WHERE THE MAGIC PEOPLE GATHERED. The Role of Private Members Clubs in the Contemporary Music Economy[1]

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Abstract

In recent years, a new format of private member club has become increasingly popular. These clubs are aimed at a crowd which identifies with entrepreneurialism, independence, and creativity. This article explores one such club, Soho House, at the heart of the contemporary music economy. Soho House has successfully inscribed itself as a primary meeting point, where recording artists, managers, label owners and major record label employees frequently socialise with other members of the creative industries. This article explores the role of Soho House in the music economy. Through interviews with members and an overview of relevant theoretical literature, this paper analyses how the club is used to facilitate communication and knowledge transfer between CI workers, how a common language and behaviour is shared, and how the private member club model ultimately supports the sociality of the music industry. This study concludes that Soho House plays a vital role the contemporary music economy by encouraging social interaction between industry professionals; by connecting the music industry with other CI subsectors; and by promoting a common language and tacit codes between anchoring points within the global creative economy.

Keywords: Private clubs, London, cultural workers, cultural labour, Soho House, creative industries

1   Introduction

The music industry is a subsector of the creative industries (CI) that thrives on the inherently interdisciplinary, collaborative, and multifaceted nature of the creative economy. Over the past few years, the CIs

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have benefited from a rise in alternative physical spaces in which members of the music industry and others coexist (see Brown 2017). To drive production of cultural artefacts, these alternative spaces expand their professional and personal networks, adopt a lifestyle assumed by CI activity, and express allegiance to the CI community.

Such alternative spaces recently received increased attention in CI literature and the news media. In a 2017 BBC News article, Jennifer Ceaser addressed the emerging trend of a new format of private member clubs (PMCs hereafter), exemplified in this article by Soho House. Ceaser proclaimed, *"Welcome to the new breed of private members' club, which claim to be less restrictive and more diverse than the stuffy gentlemen's clubs of the past"* (Ceaser 2017). These clubs are targeted at a demographic that identifies less with old money and elitist lifestyles – characteristics that are associated with the traditional gentlemen's club – and more with entrepreneurialism, cosmopolitanism, and an allegedly inclusive mindset.

Given these PMCs are relatively new, having only gained prominence in the last twenty years, the true impact of private member clubs on the music industry, and by extension the CIs as a whole, remains difficult to establish. However, their significance must not be understated. These new environments have come to play a sizeable role in the daily lives of an ever-increasing number of CI professionals and have successfully accommodated the increasingly collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the creative industries. As financial investment in these spaces reaches new heights, this raises the question as to what role they play in the lives of music industry professionals and what this may signify for the music industry—and the wider creative economy as a consequence.

Soho House is deeply embedded within the music industry in certain key locations, such as Los Angeles, London, and New York City. Aimed at the 'in-crowd'*,* over the years Soho House has become an essential meeting place for members of the music industry, including performers, record producers, artist managers, and executives. An analysis of its internal activities may therefore shed a light on how its members make use of PMCs to benefit their industry as the creative economy evolves.

This paper aims to uncover and analyse the role of private member clubs in the lives of music industry professionals. This paper draws from interviews conducted primarily with club members at Shoreditch House, the East London branch of Soho House, all of whom are deeply embedded within the music industry, either directly or by virtue of their respective interdisciplinary subsectors. Using Shoreditch House as an initial case study, this paper first presents the PMC as a space where music industry professionals co-locate with other CI workers to shape a unique lifestyle and perform a common habitus. Subsequently, the PMC is considered as a node, first within a global network of PMCs and then within the global music industry ecosystem. This study explores the identities of its members, how they build a personal and networked identity, and how alternative spaces where professional and personal lives collide influence the networked and connected natures of the global music economy. Finally, tentative limitations to the PMC model will be discussed.

Prior to the findings and discussion, the theoretical review will begin with a brief historical background on the cultural contexts in which the Soho House model was born. Then a brief theoretical review on creative labour and lifestyles will follow. The role of networks and spaces in the contemporary music economy is reviewed, which highlights the importance of co-location of CI professionals in an increasingly globalised economy.

2   Brief historical contexts of London's club culture and Soho House

Soho House finds much of its roots in the night club culture and music scene of the 1980s and 1990s, during which A-list members of the music, fine art, and film industries socialised in small groups. Private clubs such as Groucho's, The Hospital Club, and Black's, among others, were deeply rooted within the cultural zeitgeist of the time. Its crowds were exclusive, elite, and few in number. PMCs were a safe place for London's most influential artists to form tightknit bonds, where opportunities for col-

laboration would arise, uninterrupted by the prying eye of the media. At first, Soho House appeared as a direct competitor to neighbouring clubs. It quickly embedded itself into London's cultural footprint, which had been revitalised in the late 1990s and early 2000s through the 'Cool Britannia' period (Sunley, Pinch & Reimer 2011), Brit-pop, and Brit-art (While 2003).

Over the past decade, Soho House evolved into a more corporate format. Its subsequent global expansion efforts demonstrate an acknowledgement that its corporate identity soon relied on the ever-growing, ever-changing face of the creative economy. Ellis-Petersen (2016) quoted social commentator Peter York as saying that high demand for memberships and aggressive worldwide expansion (Addley 2012) have seen the club concede its exclusivity to meet the growing market of creative workers. Where once it was considered the privilege of an elite, cultural cohort, now it appears *"there's nothing special about it anymore"*, and it no longer serves as a location for *"where the magic people … go anymore"* (ibid.). Through the term 'magic people', Ellis-Peterson referred to the cultural icons and noteworthy industry insiders of the music industry, film and television, and other media subsectors, many of whom were invited as founding members to raise the club's profile.

The club has now become a prime location for spotting a newer, albeit arguably more attenuated, breed of 'magic people'. A more mobile and digital workforce meant a rise in demand for new environments where non-traditional, professional activities could be exercised. Co-working spaces (see Brown 2017) and alternative environments bridging the personal with the professional attracted a lifestyle-oriented creative industries workforce that had changed face overnight. Thus, Soho House inscribed itself into a global vision as the home of the stereotypical, *new* creative: one that is increasingly self-mediating and self-policing; one defined by its distinct habitus, common codes, a rejection of white-collar corporatism, and an affinity for authenticity, aesthetics, and urban pastoralism (see Harris 2012).

