social Scene's free show at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto on July 11th, 2009, is perhaps the best recent example of this. With a banner of a black and white cityscape painted in *Broken Social Scene* style hanging behind them, it was a rare show where practically all members of the band were present; where the format was two thirds Broken Social Scene show, one third revue show, the collective playing songs from many of the associated acts (Amy Millan, Metric, Jason Collett, Apostle of Hustle, and a medley duet of Feist and Drew's songs); and where Toronto's mayor David Miller called to let them ignore city noise bylaws and play indefinitely, inspiring the members to stretch the concert to two and a half hours. The show felt like a celebration of all things Broken Social Scene, a swell of fun and love that was a culmination of all the years past and clearly showed the collective's ability to still joyously unify. It was recorded by Bruce McDonald for an upcoming film tentatively titled *This Movie Is Broken*.

more songs about fear" ("7/4 (Shoreline)"); "try to be a band more often" ("Fire Eye'd Boy"); "learn how to defeat the plague" ("Hotel"); "practice vocals in between fights" ("Handjobs for the Holidays"); "slice up your arms (if necessary)" ("Superconnected"); and "don't kill your friends" ("Bandwitch"). Kevin Drew differentiates between this album and *You Forgot It In People* by stating "the last record was made with hope ... this one was made with fear" (McBride par. 18). It is precisely this trepidation that Ibi Kaslik seems to be channelling in *The Angel Riots* when her character Jim narrates "I wanted to get it, to see us as others did, as this big, functioning sustainable entity, because all I could see sometimes were the seams ripping apart" (149). Nowhere is this tension better expressed than in *Broken Social Scene*'s ultimate track "It's All Gonna Break," an unbridled, ramshackle but exultant, nine minute piece that serves as an epic conclusion to the album. Originally written in 2001, Stuart Berman referred to it as Broken Social Scene's "self-fulfilling prophecy" in my interview, and in his book writes "the band was predestined to save ["It's All Gonna Break"] for release in 2005 – because that's the year it all very nearly did" (Interview 1; *Broken* 124). The band recorded *Broken Social Scene* in shards, as they had splintered into various projects and were on the road constantly on exhaustive tours. Internally, personal relationships were at a low and there was great tumult romantically.[60] Essentially, the collective form's potential for disarray, detailed previously, was in this moment at its peak. But this is the same formation of people which produced such dizzying fun and ecstasy only a few years earlier. How can we account for such a paradox?

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[60] Many of the members have been romantically linked to each other in the past and present, and while the varying attitudes towards sex, love and romance can cause difficulties, they eventually dissipate, as Stuart Berman relates: "I think some people in the band do have this attitude that 'we've all fucked each other, who cares? Whatever, life goes on.' But if you're not of that mindset and you might not share that same laissez-fair attitude towards romance, that's where things get tense. From what I've seen, any tension is all purely temporary. Like anything, you need a breather, that might mean someone stay off the tour for 6 months, comes back at the end, everything's cool ... I wouldn't say there's any Broken Social Scene code on relationship ethics, but they manage to make it work, and I think that's a real testament to the strength of their friendships" (Interview 1).

In *The Inoperative Community*, Jean-Luc Nancy forwards the idea that a community is formed on precepts which inevitably set the terms for its *interruption*, not destruction. Origin, Nancy writes, "is nothing other than the limit: the origin is the tracing of the borders upon which or along which singular beings are exposed" (33). Within these limits, Nancy describes a cycle where a literary community ultimately undoes itself by its own art and processes, only to create conditions for its rearticulation. While Nancy's focus is on literature, his ideas can apply strikingly well to music; this is perhaps because he defines literature as "giving voice to a being-in-common" and as a "sharing of voices," each of which describes Broken Social Scene's music quite eloquently (64; 77). The band came together on collective precepts, and it is precisely those precepts which will continually pull it apart but always guarantee its resurrection, meaning it was never really broken at all. Viewed through Nancy's framework, Broken Social Scene's collective highs and lows are confirmed as ineluctable conditions of its creation. However, what is most pertinent to this exploration of Broken Social Scene's paradox is Nancy's discussion of the affect that would inform and be informed by this cycle: love, or even more appropriately, the title Nancy gives to the chapter, "Shattered Love" (82).

