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THE MUTATION OF CULTURAL VALUES, POPULARITY, AND AESTHETIC  
TASTES IN THE AGE OF CONVERGENCE CULTURE: SOCIAL NETWORKING  
PRACTICES OF MUSICIANS

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

# THE MUTATION OF CULTURAL VALUES, POPULARITY, AND AESTHETIC TASTES IN THE AGE OF CONVERGENCE CULTURE: SOCIAL NETWORKING PRACTICES OF MUSICIANS

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This dissertation examines cultural production in an age of digital media and convergence. It focuses on how musicians, by exerting immaterial and affective labor, use social media websites to gain popularity and increase their music's value. Within the larger context of convergence culture, in which old and new media collide, this dissertation focuses on four websites as case studies ([myspace.com](http://myspace.com), [youtube.com](http://youtube.com), [secondlife.com](http://secondlife.com), and [indabamusic.com](http://indabamusic.com)), analyzing them via four key terms ("social protocols," "cultural intermediaries," "labor," and "self-promotion").

Broadly speaking, this dissertation analyzes various binary tensions that are symptomatic of a convergence culture context, such as commerce vs. creativity, competition vs. collaboration and empowerment vs. exploitation. These tensions exist unequally, creating an oscillating relationship. This dissertation, by assessing the resulting paradoxes, highlights the different dynamics of power at play on the social networking sites. Thus, this study introduces and assesses the emerging protocols on the social networking sites, the expanded role of cultural intermediaries in the social network, and the manner in which musicians engage in self-promotion.

After introductory and literature review chapters, chapter three investigates Myspace users' attempts to gain popularity. The chapter examines various protocols both in online interactions as well as in the consumption of "how-to-succeed" manuals. Chapter Four analyzes the laboring practices and music competitions on Youtube, and conceptualizes the website's emerging norms of popularity and their impact on signed and unsigned musicians. The fifth chapter, devoted to Secondlife, sheds light on the role played by live performances, a dimension not typically a part of other social networking sites. The sixth chapter on Indabamusic explores the manner in which collaborative and competitive activities reconstitutes the complex relationship between mainstream and grassroots convergence forces. As a whole, this dissertation examines new developments in the formulation of cultural values, and evaluates a landscape in which the commodification of the self and the notion of popularity complicate the purportedly democratic nature of convergence culture and social media sites.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the few years prior to 2009, there have been many shifts and turns in the recording industry, as newly rising technologies have become an integral part of our daily lives. Especially with the advent of social networking websites, tremendous changes have occurred in terms of political economy and in the convergence of major and independent music corporations, and of independent (indie), major and unsigned artists. In the midst of these concrete visible changes, one aspect that cannot be ignored is the empowerment of independent musicians.

However, on social networking sites, the artist not only has a platform from which to share performances with audience members, but he or she even has the capacity to build a successful career. Now the activities related to production, promotion, consumption, and live performance occur directly in the virtual world. Because music requires consumers to listen, the virtual world can be a place where musicians can thrive. Refusing to simply adopt an unmitigated utopian perspective on this development, this dissertation traces the mechanisms that can negatively influence the move towards success.

On the surface, social networking sites seem to provide everything that independent musicians could possibly desire, such as the ability to record music and find collaborators. The sites also offer outlets for musicians to sell their music to numerous people simultaneously. To some extent, these websites assist musicians in gaining freedom from the controls of the corporate music industry (Morrow, 2009). While this dissertation recognizes this fact, the other common thread that connects the social networking sites is the convergence of mainstream and independent / unsigned artists,

who are united through the complex network of competitions, collaborations, ranking, and ratings. The music industry is undoubtedly threatened by the rising power of the social networking sites; however, it is not passively accepting the decrease in profits caused by the Do-It-Yourself model (Sydell, 2009). Instead, the mainstream music industry is taking advantage of the trends embedded in the social networking sites by joining forces with the alternative media in order to survive. The overarching development of this phenomenon is clearly discussed in Henry Jenkins's (2006) seminal work, *Convergence Culture*.

According to Jenkins, "convergence culture" is the mixture of the top-down corporate driven process and the bottom-up consumer driven process. On social networking sites especially created for cultural production, grassroots endeavors have increased, providing an alternative to mainstream content:

this ability to exhibit grassroots cultural productions has in turn fostered a new excitement about self-expression and creativity. For some, these grassroots cultural productions are understood as offering a radical alternative to dominant media content, providing space for various minority groups to tell their own stories or to question hegemonic representations of their culture. (Jenkins, 2003, p. 287)

Because of the manner in which media convergence operates, the roles of the participators and the distributors are no longer clearly demarcated. Instead, convergence culture has challenged and changed the sphere of cultural products and fields (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins explains that the activities that occur within the context of the convergence media do not necessarily function in isolation from the major network channels; this form of media, instead, holds the potential for shared work, resulting not in division and alternative voices, but in collaboration and unity. The encouragement of democratic participation often results in an increase in artistic activities. The democratic

media, such as social networking sites, encourage users to voice their opinions on aesthetic tastes, as well as to share their works of art, poetry, and music. Whether this type of activity is pursued as a leisure-time activity or as a serious networking endeavor (such as launching a career path), this phenomenon creates a new cultural landscape that yields new sets of problems for analysis.

In music production, Jenkins's corporate vs. grassroots demarcation is distinguished by the categories "major" vs. "indie," and sometimes "unsigned." The labels distinguish artists who are signed to major labels and artists who are not. This latter category includes artists who are signed to independent labels or who are completely unaffiliated. Popularity, however, does not always require a contract with a major label. There are many incidents in which unknown artists have gained enormous popularity on social networking sites through the help of cultural intermediaries, frequently resulting in contracts signed with major record labels.

However, it is also highly important to note that independent labels, in years past, functioned as subsidiaries of major record labels, even before the advent of the social networking sites. Thus, while independent labels can work autonomously or in a partnership with major record labels, making a clear demarcation between the different types of independent record labels is a challenging task. In light of this, this dissertation will challenge and problematize Jenkin's binary division between mainstream and grassroots cultures. Thus, the overall goal of this dissertation is to provide insight on the direction of and the role played by social networking sites in our contemporary culture, as well as in the music industry as a whole. This dissertation, therefore, is characterized by two issues: pragmatism and theoretical. On one level, this study is pragmatic because it

speaks to lay people in the music industry and musicians who wish to understand the trajectory of the business. On another level, this study also aids in the conceptualization of constantly evolving notions, such as popularity, aesthetics and cultural values, in the context of convergence culture.

In problematizing the framework created by mainstream and grassroots forces, four concepts (cultural intermediaries, self-promotion, labor and social protocols) will be explored in depth because of the pivotal role they play in musicians' social networking practices. Understanding these four concepts is important since they function as a framework for the overarching goal of this dissertation, which is an in-depth understanding of the mutation of cultural values, popularity and aesthetic tastes. The keyword "mutation" was chosen instead of "change" as it signifies that the shift over the past few decades has not necessarily always been significant or drastic. Also some practices have remained the same while others have taken various, divergent forms. For that reason, this dissertation has purposefully not adopted a technological deterministic stance. It is also critical to understand that prior to the advent of the social networking sites (approximately before year 2004), mutations occurred in the music industry as mergers between major and indie labels increased. While this merger will be discussed later in this dissertation, the following four concepts must first be addressed as they play an integral role in the music industries.

### Cultural Intermediaries

The notion of cultural intermediaries was conceived by Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1984). In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu (1993) explains how different types of agents and cultural intermediaries play a role in the making of a star.

Recognizing a gifted artist does not necessarily pertain to the actual talent or a genius of an artist, but rather relates to the evaluations of people in authority and the creation of hype surrounding an artist.

Keith Negus (2002) delves into a more detailed understanding of the role of intermediaries, and subsequently problematizes Bourdieu's notion. Cultural intermediaries are "those workers who come *in-between* creative artists and consumers (or, more generally, production and consumption)" (Negus, 2002, p. 503). Although Negus recognizes the key role that cultural intermediaries play, he finds Bourdieu's notion limiting due to the latter's separation of intermediaries into a discrete category:

The concept of cultural intermediaries has been introduced in a way that privileges a particular cluster of occupations. It accords certain workers a pivotal role in these processes of symbolic mediation, prioritizing a narrow and reductionistic aesthetic definition of culture (...). Hence, representation, 'meaning' and the symbolic are treated as 'cultural,' whereas the notion of culture as a 'whole way of life' seems to be rather marginalized or forgotten- or applied only to the selected workers engaged in 'symbolic activities.' (p. 504)

Negus describes other types of cultural intermediaries who play just as important a role as those discussed by Bourdieu. In the context of the music industries, Negus mentions that Artist and Repertoire (A & R) professionals may serve as the actual mediators between new talent acts and the industry. There are also other types of cultural intermediaries in the industry, such as accountants and lawyers (p. 506).

Negus sheds new light onto a previously under-analyzed aspect of cultural intermediaries. Not only are cultural intermediaries the ones who influence society in an intangible way, but they are also the ones that deal with the commercial and business affairs: "they are involved in the construction of what is to be 'commercial' at any one time, often retrospectively, and they are engaged in mediating many of the values through

which aesthetic work is realized” (p. 506). This point is crucial as we evolve into an era of convergence culture where the notion of cultural intermediaries is constantly changing. In the age of convergence culture, cultural intermediaries are not limited to the decision makers from a broad spectrum of music industry professions (accountants, A & R, executives, lawyers, marketing and public relations, etc.), but this category also includes the networked bodies which consist of “everyday” citizens, as well as other newly rising cultural intermediaries.

Although there has been a shift in terms of the concept of cultural intermediaries, this does not mean that other kinds of tastemakers did not exist prior to the convergence era. As the employment records of the major record labels suggest, there is still a wide range of cultural intermediaries; scouts from labels, various critics, MTV programmers, club promoters, opinion leaders, and disc jockeys all continue to serve in the role of cultural intermediaries. The only difference in the age of convergence culture is that other types of cultural intermediaries now exist, such as Youtube editors who choose “featured videos,” Indabamusic staff members who highlight “featured artists,” Myspace’s featured artists, and Secondlife live music venue promoters and bookers. These types of cultural intermediaries differ markedly from the traditional opinion leaders, such as DJs, magazine editors, television programmers, and entertainment venue bookers. The distinction is clearly obvious in the way in which many of the traditional cultural intermediaries were influenced by the market factors linked to the large number of consumers who supported only popular artists.

The shift from a small number of significant roles to a larger collection of people could be liberating; however, this development poses a new set of challenges and

problems. These issues will be explicated in this dissertation through an analysis of artists' functions as creators and cultural intermediaries.

### Self-Promotion

The likelihood of exposure on mainstream media can increase when unknown artists gain popularity by being their own agents and promoters. This leads to the next important concept in this dissertation: self-promotion. Promotion and marketing has been central to music production for both major record labels as well as independent labels (Shuker, 2008). Andrew Wernick (1991), in *Promotional culture*, notes the pervasiveness of self-promotion in today's capitalist culture:

when any instance of individual self-promotion spills over from the private realm to become a topic of public communication, whether unintentionally, as a personal drama that makes the news, or deliberately, as the amplified staging of a career (sporting, political, artistic, intellectual, etc.), interindividual competition gives rise to yet a further form of promotional practice: the construction of celebrityhood. (p. 183)

Self-promotion does not just entail the promotion of one's career; Wernick emphasizes how easily self-promotion can turn into the striving for celebrity status. His sharp insights from the 1990s are even more pertinent today, especially with the ability for average consumers and viewers to participate on reality television shows and create self-brands.

Allison Hearn (2008) critically problematizes western consumer society's construction of the "self" as an object for branding. She explains how branding oneself has become an important must-learn prerequisite for becoming successful. This view is clearly captured in multiple media platforms, such as reality television programs and social networking websites, where content creation is mainly geared toward self-branding. Although Hearn clearly notes that self-promotion is not a new phenomenon,

self-branding has become manageable, simpler, and practically necessary with the rise of social networking sites: “the practices of self-branding are clear evidence of the increasing cultural value, and potentially surplus value, that is now extracted from the production of affect, desire, attention, and image” (p. 214).

With the rise of social networking sites, the notion of promotion has developed a new dimension; promotion does not just entail making flyers or sending emails, it now requires the branding of oneself on line. On one hand, while this new reality changes the laboring practices of musicians on social networking sites, it also provides new ways for record labels to recruit rising acts. Prior to social networking era, record labels learned about promising or new artists through other mechanisms, such as attending their concerts (Goldberg, 2004). Now one can easily find out about which new bands are creating buzz by researching their online presences and networks. It is thus important to examine how the notion of self-promotion and branding impacts the musicians’ social networks and how it generates cultural value.

### Labor

In order to brand oneself, one must labor: “the production of self must always involve some form of labour in order to create a public persona that might be of practical or relational use” (Hearn, p. 213). Musicians in the modern industrial era have labored to gain notice and to promote and market themselves (by engaging in such activities as handing out flyers in the street, paying dues, working for free, and making demo recordings). However, prior to the invention of social networking sites, most types of labor concentrated on impressing a few decisionmakers or actively building a fan base. (Of course this work was in addition to the writing, practicing, or learning of music.)

In this dissertation, the type of labor that will be highlighted is intellectual and emotional in nature, touching upon the affective dimensions and free labor of fans on social networking sites. These are the specific types of labor that need to be studied in light of the advent of the social networking sites. Not all musicians who labor hard on social networking sites gain popularity, but their laboring practices are pivotal to winning more attention from their audience members, because when listeners becomes devoted fans, they can assist the artists by laboring for free. All of these actions create a domino effect; artists are not only agents for themselves, but they also recruit other “agents” on social networking sites by tapping into the affective dimension of labor—the art of social networking. In addition, the element of free labor is of increasing importance on the social networking sites; thus, this dissertation will also take account into different ways in which to analyze and evaluate free labor.

### Social Protocols

In analyzing the art of social networking in this dissertation, the discrete website protocols will be individually presented, as online social networking requires new methods for the act of befriending people. Jenkins (2006) highlights the importance of protocol by drawing on the work of Lisa Gitelman (2006). Jenkins states that

a medium is a set of associated ‘protocols’ or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology. Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are also cultural systems... Protocols express a huge variety of social, economic, and material relationships. (p. 13-14)

Protocols are of particular importance in reference to participatory culture: “As long as the focus remains on access, reform remains focused on technologies; as soon as we begin talking about participation, the emphasis shifts to cultural protocols and practices”

(Jenkins, p. 23). The notion of protocols needs to be considered in this dissertation because every social networking site has created a unique set of procedures that one must learn in order to maximize the benefits offered by each site.

Countless books have been written touting various means of creating success in the music business. Many of the recommendations in these books pertained to impressing A&R and record label executives (Goldberg, 2004). For instance, one of the notable changes in recommendation given to A&R record label executives was to advise musical artists to cultivate a greater degree of aloofness and a mystique aura. Goldberg (2004) recommends,

cultivating a sense of mystique and self-sufficiency creates interest. Asking people to confirm your musical direction and ability only puts you at another's mercy and almost invites criticism. Desperation is the ultimate turn off and the ultimate fear. Bluffing is all about playing it cool and pretending that you don't want what you want (p.98).

However the advice rhetoric changed with the advent of social networking era, after year 2004. The emphasis on being independent and savvy, as well as actively outgoing in the internet context, will be examined later in this dissertation.

In connection with Myspace, one specific protocol will be explained at length by examining the self-help books that address how to gain popularity on this site. A similar set of recommendations has been written for Youtube; the authors, actual users of Youtube, seek to share their knowledge and tips with novices. The social norms on these types of social networking sites differ from those required by physical social interactions, because at times, users communicate with strangers without knowing their true identities. Users have access to numerous unknown people at any given time (Boellstorff, 2008). This is markedly highlighted on Secondlife, where musicians perform as avatars in online

performance venues. A different set of social protocols exists and is explicated by the tips given by the expert on this website. In terms of Indabamusic, a certain protocol exists in dealing with online collaboration and competitions. In each case study, the protocols will be explicated by examining the testimonies of various musicians, by pursuing a textual analysis of the actual social networking sites, and by analyzing the discussion boards where musicians promote themselves. By applying Lazzarato's (1996) and Hardt and Negri's (2000) theories of immaterial and affective labor and Terranova's (2004) concept of free labor, I will explain how the varying forms of labor intersect and, at times, propel and encourage the free labor of audiences.