In 2007, the group made its ode to East London when it opened Shoreditch House. This space is grounded in what once served as the centre stage for cultural production from the early 1980s to the 1990s (Harris 2012). Harris' seminal research testifies to a district that was once the core of a creative revolution thanks to cultural icons, such as Jonny Woo, who shaped its cultural identity (Cochrane 2014). Relying on the countercultural image of the area (Saner 2004), Shoreditch House found a home in a large warehouse a few streets away from Curtain Road, East London's music artery. Shoreditch House is itself a pastiche of an East London far gone, once home to *"non-mainstream forms of cultural life"* (Hoare 1994).

3   Literature review

3.1 Overview of Cultural Labour and Lifestyles

3.1.1 Cultural Labour

To understand the labour conditions of music industry professionals, theories on cultural labour provide relevant perspectives. Contemporary debates on the cultural worker cover theories surrounding cultural labour (McRobbie 2002; McRobbie 2016; Pratt 2008), lifestyle (McRobbie 2013; Martins 2015; Bontje & Musterd 2009; Florida 2002; Florida 2014), and social organisation and interaction (see Florida 2002; Vivant 2013; Neff 2005; Flew 2013) along with extensive evaluations of labour conditions in the creative economy (McRobbie 1998; McRobbie 2002; McRobbie 2013; Flew 2013; Pratt 2000; Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh 2019; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011; Zukin 1998).

The labour conditions of CI workers have drifted from the conventions that governed much of the 20th century in traditional white-collar industries (Pratt 2000). Since the turn of the century, the UK's creative industries have surged, in part through major domestic policy efforts and the creation of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (McRobbie 2016).

The number of creative workers grew and its associated lifestyles and dispositions along with it. Today the sector sees high rates of self-employment, project-based work (McRobbie 2002), and increased 'self-exploitation' (Zukin 1998) both in corporate environments and in the gig-economy. These traits are equally relevant across the music industry, along with unconventionally long work schedules and below average wages (Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2010). Neff, Wissinger & Zukin (2005: 308) equally note a "problematic normalisation of risk under flexible labour conditions". McRobbie (2016) notes that the personal and professional lives of contemporary cultural workers increasingly blur (see Pratt 2000; Wittel 2001) as socialisation after working hours, parties, social events, joining cultural events, and networking form a vital part of career development. Hesmondhalgh & Baker (2010: 14) similarly posited that this type of socialisation is considered a *"compulsory element of a job"* in music to remain in the loop in the music scene[3].

CI workers are subjected to a mode of labour market mediation carried out intrinsically through social networks (Benner 2002), an attribution to a freelance economy highly reliant on project-based work often obtained through extensive networking practices (Neff, Wissinger & Zukin 2005). Castells (2000) equally observes a shift in organisational structures from hierarchical standards to a more network-intensive structure that prioritises interrelationships. Increased reliance on networking is said to contribute to the labour insecurities that pervade much of the modern working conditions of the CI worker, particularly where labour market inequalities arise from restrictions from localised specialist circles (Neff, Wissinger and Zukin 2005). Additionally, CI workers experience the added stress of the need to self-promote, self-mediate, and generate a personal brand to transmit a reputation within local networks (see Gill & Pratt 2008; Leadbeater & Oakley 1999).

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[3] This follows the concept of the "music scene" which Florida & Jackson (2010: 311) define as *"geographic locations that bring together musical and business talent (e.g., agents, managers, taste-makers, gate-keepers, critics, and sophisticated consumers) across social networks and physical space (neighborhoods, communities, clubs, music stores, recording studios, and venues)"*.

CI workers are associated with the *Creative Class* (Florida 2002; Florida 2014) concept, which blends labour market theory and concomitant lifestyle dispositions through the emphasis of tacit codes and social values. In addition to basic countercultural lifestyle traits, reconfigured class relations are arguably defined by a uniquely entrepreneurial focus and an affinity for meritocracy with increased social mobility. These creatives are uniquely placed to transcend the traditionally observed restrictions of ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation thanks to a higher level of education, an alleged rejection of conservative social views, and prominent individualist values. As such, the creative class is a class where social ordering and self-determined hierarchies operate within closed networks. Framed in a neoliberal perspective of contemporary labour market trends (Mould 2018), the creative economy sees reconfigured definitions of creativity, which befit the stretched and vague terminologies attributed to a *"widely cast net"* of the labour market (Flew 2013: 4). Bilton (2010: 2) equally notes that this new *"creativity"* has emerged as a *"buzzword in business"* in the effort to *"adapt to unpredictability, individualism and discontinuous change in the business environment"*. This interplay between creativity and enterprise is most apparent where this convergence facilitates the increasingly internationalised role of the creative sector in the global economy (Bilton 2010; Caves 2002; Howkins 2013) in which artists are increasingly pressured to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset (Florida 2014).

3.1.2 Habitus and lifestyles

The creative economy has led to a systemic integration of work and leisure (McRobbie 2016). As such, personal identities play a significant role in cultural labour analysis. Industries highly reliant on cultural and symbolic output are perceived to self-legitimise by borrowing from counter-culture movements through an appropriation of clothing, lifestyle choices, and 'cool' attitudes (Bilton 2010; Neff 2005; McRobbie 2016; Florida 2002). This is visible, for instance, in how so-called 'hipster' culture (see Hill 2015) manifests as a perceived appropriation of counter-cultural lifestyle choices. The consumption of these cultural symbols and lifestyle

choices in neoliberal contexts accompany an increasingly individualised lifestyle that is socially *dis-embedded* from nearby communities and energised by an entrepreneurial impetus through a wilful capitalisation on (sub)cultural output (Mould 2018).

CI workers are frequently lumped into one—tribal[4]—affinity group, mutually bound by lifestyle choices, cultural tastes, tacit codes, and common values. Such affinity groups place high value on a free-thinking mindset, an intrinsic spirit of tolerance (Florida 2002), and an openness to diversity (Jacobs 1961). They express these values by co-locating and socialising in 'cool' spaces (Vivant 2013). Firms create an image of authenticity (Lloyd 2006) by locating historically significant buildings (Hutton 2006). In his case study of Hoxton, Harris (2012) argues that 'properly creative' individuals are to thank for the area's recent revival, as they were at the origin of Hoxton's social and cultural identities. Local communities were gradually replaced by external newcomers who invested in the success of the creative buzz and symbolic capital these artists generated (see Neff 2005: 139). Local lifestyle connotations were quickly assimilated as the area was regenerated with a 'shabby-chic' aesthetic.