Love forms a significant part of the discourse surrounding Broken Social Scene, an affect mobilized to describe the connections between all members and to express what guides the collective spirit. For example, the back cover of *Broken Social Scene* has a series of hearts immersed in the same colour and style as the background of the front cover's cityscape, as if the very air denizens of this collective city breathe is made of love (Image 5).

Image 5: Back cover of *Broken Social Scene*

Kevin Drew, speaking at the time of recording *Broken Social Scene*, stated that "[a]s a band, we hang on by a thread and with love... We could break up in two weeks if we're not careful. We're all best friends — and you'd think that would make it easier, but it's not" (Perez par. 14). So in the song "It's All Gonna Break," when a paradoxical chiasmus like "and I know that you fuck what you love / and you love what you fuck" is whispered through the speakers in the quieter sections of the opus, a somewhat anxious, accepting, even nuanced understanding of how the collective operates is being communicated. Aligned with Nancy's insights on this form of love, it becomes clear how such an affect could actually structure collective life. Nancy writes "love is at once the promise of completion – but a promise always disappearing – and the threat of decomposition, always imminent" (93). Love, a paradoxical, well-formed operator, which Nancy writes elsewhere is "the eruption of multiplicity," seems to eloquently account for the climax of *You Forgot It In People* and the turmoil of *Broken Social Scene* (102). While I give love neither a causal nor epiphenomenal role here, it is undoubtedly an affect which, in Broken Social Scene's case, is a structuring, indispensable piece of collectivity. In Nancy's conceptualization of love, we see the thrill of culmination and the distress of fracture. In Broken Social Scene, it is this form of love which is the felt reality of the collective, a paradoxical affect which helps account for its evidently protean experience.

When I asked Jason Collett if he felt Broken Social Scene's sound was informed by its collectivity, his answer was unequivocal:

> Absolutely ... seeing people come out in say Austria our first time there and just knowing the lyric, and there was no record deal there, no distribution, no record out there. We were witnessing the internet at work, right in that moment. It was really exciting, having sold out shows and wondering "what the fuck are they so into? What is it?" And I think that that is it. That is the higher articulation. That is, whatever you want to call it, collective, whatever, that is what is being articulated, but only subconsciously, only sort of oozing out of the pores, the result of the friction of a bunch of friends coming together (Interview 3).

In the closing minutes of "It's All Gonna Break," I think there is a prime example of this collective sound and ethos, what Richard Middleton would call a homology, a "structural resonance" (9-10). Leading up to the bombastic finale of the track and album, the lyrics ramble off a string of unfinished questions culminating with an echoed "we have to get out of here / why do you always... / why do you always... / why? why? why?," an almost internal questioning revealing the anxiety and paradox that the collective presents, recapitulated as the layered instruments roll over and collide with one another in typical *Broken Social Scene* fashion. In the end though, it is the music that immediately answers, with a bombastic unification of all the instruments that throughout the album have been divided. This is the power of the collective, lead by the triumphant timbre of the horn section. Except there is one piece of sound, one single tone of distortion within the finale that is out of line with the rest of the thundering instruments, and that distorted sound extends beyond the song's termination to close the album. Intriguingly, this is the same tone of distortion that united the instruments and began "Ibi Dreams of Pavement (A Better Day)," the song that got the album off to a start after "the sound of things falling apart" that is the instrumental opener "Our Faces Split The Coast In Half"[61] (*Broken* 130). So in *Broken*

[61] The track, seemingly a tribute to lost momentum and false starts, stands as a sort of musical equivalent to the previously discussed moment on KCRW's *Morning Becomes Eclectic*.