One crucial commonality that runs through each case study is the competitive dimension (e.g. contests, ranking, and ratings). In the interactive era, competitions have become a driving force for various social networking sites. The promised reward is increased exposure on mainstream media. On Myspace, there is a chart similar to Billboard 100 on which the most popular musicians are ranked. On Youtube, many competitions are jointly sponsored by various mainstream major corporations, most of which are looking for a means of making already famous artists even more famous; on Secondlife, ranking drove the secondary and now inactive social networking site, sluic.com. Although this site no longer exists, the site reflected the prominent role played by ranking in Secondlife music culture. On Indabamusic, various competitions are hosted to offer mainstream exposure for contest winners—often these allow unknown musicians to collaborate with famous artists, such as Mariah Carey, Yo Yo Ma, Kos, John Legend and The Roots. The importance of these competitions and ratings also affects the labor of artists. In order to win, artists must gain the votes of intermediaries,

or at times, they are picked by a single judge, as in the case of Yo Yo Ma competition.

While the competitions and rating / ranking systems seem to dominate the activities on the social networking sites, collaboration and cooperation are other common trends. Many competitions focus on locating potential collaborators, while employing crowdsourcing methods to select the winners. Thus, convergence here involves Pierre Levy's (1997) notion of collective intelligence, which is defined as "a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills" (p. 13). Levy further explains that "the basis and goal of collective intelligence is the mutual recognition and enrichment of individuals rather than the cult of fetishized or hypostatized communities" (p. 13). Jenkins applies Levy's theory as a crucial concept in his convergence culture framework; however, the actual influence of this activity will be highlighted in the case studies of Youtube and Indabamusic, since Levy's "collective intelligence" impacts aesthetics taste in terms of both artistic production and critical assessment.

Thus, the broad goal of this dissertation is to examine how the concepts of popularity, aesthetic taste, and cultural values mutate in convergence culture. Although this is the overarching aim of this dissertation, several secondary research questions will be addressed in order to unpack the shifting nature of the three theoretical concepts. Firstly, in order to understand the mutation of aesthetic tastes, it is important to understand the people who are involved in the shaping of these preferences. In this context, the following research question will be explored: what roles are played by cultural intermediaries, and how have these roles impacted the aesthetic tastes related to convergence culture?

When considering the mutation of popularity, it is important to first underpin the definition of popularity and problematize the transformation of the commercial dimension of this concept. Thus, the second research question is: how do musicians gain popularity on social networking sites, and what kind of social protocols are learned and adopted by site users? Here, it should be noted that while not every musician is seeking popularity or fame through use of the social networking sites, my focus will be on select site features which promote the sites as places where performers can attain recognition. In addition, the presumption that many musicians are seeking popularity on the social networking sites cannot be blindly equated with the desire for mainstream exposure. However, it is important to understand how various industries and services are trying to capitalize on the idea that success is only to be measured by the reactions of the mainstream media. This notion will be discussed in the context of the analysis of the recommendations pertaining to the generation of popularity on the social networking.

Thirdly, when studying the mutation of cultural values, one must address the tension and dynamics that revolve around six specific types of binary concepts. The first binary relationship is the connection between mainstream and grassroots endeavors. Each case study is contextualized in the framework of mainstream industries and grassroots, do-it-yourself activities. How do these two different impulses counterbalance one another? Does the mainstream industry's involvement with the participatory media, as exemplified by the social networking sites, impact the careers of both signed and unsigned musicians?

The second binary thread that runs throughout the case studies is actuality vs. potentiality. To what extent is the commercial success trumpeted by the press magazines

directly caused by the social networking sites? Could some of the boosterist tendencies in the press be merely hype? As will be shown in each case study, numerous articles focus on musicians signing record contracts or gaining mass media exposure as a result of winning certain competitions. Yet, what are the ramifications of the “buzz” connected to a certain social networking site’s ability to promote new artists?

The third binary thread is commerce vs. creativity and its intersection with the idea of self-promotion. While self-promotion prior to the convergence era did not involve social networking sites, involvement with such sites today is a crucial necessity because it is a way in which to ascribe value to one's work. However, this effort could potentially decrease the amount of time musicians have to work on their skills and their music. Several descriptions of this tension will be presented in four of the case studies, particularly in the examination of Indabamusic’s Yo Yo Ma competition. The link between this binary relationship and cultural values is of pivotal significance to this study. As more emphasis is put on the aspect of self-promotion, what kind of cultural values emerge?

The fourth binary is the tension between competition and collaboration, or corporatism and community. While the growth of competitions on the social networking sites has been clearly explained above, the sites are also creating paradoxical tensions through their diverse activities. While collaboration is encouraged by the competitions, collaboration also occurs as a result of the competitions. For instance, in the Youtube and Indabamusic chapters, it will be clear that collaboration with established artists or bands entails musicians participating in competitions which simultaneously create divisions between the contestants. This also means that the community-like online

environments may encourage the growth of corporatism in which one's interest only lies in one goal: profit. These competitions often create a potential for profit, since the winners frequently are awarded with opportunities to record with famous artists. The ultimate implication is that as a winner, one might someday become famous and hopefully wealthy. Thus, the following questions can be asked: How do partnerships with major corporations affect cultural values? Since the social networking sites are driven by ranking, ratings, and competitions, how do the continuous judgment evaluations affect cultural values?

The fifth binary relates to individuality and collectivity. On social networking sites, in order to distinguish oneself, one needs to emphasize individuality, yet this can only happen as the result of relying on collectivity. In other words, to stand out, one must be connected to a large network of friends. Examples of this paradox will be discussed in the Myspace and Youtube chapters. Exploring the answers to the following questions will help clarify the relevant issues: Does constant contact with others via networking and self-promotion engender a certain type of value in our society? Are we, as individuals, becoming freer, or are we in fact being controlled by the protocols on the social networking sites?

Finally, the last type of binary tension involves empowerment vs. exploitation. To what extent is labor undertaken on the social networking sites a means to empower oneself as a musician or artist? To what degree can we describe internet activities as an exploitation of the free labor of fans and of musicians who participate in competitions? Through these six binaries, the research questions outlined above contribute to a fuller understanding of the complex mutation of cultural values.

Studying cultural values in the context of media convergence poses a complex challenge, but a select variety of systematic research methods was applied to this endeavor in order to document the cultural changes that have taken place. In this dissertation, value and its intersection with the related issues of popularity and aesthetic taste will be discussed in each chapter. When musicians become popular, they are often regarded as generating value for and in their work—values coincide with branding power, which directly impacts economic value. Popularity can also influence aesthetic values. Value in music can exist in more than one form. Depending on the type of value at issue, music can be perceived as either having high cultural aesthetics value or not. All of the aspects mentioned above pertain to the production of cultural values; however, this dissertation will take into account how such values are allocated in the context of the social networking sites, where both mainstream and grassroots activities take place and compete against one another.

It is important to keep in mind that the focal point of this study is not an analysis of aesthetics or a study of the creation of aesthetic standards. Each dissertation chapter focuses strongly on understanding the process of gaining popularity. While each chapter focuses on popularity at great length, the issues of values and aesthetics will be interwoven to varying degrees dictated by relevancy. When discussing the types of value that impact music (aesthetic, monetary, and popular), it is important to note that all of these arts-related values intersect with one another. In other words, several possible scenarios can influence music's relationship to aesthetic, monetary and popular values. The first possible scenario is the belief that popular music holds aesthetic value and high monetary value. The second possible scenario is that music is aesthetically valuable but

not popular, thereby yielding low monetary value. The third possible scenario is that music which holds aesthetic value can also be popular and rate high in monetary value. As these different values coincide they transformed into cultural value.

Each website case study will explore not just one aspect or dimension of the social networking experience, but will address a number of known aspects, including user experiences, expert recommendations on each social networking site (specifically those relevant to efforts to gain popularity), audience / participant / non-musician opinions about networking and artistic trends (for instance, bloggers who are paying close attention to social networking practices), and news articles about the development of the various social networking sites. Thus, convergence culture also brings together various media outlets that intersect and merge, promoting the growth of other types of media platforms, such as self-help print manuals for social networking sites.

The chronological order of the chapters in this dissertation are intentional, as I trace the most groundbreaking social networking sites in recent years and then analyze new and promising social networking sites in terms of their potential impact on the music community, as well as on the contemporary cultural landscape. After a literature review in Chapter Two, Chapter Three concentrates on Myspace, describing the evolution of social networking sites from their inception. The focus will be on the laboring practices of musicians, specifically their communication and branding methods. In addition, this chapter will explore how musicians increase value and popularity through self-promotion and fan labor. By analyzing the self-help books written by the experts, this chapter will underpin the social protocols on Myspace and their intersection with self-promotion and cultural intermediaries.

Chapter Four will analyze the laboring practices on Youtube and will attempt to explain the site's emerging norms of popularity, which are linked to laboring practices as well as various competitions. In this chapter, I will introduce various musicians who have become popular because of their use of Youtube. From these examples, it will become clear that both mainstream artists and unsigned musicians actively use Youtube as a way to build, as well as maintain popularity.

The fifth chapter, devoted to Secondlife, will shed light on the role played by live performances, thus introducing new constructs that have not yet been incorporated into the other social networking sites. By conducting virtual ethnography of second life music concert venues, I will show how musicians labor to interact with audiences. In addition, this chapter will also examine various tips given by experts and musicians as social protocols. This chapter will also show how the users of Secondlife ascribe values to musical performances on Secondlife by textual analysis and discourse analysis of websites devoted to Secondlife.

The sixth chapter on Indabamusic will reveal how social networking sites can also function as virtual recording studios, where people remix, produce, and collaborate on music through the use of a new technological tool called Console. In addition, it will present a study of various competitions, which provide opportunities for collaboration between site users and highly established artists.

All of these case studies converge, not just in terms of the discussion on popularity, aesthetic tastes, and cultural values, but also in terms of applications. Each social networking site relies on other social networking sites for promotion as well as exposure. For instance, the operations of Myspace and Youtube are not simply limited to

practices within their own social networking spheres. These two sites are often mentioned and viewed simultaneously through the mediation of other social networking practices and devices.

While each case study adds new insights and dimensions to the overall pursuit of understanding cultural values in the age of convergence culture, many musicians' social networking practices are exerted on all or some of the existing social networking sites. Thus, cohesion and unity will also be evinced as we learn in detail how musicians labor both singly and jointly on each one of these social networking sites by adopting and implementing unique sets of social protocols. While the familiar act of striving for popularity and aesthetic value is not unprecedented, a new hierarchy of values is emerging in the age of convergence culture.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

With the rise of the participatory media, critics and scholars alike have adopted one of two polemic stances: either they view the media's effect as empowering and democratic (Servaes, 1999; Jenkins, 2006), or they are critical of the interactivity occurring on the participatory media, believing it to be ultimately controlled by major corporations' advertising and marketing strategies or not always positive (Andrejevic, 2008; Barbrook, 2001; Keen, 2007). Although there are clearly two perspectives on the Do-It-Yourself (D-I-Y) movement, there are also various ways to view both voluntarism and free labor (Terranova, 2004). However, this dissertation's goal is not to side with either one of these views, but to explore gray areas where no single answer can be found, and to examine the trajectories of aesthetics, popularity, and cultural values.

In the first section of this chapter, I will provide an overview of the debate and the varying perspectives that pertain to the music industry in regards to the convergence of the major record labels and independent labels. By understanding the influence of the participatory media and the D-I-Y movement on the music industry, it will become clear that the binary optimism vs. pessimism discourse has no origin in the actual social networking medium; rather, the tensions have existed in the music industry since the inception of the independent labels. After reviewing literature pertaining to convergence culture in the music industry, I will explore how aesthetics and popularity can be problematized on social networking sites; this study will inform readers about the complexities surrounding the determination and assignment of values to cultural objects.

Because the four case studies conducted in this dissertation deal with social networking sites, an overview of the ontology of the social networking sites and their

common functions will be explained. Finally, in the last section, I will describe the research design and methodology employed in this dissertation.

### Problematizing the Participatory Media and the Do-It-Yourself Movement

The term participatory media was coined to refer to the media, such as social networking sites, that highlight the ability of the active audience to participate in the processes of making content. The celebratory outlook of the participatory media grounds its premises in the spirit of communication democratization (Vatikiotis, 2004, p. 12), while the critical view of Mark Andrejevic's (2007) work unveils the exploitive reality of interactivity in the participatory media. In this context, participatory media promote and encourage ordinary individuals as social agents, insofar as each person is responsible for causing a necessary change (Servaes, 1999).

As an early contributor to the notion of participatory media, Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1974) distinguishes the repressive use of media introduced by early mass communication from the emancipatory use of media, wherein interactivity between the producer and the audience occurs, thus promoting a kind of collectivism (p. 113). Finding impetus in Enzensberger's theory, Denis McQuail (2005) proposes the democratic participatory medium as a way for the "common" citizen to express his or her personal views and opinions (p. 131). Although participatory media purportedly rejects hegemonic control as exercised by media conglomerates, participatory media also stands apart from alternative media in that participatory media includes more than just vocal dissent. Participatory media works alongside media conglomerates to create contemporary cultural content. As Jenkins (2006) states, "sometimes corporate and grassroots convergence reinforce each other, creating closer, more rewarding relation

between media producers and consumers” (p. 18).

For some scholars, the advent of the internet has allowed for the participation of users as the creators of cultural content (Spirngel, 1999, p. 155; Currah, 2007, p. 469). In contrast, other scholars, such as Chris Atton (2001) and Jean Burgess (2006), question the effectiveness of these cultural productions as a political platform. For example, in his case study of personal websites, Atton asserts that these websites do not greatly impact the overall media culture nor do they influence personal taste formation. In a similar vein, Burgess (2006) argues that celebrating the internet user’s will to create and produce is insufficient to create actual change. On this note, she poses the following question: “who is heard, and to what end?” (p. 203).

While some scholars are skeptical of the effects of the grassroots media, Jenkins’s (2003) work on fandom clearly supports arguments for the positive effect of participatory media: “Fan culture... represents a participatory culture through which fans explore and question the ideologies of mass culture, speaking from a position sometimes inside and sometimes outside the cultural logic of commercial entertainment” (p. 288). The effects of fandom are apparent in light of fandom’s reconfiguration of the dynamics between the mainstream and the grassroots media. In “Digital cinema, media convergence, and participatory culture,” Jenkins (2003) points out that the internet is able to grant exposure to a variety of voices, expressions, and creativity, while also fostering the potential to subvert mainstream media contents.

On a contradictory note, Mark Andrejevic’s book *I spy: Surveillance and power in the interactive era* (2007) illustrates a critical dimension in the landscape of media convergence. Whereas John Pavlik (2001) views interactivity between different forms of

journalism media as offering “the online audience a more textured and engaging experience and potentially a much fuller understanding of the subtleties and nuances of stories being reported from around the world” (p. 32), Andrejevic argues that “interactivity” has been used as a way to control and manipulate consumers in the current media culture. He contends that although the involvement of numerous users may seem empowering, upon closer investigation, control and surveillance usually accompany the more developed technologies. Andrejevic states that the type of participation that occurs in the interactive era is “a form of manipulation insofar as it is passed off as a form of democratic empowerment” (p. 244). The reason for this is due to the asymmetrical nature of commercial interactivity: “the decisions and actions of corporate entities remain opaque—private—even as consumers are rendered increasingly transparent to marketers and advertisers” (p. 257). Andrejevic’s account of interactivity is an alarming wake-up call rather than a celebration of diversity and democratization.

#### Major Record Label vs. Independent Record Label

Since Jenkins’s notion of convergence assumes the merging of mainstream and grassroots cultures, how does one distinguish mainstream music from grassroots efforts? Obviously, an immediate distinction can be made when one considers how the music is produced. Major record labels have many resources, while independent entities are more limited in scope. Moreover, there are other intrinsic differences that characterize the construction of major record label markets.

Both popular music studies scholarship and music industry magazines have problematized various aspects of the production and consumption practices of music (Frith, 1996; Frith, 2001; Negus, 1999; Hirsh, 1970; Hesmondhalgh & Toynbee, 2002;

Hiatt, 2006; Hiatt, 2007; Hesmondhalgh, 1997 and Burnett, 1996). One of the prominent characteristics of the popular music industry is its focus on the aspect of prediction. Frith (1996) in “Popular music industry” describes the care taken by the recording industry to carefully research all aspects of the products that will be consumed by listeners and viewers. He explains that there are two devices that the recording industry relies on for determination of popular taste. The first one is the “star system.” By “star,” Frith means “musicians whose past sales successes are taken to guarantee their future sales successes” (p. 35). He adds that the making of a star is a higher priority for the recording industry than mere record sales. The second industry device utilizes “genre labels.” By strictly sticking to an established genre, the recording industry relies on a steady market composed of consumers who share similar tastes in music.