Zukin's (1982) focus on SoHo in New York City demonstrated that as warehouse spaces were connoted with artists' loft-living lifestyles, companies increased investments in office space in industrial neighbourhoods. Zukin associates these appropriations with the promotion of the habitus of the artist, where CI workers occupy warehouses as artists would living lofts. These symbolically rich *"knowledge-value"* spaces (Kotkin & Devol 2001: 21) benefit from interiors of dated labour conditions as a backdrop for a more *"vibrant, stylish"*, and cosmopolitan "alternative" (Hannigan 2003: 354).

In Shoreditch, CI workers gravitate toward unique sites rich in symbolic capital where local dispositions can be assimilated, and shared values are clearly articulated. This assimilation results in the reclamation of urban spaces by a consumer class, leading to an idealisation of local heritage spaces for consumption (Pine & Gilmore 1998). Location-specific symbolic capital is used to drive individual identities, in which

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[4] See Maffesoli (1996: 139)

this 'creativity' has come to denote an aspirational state of mind refer-
ring to a cosmopolitanism where inclusiveness and diversity are inherent
(Pratt & Hutton 2013) and implied by design; in other words, a lifestyle
trait dissociated from its more fundamental inference of cultural produc-
tion (Mould 2018).

3.1.3 Networks & collaboration

Networks are crucial for artists to put the aforementioned entrepreneur-
ial skills to use in environments that expose them to a variety of sources
of value creation. Engelmann, Grünewald & Heinrich (2012: 32) note
that multi-skilling, an ability to incorporate professional structures, and
"investing in different kinds of capital in different networks" are instru-
mental to developing opportunities within the industry. They further
corroborate that developing relationships within networks form a vital
part in adapting to the enterprise of music business practice and pro-
vides a springboard for producers whereupon cultural and social capital
(see Bourdieu 1984) can be shared and, crucially, exchanged (ibid.).

The importance of developing networks of collaboration and
knowledge exchange between members of the music industry has been
firmly established both in terms of digital connectivity, as well as face-
to-face interactions within cultural environments in metropolitan areas,
where physical spaces are significant enablers for artists to develop
networks with a diversity of CI workers (Engelmann, Grünewald & Hein-
rich 2012). An increasingly entrepreneurial focus on creativity and cul-
tural production buoys this, as artists are increasingly pressured to in-
scribe themselves within business-oriented environments[5] to propel
themselves in their respective industries (Hesmondhalgh 2019) and ex-
tend their creative networks well beyond purely music industry contexts.

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[5] Reflecting structural observations by Bilton (2010) and Florida (2002).

3.1.4 Place

'Place' has recently regained importance in cultural labour analysis as new spaces have evolved to accommodate new lifestyles in the digital age. CI workers foster personal and professional networks in clustered spaces (Landry & Bianchini 1995). It has long been established that clustering (or co-location) brings with it significant benefits (see Lorenzen & Frederiksen 2008). As such, co-location provides further economic benefits to the music industry and other creative subsectors thanks to close proximity in economic contexts defined by volatile market demand (Caves 2002 via Florida & Jackson 2010).

Frequent face-to-face communication (Karlsson 2008) and porous networks through embedded interactions (Granovetter 1985) are key benefits to overall creative sector activity, as 'face-to-face interaction in shared physical space' (Goffman 1963, via Grabher et al. 2018: 246) promotes frequent knowledge spill-overs (Karlsson 2008) between subsectors.

Project-based workers feel pressured to consistently and actively network to remain socially embedded (Vivant 2013: 60). Artists at the beginning of their careers recognise the importance of collaboration, networking with cultural intermediaries and other producers to get a foot in the door, and capturing the crucial attention of endorsers in the music industry (Musgrave 2017). Within these specialist fields (see Bourdieu 1984), face-to-face interaction consolidates relationships and encourages opportunities by 'being there' (Gertler 1995). Here, freelance CI workers can exchange contacts and ideas, and keep up with industry gossip (Oakley & O'Connor 2015: 201). This spill-over impacts a wide variety of subsectors. Watson (2008) specifically points to the music clusters of Soho and Shoreditch, where agents can navigate codified language, share social contexts, and develop trust.

Co-location and embeddedness are tightly interwoven (Gertler 1995). Shared knowledge, values, and memories (Scott 2010: 123) are articulated by the individuals who inhabit co-located spaces (Clare 2013). Here, habitus (Bourdieu 1977), local practices, tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1958), and cultural values are informally transmitted between

agents, facilitating social identification and ordering. Karlsson (2004: 98) notes a link between tacit knowledge and knowledge spill-overs, as tacit knowledge is difficult to transmit if proximity among peers is not assured. Frictionless transmission of codes is vital where *"personal knowledge of each other [is] based on a past history of successful collaboration or informal interaction."* (Gertler 2003: 84). Therefore, it is crucial to be effectively inserted into the local 'buzz' and 'noise' (Grabher 2002) through intended and unanticipated encounters for local knowledge to be transmitted (see Clare 2013: 53). The presence of such co-located networks specific to CI subsectors is furthermore an acknowledgement of a will to foster comprehensive networking frameworks in a music economy that thrives on collaboration between various aspects of the market (Winter 2012), but which is simultaneously difficult to penetrate and has a track record of being closed to new entrants (ibid.).

3.1.5 Third spaces

Third spaces[6] provide a backdrop in which common codes can be explored and performed. Nightclubs (Kotkin 2002), coffee shops, social clubs, and co-working spaces have become environments in which local professional ties are developed (Merkel 2017). These spaces have gradually replaced offices as the new hotbed of cultural production (Neff 2005), permitted in part through the mediation of social cohesion through informal gatherings. As Merkel (2017: 124) further confirms, they provide an environment that permits *"the free exchange of ideas, while enabling support networks and promoting the negotiation of shared spaces, resources and values"*. Once effective, unplanned interactions are critical to the development of trust between agents (Turok 2003; Schüßler, Grabher & Müller-Seitz 2015). Watson further confirms that music professionals migrate networking activity to informal environments outside offices to cement this trust, where formal settings would prove otherwise problematic when opportunities for collabora-

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[6] See Oldenburg 1997

tion between independents and firms are being developed (Watson 2008).