Social Scene, what initially unified became discordant, fell out of unison, perhaps to start anew elsewhere, but what is demonstrated is the underlying truth of the Broken Social Scene's collectivity: no matter how cohesive, likeminded, or directed a collective is, it will always have divergent elements that contradict within it, even if a particular element once unified those voices. The very principle that brought them together may be the very thing that tears them apart. And therein lies the cycle of fun and anxiety, transcendence and destruction, the paradoxical love of Broken Social Scene.

Conclusion

this is superconnected
it's time to leave
-"Superconnected" (*Broken Social Scene*)

For this is the essential thing: ***a fuzzy aggregate, a synthesis of disparate elements, is defined only by a degree of consistency that makes it possible to distinguish the disparate elements constituting that aggregate (discernability)***.
-Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (344, original emphasis)

In interviews, Emily Haines relates that she is always being asked if Broken Social Scene is breaking up, a question to which her response is an emphatic: "you can't break something that's already broken! It's broken, it's permanently broken. The only way you could destroy it would be to actually fix it!" (*Broken* 146). In this case study of Broken Social Scene, I have attempted to show the truth in Haines' paradoxical statement: how something can come together antecedently broken at the crossroads of the highly commodified music industries and a cultural renaissance in Toronto; how such an entity operates politically, economically, creatively and interpersonally; and how its paradoxical culminations and fractures may be inherently tied to its particular motion and affect. In short, I have tried to map Broken Social Scene's form of popular music collectivity.

I have no pretentions at having uncovered and examined the gambit of popular music collectives, especially considering how contentious a word such as 'collective' can be. Critiques of Broken Social Scene and Arts & Crafts as a collective have emerged from people such as Steve Kado, who founded the Toronto-based Blocks Recording Club, a worker's cooperative that functions as artistic community and record label. Speaking about Arts & Crafts, he commented:

> A&C is just a label more in touch with the structure of contemporary capitalism than most ... They are a slick small organization that is a response to the record industry being doomed. I wish they would own up to being a small business with a corporate structure. Words like 'collective' are thrown around so easily. Do you work with your friends and are co-owners with them or do you mediate between them and a corporate distribution company for your friends? (Quart 47).

Certainly, it is clear that both Broken Social Scene and Blocks Recording Club were a response to the power, control and destructive practice of the major labels. In Kado's comments, however, the vestiges of independent sensibilities that were dominant before the late 1990s are detectable – all interaction with major labels is compromising, so an independent label must negate corporate structures by organizing in a politically overt, collective manner, and any compromise in that formula is fundamentally detrimental. Broken Social Scene has never claimed to be a collective in Kado's sense, and in chapter four I argued that Broken Social Scene has had an opportunity to succeed as a collective precisely because Arts & Crafts was working as an intermediary with the music industries. Broken Social Scene was drawing on independent sensibilities that trumpeted cautious engagement with major labels, producing a very different collective project.

When I asked Brendan Canning what the word collective meant to him, he responded with simplicity:

> When I think of a collective, I just think of a group of people working together in some way ... my friend runs a store on Queen Street, "The Fresh Collective," all different designers selling their clothes out of the one shop, so something like that (Interview 5).

Canning's comments reveal a collective not so much dedicated to a political discourse of negation, but one where people come together to help each other make a living from their trade. When I asked Jason Collett a similar question, he made direct reference to the controversy:

> I know that we got flak from it early on from other, very serious minded, small, up-and-coming labels in Toronto, that we shouldn't be calling ourselves a collective. We never called ourselves a collective. Nobody ever said that word amongst the family of people. It's just what journalists did, but I think only naturally too. I don't mind the word, I actually quite like the word ... I've

> always been fond of collectives; politically, I believe in collectives ... [but] it really was purely accident and coincidence that it just became so many people (Interview 3).