In *Music genres and corporate culture*, Negus (1999) also echoes the point mentioned above by Frith by describing the predictable nature of the mainstream music industry:

markets are not simply out there in the world, forming as members of the public gravitate towards certain recordings and not others. Market has to be carefully constructed and maintained; a process requiring investment in staff and systems for monitoring and researching the purchase and use of recordings. (p. 32)

Negus carefully describes the operation of major record companies. For example, he points out how major record companies are disinclined to take risks. David Laing (2003) borrows this idea of the “construction of market” and explains the three strategies that the markets utilize. The first strategy is the “portfolio approach.” In this approach, a record company promotes a varied range of recordings with the expectation that some of the recordings will be successful. The second strategy involves research into the consumers’

proclivities and behavior. The third strategy is to “influence the various gatekeepers or intermediaries perceived to be influential in consumer decisions” (Laing, p. 313). This category of individuals includes broadcasting executives, journalists, and disc jockeys.

Furthermore, Laing asserts that since the 1990s, groups interested in radical marketing tactics, called “street teams,” have targeted the opinion formers and tastemakers within the audiences. This tactic strategy is consistently employed by large corporations, such as Sony, Warner, BMG, Universal, and EMI. The three strategies described here reveal that the recording industry places an enormous emphasis on audiences’ tastes and penchants as indicators of the potential success of the market. To this extent, although there may only be a limited number of decision makers in the record industry, the end goal is to understand how mass audiences will react to their decisions.

The popular recording industry, however, did not remain static in the methods it employed. In the 1990s, the music industry shifted its focus. Robert Burnett (1996) noted that “the 1990s will see the industry move away from the selling of products to concentrate on the selling of musical rights and the collecting of royalties” (p. 46). He also reported on a pivotal change occurring in the international music industry. Not only were music industries still interested in pleasing large numbers of audience members, they were now beginning to merge with many different entertainment companies and record labels, resulting in the creation of a large-scale buying and selling process. This merger also involved a new type of entity: the independent record labels.

### The Evolution of Independent Records

Roy Shuker (2008) defines independent labels as “small record labels that are independent of majors (at least in terms of the artist acquisition, recording, and

promotion), though still reliant on a major for distribution and more extensive marketing” (p. 21). This statement implies that the operation of the independent labels is not clearly demarcated from that of the major labels. Secondly, the quote also notes that the term “independent” is, to a certain extent, arbitrary because independent labels can merge with major record labels.

In “Re-examining the concept of the ‘independent’ record company: the case of Wax Trax! Records,” Stephen Lee (1995) problematizes the very definition of independent by conducting a case study of Wax Trax! Records. He questions how the notion of independents has evolved throughout the history of the recording industry. In this article, important themes emerge which underpin the mutable and evolving nature of the independent labels. For instance, Lee argues that independent labels have often forged partnerships with major labels to expand their distribution outlets, while major labels have used the labeling and ideology of independent labels as a new marketing strategy. From these observations, it can be concluded that the independent labels do not remain static: either they struggle financially and file for bankruptcy, or they eventually merge with major record labels, or they become successful, but only in terms of maintaining the ideology of the independent paradigm, not in terms of finance. The report that “over the past ten years the majors have systematically purchased all of the larger independent record companies operating in the USA” (Lee, 1995, p. 16), clearly indicates the harsh realities for independent record labels.

David Hesmondhalgh (1998) also analyzes the claim that British dance music stands as an alternative to mainstream music industry. He explains that while two defining characteristics of mainstream record labels are concentration and centralization,

independent record labels are decentralized with many small companies taking part in the larger industry. Despite this sharp difference, Hesmondhalgh also does not think that the independent recording industry operates in a purely independent manner. In Great Britain, dance music relies on the mainstream record industry in terms of crossover hits and compilation albums. In addition, independent labels also work alongside mainstream record labels through the creation of partnerships. Independent music labels also face the pressure of branding for recognition's sake, just like the mainstream major labels. These findings point us back to Jenkins's notion of convergence culture, which highlights the overlap between top-down mainstream media and bottom-up grassroots media.

Another example that directly invokes the connection between independent record labels and major record labels is illustrated in Hesmondhalgh's (1999) article "Indie: the institutional politics and aesthetics of a popular music genre." He states that "indie is a contemporary genre which has its roots in punk's institutional and aesthetic challenge to the popular music industry but which, in the 1990s, has become a part of the 'mainstream' of British pop" (p. 34). Independent labels are characterized by an ongoing state of flux. At the heart of this transformation is the tension that exists between mainstream record labels and independent record labels. As the earlier example indicates, independent and mainstream record labels have an almost symbiotic relationship.

Hesmondhalgh's article includes a case study of two independent British labels, "Creation" and "One Little Indian." Hesmondhalgh poses two important questions in this article: 1) "What forces lie behind the move of such alternative independents towards professionalization, and towards partnership / collaboration with institutions which these

companies had previously defined themselves strongly and explicitly against?” 2) “In terms of institutional and aesthetic politics, what losses and gains are involved in the move towards such professionalization and corporate partnership / collaboration?” (p. 35-36). These two questions directly relate to the focus of this dissertation, as the answers to these inquiries not only shed light on the processes propelling the convergence of independent record labels with the major record labels, but also reveal what is being lost and gained in terms of aesthetics. How does the convergence of two differing ideologies shape new values and aesthetics? Do they yield new values and aesthetics, or are the results merely a consequence of surrendering to the ideology of major record labels? Hesmondhalgh argues that it is all too easy to simplify the gains and losses of this process. While it may be tempting to portray convergence as the result of independent record labels “selling out” their principles, much more complex issues underlie the process.

Hesmondhalgh provides an historical overview of the post-punk scene in Britain in the 1980s. In doing so, he captures how indie labels began to form out of the dissipating post-punk genre. He explains that indie labels faced new problems as they gained popularity in the mainstream culture. Citing Georgina Born’s work, Hesmondhalgh mentions a crucial point, which is central to this dissertation: he describes the complex and manifold definitions of popularity. Although indie bands have attained popularity, this does not mean that they have “sold out” or that they lack aesthetic values:

popularity, in this model, is not a ‘sell-out’ but derives from fundamental but contradictory human drives. Alterity too has its positive and negative aspects: the exploration of the ‘exotic or complex, as opposed to the banal.’ But also the denigration of the ordinary, and the idealization of the different. (p. 52)

While indie bands strive for difference and alterity in aesthetic sounds, when they form partnerships with the mainstream institutions, what do they gain and lose?

Despite punk music's goal of maintaining autonomy and independence from the mainstream may have been altered, Hesmondhalgh explains that in the case of the indie label Creation, "aesthetic position helped to form its institutional politics, rather than the other way round. This reverses the way in which often-noted moves from a (contradictory) oppositional politics towards something more conformist and conservative are explained 'within' popular culture" (p. 56). This statement challenges the negative criticism targeted at various entities for altering or influencing the aesthetic content of indie music. It is important to be cautious of making an assumption that is one-sided and simplistic. Thus, in the merging of indie and major record labels, the aesthetic consequences are not clear-cut.

While the boundary between independent and major labels has been described above as somewhat vague, Robert Strachan (2007) in "Micro-independent record labels in the UK: Discourse, DIY cultural production and the music industry," presents a slightly different perspective, one that reinforces the division that exists between independent and major labels and between art and commerce. Strachan (2007) argues that the discourse on art and commerce "continues to hold power [since] they actively affect a variety of musical practices, are constantly negotiated across a number of musical cultures and continue to resonate with small-scale cultural practitioner and popular music consumers" (p. 249).

Strachan contends that while many independent labels may have merged with major labels, some independent labels continue to insist on their distinctness, and

purposefully distance themselves from major labels, regarding them as a corrupted industry. Thus, the refusal to merge with major record labels becomes a political act rooted in an ideology purportedly opposed to capitalism and corporatism. Strachan further concludes that although small independent labels may not hold as much power as major labels in terms of scale, the independent label owners' "critique of the power relationships of cultural production is significant at a discursive level" (p. 261). In other words, although independent labels may not be able to become greatly successful, their continuing existence matters in the overall scheme of the cultural industry. The small labels may be marginalized as a result of refusing to merge with major labels, however, there is power posited in that marginality.

#### The Digitalization and Record Labels: A Case Study on Radiohead

The point made above intersects with an interesting case of one major band, Radiohead, which intentionally canceled its contract with a major label in order to become independent. In "Radiohead's managerial creativity," Guy Morrow (2009) explores the trajectories of Radiohead's career. Morrow mainly focuses on how Radiohead has continued to succeed, even after the band terminated its record contract with EMI Records. The author argues that the band's success is mainly due to its tight relationship with its management and its utilization of an online infrastructure. By relying on Myspace, Youtube, and the band website, Radiohead has come up with a method of "marketing converging with distribution" (p. 167). In other words, the band members use the social networking sites as a marketing platform, a place where consumers and fans can buy albums. Even though Radiohead has allowed listeners to set prices on their albums, Morrow notes that being able to download music for free "did not

so much devalue the music as a ‘product,’ rather it further facilitated the role that radio has played in music marketing processes in the past” (p. 167).

It can be argued that Radiohead’s success is strongly based in its past relationship with EMI. Without receiving wide exposure, the band may not have ever gained such a large fan-base, an outcome that may not have come to be if Radiohead had to build its success without the benefits of a major label. While Radiohead’s brand may have already been in place prior to the decision to go independent, from this case study, it is clear that the direction of convergence does not necessarily entail moving from independent labels to major labels. The trend may also take the form of leaving major labels in favor of independent labels. This illustrates that convergence can happen in both directions. However most importantly, Radiohead’s decision to go independent is intricately tied to the digital revolution, namely the creation of social networking sites where they can directly communicate to their fans. In the context of this example, it is important to understand that although the digital revolution in music took place prior to the appearance of the social networking sites, with the rise of the sites, mobility between the categories of major, independent, and unsigned has become efficient and common. One should not assume, though, that the social networking sites are the only cause and impetus for these mergers; partnerships between independent and major record labels first began in the 1990s.

#### Musicians’ Activities Prior to Social Networking Era

In *Facing the music: A pantheon guide to popular culture*, Frith (1988) notes that the old model of the music profession was based on a pyramid. (the use of the words “old” and “new” are arbitrary, as they are always contingent to the period in which each

writer lives.) Thus, while keeping in mind that the adjective “old” is of limited usefulness, a brief history of how musicians gained popularity and fame in the past should be presented for comparison's sake. According to Frith, there are two common ways in which popular musicians seek success. The first one is illustrated by the diagram of a pyramid, which signifies the process of working from the bottom up. This model starts with hard work and determination-- one must put in much practice to hone one's skills: “the position at the top of pyramid is justified because they have *paid their dues* on their way up it” (Frith, 1989, p. 112). Each rung of the ladder possesses “a different set of gatekeepers” or cultural intermediaries (p. 112). Frith notes that musicians achieve success when they interact with audiences, and when they are ultimately aided by record companies, promoters, and press and radio outlets (p. 112). Frith argues that once success is achieved, “stardom in this model is permanent” (p. 112). In this model, hard work and talent will be rewarded in the end thanks to the combination of the right type of cultural intermediaries and loyal audience members. Yet, Frith notes that “this is an ideological account of success,” meaning that the model follows a particular sequence of protocols (p.112). This kind of success is not linked to luck, thereby implying that success is achievable and fame is acquirable only if one works hard at it.

The second model that Frith mentions is “the talent pool” (p. 112). Here, contrary to the earlier model of success, musicians can acquire success by sheer luck: “the process is, from both the musicians’ and audience’s point of view, essentially *irrational*” (p. 113). Frith notes that “the ‘creative’ role in this pop scheme is assigned to the packagers, to record producers, clothes designers, magazine editors, etc.; they are the ‘authors’ of success, the intelligence of the system” (p. 113). In other words, regardless of one's

talent or hard work, one's stardom is almost random in nature: "who gets selected for success seems a matter of chance and quirk, a lottery, and success itself is fragmented, unearned and impermanent" (p. 113). The key difference between the earlier model and this model is the relationship between the performer and audience members; in the latter model, this relationship is mediated by the advertisers and marketers. No close, genuine proximity exists between the audience and the performers, a proximity that can heighten the authenticity that matters significantly in the music business.

As described by Frith, these two models for success in the music business are crucial as they intersect with one another in the social networking sites. While there is an aspect of "working hard" as in the first model, there is also a strong emphasis on the crucial role played by advertising. The mediating event is, however, no longer the advertising and promotion done by the major record labels; now the act of mediation is often done by the musicians themselves.

Another analysis of the intersection between the musicians' laboring practices and the achieving of success is presented in Sara Cohen's book *Rock culture in Liverpool: Popular music in the making* (1991). In this publication, Cohen focuses on the musicians' dependency on the record labels and their marketing teams in the generation of success. She comments on the motto, "the more you can work together as a democratic body, the more we can help you" (p. 41). The emphasis in this context was placed on working together cooperatively. This trend is changing in the social networking site context, as the competitions become more fierce and self-worth and promotion are pursued independently. The aspects of community and working together come into play when an artist must rely on the mass networks to achieve popularity.

Despite the new internet context, one should not presume that the idea of “self” as a commodity did not exist prior to the inception of the social networking sites. While the “star system” is what made the music industry so profitable and predictable, promotion is the key difference between the past and the social networking era. According to Frith (1981), live performance required the involvement of two or more “gatekeepers,” which were usually “agents and the promoters.” (p. 136). Although agents and promoters continue to play active roles even today, the social networking sites are now starting to function as agents and promoters. To some extent, it is not an exaggeration to say that the social networking sites are slowly replacing the role of promoters and agents; for this reason, laboring and self-promotion on the social networking sites are fierce and competitive. As the subsequent chapters will indicate, the star system on the social networks is often based on the individual’s efforts at promotion and marketing.

While some laboring practices are consistently important, such as the promotion and acquiring of star power by the record labels, the methods utilized to achieve this end are beginning to shift. As older methodologies begin to crumble and take new forms, we should begin to question the conceptual shifts related to the mutation of popularity and aesthetic taste. Do the physical and concrete changes to music business affect popularity and aesthetic tastes in convergence culture? If so, how? What theoretical frameworks must be applied to fully underpin the ongoing mutations?

### Aesthetics and Popularity in Convergence Culture

In examining the emerging norms of popularity on social networking sites, aesthetics is an issue that should not be ignored or dismissed. Often times in problematizing popularity, the notion of aesthetic value is discussed, echoing Theodor

Adorno's critique of mass culture and popular music (2001). Adorno's notion of popularity is currently viewed as problematic because he fails to appreciate that popularity can be a possible component in aesthetics. "What Adorno offers is not a judgment of taste but a theory concerning the moral and political projects inherent in both 'serious' and 'popular' art" (Witkin, 2003, p. 1). Although Adorno's notion of popularity has been troublesome in that respect, his conceptualization of popularity is pertinent to fully understanding the emerging norms of popularity.

In a similar fashion, Bourdieu (1984) demarcates "popular aesthetics" from "pure aesthetics," adopting the position that popular aesthetics are anti-Kantian which is repudiating a universal outlook on aesthetic tastes (p. 41). The intersection between Adorno and Bourdieu lies in their distinction of "banal" popular elements from the good morals in "pure" aesthetics. According to Bourdieu, "the pure aesthetic is rooted in an ethic, or rather, an ethos of elective distance from the necessities of the natural and social world, which may take the form of moral agnosticism..." (p. 5). For Bourdieu, the high quality - low quality debate has a clear definition and is conditioned upon socioeconomic status. As Elana Shefrin (2004) observes, Bourdieu's theorization of social class in relation to aesthetic tastes is problematic, for he does not recognize that all people have access to "bourgeois" aesthetics, which are only consumed by working class people according to Bourdieu (p. 264). As Raymond Williams (1962) aptly notes, "most of us do not live in these neatly separated worlds" (p. 48). The problematic aspect of Bourdieu's demarcation comes not only from the consumer's end, but also from the producer's. Artists can come from a proletarian background and still produce "pure" aesthetics. The class divide here does not function as a measure by which to distinguish

taste issues.