Effective random encounters result from a curation and mediation process undertaken by managers of dedicated private spaces (Merkel ibid.). A reassessment of the term 'Third Space' has taken place, to denote these curated co-working environments as new third spaces that combine the informality of socialisation with the formality of work. The prevalence of such curated network spaces appears in part as a by-product of a symbiotic relationship between being a creative and simultaneously adopting principles of enterprise and self-determination, as common codes and tacit rules distinct to CI enterprise are universally available and homogenised within these environments. Exclusive, curated environments like PMCs provide the added benefit of significant symbolic capital, as these have *"reputational effects"* on its membership (Brown 2017: 115). Therefore, they are particularly crucial for singling out music industry professionals, in a field where barriers to entry as regards creative production and developing a social network have been dramatically lowered–and famously 'democratised'–thanks to technological advancements and the ubiquity of social networking platforms (Musgrave 2017).

3.2 Local buzz and global pipelines

Creative networks have been underpinned by a dual development of local cluster development in major global cities, as well as highly enriched international networks (see Maguire & Matthews 2014)—a trend reflected in the music industry (see Florida & Jackson 2010). This is generally denoted as the duality between local buzz and global pipelines (Bathelt, Malmberg & Maskell, 2004). Major metropolitan areas such as London, Los Angeles, New York City, and Berlin have benefited from strengthened ties. Global cities— 'local anchoring points' —in which these nodes are most apparent, refer to specific districts within major metropolitan areas where networked activity is more common (Castells 2000). As such, London's recorded music sector is heavily centralised in a few key areas, where Soho and Shoreditch have historically represented

some of the key zones (Watson 2008). The relationship between local buzz and global flows is a symbiotic one, where one feeds into the other (Amin 2000), and a coherence in communication and tacit rules is created between regional clusters (see Latour 1986). Major cities with prominent clusters rely on this duality to remain attractive in international networks.

Network infrastructures within these anchoring points that promote collaboration is all the more crucial to the music industry, as it continues to diversify its cross-industry partnerships to increase competitive advantage. It is widely acknowledged that the digital age has engendered significant strain on the music industry, which has led record labels to diversify revenue streams through partnerships with the television and motion picture industries worldwide (Wang 2012). Considering all the major record labels are owned by large media and/or technology conglomerates that are heavily inscribed into the wider CI economy, music's inscription into a tightly interwoven network has led its production output to play an increasingly important 'second' role in media productions through these partnerships (Wang ibid.). It is within this context that the music industry is considered highly collaborative and focused on building strong partnerships both on a local scale and in international pipelines (see also Watson, Hoyler & Mager 2009).

3.3 Limitations

Digital technologies and modern telecommunications have led some to announce the 'end of geography' (O'Brien 1992) or the 'death of distance' (Cairncross 1997). Wellman's 'networked individualism' (2001: 238) brings to light that grouped approaches to production are reliant on social ties proper to individuals, rather than interpersonal community ties. A general neoliberal push for individualism (Neff, Wissinger & Zukin 2005: 314) is observed more widely among many cultural workers (see also Mould 2018; McRobbie 2016). Changed lifestyles through increased mobility, networked individualism, and self-sufficiency lead to *place* playing a more accentuated role in identity formation. Similarly, 'net-

work sociality' posits that socialisation is increasingly characterised by individualisation and technological embeddedness (Wittel 2001).

Social relations and embeddedness are nuanced, where a further push is observed toward individualism as a result of neoliberal policy, labour market trends, and technological innovation (McRobbie 2016; Beck 2002). CI workers are thus often found *"lifted out of their contexts and reinserted in largely disembedded social relations"*[7] (Wittel 2001: 65). A new perspective arises on a reconfiguration of social relations as a result of technological innovation where social relations and transactional activity are increasingly centralised in economic clusters (Florida and Jackson 2010). Lastly, co-working spaces and curated environments that are restricted to the open public also potentially exacerbate the inequalities inherent to the 'creative class' theory (Brown 2017: 113).

4   Methodology

4.1 Qualitative case study

The aim of this research is to uncover the role of the PMC in the music industry. As part of this, Shoreditch House was designated as an appropriate limited field in which a case study could be conducted. Lune & Berg (2017: 179) define case studies of communities as *"the systematic gathering of enough information about a particular community to provide … understanding and awareness of what things go on in that community"*. Their definition also considers the *"social forces [that] may bind together members of this community"* (ibid).

Baxter & Jack (2008: 544) further note that the qualitative case study as a research design in itself ensures that issues are viewed through *"a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of [a] phenomenon to be revealed and understood"*. This strategy is most appro-

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[7] The notion of social relations being qualified as 'disembedded' is attributed to Giddens' formulations of social relations in late modernity (1991). In this context, social relations are qualified as disembedded if they no longer rely on interactions between agents within an individual's direct environment.

priate, as the goal is to uncover specific contextual properties of a phenomenon. The central question approached in this study is to explore how the PMC is embedded within the music economy, and why music industry professionals use it as a space to further their careers. The unit of analysis is how the PMC manifests itself as a network, within the 'bounded context' (Miles & Huberman 1994) of Shoreditch House and Soho House, which are the specific fields in which this case study was developed.

Following Stake (1995) and Yin (2003), the case study is backed on a constructivist paradigm. This is ensured as the central analysis of the PMC is based on the individual perspectives by the participants of this research. This allows for a descriptive approach to the phenomena occurring within the selected space. Geertz's (1973) 'thick description' further lends itself appropriately to this analysis, as this process involves a detailed understanding of the behaviour of people within an organisation, emphasising their actions and behaviours. The framework for this case study is grounded in the data collected. Emphasis was placed on networks and lifestyle dispositions of the subjects.

4.2 Data collection

This research consists of five dominant data collection methods: field observation and notes, semi-structured interviews, correspondences with Soho House members, and geographical mapping exercises.   This study takes an iterative approach (Miles & Huberman 1994). The data collection process involved predetermined questions, which changed over time as the interview process and field observation lead to new inquiries, and a reflexive approach to the qualitative data collection strategy.