Stuart Berman communicated a similar sentiment to me in our interview when the issue arose:

> I always feel there's almost a political subtext to the word collective, where it's everyone working together for a common good ... [but] there's no real political ideology behind Broken Social Scene. I mean, they're all definitely conscious citizens of the world and certainly have their heart in the right place, want to create a better world, and are outspoken in their own way, but I don't think the formation of this band was a political act (Interview 1).

While Broken Social Scene may not be a collective in Kado's traditional, ideological sense, its processes display a significant and unique collectivity as deserving of the moniker as the more politically-minded projects Kado idealizes. But this difference should be considered when evaluating whether the insights Broken Social Scene and Arts & Crafts' case provides are useful for other entities which are labelled collectives; each instance requires a measured awareness of the political project at hand, or lack thereof.

That being said, there are parts of this study which do have resonance across other cases. The political economic analysis of the major labels in chapter one and the evolution of independent sensibilities in chapter two are contextual and historical conditions occurring broadly in the field of cultural production, and so pains were taken to analyze and present them as such. Furthermore, those forces taken together with the discussion of the organization and oversights of the Canadian major labels of chapter three goes a long way into explaining why collectives may have arisen across the country at approximately the same time. However, there are certainly limits to this case study's generalizability. I attempted to focus on the particulars of the Toronto music scene at the turn of the century which would have informed Broken Social Scene's form, but Stuart Berman opens his final chapter by writing "the Toronto that spawned Broken Social Scene in 2000 doesn't exist anymore," as various landmarks and institutions

integral to their emergence have since closed[62] (*Broken* 141). It is clear Broken Social Scene's case arose from a very specific *time* and *place*. In addition, Broken Social Scene's internal dynamics, its political economy, and its unique relationship with Arts & Crafts, along with its emphasis on process, are all not *necessarily* 'collective', though I would argue they have all come together in a collectivity recognized by their fans, the popular press, and crucially, themselves. Chapter five's focus on affect and the paradox of Broken Social Scene strikes me as possibly being especially anchored in Broken Social Scene's particulars, but I am uncertain; part of me suspects a form of Broken Social Scene's paradoxical affect may very well be present in other collectives. What this suggests is that the next step in this line of inquiry is a comparative study, with the hope of examining music collectives in other geographic locations, both across Canada and the world, as well as across different genres and political ideologies. In Broken Social Scene we have a collective that arose organically without preconception from the contextual political, economic and social conditions of the Toronto scene; a collective where the label they founded is acting as an intermediary with and aegis from the more corrupting forces of the music industries, allowing the band to make a living from their work while maintaining distance, artistic integrity and a collective form; a collective that is process based, defined by its movement and flux rather than any stable ontological essence; and a collective which affectively and materially teeters somewhere between completion and decomposition. A further, comparative study is required to consider whether these identified traits are Broken Social Scene idiosyncrasies, or broader cultural forces of collectivity in the restricted field of popular music production.

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[62] Among other things, Ted's Wrecking Yard closed in the fall of 2001 and Dave Newfeld closed his studio Stars and Sons to build a new studio in Trenton, Ontario.

The next step may well be to begin thinking about collectivity outside of bordered contexts, as a wholly different way of conceptualizing the production of popular music across bands and memberships. By focusing my case study on Broken Social Scene and Arts & Crafts, I may have limited my study precisely in a way that its members no longer limit themselves. In fact, even coming together as a proper band under the banner of "Broken Social Scene" could have been more of an industry demand than a reflection of how the artists understood their collaboration process. Charles Spearin reflects:

> One slightly negative point is that at its inception, Broken Social Scene was about being inclusive and breaking down traditional barriers between bands but, due to the size and complexities of the organization, it has taken on the image of a somewhat exclusive club. We were musicians first; giving ourselves a name and calling ourselves a 'band' was really a silly practical necessity in order to function more easily. As the organizing got more complex the name and definition of the band became more important (Interview 2).