For John Fiske (1989), aesthetics do not intersect with the realm of popularity. In his perspective, the popular is the antithesis of the aesthetic: “aesthetic judgments are anti-popular—they deny the multiplicity of readings and the multiplicity of functions that the same text can perform as it is moved through different allegiances within the social order” (p. 130). Fiske’s view of aesthetics is separated from popular culture in that aesthetics does not have plural definitions: “the aesthetic centers its values in the textual structure and thus ignores these social pertinences through which text and everyday life are interconnected” (p. 130). Fiske views aesthetics as being divorced from everyday life and possessing an immutable characteristic: “the aesthetic denies the transience of popular art” (p. 130). Moreover, Fiske states that aesthetics are allied with specificities of meanings and rules: “[aesthetics] requires the critic-priest to control the meanings and responses to the text, and thus requires formal educational processes by which people are taught how to appreciate ‘great’ art” (p. 130).

Fiske’s understanding of popularity stands in opposition to traditional aesthetics, however this dichotomy is not applicable to the context of social networking sites, where at any moment, any musical composition has the potential of gaining popularity. In short, what we are seeing is a popularization of aesthetic judgment. With this in mind, how do we develop a new perception of popularity? Hall (1981) in “Notes on deconstructing ‘the popular’,” presents several different interpretations of popularity. The most pragmatic meaning relates to the market and commercial endeavors: “the things which are said to be popular because masses of people listen to them, buy them, read them, and seem to enjoy to the full” (p. 446). Hall notes that this definition is “quite

rightly associated with the manipulation and debasement of the culture of the people” (p. 446). Yet, Hall finds this definition problematic as it blindly assumes a passive audience base.

The second type of popularity that Hall describes is the one linked to alternative cultures, “the authentic ‘popular culture’” (p. 447). Hall explains that while this may seemingly replace the earlier definition with a type of valorization, “it neglects the absolutely essential relation of cultural power – of domination and subordination—which is an intrinsic feature of cultural relations” (p. 447). In arguing the shortcoming of this outlook, Hall states that no popular culture can exist “outside the field of the force of cultural power and domination” (p. 447). While problematizing the first two types of popularity, Hall prefers a third definition of popularity:

in any particular period, at those forms and activities which have their roots in the social and material conditions of particular classes; which have been embodied in popular traditions and practices... what is essential to the definition of popular culture is the relations which define ‘popular culture’ in a continuing tension [...] to the dominant culture. (p. 449)

The third definition of popularity is the one that justifies the aim of this dissertation because it focuses on the need to capture the transient definition of popularity, which exists in between the top-down and bottom-up forces of power. Hall also mentions that this conception of popularity is treated as “a process: the process by means of which some things are actively preferred so that others can be dethroned” (p. 449). Thus, popularity is a notion that is in continuum with the passage of time, always contentious and amorphous. Hall’s analysis thus provides a clear framework within which popularity can be interpreted and problematized. In light of his conceptualization of popularity,

where tensions exist between dominance and subordiance, this dissertation will strive to discover whether his definitions change in the context of convergence culture. Does the actual meaning of popularity remain the same or mutate in the digital era? In addition, I will be examining how the hegemonic struggle between dominance and subordiance is contextualized in convergence culture.

In convergence culture, aesthetic concerns can be problematized in three distinctive ways. Firstly, the issue of aesthetics can be raised when revisiting the old concept of equating aesthetic quality with non-popular music. On social networking sites, the notion of “popular music” is challenged as popular music studies often focus on highly celebrated musical genres, such as rock, hip-hop, punk, and pop. Various popular music scholars, such as Larry Grossberg, Steve Jones, Keith Negus, Theodore Gracyk, Robert Burnett, David Hesmondhalgh and Simon Frith, have evaluated the value of popular music, some even arguing for the existence of high aesthetic values in popular music. However, on social networking sites, how does one analyze any music that becomes popular? Should it be defined in terms of genre or popularity? If popular music is defined solely by its popularity, (as in the numbers of sales and charts) does the issue of aesthetics pose any problems?

### Popularity, Values, and Cultural Values

What kind of cultural values does convergence culture create? Are they new or old, or are they a combination of both new and old issues? In order to address this question, it is important to unpack the terms “culture” and “values,” and to adopt a unifying definition for “cultural value.”

Raymond Williams (1995 [1961]) in “The analysis of culture,” discusses three distinctive ways that one can analyze culture, and depending on one’s focus, the values are different. In referring to the first definition of culture, Williams describes an idealized culture: “culture is in a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal value” (p. 48). Secondly, a study can be approached as a “documentary in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work” (p. 48). In this view of culture, the value is put on the “activity of criticism, by which the nature of thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention in which these are active” (p. 48). The third approach to culture is linked to the “social definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values are not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior” (p. 48).

Depending on which conception of culture one adopts, cultural values are interpreted differently. For instance, if the first definition of culture were utilized, the outcome of this dissertation would be very different, because of the ultimate stress would be put on universal truth, beauty, and goodness; often this is how aesthetics is conceived in the traditional sense. However, this dissertation is contextualized in a particular culture, thus the third definition of culture describes convergence culture most closely. To this extent, I am interested in cultural values that spring from a certain period of time in which people practice a particular way of life. The description of this time and the particular practices of people is how I will contextualize culture.

The notion of value can be approached via numerous definitions, just as is the case with the concept of culture. To mitigate possible confusion, I will clearly describe

to what extent I am discussing values, and moreover, explain how the various case studies of social networking sites will contribute to the overall construction of cultural values. To begin, I will focus on Wilfred Dolfsma's (1999) differentiation between value and values:

I would like to use the expression VALUE to denote strong underlying socio-cultural convictions many people in a group of in society hold, most of which would be considered of an ethical or philosophical nature. These include matters of justice, beauty, love, freedom of will, social standing and behavior, and personal identity. The VALUES expressed in an institutional setting are likely to change over time. Values, on the other hand, are the terms of trade/exchange established in society for specific goods or services. A value need not be a price—it can be the importance attached to having (a) close friend(s) or children. (p. 48)

To this extent, values are mutable and attached to individual and personalized components. Dolfsma's work is important in the context of this study because he examines how individual inclination for popular music is reflected in values: "showing a liking for the music of Bill Haley, for instance, expresses one's underlying VALUES of wanting to be independent from others [...] trying to find one's own way, experimenting, wanting to express and enjoy yourself, etc." (p. 51). This aspect is important in terms of distinguishing how mainstream values and grassroots values are negotiated on social networking sites, as musicians labor to gain popularity.

At this point, how do we come to a conclusive definition of cultural values?

In *Cultural studies and cultural values*, Frow (1995) addresses this issue in regards to cultural values in the advanced capitalist world. Frow's notion of cultural values needs to be clarified: "I am not interested in any return to treating it as a problem in aesthetics, nor in dissociating it from its intrication in an industrialized system of aesthetic production" (p. 4). Frow takes the concept of value as a site of social struggle

and then extends his examination to the political implications. As a driving force for his work, Bourdieu's work on *Distinction* was reintroduced and problematized. Frow disputed Bourdieu's theoretical arguments as outlined in this publication: 1) "relation between class and culture"; 2) "initial rejection of aestheticizing conceptions of value"; 3) "the relation between the position from which descriptions of value systems are generated, and the content of those value systems" (p. 5-6).

Frow, thus, offers an extended explanation of what he calls "regimes of values": "regimes of value are mechanisms that permit the construction and regulation of value-equivalence, and indeed permit cross-cultural mediation" (p. 144). More specifically, "every act of ascribing value is specific to the particular regime that organizes it" (p. 145). Frow's argument is integral to this dissertation for a few reasons. Firstly, Frow critiques Bourdieu's nebulous characterization of class hierarchy and its relationship to taste, in addition to the definition of aesthetics as the sole factor in determining values. Secondly, Frow's concept of regimes is important to the current endeavor because it argues against the inherent meaning of certain values attached to universalism:

The concept of regime expresses one of the fundamental theses of work in cultural studies: that no object, no text, no cultural practice has an intrinsic or necessary meaning or value or function; and that meaning, value, and function are always the effect of specific (and changing, changeable) social relations and mechanism of signification. (p. 145)

In short, values are constructed by specific contexts, and they are not fixed but mutable. The asignifying nature of regime work relates to "protocols": "as the composition of this [in referring to institutions] network, together with the protocols and criteria by which value is articulated, vary historically so too do the particular functions performed by 'high' culture" (Frow, 1995, p. 146). What this means is that the construction of values

depends on the protocols that one adapts and learns. All individuals learn various social protocols, which differ according to historical time period; people have always socialized, yet with the rise of social networking sites, the way in which people socialize and network is different. There are so-called “norms” that only pertain to social networking cultures; similarly, this allows the experts to spell out protocols within particular social networking sites.

This idea of new sets of protocols intersects with regimes as they both operate independently of any particular ideologies or institutions. They both are formed in a direct context of a certain setting, time, and environment. Values are thus formed within these discursive spaces; this consequently demolishes universalism and high-class affiliations of high-culture values. As a whole, applying Frow’s theory of regimes of values provides a suitable technique for one to understand the values that are generated by social networking music cultures.

Thus, the discussion of cultural values will address and problematize newly emerging issues that are attached to the rise of social networking sites, and the analysis will eventually conceptualize the process of emerging normative and naturalized cultural values. This section will also review the literature pertaining to the social networking sites. By studying the ontology of and other various issues linked to the social networking sites, we can conceptualize the emerging norms of popularity and cultural values in a clear way.

### Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are the focus of many scholars today, especially those in the field of new media and computer-mediated communication. Barry Wellman’s works

have long been on the leading edge of this research. Wellman applies social networking analysis to issues pertaining to the global village and its impact on community and personal relations (1999a, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; Kennedy and Wellman, 2007).

Wellman's application of social network analysis indicates a much wider and richer aspect than the mere examination of the obvious networking that happens on social networking sites.

The most important contribution in Wellman's work is the idea that "life is a network" (Wellman, 1998, p. 1). Instead of viewing each group as a dualistic form of group vs. non-group, a social network analysis of any type of relationship can reveal dimensions frequently neglected in a group analysis:

...researchers can bring to bear in their analysis a set of structural variables, such as the density and clustering of a network, how tightly it is bounded, and whether it is diversified or constricted in its size and heterogeneity, how narrowly specialized or broadly multiplex are its relationships and how indirect connections and positions in social networks affect behavior. (p. 1)

The intricacy of each relationship is formed with what Wellman calls a set of "nodes" and "ties." Nodes are not necessarily individualized in their structure, since they can also be organizations or states, and the word "ties" refers to the connections between each node.

Wellman further extends the analysis of social networks to the online setting. From his studies of online relationships between users, he developed the notion of networked individualism in which the idea of the individual becomes further complicated through the rise of social networking culture (1997, 1999b, 1999c, 2002, 2003; Wellman & Hogan 2004c). The significance of this contribution is evident in the manner in which we view the recent development of social networking sites. Wellman argues that

individuals have abandoned their isolationism and become “networked individuals.”

This claim propels the following question: how do networked individuals undertake the task of social networking in order to market and promote their cultural commodities?

Recent scholarship has explored the social and cultural ramifications of participating in social networking sites (Garcelon, 2006; Liu, 2008; Lange, 2008; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, Walter, 2008; Miller, 2008; Morrow, 2009; Utz, 2009; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Byrne, 2008; Hargittai, 2008). Boyd and Ellison (2008) explicate the meaning of social networking sites as web-based services that provide multiple functions for users, who can

(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (p. 211)

Boyd and Ellison further explain the characteristics of social networking sites as places where individuals can enhance and strengthen already existing relationships established in real life, as well as network with new groups of people.

David Beer (2008) problematizes boyd and Ellison’s analysis of networking sites because it allows for multiple interpretations: “it is intended to do too much of the analytical work, and therefore makes a differentiated typology of these various user-generated web applications more problematic” (p. 519). Social networking sites have become harder to define and explicate, thereby resulting in a growing complexity in defining the ontology. My definition of social networking sites is not limited to networking done by users who have already befriended other users in real life. Rather, my perspective encompasses both real-life contact and first-time web-based contact,

which is necessitated by the following fact.

On social networking sites that focus on cultural production, the overarching goal is to not only strengthen the ties that already exist but also to develop new ties; thus, the key is to network with everyone who may be interested in consuming, engaging or participating in one's artistic works. However, this is not to say that all social networking sites focus on the making of new acquaintances. For instance, Facebook and LinkedIn function as a way to foster already existing ties. Although anyone can add any other user to their contact group, the core activities of these social networking sites are based on re-establishing and promoting older relationships. Mylife.com also emphasizes such personal and historic ties, whereas familyreunion.com is specifically geared toward finding lost family members.

While the cultural meaning of social networking sites can be contentious, the body of research into the social networking sites sheds light on the issues tied to identity construction, self-expression, and the display of personal taste (boyd and Heer, 2006; Liu, 2008; Livingstone, 2008). Hugo Liu (2008) in "Social network profiles as taste performances" presents his extensive research into how profiles on Myspace can function as taste indicators, where users display their interests in music, movies, television shows, books, etc. Liu argues that the listing of various interests in such profiles may more accurately reveal one's aesthetic tastes in comparison to other kinds of reports related to personal likes and dislikes. In a similar vein, Sonia Livingstone (2008) examines how transitions occur amongst different teenage groups. Younger teenagers often show tendencies to decorate their profile pages in a highly stylish manner, while older teenagers are more interested in pursuing intimate friendships and focus less on the

design of their pages.

From these studies, the central idea seems to be linked to the manner in which one desires to be perceived by others in the network; this perception is directly related to the pursuit of a certain social status. Nicole Ellison, Charles Steinfield, and Cliff Lampe (2007) examine Facebook's function as a way to maintain or create social capital. These scholars note that although Facebook may allow college students to keep in touch with acquaintances with whom they may not be very close, the site does not necessarily strengthen weak ties or maintain the existing strong ties. There have, nonetheless, been some reports of benefits, such as aiding college students in gaining more self-esteem or in acquiring information through the active use of Facebook contacts. In addition to these research studies into the social ramifications and implications of using Facebook, the issue of privacy has also become a growing interest among researchers (Lewis, Kaufman and Cristakis, 2008; boyd, 2008).

As the growing body of scholarship on social networking sites indicates, the sites have become a pivotal tool wherein users exhibit who they are, who they want to become, and also how they want to be perceived. All of these point to an interesting phenomenon that the social networking sites have engendered: a new culture of self-promotion, self-exhibition, and self-branding. Although social networking sites can be used for a specific purpose, such as a political campaign (Utz, 2009), by and large, the sites have motivated the commodification of self. Hearn (2008) argues that as numerous people attempt to brand themselves on the social networking sites, they "illustrate the erosion of any meaningful distinction between notions of the self and capitalist processes of production and consumption" (p. 197). Furthermore, on a smaller scale, Hearn

maintains that the ultimate aim of such branding is to look popular: “collecting or acquiring as many friends as possible seems to be a central goal” on both Myspace and Facebook (p. 211).

With this in mind, how can one relate the discussion of aesthetics, popularity, and cultural values to the world of social networking sites? Unlike the other media that are available today, social networking sites are platforms where the issues of aesthetics, popularity and values are intensified and complicated. One unique aspect of social networking sites is the blurring of the many dichotomous relationships that often exist in the mainstream media. The five types of dichotomies described below illustrate how the notions of aesthetics, popularity, and values can be enriched by a study of the characteristics of the social networking sites.

Firstly, there is no strict demarcation between the creator and the audience. The audience and fans can interchange their functions. There is no single role that users must adopt on social networking sites. On websites solely devoted to creators, such as Indabamusic, each user is simultaneously an audience member and a creator. This situation results in the possibility of generating critiques of artistic productions, since the feedback functions as a professional peer review. In addition, sites like this can also create supportive environments for those who share a common passion for creating. Furthermore, popularity gained here may not be precisely equivalent to other social networking sites that are open to non-creators as well.

Secondly, the labels “professional” and “amateur” are somewhat nebulous. Traditionally a professional musician was one who made a profit and a living by selling or performing music. In the past, this was made possible through the affiliation of a

major record label, because without a corporation's support, it was hard for musicians to make a living. However, with the ubiquity of social networking sites today, another type of professional category has emerged, which involves earning a living by having one's own record label or selling music on social networking sites. To this end, the categories of professional and amateur are not strictly separated. The binary arrangement of professionalism vs. amateurism also relates to the designations of producer and consumer. All musicians involved with the social networking sites can sell their music while simultaneously being consumers of other musicians' music. When the strict demarcations between audience and creator and between professional and amateur no longer exist, anyone can contribute labor to the creation of others' cultural capital; to this end, it is possible to promote intense competition and to thereby gain more legitimacy and value for one's work.