4.3 Semi-structured interviews & correspondence

Respondent #	Age Range	Industry / *Occupation*
1	50+	Music / *Industry Specialist, Artist Manager, Freelance*
2	18-34	Marketing / *University Student*
3	50+	Music / *Artist, Producer, Director, Freelance*
4	18-34	Advertising / *Project Manager*
5	18-34	Sonic Advertising / *Director of Business Development*
6	50+	Marketing / *CEO, Director*
7	18-34	Film & TV / *Producer, Actor, Freelance*
8	50+	Music / *Industry Specialist, Educator*
9	35-49	Sonic Advertising / *Managing Director*
10	18-34	Sonic Advertising / *Head of Production*

Figure 1: Participant information chart

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten members of Shoreditch House, each session lasting up to one hour. *Figure 1* displays the essential information of each participant. The interviews explored three key areas: (i) the participant's use of the club in their day-to-day lives, (ii) the participant's views on the role of the club as a network in their professional lives, and (iii) the participant's reflections on the club as a social and cultural driver in London. As Lune & Berg (2017: 70) note, semi-structured interviews permit the understanding of *"the perceptions of participants"*, and *"how participants come to attach meanings to phenomena"*. These research topics guided the interview process in the effort to bring to light the individual perspectives of participants.

The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed and coded according to the central themes. The answers were first pre-coded (Bryman 2016: 245) according to the questions, and an open coding approach (Strauss & Corbin 1990) was taken for the remaining sec-

tions. The subjects by which the interviews were transcribed were determined beforehand, as these themes pertained to the central research question. In certain instances, parallel coding was used in which multiple codes were attributed to data subsets.

A further correspondence via email was conducted with an additional participant who provided a personal account of their use of the club as part of their occupation. The email covered the same subject matter as the questions asked during the semi-structured interviews.

4.4 Mapping

Each participant completed a mapping exercise. The goal was to provide a visual representation of participants' use of the PMCs in their daily lives in relation to London and uncover whether an overall network of interactions between members could be determined. Each participant was given a map of a large section of Central London using a print-out of Bing Maps. Lune & Berg (2017: 179) acknowledge the usefulness of maps in case study research as it provides an adequate sociometric study of an environment within the context of the selected community. Shoreditch House was pinned on each map before the exercise. Participants were invited to pinpoint significant points of interest on the map. This included the Soho House locations they used, primary residence, workplaces and other offices, prominent leisure spaces such as restaurants, pubs and cafes, and commutes.

4.5 Limitations

This study seeks to uncover the role of the PMC in the personal and professional lives of the members who participated. As this is a particular case study, it is not inherently exhaustive of a universal case and instead provides a collection of accounts and subsequent reflections that aim to inform further study of these spaces in the music industry and wider creative industries.

5   Findings & discussion

5.1 Shoreditch House as stage for the new creative

Within the PMC sphere, interior design principles and atmosphere are instrumental in shaping the environments where social practices take place. Bille, Bjerregaard & Sørensen (2015: 34) famously reflect this asserting that atmosphere is a *"way of being together, of sharing a social reality"*. A brief overview of this setting provides a context in which CI workers exercise their professions. Shoreditch House was selected as an example.

Shoreditch House is located in a repurposed warehouse. The club is comprised of hotel rooms and two club areas spread across two floors. The fifth floor is the primary interior common area and is comprised of an open space spanning the width of the warehouse. It is divided into five zones with dispersed individual and grouped seating areas and event spaces used to host organised talks and networking events. The sixth floor is the rooftop of the building, comprised of a swimming pool, a dining area, and an indoor restaurant.

The interior design features of every Soho House are highly aestheticized and connotative of bohemian—or urban pastoral—lifestyle[8]. For Shoreditch House, an industrial aesthetic is apparent, reminiscent of Bourdieu's notion of aestheticized objects and histories (1984)[9]. This industrial aesthetic is visible in principle design features, such as exposed plumbing and ventilation systems, extensive use of iron and metals, visible wooden beams in the supporting structures, exposed brick walls, and the retention of the original window frame design of the warehouse. These are connotative of an authenticity proper to the local

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[8] See Harris (2012). See also Soho House in downtown Los Angeles, nicknamed *Soho Warehouse*, which *Variety* (2019) noted as being *"designed to resemble artist lofts"*, in a general nod to Los Angeles' street art and musical heritage.

[9] Bourdieu (1984: 5) designates this as a *"capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even 'common'"*. This is equally a characteristic which Harris (2012) links to Shoreditch and Hoxton's contemporary connotations of working-class abjection in contemporary popular culture aesthetic (ibid.: 15).

culture of Shoreditch in its historical zeitgeist of local industrialisation and 1980s cultural production. The latter is further reflected through the ubiquity of framed photographs, coffee table books, and other visual artefacts. The interior was described by participants as 'shabby-chic', 'gritty', 'authentic', and as having a 'warehouse vibe'. Much of the interior was also described as mimicking a living room space, as several respondents noted 'feeling at home' in the space.

5.2 Soho House as space for socialisation and third space

5.2.1 Socialisation

The PMC is organised to facilitate interaction between members. Socialisation can be divided into two overarching categories: socialisation in leisure contexts and professional networking. While house rules prohibit members from approaching others who are unknown to them to maintain individual privacy, the frequency of chance encounters was noted as highly dependent on individual cases. Respondents who did not seek to network noted that chance encounters were generally rare, as their social interactions would be limited to their current network. Members relying on intensive networking to develop their social capital reported frequent socialisation in casual contexts during evening events, such as parties, live music events, and film screenings. Respondents who use the club to grow their client base noted that professional social ties would frequently blur and evolve into personal friendships.

Membership was widely noted as being deeply embedded in professional life, as participants noted the ubiquity of work-related networking. For several respondents, their membership was purely career driven. One participant who often worked with music and film industry workers noted making new contacts daily and felt pressured to 'keep up' with networking. They described keeping up with the local buzz as 'infectious' and crucial in developing prospects of collaboration with actors, musicians, and other artists.

Respondents from the sonic advertising subsector described that the club's value proposition reflected the requirements of their business

practices. One noted his profession as being highly 'relationship-driven', where taking music producers and advertising clients for lunch or dinner 'somewhere special' in exchange for work is conventional. He referred to his membership as a 'status symbol', as clients visit the club for its exclusive experience. The space thus contributes to the construction of personal reputation through socialisation and consumption.