Spearin's comments suggest that follow up studies on collectivity and popular music would do well to consider it beyond a single case study, as I have done, and instead allow the artists examined to set the parameters of their collectivity. In some ways, Spearin even suggests that some of the elements of the collective may actually be the result of *naming* Broken Social Scene, a consequence of bringing more general processes of collectivity into a writing and touring entity. This study precisely examines a hub of collectivity, which is appropriate in Broken Social Scene's case because they present themselves as such, but may not be appropriate for other artists who are demonstrating degrees of collectivity but are not presenting it in that way. I think here of a band like Wolf Parade, whose members hopscotch between it and other bands such as Frog Eyes, Handsome Furs, Sunset Rubdown, Johnny and The Moon, and Swan Lake,[63] but

[63]Swan Lake includes Dan Bejar, who is the singer-songwriter for his own project Destroyer, but also a member of Vancouver's collective The New Pornographers. As rhizomatic connections open up, it becomes less and less certain that focusing on a hub is the best analytic approach.

where no one band is prioritized or would be considered the collective core. In Broken Social Scene's case, it is easy to determine and target what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to as "the fuzzy aggregate," or a focal point of the rhizome, because Broken Social Scene self organize in that way (344); other cases of parallel motion and flux without that hub may not be necessarily as discernible. A more general targeting of collectivity, rather than any one collective, could potentially be an extremely illuminating subsequent project.

In a follow-up e-mail, I asked Spearin the best way to understand Broken Social Scene metaphorically,[64] as I had with all interviewees, and his response was remarkably eloquent:

> In Buddhism they talk about the three jewels: Buddha – your naturally awake mind; Dharma – the teaching that leads you to recognise your own natural state; and Sangha – the community of practitioners.
>
> In music you could say: Buddha – the intangible, powerful, somewhat magical experience of actually hearing music; Dharma – the performers and their instruments; and the Sangha – the promoters, management, fans and everyone who helps bring the whole thing together.
>
> They are all precious (Interview 2).

Spearin's response reveals how wide and interconnected Broken Social Scene's collectivity is, extending well beyond the entranceways I have used for this case study. But faced with such a sprawling and sublime form, one which Stuart Berman writes "exists in a permanent temporary state," only so many avenues can be taken and explored by one study (*Broken* 152). I have presented Broken Social Scene as an assembly of relations, processes and affect that exist between dynamic positions, and this reality only guarantees they will continue to be a fascinating locus of collectivity as they continue to morph and, most importantly, create and perform music in the years to come. At a certain point as an analyst, you have to heed the advice of the song "Superconnected" and take some space from the collective and its processes as its expanse opens

[64] Spearin had earlier referred to Kevin Drew as a sheepdog, which led me to ask if by extension this made the rest of the members sheep in the flock; he gently informed me the analogy did not work beyond herding.

up before you: “this is superconnected / it’s time to leave” (*Broken Social Scene*). But much like its members, it is hard to deny that I will be drawn back to the band, fascinated by a collectivity that is becoming more and more relevant in independent popular music, which is for me their undeniable higher articulation – the big, beautiful mess of Broken Social Scene.

Appendix: Interview Catalogue

1. Stuart Berman – March 11th, 2009 – Beaver Café, Toronto ON – 1:08.53
2. Charles Spearin – April 23rd, 2009 – Arts & Crafts Offices, Toronto ON – 0:28.38
    - e-mail follow-up received April 24th, 2009
3. Jason Collett – April 25th, 2009 – Saving Gigi, Toronto ON – 0:48.25
4. Jeffrey Remedios – Aprils 27th, 2009 – Arts & Crafts Offices, Toronto ON – 0:29.33
5. Brendan Canning – June 3rd, 2009 – Telephone Interview – 0:22.44
    - e-mail follow-ups received June 8th, 2009, and June 10th, 2009

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