Thirdly, the division between high art and low art is also unclear. In years past, the mass media-produced arts were accessible to the public, whereas high art often existed in a niche market. With the proliferation of mass media outlets, high art was not associated with popularity but with a smaller coterie of followers. On social networking sites such as Myspace, Adorno's conception of "high arts" coexists with mass-produced popular and commercial arts. Many profiles have been created to honor the greatest composers that have ever lived, including the modern composers of today. The popularity of both classical music and popular trends is evident on these websites. This aspect justifies the premise that a strict divide between aesthetics and popularity does not exist on social networking sites.

Fourthly, the dichotomy between underground culture and mainstream culture is

blurred. On social networking sites, it is difficult to detect the line between these two cultures. A person can hardly escape exposure to the various genres of music when he or she is participating in a social network. In addition, the notion of underground and mainstream cultures is negated to a certain extent because all users entering the social networking sites are in the same “place.” Physical proximity is no longer a factor bound to the concepts of underground and mainstream culture.

Fifthly, the dichotomies between actual vs. virtual performances and live vs. mediated performances deserve attention while pointing out the similarity between the two. On social networking sites, musicians’ laboring practices involve performing live online. Besides networking with other musicians and fans, how do musicians labor affectively through the act of performance? Although performing to a virtual audience was not possible until recent times, such environments are created on social networking sites, such as Secondlife.com and Vles.com. In this context, it is important to rethink the traditional concept of live performances. Live performances are often linked with the issue of authenticity; live performance traditionally functioned as a means to legitimize one’s status as a performer (Auslander, 1999). This issue is also linked with the idea of gaining value and popularity.

At this juncture, understanding the aesthetic activities that take place on the social networking sites deserves attention. This can be accomplished by exploring the following question: how do musicians and fans network with one another? The processes of networking with music mostly involve interactivity between the producer / consumer (creator / audience, musicians / fans), the producer / producer (creator / creator, musicians / musicians), and the consumer / consumer (audience / audience, fans / fans). In addition

to studying the actual website operations, underpinning the notion of interactivity is necessary. Thus far, we have learned that two dimensions of participatory activities occur on the interactive media; at this juncture, the important issue is to understand that intricate, complex labor takes place during the cultural production of the participatory media. Thus, we must shift our attention to a specific example of interactivity.

### Immaterial Labor, Affective Labor and Free Labor

In participatory media, or more specifically on social networking sites that focus on cultural production, participants should be seen as more than solely frivolous users. Although describing their activities as “labor” may initially seem puzzling, many types of labors have been conceptualized to describe non-physical labor. Understanding these types of labor and recognizing how these types of labor have been applied on social networking sites is vital because laboring practices impact value.

Cultural production does not occur without some type of labor; yet, the word “labor” often invokes the Marxist tradition of the so-called working class. However, physical labor may not come to people’s mind when conceiving of cultural production on the internet. Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) traces the trajectory of how labor transitioned from material labor to immaterial labor in the post-Fordist era: “it is around immateriality that the quality and quantity of labor are organized” (para.4). Lazzarato’s theories of labor present a paradoxical conception of labor, because while he obfuscates material and immaterial labor, he also clearly demarcates the difference:

I have defined working class labor as an abstract activity that nowadays involves the application of subjectivity. In order to avoid misunderstandings, however, I should add that this form of productive activity is not limited only to highly skilled workers; it refers to a use value of labor power today, and more generally to the form of activity of

every productive subject within postindustrial society. (para. 7)

Lazzarato does not separate the type of labor that workers produce from the other types of labor that pertain to higher mental activities: “the old dichotomy between ‘mental and manual labor,’ or between ‘material labor and immaterial labor,’ risks failing to grasp the new nature of productive activity, which takes this separation on board and transforms it” (para. 3). While marking the sharp difference is not a priority for this research project, understanding how the notion of labor has been transformed and complicated is of value. Hence, a definition and discussion of immaterial labor must ensue.

Lazzarato (1996) defines immaterial labor as “the labour which produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity” (para.2). He further explains that this concept diverges into two different methodologies of labor. While the first one directly refers to the labor of the working class, the second category is the one under which the labor on the social networking sites falls:

[It is] the activity which produces the “cultural content” of the commodity, it alludes to a series of activities which, normally speaking, are not codified as labour, in other words to all the activities which tend to define and fix cultural and artistic norms, fashions, tastes, consumer standards and, more strategically, public opinion. (para. 2)

In a similar vein, Hardt and Negri (2000) elaborate on the nature of immaterial labor, which they define as “the labour that produces immaterial good, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication” (p. 290). Similar to the manner in which Lazzarato distinguishes between the two types of labor, Hardt and Negri identify three kinds of labor: 1) the communicative labor in the contemporary economy; 2) the interactive labor of symbolic analysis and problem solving; and 3) the labor of production and manipulation of affects (p. 30).

In their explanation of the three immaterial labor categories, Hardt and Negri emphasize cooperation and social interaction as vital components in the laboring process (p. 294). This aspect needs to be taken into account in the analysis of social networking sites, such as Myspace, Youtube, Secondlife and Indabamusic, because work that one exerts while on these sites cannot occur without the cooperation of and interaction with others. Hardt and Negri's ideas of "immaterial and affective labour" have been applied as a framework to discussions of Myspace, incorporating the aspects of "social interaction and cooperation" as an interplay between work and play (Scholz, n.d.; Pybus, 2007; Cote & Pybus, 2007). In addition, Lazzarato maintains that "immaterial labour constitutes itself in forms that are immediately collective, and we might say that it exists only in the form of networks and flows" (p. 136).

The collaborative and network aspects of this framework are vital to understanding the overall function of the social networking sites. Here, the nature of social networking theories (Garton, Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 1999) explicates the internal communication mechanism happening within various social networking sites. For instance, understanding the characteristics of networking communities explains how people communicate online and form virtual bonds and friendships with one another. In the case of musicians and listeners, friendships develop between website members, although the friendships formed may not ever rival the level of intimacy real-life encounters may offer.

Cote and Pybus's (2007) article "Learning to immaterial labour 2.0: Myspace and social network" clearly explains how the activities on social networking sites can be regarded as a form of immaterial labor. While the article mainly focuses on Myspace, an

analysis provided by Cote and Pybus on the intersection between immaterial labor and social networking applies to all of the chapters in this dissertation. Although Myspace may belong within the territory of corporatism, Myspace functions as a place where users can express themselves and build their social capital, as well as basically have fun. However, not everything that takes place on Myspace can be regarded as a mere leisure-time activity; users of Myspace “learn to produce their networked subjectivity on the social network which offers an unprecedented milieu for myriad forms of circulation and valorization” (Cote and Pybus, p. 95). Cote and Pybus further argue that “this apprenticeship is not only socially ‘profitable’ for youth, it helps capital construct the foundations of a future of networked subjectivity and affect” (p. 95). This point is crucial as it not only segues into an understanding of affective labor, but also because it highlights the ambiguity of the social networking experience in terms of the benefits of immaterial labor. Not only do users learn to express and subjectify themselves online, but their activities also provide a platform for corporations to reap benefits and evaluate user preferences. This reality intersects with the notion of free and fan labor, where users voluntarism is leveraged for larger, financial benefit.

While immaterial labor relates to the structural, macro-environment of social networking sites, affective labor, deals with the micro, intimate levels of labor. The notions of “affects” and “affective labor” have been discussed by many theorists and scholars across various disciplines: Deleuze and Guattari, 1994; Negri, 1999; Hardt, 1999; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Gibbs, 2002; Clough, Goldberg, Schiff, Weeks & Willse, 2007; Wissinger, 2007. However, underpinning the notion of the affects in affective labor poses a challenge. In “Notes towards a theory of affect-itself,” Clough et al (2007)

state that “affect-itself is admittedly an underspecified concept because it is meant to address the becoming abstract, and therefore becoming subject to measure that which is seemingly disparate” (p. 62). In this respect, I would like to contextualize what is implied in “affective labor” by starting with a discussion about Negri and Hardt’s (2000) notion of it. In Hardt’s (1999) article “Affective labor,” affective labor is regarded as one facet of immaterial labor:

Affective labor is better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of “woman’s work” have called “labor in the bodily mode.” Caring labor is certainly entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. What affective labor produces are social networks, forms of community, biopower. (p. 8)

In contrast, Clough et al (2007) problematize “the conceptualization of the body assumed in the labor theory of value” (p. 65). Due to the limitation of the concept of affective labor, these authors shift from considering affective labor to considering the general implication of affects. As evinced by this statement, affective labor pertains to the emotional, bodily, sensory realm. The shortcomings of affective labor, as conceived by Hardt and Negri (2000), are also discussed by Elizabeth Wissinger (2007), when she describes how affectivity in modeling does not always entail the showing of emotions; rather, modeling requires spontaneity in any situation. Wissinger contends that “focusing on the subjective qualities of affective labour minimizes an important dimension of the concept because it does not adequately explore affective labour’s additional tendency to call on changes in energy that take place below the level of consciousness” (p. 260). Affective labor occurs on many social networking sites linked with musicians because branding is vital to commercializing and marketing oneself.

The process of branding oneself can occur by creating a website banner of one’s

name, adding pictures and website links, and sending private and public messages to network friends. A brand is important since it “offers an exemplary empirical manifestation of the value logic of informational capitalism... brands themselves are a form of immaterial capital” (Arvidsson, 2005, p. 9). In this respect, affective labor intersects with immaterial labor. The affects of branding are embedded in the image the brand portrays. In other words, on social networking sites, the aura surrounding one’s brand can also be instrumental to creating more popularity, because as Adam Arvidsson contends “[brands] represent the additional value of the informational content of commodities” (p. 9).

Finally, the last type of labor that needs to be explained in relation to cultural production is “free” labor. Tiziana Terranova (2004) provides a useful explanation of this type of labor:

Simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited, free labour on the Net includes the activity of building websites, modifying software packages, reading and participating in mailing lists and building virtual spaces. Far from being an “unreal” empty space, the Internet is animated by cultural and technical labour through and through, a continuous production of value which is completely immanent in the flows of the network society at large. (p. 74)

Terranova’s analysis applies to fans’ and audiences’ voluntary efforts to contribute toward a musician’s promotional and advertising goals. This type of labor is often evident on social networking sites, and helps to increase the renown and popularity of many musicians.

Andrejevic (2008) highlights the troublesome quality of Terranova’s notion of free labor. In observing the productivity of fans online, he rejects a positive interpretation of fans’ laboring processes, thereby refuting Jenkins’s (2002) assertion that “fandom

constitutes the base for consumer activism” (p. 278). Even though fans may receive pleasure from having their comments viewed by other fan members, Andrejevic contends that “the advantage to marketers of online communities is that they help build allegiance to particular products, serving as forums for practices of self-disclosure that generate detailed information about consumers” (p. 43).

In short, for Andrejevic, the fan communities’ free labor does not merely benefit the users through the enjoyment of sharing and communicating about television programs that interest them. Whether it is known amongst the fan communities or not, their self-disclosures actually provide a platform for major markets to gain insights about their consumers, thus giving the markets vital information about the targeted consumers. In this vein, interactivity occurring on the participatory media cannot be solely viewed as an empowering process for participants. However, this view changes in the context of cultural production, especially in the discussion of fan labor.

Baym and Burnett (2009) in “Amateur experts: International fan labor in Swedish independent music” explore the complexity of fan labor as a form of exploitation or empowerment. This major theme runs throughout each dissertation chapter. While Andrejevic’s position clearly argues for a more exploitative interpretation of participation in the interactive era, differences do exist when exploring the labor related to music creation and marketing. Although musicians may create and post their music just for the love of music-making, what inspires fans to promote their favorite musicians’ music?

Baym and Burnett (2009) explored the fan community in the Swedish independent music scene through a series of interviews with fans who provide free labor for their favorite bands. The authors argue that viewing fans as being merely exploited is

reductionist, insofar as no account is taken of the many types of values that are attached to the products of the labor. The rewards do not always lie in economic value—rather there are other types of compensations such as “free music, access to live music performances, and in a few select cases, expense-paid invitations to Sweden” (Baym & Burnett, p. 443). In addition to these concrete rewards, there are also intellectual and self-enriching rewards, such as the broadening of one’s knowledge of music increased listening opportunities, and even the social advantages of mingling with other fans. A simple sign of gratitude by telling someone “thank you” may be enough reward for some (p. 443).

Besides the immaterial rewards mentioned, the authors also provide the three distinct fan perspectives related to their labor. The first group of fans strives “to lessen the value of their own work by positioning themselves as enthusiastic, too far outside the scene to merit economic reward” (p. 444). In other words, these fans do not view their efforts as significant when compared to what their favored musicians do. Thus, they perceive their endeavors as inferior and insignificant. Sheer enthusiasm legitimizes their efforts. The second stance is as follows: “the fans see themselves as doing favors for people who either are or could easily be friends” (p. 444). In this case, fans do not expect any type of reward, but see their work as an investment in the befriending of someone they like. The third category of fans “view[s] their labour as an investment toward a future career that may eventually lead to appropriate financial compensation” (p. 445). These fans are not just working for the sheer joy or support of their favorite artists, but instead expect some kind of financial reward in the end as a result of their hard work.

As indicated by these three different stances, fan labor can be located within the

boundaries of general enjoyment, even if the fans hope for a reward in the end: “these fans value spreading the pleasures they have enjoyed and building relationships with others in their online and offline communities more than they value cash” (p. 446). The conclusions drawn as a result of interviewing fans of Swedish independent music indicate that fans are doing the work with full knowledge that there may hardly be material or financial rewards. This view belies the critical view on interactivity in the participatory media. The conclusions strongly suggest that despite the awareness of possible exploitation, fans would still voluntarily put themselves out there to help the artists. Having an understanding of both sides of the argument is highly critical in the context of this dissertation as each chapter captures the ambiguity of exploitation vs. empowerment.

### Research Design and Methods

In the essay “Ethnography and radical contextualism in audience studies,” Ien Ang (1996) introduces a new way to study audiences: “radical contextualism.” This method pushes the boundary of studying television audiences, and incorporates ethnography to examine other contentious aspects in the larger context of the media industries:

Radical contextualism can then act as a stance not governed by a wish to build an ever more ‘comprehensive theory of the audience,’ which would by definition be an unfinishable task, but by an intellectual commitment to make the stories we end up telling about media consumption as compelling and persuasive as possible in the context of specifically that arise from particular brand of politics. (Ang, p. 258)

This also means that the relation that a researcher has to a particular research context is significant and the role played by interpretation is of key importance. This dissertation will apply Ang’s theoretical framework and will utilize cultural studies as a research method.

Cultural studies highlight three important aspects of: 1) lived realities; 2) discursive mediation; and 3) the social and political landscape (Saukko, 2003, p. 12). While these three aspects embody the crux of cultural studies methodology, the key in cultural studies is its' view on reality "as fluid... rather than seeking the task of research to accurately describes this reality, it argues that research creates or socially constructs the realities it studies" (p. 26). This "research prism" is committed to "projects that bring to the fore multiple perspectives on reality, or multiple realities" (p. 26). In this respect, cultural studies also claims multiple validities. However, this discipline does not entirely abandon the established rules in conducting research; rather, different types of validities (dialogic, deconstructive, and contextual) are carefully chosen according to the researcher's aim. In this particular project, dialogic validity fulfills my research goal in that dialogism "does not view research in terms of describing other worlds from outside, but in terms of an encounter or interaction between different worlds" (p. 20). My chosen object of research is the social networking sites, which by nature focus on interactivity between many types of people coming from different worlds; thus, case studies of four kinds of social networking sites will be investigated.