One participant, a record producer and business owner, noted that he created important professional ties at Soho House. As a recent example, he met a film producer for whom he would eventually produce the score of his latest production. This was a direct result of having connected at Soho House.

Interviews with founding members suggest that the club's inherent sociality has starkly evolved since Soho House first opened. One respondent, a founding member, contended that the club originally harboured a 'genuine community of interest—a socialisation' in contrast to the increasingly work-based networked behaviour of today. Another founding member noted:

I first joined in 1997. Then it was like a social scene, where … we could go because everything else was closed and have food and drinks till 2 am. We used it socially until 2002. Then I used it more for professional networking until 2006. Soho House was the hub of people hustling and networking.

The social makeup of the club has thus changed drastically over time, and its perception as a social space remains a personal case for each member. According to founding members, this evolution was attributed to two developments. First, the club accepted more members in part due to an altered value proposition targeting freelancers and members of the creative community whose occupations require frequent travel and remote work. Second, innovation in mobile technology led to the ubiquity of smartphones and laptops in the club. Respondents described a changed atmosphere. For one respondent, the club appears more 'like walking into an office', having lost its original 'coolness', as it became a 'modern members club in a digital age'. This is equally visible

in *House 7*, the club's online proposition, geared to offering a digital home for its increasingly digitally native customer base.

It was widely acknowledged from respondents that Soho House, in its exclusivity, serves as a filtration system, where members of the creative community assert their membership of Soho House as a calling card. One respondent reported making connections with other Soho House members easily outside of the club thanks to their membership. Affiliation to a PMC is a universal indicator by which social inscription into the creative community can be easily recognised by peers in annex industries.

5.2.2 Third place

Soho House is used as a 'third space' by its members—or a liminal space that is neither an office nor a place for pure leisure. Work and leisure are regularly blended to accommodate co-working as part of its value proposition.

One respondent described this blend as one determined by the club itself. They noted that after 5 pm, interior lights would be dimmed as the volume of the music would increase, ultimately leading to a programmed transition from work to leisure. This sentiment is also sustained by organised film screenings, live music events, and creative talks. Several respondents also equated social events after office hours at Soho House as both casual and professional. A staple feature of the interior that lends itself well to illustrating this concept is the third section of the 5th floor, where large team working desks serve as table-tennis tables after 5 pm.

The space equally lends itself to the possibility of chance encounters with industry peers. Soho House's model was originally conceived on the premise that the social and the transactional sides to creative business operate in symbiosis. One respondent stated:

You were seeing groups of people working in music, fashion, media, even advertising who were spinning off each other. But pre-social media you couldn't really network very easily. And if you wanted to find those people, aside from Groucho's, you'd be in a certain restaurant, or you'd

be talking at the bar in a night club, about quite an important piece of business you'd want to do. And it would be casual, but you'd be bothered by the music or the crowd.

Soho House's value proposition is grounded in the provision of a space that reflects the *modus operandi* of the music industry and wider CI workers in developing transactional ties in informal environments.

Membership to Soho House often comes part and parcel with, or is a job requirement for, many positions occupied in the music industry. Roles in artist management, creative production, and marketing are frequently tied to a Soho House membership. By extension, artist managers and performing artists are often compensated for events at Soho House with memberships. One respondent, an artist manager and senior executive in the music industry reported receiving his membership as a gift, as a result of bringing artists in to perform at Soho House. A membership is thus not an obligation, but it is highly tied into many occupations and serves as a facilitation to expand local networks, gain access to the local buzz, and be inscribed within global communication pipelines. Participants noted that executive meetings and label events occur so frequently at Soho House that lacking personal access would be a great inconvenience. One participant, a record producer and label owner, noted that Soho House is a convenient environment to take work relationships for lunch or a brief meeting. Similarly, a founding member, formerly active in London's music and nightclub scene, noted the importance to its members of having a reliable place for casual encounters where they could also conduct professional meetings, describing Soho House as a 'neutral ground' for ideation and conversation. A membership is thus inscribed within personal lifestyles, either on the member's own accord or inferred through their occupations.

5.3 Shoreditch House as a node of Soho House

A clear network became visible through mapping exercises undertaken by members. The empirical map data collected from participants demonstrates that Shoreditch House is deeply embedded within the network of Soho House locations around London. All respondents noted

having their main workplace located near their most-frequented house. The data confirms that the use-patterns of Soho House and Shoreditch House are highly clustered, where members cluster around Shoreditch and Soho. Its members rarely make exclusive use of one location and will frequently navigate between them. Therefore, it is important to consider Soho House as a network in and of itself.

The club plays an auxiliary role in their daily lives, acting as a space they frequent as part of their daily routine. A clear network is visible in the mapping exercises undertaken by members.

Respondents noted that the club plays an embedded role in their professional and personal healthcare routines and is deeply incorporated into their daily commutes between their residence and office. Free time would be used to visit one of the club locations. Often-cited reasons included chance encounters with acquaintances and industry professionals, using co-working spaces, or for joining organised events at Soho House and Shoreditch House. Most respondents reflected a lifestyle mostly geared toward Soho House, with commutes only appearing between residence, places of work, and the clubs. For several members, the practicality and sociability of Soho House meant that it has come to replace most of their leisurely experiences in London. In addition to co-located behaviour around consumption, the data equally confirms clustering for production around the Houses, adding to Watson's (2008) seminal research of the clustering of the recorded music industry in London.

Geographical connections remain strong within the realm of work-related activity and local consumption practices. As it pertains to cultural production, respondents also noted being in close contact with Soho's music and advertising clusters, often using the club as a central meeting point. For Shoreditch House, the music industry came up several times in interviews in relation to the cultural past of Curtain Road (Strong Room Studios still being a noted hub) and the area's vibrant music scene of the 1980s and 1990s.

As a result of the geographical position of the clubs, Soho House offers a practical environment for meetings between employees from dif-

ferent companies, and, thus, operates as a neutral zone for these employees to meet. The primary data confirms that with Soho representing a central location for much of the independent music industry, the motion picture industry, and advertising. Respondents noted developing their professional practice and expanding collaborative opportunities as a result of the PMC, and frequent meetings between members across the various locations would occur as a result. Soho House is uniquely placed to facilitate cross-industry collaboration between companies and freelancers. These observations underpin the notion that Soho House operates as a network in and of itself and is highly connected to local production companies and freelance networks.