#### Methodology for Case Studies

Each case study utilized multiple qualitative methods. In other words, instead of applying only one approach, such as survey method, virtual ethnography, email interviews, discourse analysis or textual analysis, each chapter attempted to explore multiple facets of the social networking experience. In short, I analyzed each case taking into consideration a variety of viewpoints: users' perspectives, expert advice, lay people's opinions, and various testimonies and reports in news articles. For example, although I

posted a blog survey and publicly announced the posting, I recognized that the answers to the blog survey alone would not sufficiently capture the full breadth of sentiments held by users and musicians. Thus, in an attempt to more precisely depict the activities of users and musicians, it is important to capture other discourses that took place in public forums on the social networking sites. While a researcher's survey may possibly be perceived as an outsider intrusion, the forums created within each social networking site reveal the more organic and natural conversations created by the users. In addition to combining these two methods, understanding the "expert" tips and recommendations on how to succeed on these social networking sites was also significant. Most of the social networking sites examined in this study provided pointers about the "social protocols" inherent to each one.

In order to examine the various social protocols that exist on each social networking site, I conducted a discourse analysis. This approach "generally favor[s] an observational role for researchers the systematic analysis of transcribed data, and avoidance of 'talk extrinsic' context in that analysis" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 265). Referring to Foucault's theories, Hook (1991) points out that there is a limit to the actual meaning of words, the so-called "finitude of discourse." Foucault argues that one should not merely accept a statement at its face value, but should instead analyze the possible implications of each statement. In "What is Author?" (1994), Foucault maintains that "the author function is not a pure and simple reconstruction made secondhand from a text given as inert material" (p. 215). With this insight in mind, I examined how the experts on the social networking sites provided recommendations to musicians in the form of guidelines. For Myspace and Youtube, I analyzed a selection of books; for Secondlife, I

studied the tips given by the experts and Secondlife performers in a variety of articles and forums. In analyzing the discourse expressed in the tips, it was important to focus on not only the surface meaning, but also on the more covert implications imbedded in the statements.

### Methodology for Myspace and Youtube

For the chapter on Myspace, I posted a blog with general questions. Users were asked to write responses in a free-form style. By not conditioning or eliciting a certain response, blogging was believed to be much more effective than utilizing specific survey questions. Users were not only meant to feel at ease with participating in the convenience of home, but they also were allowed to respond however they chose fit, thereby avoiding the chance of getting partial answers. On my blog, I posted general questions pertaining to user perspectives on Myspace's success, to what they attributed this success, and what, if any, shortcomings they perceived in the network. The blog posting was up for about six months, and all users were invited to answer the survey questions. For the chapter on Youtube, I employed textual analysis methods. I not only examined the Youtube musician site, but also analyzed various news articles on how musicians became famous on Youtube, as well as reports of convergence trends involving major record labels. In addition, I examined several self-help books about how to become popular and successful on Youtube.

### Methodology for Secondlife

For the case study of Secondlife, I conducted a virtual ethnography. Other case studies deal with the issue of "virtuality" in terms of virtual ethnography; however, the

definition of ethnography as defined by Christine Hine (2000) emphasizes “the sustained presence of an ethnographer in the field setting, combined with intensive engagement with the every life of the inhabitants of the field site” (p. 63). According to this definition, the other sites I researched could not be analyzed in a virtual ethnographic framework because this would have entailed varied, diverse levels of participation. However, the virtual music concerts held on Secondlife required “sustained presence” for the duration of each concert.

Hine (2000) explains that virtual ethnography differs from ethnography in terms of spatial as well as time dislocation, insofar as “immersion in the setting is only intermittently achieved” (p.65). In addition to this difference, Hine also highlights the fact that “virtual ethnography is necessarily partial” (p. 65). In other words, “the notion of pre-existing, isolable and describable informants, locales and cultures is set aside” (p. 65). This aspect was very important to remember while pursuing my virtual ethnography, since I was unable to study the backgrounds of the users who were the focus of my case studies.

In virtual environments, the information related to a specific user’s ethnicity, culture, race, gender, and economic class is disregarded when dealing with the notion of cultural values, popularity, and aesthetic tastes. Although this fact does not hold true on Myspace (where people usually reveal their identities, whether real or fabricated), in the cases of Youtube, Secondlife and Indabamusic, researchers cannot gain any information on the users except for their pseudonyms and avatars, which may bear no resemblance to the actual identity of the users in question. Due to this unavailable information, my dissertation assumed that the responses given by people were accurate and true.

Nonetheless, this supposition raised the issue of authenticity.

Hine (2000) explores at length the issues of authenticity and identity in the internet context, addressing specifically the problems that surround the claims and statements made by internet users:

Rather than asking whether Internet interactions are authentic, or whether people really are who they say they are, the ethnographer aims to assess how the culture is organized and experienced on its own terms. The intention is to sidestep questions of what identities really are and whether reality is really there, by shifting to an empirical focus on how, where and when identities and realities are made available on the Internet. (p. 118)

Thus, belaboring the veracity of claims and statements made by internet users should not be the central concern for scholars doing virtual ethnography. The description of ongoing commentaries and interactions in subsequent chapters of this dissertation will give the reader insight into the social protocols of various networking sites; by studying these commentaries, the ethnographer can better understand the context of the virtual communities. Although the interaction between people online may not always be the same as face-to-face interaction, the important issue is that internet interactions have their own merits, which distinguish them from face-to-face interactions. This leads to another important distinctive characteristic of virtual ethnography, which is “an intensive engagement with mediated interaction” (p. 65).

As Hine claims, “this [mediated] kind of engagement adds a new dimension to the exploration of the use of the medium in context” (p. 65). In a virtual world such as Secondlife, mediated interaction can be much more intense than actual face-to-face interaction, because the researcher is on the same level as those being studied; one does not feel consigned to a different status than other users. As Wellman (2004a) notes in “Connecting community: On-and offline,” internet connectivity is not inferior to face-to-

face connectivity. Although it is different and it cannot replace the face-to-face relationships, Wellman emphasizes that people who use the internet are much more frequent in their establishment of new contacts. In an actual fieldwork setting, which requires personal interaction, a researcher may feel less inclined to participate actively in whatever activity is being observed, because often the researcher is the outsider to whichever setting he or she is encountering. However, in an online platform, the researcher occupies the same setting and possesses the same status as everyone else participating in the virtual world. This may also put the study subjects at ease because the researcher is truly “one of them.” Wellman (2001) also notes that people in virtual communities are more inclined to help one another and provide information, which may foster more fruitful interactivity than real life interactions.

Another important difference that needs to be addressed is the nature of the texts (written forms of communication) acquired during virtual ethnography. While a large portion of my data appears in a written form, the role or value of the texts should be clarified. As Hine (2000) argues, “texts are an important part of life in many of the settings which ethnographers now address, and to ignore them would be to produce a highly partial account of cultural practices” (p. 51). She thus emphasizes that rather than valorizing the text as the sole truth or dismissing it completely, the ethnographer should be sensitive and considerate to the context in which these texts are produced. The ethnographer’s goal should be to understand the different nuances of culture in a given field site. The written text served in my case studies as a major source of data, because on social networking sites, chatting, leaving comments, and responding to blogs is the primary way of communicating with others. (Note: This does not mean that oral

communication does not exist on social networking sites; during Secondlife live music performances, the performers can directly speak to the audience members.)

### Methodology for Indabamusic

For the last case study of Indabamusic, I visited various site forums to understand the sentiment and activities of the musicians who used the site. I also conducted a textual analysis of the site in terms of features, and collected the testimonies of musicians, focusing primarily on their experiences with the Yo Yo Ma contest. In addition, I conducted an online survey and an electronic interview with the co-founder of Indabamusic. In order to conduct the online survey, I announced the survey<sup>ii</sup> on the discussion boards, as well as on my personal Indabamusic blog. This blog was advertised to the entire Indabamusic community by featuring it on the front page of the site on the day of the posting. After the announcement had been posted on several other locations, I conducted an online survey of those who volunteered for this study. The survey questions related to the process of collaboration, the benefits that the users had discovered through use of the website, and the unique characteristics of this website in comparison to others. I provided open-ended questions to the participants so that I would not elicit a certain type of response.

## CHAPTER III: A CASE STUDY OF MYSPACE.COM

### Introduction

Many independent musicians today rely on the mass network bodies. With the support of fellow musicians as well as the users of Myspace, independent musicians have found a voice, a platform, and an outlet to express and network with their music. Nonetheless, with the enormous popularity of this music site, has Myspace's "do-it-yourself" motto truly become this generation's future in terms of functioning as a democratic and collaborative network for a wide variety of cultural productions? While the masses have stepped into the role traditionally filled by intermediaries and decision makers, how do musicians gain legitimacy and value online?

As an independent musician, I have used Myspace for over five years as a way to share and network with my music. This all started with the uploading of four clips of music from the comfort and convenience of home; over the ensuing months, I was approached about joining a band and asked to collaborate on various projects. However, inasmuch as the experiences of using Myspace have been rewarding and have provided a wide array of opportunities for me, I noticed that over the years, Myspace has generated fierce competition and produced extreme marketing strategies. Because there have been numerous cases of musicians being discovered from this site (such as Colbie Caillat and Tila Tequila), the competition for attention and praise has given rise to contrived and desperate efforts to network. With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the complex trajectories of Myspace with particular attention to musicians' laboring practices, self-branding, and convergence with the mainstream media.

How has Myspace evolved since its inception, and what are some of the downfalls and shortcomings to this network? How do musicians “labor” on this site? By answering these questions, the overarching goal of this chapter is threefold. First, the processes of consecration and the gaining of legitimacy will be a main focus. These processes will be examined through a textual analysis of Myspace’s musician site. By exploring the notions of immaterial and affective labor (Lazzarato, 1996; Negri, 1999; Terranova, 2004; Prada, n.d.; Cote and Pybus, 2007), I will introduce the methods whereby audiences and creators labor on this site by utilizing various communication mechanisms; simultaneously, some of the contrived and deceptive practices counteracting the immaterial labor will also be discussed. Secondly, I will address the affective labor issues related to this website: how do Myspace musicians labor affectively through the linking of branding and advertising activities?

Finally, in order to gain insight into the laboring process, it is extremely critical to understand what the website experts recommend in terms of successful marketing and promotion on Myspace. Thus, this chapter will closely examine the tips offered by the author of the book, *Myspace music profit monster: Proven online marketing strategies for getting ore fans fast!* (Nicky Kallongis). This book describes how musicians’ social networking sites function as concrete expressions of immaterial, affective labor. The last part of this chapter will address the gradual decline of Myspace’s popular status.

### What is Myspace?

Myspace began when Tom Anderson, a musician with a film degree, paired up with Chris DeWolfe, an Xdrive, Inc., marketer, to create a website where musicians and fans could interact and engage in music sharing and casual discussions on music.

Between the website's launch in January 2004 and 2009, Myspace has grown into a gigantic conglomerate. On July 18, 2005, News Corporations bought Myspace for approximately \$580 million dollars (NewsCorp, 2005). In 2006, Myspace has almost 100 million members and is ranked the sixth most popular website on the U.S. internet by the net rating system in terms of page hits (Cote & Pybus, 2007, p. 88).

The popularity of the Myspace website is mainly attributable to the variety of options made available to its members. Myspace has two separate kinds of profiles that are determined by whether one is a regular user or a musician. For regular users, the main features are related to the ability to post personal information, including general interests, pictures, videos, and background music. The musician profiles provide an additional feature where up to six tracks can be uploaded free of charge. The musician pages also allow users to input biographies, gig schedules, pictures, videos, general information, blog entries, and comments. They can even sell individual music tracks. While the music profiles have sample songs for viewer listening, the profiles also provide an outlet for compact disc sales and the promotion of concerts and tours, as well as links to personal websites.

Myspace frequently represents music marketed by the mainstream media. For example, on Myspace in the section titled "Top Artists," users can view three different categories of artists, organized by record label affiliation: Major Label, Indie, and Unsigned. The artists are ranked side by side within their own categories on the music page. This illustrates an even level of exposure granted to unknown, as well as well-known, artists. It is, however, unclear whether or not the artists listed in the top ranks have been categorized solely based on the popularity gained on Myspace. Nevertheless,

viewers have equal access to music produced by amateurs as well as by “professionals”(musicians signed under major or indie labels).

### Myspace Musicians

According to Jeff Howe (2005), numerous music bands have become successful due to Myspace and other community sites, such as purevolume.com. Some of the bands that have risen to commercial stardom are Fall Out Boy, My Chemical Romance, Reliant K, and Silverstein, to name a few. Colbie Caillat is a prime example of an unknown artist becoming extremely popular. Whitney Self (2009) notes that after Caillat posted a few songs on Myspace, within eight months, she was the number one unsigned artist on Myspace; this eventually led to her contract with Universal Republic Records and her debut album, *Coco*, in 2007. (this charted at Number Five in Billboard)

In another article, Caillat praises Myspace’s role in the success of her career. The great thing about MySpace is that you can build up an army of fans and then when you go to a record company, there's no point in them trying to change what you do because it's already been tried and tested. (Cited in Kilgore, 2007, para. 5)

While there are also stories of musicians being discovered outside of the social networking sites (such as performing on the street or at a music venue), the difference between being found on Myspace, as opposed to a real-life context, is the role played by the charts. While musicians in actual venues can also document their fan bases by keeping track of the audience attendance at each concert, the popularity of Caillat and other successful Myspace users is more visible because of the site's unsigned musicians’ chart. This is the most obvious way to distinguish Caillat from others in the eyes of the record labels executives.

Many mainstream musicians also utilize Myspace and Youtube as an important

source of marketing. For example, singer-songwriter James Blunt, who is signed to Warner Brothers Records, released his album on Myspace (Contactmusic, 2007). Anyone could download his album for \$9.99, and in addition to downloading, the purchaser also receives a CD album in the mail. However, it is important to note the cases in which artists who are signed to major record labels are transformed into indie artists by signing with the Myspace Record label. Conception (2008) reports in *Billboard* that Christina Millian, whose recording contract with Def Jam Record terminated in 2006, will sign a new deal with Myspace Records.

In addition to signing with Myspace Records, artists who are already signed to major record labels, such as Lily Allen, utilize Myspace as another source of marketing new albums by performing in Myspace's "Secret Show Series" (Ayers, 2009). Allen is also reported to have performed in Tokyo for another of Myspace's "Secret Show Series." As revealed in the above examples, Myspace does not just cater to independent artists, since it clearly embraces and aids mainstream artists who are signed to major record labels. According to Van Buskirk (2008), Myspace has joined forces with three of the four major American record labels. Although Myspace Music will remain a separate entity, it will be owned in part by the other labels. Myspace is not the only social networking site that has established partnerships with the mainstream record labels.

### Labor on Social Networking Sites

The introduction to this dissertation explains how the interactivity between the content producer and the audience requires effort and labor; in this context, three types of labor were introduced: immaterial, affective, and free. Before exploring how specific labor theories are applicable to Myspace and other such sites, one must examine the

relationship between the general notion of labor and the creation of value. According to John Banks and Sal Humphreys (2008), “understanding media consumption as a labour practice is not entirely new” (p. 403). Banks and Humphrey explore the emergence of labor practices by drawing from the work of such scholars as Andrew Ross. Referring to Ross’s argument, they argue that “the implications of social, peer production for the livelihoods and working conditions of creative workers have been ignored” (2008, p. 405). This particular concept of labor intersects with the type of labor that the commercial industry pursues to gain financial rewards.

Banks and Humphrey also note weaknesses in Ross’s arguments: “Ross does not come to terms with the emerging shape of social network markets in which the flows and extraction of value are very different from a simple displacement of traditional labour by unpaid creative labour” (p. 405). This point is crucial to this study’s task of analyzing the relationship between value and labor.

On social networking sites, even though financial gain may result from laboring practices, the type of labor pursued differs from traditional labor forms in that laboring is often done on an immaterial and affective basis. Banks and Humphrey further point out that labor becomes more complex when it is transformed into free labor: “this free labour has not been appropriated but voluntarily given. The relationships are much more nuanced and complex than the language of incorporation, appropriation or exploitation suggests” (p. 407). This chapter will strive to explain how the laboring practices that take place on Myspace function as forms of immaterial, affective, and free labor. An analysis of musicians’ testimonies and experts’ recommendations will clearly reveal the differences between this form of labor and traditional interpretations of musicians’ work.

Skills that relate to the communication applications of the social networking sites as well their social protocols are new to the world of artists.

### Immaterial Labor on Myspace

What does “immaterial labor” mean in the context of Myspace? Cote and Pybus (2007) describe “immaterial labour” on Myspace by concentrating on the “social and cultural component of labour” (p. 89). They focus on explaining the immaterial activities on Myspace by highlighting “the composition, management and regulation of the activities of its users” (p. 90). While they do not specifically examine how musicians work on this site to increase the value of their works, this chapter delves into such processes by exploring the major methods of communication and exposure utilized by musicians on Myspace.