5.4 Private member clubs in the global music economy

With the music industry as an increasingly international-facing industry (see Maguire & Matthews 2014), Soho House plays a significant role in the global music economy. The company's global expansion in preceding years has attempted to accommodate the increasingly internationalist nature of the global CIs, where major metropolitan areas, such as New York City, Los Angeles, Berlin, and Amsterdam, are now so-called 'anchoring points' in global industry pipelines. Through this borderless perspective on the global music economy, the transfer of tacit knowledge in proprietary spaces is all the more valued, and Soho House identifies as such a beacon that effectively facilitates cross-communication within the music industry and across other subsectors, such as the advertising and motion picture industries.

Based on interview data, members value the club as a space that provides continuity in their lifestyles, common language, and tacit codes in closed groups worldwide. The clubs are visited with the assumption that this continuity is maintained, making networking opportunities highly likely, and chance encounters with familiar industry peers abroad a regular occurrence.

Several members in senior positions within the recorded music industry noted that the club serves as a personal homestead overseas, as several participants noted frequent use of its overseas locations. As

such, while Shoreditch House is deeply embedded in East London's music economy, it is also directly connected to metropolitan areas overseas. Soho House locations thus serve as single nodes in a complex globalised network of creative professionals. A managing director of an artist management firm noted a benefit in seeing similarities in interior design and service provision. He noted that during business trips, a membership offers a source of comfort and a 'home away from home' where they could find 'instant familiarity' abroad in foreign cities, and that random encounters were likely to happen.

The fact that the Houses should be considered as one global network, where one location represents a node, is important. This in itself is deeply reflective of the current state of the recorded music industry as a whole and the interconnectedness of subsectors in the creative industries; one that inherently transcends borders and is highly dependent on close network ties and valuable interrelationships across a number of other sectors, such as advertising, and film and television. Accessibility to global regions is greatly facilitated for its customers and for consolidating its global creative community in a way that brings clear benefits to business development.

Respondents who are senior members of the recorded music industry were asked whether Soho House plays an important role in their occupations. Several respondents in the music industry noted the frequent use of Soho House in Los Angeles (West Hollywood and Downtown) during business trips, and they equally noted the benefit of seeing members of the British music industry overseas thanks to the clubs. A Los Angeles-based British record producer noted that members clubs are helpful to the large (and ever-growing) number of independent managers, artists, and producers who do not have access to a permanent office space. This respondent added that impromptu meetings and networking opportunities frequently occur, noting that in major cities such as Los Angeles, Soho House venues are practical for bringing people together who are not permanent residents of the area. It is apparent from these responses that private clubs act as a crossroads for lifestyles and work schedules that are not bound by a single location.

The empirical data demonstrates that PMCs are evident locations for identifying an archetype of the CI professional. While on the one hand, much of the taxonomy and characteristics of contemporary cultural theorists are observed and widely confirmed, it also demonstrates the internationalised nature of the music industry and deep reliance on other CI subsectors. It also brings to light the importance of localised nodes in major cities in the global music economy and the value such social spaces have to its users and for improving individual networks in global pipelines. Within this context, PMCs' role within an increasingly digitalised economy is also apparent, where a heightened homogenisation of communication practices means that common codes and tacit rules proper to the music industry move globally at a rapid pace and uninterrupted. The PMCs appear to operate as a neutral zone in which this habitus is assured across the most important locations of the industry. Its interiors are equally homogenised, and its membership professes a mutual recognition of power relations and sociality. These nodes are especially important considering, drawing from Castells (2000) and building on the observations of McRobbie, the global economy has perceived a clear shift from hierarchical relationships to ones determined by complex and intricate networks among peers.

For Soho House members, it would appear that there is not only a desire to be part of these closed groups, but that such an alliance is even a necessity to retain a certain threshold of influence and success in the music industry. The role of private members clubs in music business professions that depend on global relationships is apparent, as they play an instrumental role in homogenising communication between industry locations, consolidating occupations that are highly digitally dependent by means of integrating work-life and face-to-face social events, maintaining fluid inter-sector relationships, strengthening community ties internationally, and significantly facilitating tacit knowledge and transactions.

5.5 Tentative limitations to the private members club

Empirical findings for this study suggest potential limitations to the PMC structure as a new model for improving community ties and for accommodating the lifestyle of an increasingly freelance workforce.

5.5.1 Global pipelines & social exclusion

The data collected from interviews with members appeared at times critical of the private member club model. Criticism often pointed to an inherent change in the strategy of Soho House from a unique, exclusive, London-based club to a global network.

One respondent, formerly active in London's nightclub and recorded music scene, detailed the origins of Soho House's model as one founded on a pre-existing template of London's contemporary club culture—embodied at the time by competitors like Groucho's. However, whereas the barriers to entry were originally founded on creative practice and symbolic and economic capital, newer iterations of the PMC include added dimensions of having a global-facing and cosmopolitan lifestyle disposition, with rich social capital to boot. Soho House now represents a field in which various—and at times indeed contested—definitions of *creatives* coincide. Its membership implies a certain cohabitation between the traditional definition of an artist, for those who can afford it, and those creative industries professionals who are perhaps not practitioners as such, but who are nonetheless deeply embedded in the creative industries supply chain.

These new barriers equally lead to questioning the impact of PMCs on inclusiveness and openness to diversity and whether these spaces raise opportunities or, on the contrary, hinder knowledge transfer. In fact, primary accounts of members and field notes reflect the deep imbalances and inequalities present in the wider creative industries subsectors. One participant described the club as being a safe space for members of the LGBTQ+ community, yet joined other respondents in underpinning that BAME individuals remain underrepresented—a prominent characteristic strongly reflected in the music industry. While the club's inscription into a global network raises the profile of its local

neighbourhood, another respondent similarly noted the club may equal-
ly distance itself from local communities by excluding local emerging
artists, such as grime artists and indie artists, from creative networks
that may prove necessary for developing crucial ties in music industry
circles[10]. This would further confirm that at the root of this contested
creative class, many individuals within the creative community—singers,
artists, performance artists, and visual artists—are de facto excluded
from these otherwise consequential knowledge spheres and network-
intensive environments. This is further confirmed in Brown's (2017: 121)
research on co-working spaces and their exclusion of industry workers
who do not 'fit' the membership of curated spaces. It could then be pos-
ited that the social ordering of an elite music industry subset could
thwart upward mobility for those who lack access to these environ-
ments[11].