Myspace operates via two types of major communication between musicians and users: one can directly send a message to other members (similar to email), or one can befriend other users (meaning, one becomes a part of another person’s friends list) and leave comments on their comment sections. Besides inviting one to be a “friend” or requesting to become the friend of other members, Myspace users can also post blog entries for others to read, and viewers can respond by leaving a comment on the blog sections. Moreover, if one wants to make an announcement about upcoming gigs to a group of designated friends, Myspace provides a bulletin board section where anyone can freely post information.

In true Myspace fashion, I created a blog on my Myspace profile, inviting musicians to write about their thoughts on fame, popularity, rating systems, etc.<sup>iii</sup> Despite my effort to strike up a discussion and inspire responses, only four people voluntarily

responded to the post (of course, this statistic was directly linked to the size of my network, but with a group of approximately 5,100 friends (as of November 2009) and 26 regular readers of the blog, there was a noticeable lack of interest in this topic). The five additional responses were the result of directly emailing several Myspace users. Despite the low number of responses, the eight comments were thoughtfully conceived at the time of research, which ended in May 2008. Among these responses, three of the voluntary responses came from non-musicians. Nevertheless, most of these comments substantiated my thoughts on the presence of immaterial labor on Myspace.

In answering my blog posting, Jennifer Richman (a singer-songwriter) stated: “with myspace, you get out what you put in. Popularity can be gained at tremendous proportions if you put in the time promoting yourself on myspace.” In agreement, another commentator (a guitarist) mentioned that in order to gain popularity, one must work hard:

The bottom line is that it takes work to generate interest, in the real world and online. I have friends - musicians - who post their songs and then essentially sit back, mistakenly expecting a new community of ears to discover them and then becoming disappointed when this fails to come to fruition. I've made numerous contacts, friends and acquaintances through this website, a good deal of them through reaching out and responding to those who have made the effort to do the same; using it as a platform for authentic contact, albeit online. It seems to be that the more present you are the more likely people will stumble across your art (guitarist, personal communication, April, 13, 2008).

Similar to this response, Mat Helm (a singer-songwriter) stated that without working hard (such as, putting a lot of energy into networking), the actual results are hardly evident:

As far as the performance issue I was disappointed with the responses, or turnouts I had received from myspace "friends" in the past. It could be due to the fact that I'm introverted to an extent that I feel it requires too much energy to hold the interest of that many friends, and that the actual value of the art has nothing to gain from being illustrated from a

perspective of fame or a position of solitude.

Clearly Myspace popularity and interest cannot be generated through a passive attitude.

The results may vary depending on how much work one puts in.

While the musicians recognized the aspect of labor linked to this website, the audience members responded optimistically in reference to the effects of Myspace on the careers of independent musicians:

I believe that Myspace does help independent musicians gain worldwide popularity and recognition that they might not gain if there was not a media like myspace. It lets a wider variety of people gain access to a wider variety of music. Where as say in your case your fantastic wide range of music might only get to people that have an interest in your type of music. Here (myspace) someone clicking around myspace music may see your profile and take an interest in your music.

With similar optimism, a Japanese musician emphasized Myspace's presence in foreign countries, thereby focusing on Myspace's ability to transcend national boundaries:

I simply think that MySpace.com is one of tool to let foreign audience listen to my music. There're also some SNSs similar to MySpace.com in Japan. For example "mixi," the most popular one and for Musicians and Audiences, there's "YoroZoo" I also register for. But they consists of almost only Japanese language. So then, it can be only for Japanese. I want more audiences listen to my music who live in other country but on the same planet.

On Myspace, besides one's conscious and intentional efforts at marketing and self-promotion, the network bodies can contribute to the increase of an artist's visibility.

Here, the notion of "free labour" by Terranova (2004) comes to the fore. Terranova's analysis also applies to Myspace musicians since they are offered free labor through the actions of other users. Without intentionally asking for favors, one way to enhance one's visibility is through being featured as a "top friend." Myspace allows up to 24 friend profiles to be displayed. The top friends are the most favored members of a particular

user's profile. The display of top friends is usually done in a manner that projects one's personal taste for certain types of music or affiliations. For instance, if the musician is a classical artist such as a string player, he or she displays famous string players of the past and today. Wellman (2002) notes that this type of network activity plays a "specialized role" in which "specialized social networks consist of either like-minded people—BMW 325ix drivers or collaborating web designers—or people with complementary roles—violinists and cellists, supervisors and employees"(para. 31).

Another example of free labor on Myspace involves having a specific artist's music as a featured element on a non-artist's profile page. When a user likes a certain artist's music, he or she can simply press the "add" button shown in the music selection and have the music played as a background on his or her profile page. When other users visit the site, the music will automatically play while the artist's name and the title of the musical selection are also shown; the musician, thus, receives free promotion. However, besides these examples of free labor, musicians must work diligently to gain popularity and visibility. Yet this aspect of work has not only been recognized by musicians. Various websites have established ways to target this dimension of labor by linking it with the increasing of value and success. Now I will introduce two examples of these websites that can mitigate musicians' labor on the interactive websites.

The first one is an internet-based program that advertises the ability to rapidly increase a user's number of friends. In order to gain a large number of friends, a user typically had to literally click on each profile and ask to be accepted as a friend. Several websites have recently been developed to replace this type of labor through a program that will do the "work" for the artist. One example of this is

<http://www.thetoolsmith.com>, a site that is solely devoted to the acquisition a large numbers of friends on Myspace and the provision of automatic responses:

Easy Adder is the ultimate MySpace Friend Adder tool to help promote your band, market your product and services, or even run for office. Easy Adder automates the daunting task of adding friends, sending messages, and leaving comments.

Although it is unclear whether musicians are using this software in large numbers, the mere existence of such a website<sup>iv</sup> suggests that the “immaterial” aspect of labor is being challenged.

Another example of a labor-saving website that is particularly targeted at musicians is a site called Maxplays (<http://www.maxplays.net>). This site advertises multiple benefits:

- Increase your profiles awareness through Top Artist rankings
- Climb the Myspace charts
- Have more genuine fans take notice and visit your profile
- Generate more friend requests and comments
- Expose yourself to industry executives
- Impress fans, A&Rs, promoters, managers, record labels, radio, other musicians, booking agents, etc.
- Receive Myspace Gold and Platinum Plaques

This site claims that artists can, for a price, gain greater attention from mainstream media.

This happens when their music is being heard by numerous users. While increasing the number of times that a song is played can be accomplished through other time-intensive means, Maxplays offers to simplify the process. Again, this exemplifies the desperate effort to gain popularity. Thus far, I have introduced two types of labor that occur on Myspace (free labor and immaterial labor), and have juxtaposed these laboring processes with contrived and deceptive shortcut techniques. Nonetheless, could a large number of listeners truly be the determining factor for a musician’s success? What about the

endeavors that numbers cannot replace, such as building a real deep connection by relying on human sensitivity and emotions?

### Affective Labor, Brand, and Values

Affective labor on Myspace does not merely trigger emotional, sensorial reactions; it is also linked to a subliminal desire to fiercely self-promote and advertise one's shows, albums, and artistry, centered around the notion of branding. As Naomi Klein (2000) states, "brands could conjure a feeling" (p. 6). Branding is an essential mechanism in the context of affective labor on Myspace, because, as Adam Arvidsson (2005) contends, "brands are built on immaterial labour of consumers: their ability to create an ethical surplus through productive communication" (p. 235).

In *Brand and values in media culture*, Arvidsson (2006) describes the creation and valuation of brands. In his explanation, Arvidsson emphasizes that it is not the actual commodity that makes a brand, but the consumers that create the meaning of the brand:

...the brand referred to a context of consumption, constructed by links between consumer affect. This brand space was furthermore open-ended and incomplete. It constituted a virtual promise or anticipation, to be actualized by the active involvement of consumers themselves. In their ongoing production of a common, consumers create the actual value of the brand: its share in meaningful experiences, its connection to social identities or forms of community: the practices that underpin measurable (and hence valuable) forms of attention. (2006, p. 95)

Given this statement, even if one creates a brand, what makes the brand valuable is directly related to consumer involvement. In short, if consumers collectively associate a specific brand with an idea, a certain set of values is created. However, brands can only have an actual value when the importance of brand association is collectively internalized and materialized.

Another account of associations between value and branding is presented in the article “The logic of brand” by Arvidsson (2007). Here, he delves into the relationship between brands and labor:

The brand is a mechanism that encloses, empowers and controls such affective investments so that they provide measurable, and hence valuable results... Brands are a mechanism for the transformation of affective energies into valuable forms of immaterial labor. (p. 22)

Although brands are physical forms that become materialized into life through the carrying of a significant value, the processes related to the creation of a brand are inevitably linked to immaterial and affective labor. Essentially, it is through these immaterial and affective forms of labor that values and meanings are acquired.

In order to brand oneself, a certain outlet or platform is required so that one can labor immaterially and affectively.

Arvidsson (2006) states that the internet is an extremely conducive platform upon which to build brands:

the internet has the capacity to create all-encompassing environments centered around a particular brand: environment where all actions, where activity in general, is always already anticipated by the programme of the brand. ICTs have the technological potential to complete the real subsumption of life under capital, to the extent that the becoming of subjectivity and the becoming of value coincide. While offline branding struggles to valorize particular aspects of communicative interaction, the internet is a technological tool that permits a much more far-reaching subsumption of productive interaction. (p. 96)

In other words, because of the internet’s interactive element, it is easier to cultivate values surrounding brands in this context.

### The Branding of Tila Tequila

At this juncture, it is important to take a look at one particular profile, the one for

Tila Tequila whose enormous popularity and branding on Myspace has given her the opportunity to have her own reality television program on the major television network MTV. Who is Tila Tequila? What she does professionally is not very important, since her stardom seems to hardly relate to what she does; instead, her popularity is linked to the lifestyle and the image she represents. However, the reason why I am devoting a little attention to Tequila's profile is that one wonders what it is about her profile that has brought her enormous popularity? Many factors are rooted in her popularity on Myspace, but the main source is her success in branding. It is not an exaggeration to say that Tequila has fully capitalized her brand on Myspace.

Tequila's profile (viewed in March) is extremely cluttered with the many facets of her life, yet there is one unified theme. Even though Tequila promotes her music, clothing lines, book, and videos for purchase (which may potentially be confusing for the viewers as consumers), all of her merchandise projects one image, which is the persona of rough sex-appeal combined with the opening line on her profile: "the baddest bitch on the block." Thus, Tequila's brand is what she embodies: sexual aggressiveness, as articulated in her label, "the baddest bitch." The type of image Tequila projects is not of my concern here, but rather I am interested in the tactics she uses to build her persona to gain a certain aura that is inextricably linked to branding. To this end, it is interesting to note that Tequila uses the free labor of fans to heighten her façade as a "celebrity" (Malinoski, 2008).

This is clearly exemplified by Tequila's phone message box; she invites her fans to call a toll-free number and leave messages for her. The display of her fans' voice messages is integral to the maintaining and building of her image as a "celebrity." The

exhibiting of examples of how her many fans adore and idolize her adds value to Tequila's brand—whether or not that value holds quality is an irrelevant issue. Although her profile feeds off of countless visits from her Myspace “fans,” it is interesting to note that her message box is also used as a platform for self-promotion by other Myspace members. Because Tequila's profile page is visited heavily on a daily basis, some Myspace members leave messages, trying to promote their own music: “Come check us out for new songs up! Add us and leave us your thoughts on them!” This occurrence demonstrates an interesting paradox: Tequila hopes to maintain her status through the aid of her fans, while her own page sometimes becomes a platform for other Myspace users to promote their own music.

One last important issue to point out is that Tequila's branding operates in not just a unilateral way, but in a convergent way. After her popularity soared on Myspace, Tequila was featured in *Stuff* magazine. With her public image on the rise, MTV offered her a reality television show called “A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila.” This was a provocative dating show about a bisexual woman's quest to find love, and included both men and women as contestants. The content of the show is not as critical for this study as is Tequila's ability to capitalize on the fame generated from being on MTV and her decision to market her bisexual appeal by writing a book called *Hooking up with Tila Tequila: A guide to love, fame, happiness, success and being the life of the party*. As the title suggests, this book echoes the concept of the reality show, and is being heavily marketed on Myspace. In this sense, Tequila has been able to merge the mainstream and grassroots media outlets, and to wisely build her brand. The labeling of Myspace as a grassroots media outlet will be challenged and problematized at the end of this chapter,

with special focus being given to the discussion of values. Nevertheless, as can be seen from this small case study of Tequila's stardom, even if she receives only minimal publicity from her album release and music, the outcome of her branding is definitely permeating the various media outlets.

While the above example of branding on Myspace does not seem to directly revolve around an individual's music career, there are numerous, more modest examples of building musician brands on Myspace. Similar to the tactics described above, such as the leaving of comments in a highly popular artist's comment box, building one's brand is often done by creating advertising logos that include the name of professional websites; musicians also usually have a "thanks for add" banner (this means, thanks for adding me to your friends network). Besides showing gratitude, this type of advertising often increases one's exposure to other users. In addition, a common trend in musicians' profiles is the leaving of flowery compliments, which include requests to return the favor. A few examples of these types of commentaries are: "I love the ambiance in your SEDUCTION song! Check out my new song about Clint Eastwood. Cheers!" "Thank you very much for the approving, you are playing excellent. We would like to know your opinion about our music..." "Thanx 4 the add showing you some major love when you get a chance check out my music and tell me what you think any and all feedback will be appreciated."

#### Updated Features on Myspace

In addition to a simple commentary feature which allows musicians to brand themselves, another aspect of prime importance is Myspace's effort to branch out in order to become more of "a lifestyle brand." This plan was developed by Chris Dewolf, one of

Myspace's co-founders (Businessweek, 2005, para. 23) This has been accomplished through a series of new site features and programs (information on this topic was taken from Wikipedia). In early 2006, Myspace introduced a new feature called Myspace IM, an instant messenger program that uses Myspace screen names. One year later, Myspace created MyspaceTV, which functions similarly to YouTube. Myspace launched the Myspace News Show in April of that year. In July 2007, a new function allowed users to share their current moods by using emoticons, which are icon faces exhibiting a variety of moods. Myspace announced Myspace Karaoke in April 2008, a program which enables users to upload audio clips onto their profile pages (Wikimyspace, n.d.). As this series of updates indicates, Myspace is attempting to attract and engage users through a variety of programs. Whether it is through the creation of a brand or the application of diverse site functions, Myspace has created a blurred boundary between work and play. In the next section, an explanation of how the publishing industry has capitalized on the changing Myspace environment will be provided; this is most clearly reflected in the proliferation of self-help books that focus on branding and promotional methods.

### Laboring Tips from the Experts

Although the previous sections devoted to musicians' testimonies and the Tequila profile help explain the personal values of Myspace as related to marketing and music sharing, there is one other important facet that needs to be explored in connection with the merging of mainstream and grassroots media outlets. Various books have been published to aid musicians in gaining more fans on Myspace (Vincent, 2007; Jag, 2007; Weber, 2007). This is an action which is viewed as a ticket to greater success and to the launching of professional careers in music. Thus in this section, I will be examining a

recently published book specifically written for online music promotion called *Myspace music profit monster: Proven online marketing strategies for getting more fans fast!* by Nicky Kalliongis (2008). According to the back cover of the book, the author is “a veteran music industry professional that’s worked with the likes of the legendary Clive Davis and L. A. Reid and with artists as diverse as Aretha Franklin, Arvil Lavigne, Outcast, Pink and Prince.” After establishing the author’s credentials as an “expert,” the book explains how the author can help you to 1) make the most of your Myspace page; 2) utilize Myspace, Youtube, Facebook and Squidoo in concert for maximum online presence; 3) get people to visit your site and listen to your music; 4) increase traffic to your site; 4) write and circulate an effective press release; and 5) attract media, radio stations, record labels and fans and much more. The book also received a four and a half-star rating on Amazon.com from 21 customer reviews. (although this rating should not simply be taken at its face value, in general, this publication has been positively received)

While the book promises to provide various tips on the topics stated above, what constitutes the author’s actual advice? The whole point of examining the recommendations of the author is not to necessarily imply that the professional’s advice is legitimate and true; however, in closely reading the tips and suggestions by the author, it becomes clear that becoming famous on Myspace requires serious work. Most importantly, labor on this website pertains to the immaterial and affective dimension. Examples of affective labor are evident when the author emphasizes tapping into the “caring” dimension. While the earlier section of this chapter introduces the concept of “buying” friends on Myspace, Kalliongis (2008) makes it clear that there are two issues that relate directly to increasing the number of friends and fans:

Use the invite system to create personalized invitations. Most people appreciate an email that means something instead of a generic email that everyone receives. While this will take more time, it is worth doing in order to cultivate an invested friends list. You're not simply trying to amass the most friends, you're building your audience one fan at a time. (p. 48)

As can be seen from this statement, there is an element of "affective labor" in the effort made by a musician to befriend the audience members and to then turn them into fans.