5.5.2 Limitations to club as 'community space' & increased individualisa-tion

The extent to which such clubs are in themselves communities is an ap-
propriate annexe question. The constant always-in-motion nature of
many professionals within the club would suggest that community ties,
while diverse and international, may arguably not be locally strong.
Founding members agreed that the club's original iteration was firmly
grounded in a strong and time-specific sociality, where a PMC fashioned
on dance and nightclubs in the 1970s and 1980s would be opened for
individuals from that scene—for those whose demands would in no way
be satisfied by gentleman's clubs.

This sociality evolved as a result of increased demand, changes in
corporate strategy, and technological advancement. Data collection

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[10] This confirms Bathelt & Taylor (2002) who noted that strengthened external links to international
flows end up overshadowing local environments, where local flows of knowledge are increasingly
ignored.
[11] This equally sustains previous assertions that co-working spaces are generally disembedded from
local communities, and they instead contribute to social inequalities that *"stem from the reappro-
priation of urban public space as a consumption-based amenity landscape for a 'creative class'"*
(Leslie & Catugnal 2012; via Brown 2017: 116)

revealed a pragmatic interpretation of the members club where members' attachment to Soho House was primarily in the spirit of self-fulfilment. Social dispositions of the club's members would be increasingly individualised or, as Brown (2017) described, *alone together[12]*.

As such, respondent #9 recalled his own experiences of socialisation as being unsuccessful:

My experience over 20 years is that usually 95% of the conversations are guaranteed to go nowhere. And the real business must be done somewhere else, because it sure … isn't being done there. I just get the feeling a lot of [the talking] is stroking people's egos and talking about abstract ideas. I've experienced this a lot. … I knew nothing would lead anywhere after a meeting at Soho House.

Soho House appears as an environment in which habitus is subjected to collective policing behaviour. This participant contended that members 'project their own ideas of self-importance, these ideas that the meetings are important.' Respondents equally noted the club's role as a place where certain members 'use the space as a place to be seen'—in other words, performative behaviour stems from the desire for peer recognition[13]. Respondent #8 corroborated this, describing this as being a 'see and be seen' area, where people 'are mostly focused on themselves, presenting themselves, and making it look like they're important.' When asked about his experience, the respondent observed that many members tend to use the space as an opportunity for self-promotion. Strong community ties would then be thwarted by an increasingly individualised alternative, where perception and performance take the upper hand.

To some respondents, memberships appear more transactional rather than purely socially inscribed. Respondent #8 noted that the club is 'supposed to engender this idea that [its members] are equal', but described the club as 'being an illusion that you're a part of something, [but] at the end of the day, if you can't pay your membership, you're no

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[12] See also Spinuzzi (2012)
[13] See Waring (2008) for an elaborate analysis on this subject in the field of clubs

longer a member'. Like a lifestyle trait, one could assimilate it and relinquish it at will. Some respondents described this aspect as a game of appearances, where the membership is itself a wilful participation in an artificial social hierarchy to facilitate identification of who is 'in' and who is not. In other words, Soho House would distinguish the 'in-crowd'.[14]

An inherent inscription into the attention economy, and by extension the reputation economy, can be identified in the controlled social environments of the PMC. These spaces play a pivotal role in broadcasting one's image as a means of raising their digital reputation and brand. The club's exclusivity and reputation accommodate the networked sociality of its digitally native membership and form a vital part of the digital infrastructure upon which the music industry and other CI subsectors rely. In other words, and in reference to Castells (2000), private clubs are exclusive social environments that are crucial to developing close ties that have been transformed by digital networks.

6   Conclusion

This study explored the role of private member clubs in the music industry. The primary data collected for this study indicates that PMCs play a significant and pivotal role in the music industry and, by extension, play an important role in connecting music business to other CI subsectors, thereby consolidating much of the creative economy.

A clear evolution is visible in the value proposition of PMCs, where its original iteration of being an exclusive place for the most elite to find common ground was replaced as the cultural and economic momentum of the creative economy grew from the early 2000s onwards. A closer examination of the club's sociality reveals the archetype of the music industry worker. Personal and professional lives are deeply enmeshed, and careers are increasingly developed outside the formal workplace in

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[14] This point is further sustained by McRobbie's analysis of cultural labour, which asserts that *"a double process of individualisation"* has taken place, in which there is, on the one hand, an *"increased obsessive culture around celebrity"*, and, on the other, an inherent change to social structure in which *"people are increasingly disembedded from ties of kinship, community and social class"* McRobbie's (2002: 518).

liminal spaces, where lifestyle dispositions and tacit codes have become the hardware upon which social bonds are created. It is used as a space to act out individualised behaviours in a controlled social space, where hierarchies are replaced by intricate networks of affiliation.

The PMC also reveals a stark contrast in music industry operations before and after the digital revolution. In these environments, its connections to (and co-dependency of) the advertising and motion picture industries are clear. Inter-sector relationships seem all the more valued, and the PMC has positioned itself as a bridge between industry subsectors, promoting crucial cross-collaboration and joint ventures. This paper can therefore conclude that the PMC model plays a vital and important role in the social and economic infrastructure of the music industry.

However, while the PMC model continues to be beneficial for many of its members, its exclusivity may exacerbate existing frictions within the industry. Aspiring musicians, producers and intermediaries from disadvantaged backgrounds are de facto blocked from an important and consequential network. Local artistic communities are increasingly distanced from global circuits. A digitally native populace shows signs of gravitation toward individualism and self-mediation. Spaces allowing for personal and professional lives to be combined further the normalization of precarious CI labour conditions, and its concomitant anxieties.

Ultimately, the PMC has positioned itself in a consequential spot for the global music industry. Most, if not all, influential CEOs, executives, managers and musicians convene and socialize at Soho House. Lil Nas X's most recent interview with *Variety* was conducted over lunch at Soho House (Herman 2020), for instance. So while the original magic people who gathered at Greek Street may have left, and while the original magic may have been diluted over time, it is worth considering that perhaps the very magic that drives the music industry has simply just changed face—and Soho House along with it.

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