Although fans actually support the artist, not all friends become active fans.

Kalliongis also emphasizes that the goal is to find a way to quickly capture the user's attention in very short time span: "your Myspace profile is your window to the world. It might only receive a fleeting glance from the passers-by, so grabbing their attention is important" (p. 48). Kalliongis's tip is to first focus on the headline:

Headline:

Your headline is important. It's one of the first things the user will notice, as it's positioned directly next to your picture. Your headline can serve several purposes. Promotion of a new album or tour (e.g. our new single – out March 30th!). Use the headline to promote your upcoming work. If you're planning on releasing a single for download, mark it up in your Headline with a release date. This will instantly let the reader know what you're up to. (p. 49)

Next the author focuses on the significance of slogans:

A catchy slogan that fits in with the genre that you're appealing to. If you can think of a catchy slogan, it's useful marketing mechanism. Having a catchphrase or gimmick can help establish your brand. The punk bands of the '70s and '80s made a lot of money using slogans and t-shirt-friendly phrases. It was part of their appeal, and people like to buy into something that seems cool.

(1) A simple description of the band and its sound

(2) Bio: This field allows you to write a short history of your band or act. Myspace users have a short attention span. If you blitz them with an essay, they'll avoid it completely. Limit your bio to a couple of paragraphs of short and snappy text. Leave a link to an extended version if you must, but don't let it clog up your page. (p. 49-50)

Kalliongis provides a few additional helpful tips about improving one's Myspace page to

attract more attention:

- Using a picture that is taller rather than wider will make your profile stand out more when you are added to a friends list.
- Changing your URL on your profile page is helpful for a few reasons. Choosing a name that is easy to remember will help fans and others find your page. Adding a keyword or two will help search engines find your profile, which will result in higher rankings.
- Keep in mind that once you choose your Myspace URL, you won't be able to change it, so choose something that makes sense.
- Adding a logo is a good way to create name recognition on Myspace.
- Link your Myspace page to your web site and vice versa. This will help increase your web exposure. Include keywords into your link which will also be picked up by search engines.
- Add high PR rating Google profile pages to your friends list in order to improve your own web ranking. Google's PR rating represents how important the page is on the web. It assumes that if one page links to another, it is giving an endorsement and a vote from the other site. This can be done by searching for the highest ranking profiles using the advanced search feature on Google. Enter the search term "Myspace profiles" and for the domain, enter "Myspace.com" so it will narrow your search to only those profiles on Myspace with the highest ranking. Simply do a friend request and when approved send them a comment. This is a very advantageous strategy! (p. 56-57)

As some of these tips suggest, trying to attract users' attention on Myspace is a tedious task. What is particularly noteworthy about these recommendations is that all of these tactics are geared towards the building of one's persona as an active, important, and desired artist through concentration on interpersonal and interactive elements. The earlier case study of Tequila's profile seems to indicate that these techniques have been incorporated into her labor (or that of whomever is updating and customizing her profile).

On a related note, the labor of adding "friends" is also highly emphasized by Kalliongis. In an earlier section, I introduced a few websites that aid musicians in instantly adding friends, a service that is available for a fee. However, Kalliongis teaches

how to accrue friends manually:

If you want to add more names to your friends list, placing an “Add me” button in a comment on a popular profile with a large friends list is a powerful way to get a large amount of new friends. You can use any picture you want to draw attention, and when a new friend clicks on it they will be asked to accept you as a friend. Podcasting from your blog or Myspace page is a good way to increase your fan base. A podcast is exactly the same as a blog, but with audio as well. To create a podcast, you need to upload your songs or other audio content to your web site or you can host your podcast to your Myspace blog or page by pasting your podcast. (p. 57)

It is important to note that the laboring tips recommended in this quotation are very time-consuming and require a mastery of certain techniques. A successful user of this advice must be able to converge various media outlets and be savvy with all kinds of customizing tools. Although learning and adapting to technology is important in one’s labor, Kalliongis highlights the more interpersonal aspect of labor, which is the art of social networking.

In addition to dedicating time to making one’s profile appear more attractive, Kalliongis focuses on the social protocols of Myspace. The interactive dimension is very important, as Myspace’s central function is social networking. This point is echoed in the testimonies by musicians, all of whom emphasize that one cannot just make a profile and wait for others to approach you. Work must be put into being socially pro-active on the website. Kalliongis mentions the exact same point:

Now that you have a complete Myspace profile, it’s time to look at how to interact on the Myspace network. This is very important because the amount of time you spend marketing your music will determine how popular you become on Myspace. Myspace marketing is all about getting your name out there and making “friends.” While you shouldn’t expect this to extend to real life, a “Myspace friend” is a friend to appreciate. Every user you can get on your friend list will show others that your page is worth exploring. (p. 69)

This aspect is extremely important and resonates with other social networking sites as well.

The social networking tips given by Kalliongis (2008) should be examined further in order to understand the types of key components he is addressing, since some of them seem contradictory. For example, he states that while it is important to befriend others in a real, manual manner, “you shouldn’t be concerned with the personalities of the people on your friend’s list. A friend is a friend and in the world of Myspace, the more you have the better you’ll be received” (p. 69). The implication of this advice extends further than its obvious emphasis on the equation between the number of friends and perceived popularity and value. In essence, Kalliongis seems to be saying that the specific people who consume one’s music are not all that important, a perspective that completely ignores and dismisses the quality of audience members.

Hardt and Negri’s (2000) understanding of immaterial and affective labor highlights the promising aspects of cooperation and social interaction: “the only configurations of capital able to thrive in the new world will be those that adapt to and govern the new immaterial, cooperative, communicative, and affective composition of labor power” (p. 27). In general, their outlook on immaterial and affective labor has been viewed as “benign” (Thompson, 2005, p. 85). However, these laboring processes may not only result in positive outcomes.

Some scholars, such as Gill and Pratt (2008), are dissatisfied with the notion of affective labor, since all work possesses affective dimensions and challenges: “if all work has affective dimensions then what does it mean to say that any particular job involves affective labour” (p. 15). For these scholars, the puzzling aspect about affective labor is

rooted in the conceptualization of the affect itself: “affect appears largely in its more pleasant guises—solidarity, sociality, cooperativeness, desire—and, importantly, as (largely) always-already transgressive” (p. 15). Gill and Pratt argue that the implications of the emphasis on affirmative feelings are troublesome, especially taking into account contemporary capitalism that does not acknowledge the existence of other types of emotions such as “fatigue, exhaustions and frustration... fear, competitiveness, the experience of socializing not simply as pleasurable potential, but as compulsory means of securing future work” (p. 15).

As the earlier examples of Myspace indicate, the affective dimension is, to some extent, deceptive; Kalliongis seems to recognize this, since he clearly disregards the quality and emphasizes the quantity of friends. Even if one proactively projects a positive image and sends out invitations, at the end of the day, the labor is only productive insofar as it fulfills one’s goal of gaining popularity. Moreover, Kalliongis does not address how this type of affective labor of befriending others may result in rejection and failure. Although one may extend invitations to numerous users, there may be many accounts of people disregarding the messages. Perhaps in an effort to prevent this type of outcome, Myspace’s communicative mechanism includes various devices that encourage users to not ignore such messages. Earlier I mentioned that the function of requesting friends has been enhanced by the attachment of a comment box next to this tool. Without personal messages, one may be less inclined to pay attention to the multiple friend requests that might accumulate in one’s message box. However, despite developing a way to encourage Myspace community members to acknowledge one another’s messages and thus improve the networking process, there are also ways in

which one can reject all messages and friend requests from specific users by putting one's profile setting into a default mode.

While there are positive and affirmative aspects to affective labor on Myspace, it is also important to recognize that negative emotions can happen in the midst of one's labor. Thus, as Gill and Pratt (2008) assert, "these (unpleasant) affective experiences — as well as the pleasures of the work — need to be theorized to furnish a full understanding of the experience of cultural work" (p. 16). Similarly Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008) contend that immaterial and affective labor is problematic, especially in the context of the creative industries. They also criticize Hardt and Negri for failing to specifically address the immaterial and affective labor that takes place in the cultural sector:

at some point in an account of the labour undertaken in a particular sector, such as the cultural industries, it will also be necessary to consider what is specific to that sector. At no point do Hardt and Negri offer even a hint of assistance in this respect. (p. 99-100)

After pointing out Hardt and Negri's shortcoming, Hesmondhalgh and Baker turn their attention to a particular case study from the creative industries: the reality television programs related to talent competitions. In examining the talent program *Show us your talent*, Hesmondhalgh and Baker explain that much of what is involved in this competition is emotional labor:

managing the emotional responses of others... is also integral in talent shows. This applies not only to the performance itself but also to the contributor's walk on to the stage (trepidation, nervousness, excitement) and the post-performance chat in the green room (joy, disappointment, frustration, anger). (p. 108)

What this suggests is that the affective labor described by Hardt and Negri is not all-encompassing in the sense that not only affirmative and positive emotions are linked to such endeavors. Hesmondhalgh and Baker reveal how, in the creative industries and

especially in talent shows, the pressure to win the show can often be emotionally draining and overwhelming; this can undermine the fun and happy times that often actually happen on such occasions (p. 112).

From this case study, we can locate Myspace within the larger landscape of the culture industries, where the focus is on one's talent and the methods for displaying one's talent in such a manner that people become fans. The following recommendations by Kalliongis (2008) underscore the pressure and delicacy of dealing with social networking issues:

I'd like to point that over-dressing your email can leave the user under the distinct impression that they're a recipient of a mass-marketing campaign, so make sure you "personalize" your correspondence in some small way... Be sure to add a little humor and self-deprecation. It loosens their guard and makes them slightly more willing to give your work a listen. Nobody likes an ego, so make sure the message isn't only about you. Focus on other topics in order to keep people interested in what you have to say. Remember that you're asking for a favor. You can sugar coat the message all you want, but at the end of the day, you're still bargaining for the cooperation of the user. Always remember to thank them, whether or not they decide to give their attention to your work. It's a good idea to add a small disclaimer apologizing in the event that you've wasted any of their time. Once again, this example of good online etiquette is absolutely critical. You ARE looking for friends after all. (p. 75-76)

However when all else does fail, and one ends up being unsuccessful with online social networking or if one does not have the time to gather many friends, there is an alternative. One can purchase a Myspace profile, which are sold for prices up to \$25,000 (p. 69).

The similarities between television talent shows and Myspace are that both require a toughness to overcome personal emotions and a need to ingratiate oneself with others. On the television shows, one must learn to control one's anger and frustration, and to put on a cheery face at all times to convince program producers and staff members

that one is cut out for the competition (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008). On Myspace, one must learn to deal with negative experiences, even if one is not getting the type of attention that one desires to receive, and one must become accustomed to soliciting others' support: "The idea of disguising yourself as a friend so that users open your mail without the pretences of spam and manufactured words is good as long as you let people know who you are" (Kalliongis, 2008, p. 75). This process of befriending others could potentially be draining, as one makes an effort to make as many friends as one can, only for the sake of becoming popular online. The negative emotions that are commonly displayed on talent programs are also evident when angry Myspace users rant about the website's ranking system. Negative emotional responses do occur from time to time on Myspace in the midst of the hard work that is being exerted. (often this can be expressed by the use of emoticons on Myspace) In the next section, I will explore the online ranking systems and analyze the negative toll this type of system has had on one particular Myspace user.

### Ranking System

Even when labor is considered immaterial, it possesses a value, yet how is this value produced? If this labor is deemed to be immeasurable, what kind of measurable value can be attributed to immaterial and affective labor? According to Bourdieu (1993), "the art trader is not just the agent who gives the work a commercial value by bringing it into a market; he is not just the representative, the impresario, who 'defends the authors he loves.' He is the person who can proclaim the value of the author he defends" (p. 77). With this in mind, how do Myspace musicians gain value? Unlike the traditional way of winning recognition through hiring intermediaries to promote one's talent and potential,

the judgment of value on Myspace is left to the network bodies. Hence, the network bodies step into the roles previously played by corporate executives and artist and repertoire scouts, who traditionally shaped the careers of artists. While this development has been celebrated as a true democratic revolution, an interesting assumption arises at this juncture. One may now think that majority support is what grants and legitimizes an artist's value—hence, it can be logically thought that the ranking system on Myspace is an indicator of artistic value.

According to Jack Bratich (2009), “judgment culture often takes the form of rating communities” (forthcoming). Myspace epitomizes the judgment culture, as rating and ranking are an integral part of the music communities. Mark Sweney (2008), in “MTV and Myspace band together,” reports that MTV will soon feature the most voted Myspace musicians' video on the MTV2 website. A show called “Myspace Chart,” will also be aired on MTV2. This will feature the voting activities of fans, and the top five artists chosen by the fans will receive a free promotion. Because Myspace's fame seems to be a ticket to larger-scale renown, popularity on Myspace is not taken lightly. Nonetheless, corruption could exist in the process of climbing up the charts. On Myspace's forum, under the topic titled “Unfair ranking system on myspace's music chart,” a Myspace user expresses his skepticism and doubts about the ranking system and explains how unjust aspects of the chart system have made all of his hard work futile:

I have worked extremely hard to accomplish what I have with my music, and I was very pleased with the rewards that I reaped some time ago, but now I feel as if all the pain-staking labor I have exerted in creating my music is 100% pointless. Your unfair, impartial ranking system and music charts have destroyed my ability to promote myself on your website; furthermore, they have discouraged me from writing more music or posting it on your website. Once again, my question is, what are your criteria for selecting and ranking bands for your music charts? Also, why

have I suddenly disappeared from the charts, even before I changed my genres to see if I could notice a difference (Jadeius~the~Vdead, 2008).

As evident in this testimony, this user is advocating a close investigation of the process utilized in the ranking system. Interestingly, this user's skeptical post has received only a few dismissive comments: "quit your bitching it's really not that big of a deal. I don't even know anyone who actually looks for bands to listen to through the charts" (Mackensen, 2008). The important thing to notice here is that although the posting criticized the criteria used in ranking system, the lack of responses signifies a lack of support and interest.

In my response to personal blog post, however, one non-musician member questioned the rating system, while at the same time expressing no distrust in the actual process of the ranking system. This he believes to be determined solely by the Myspace users.

The rating system seems to be rated by the people who use myspace, so if someone comes across a concert pianist and they don't like that type of music they may rate it low. Is that fair? I would have to say no, just because they don't like that type of music they may give it a low score, not because the music is not well performed, but simply because they don't like the piano. (From Deutschland, 2008)

This user attributes the unfairness of the ranking system to the wide variation in people's taste in music; he does not indicate skepticism toward the entire operation of the ranking system.

Can the ranking system fairly reconcile and weigh a wide variety of tastes in music? To this end, it is important to recognize that Myspace's chart is also ranked by genres or categories; hence, a person's disinterest or animosity toward a certain style of music will not count among the votes that accumulate in the chart of specific genres.

Another respondent to my blog posting, David Helfrich (a rapper), asserts his belief that the ranking system matters in the general success of a musician's convergence into mainstream media outlets:

Certainly - the music industry looks at Myspace 'stats' (such as views, friends added, comments etc...) and takes that into consideration - so as with any form of popular culture (particularly in America) - people will do whatever they can to attention grab - be it via sexy photos, flashy layouts, or any element that grabs the popular culture. (Helfrich, 2008)

While these responses acknowledge the importance of statistics and ratings, Mat Helm (a singer-songwriter) claims that the value of Myspace lies in its collaborative aspects:

Myspace may serve as a springboard for an artist who has trouble releasing their art for critique or may result in a major increase in unit sales for one who has built a recognizable name. As far as being a tiny part of the communal universe of artists, I do not feel competitive and personally use myspace to work out musical ideas in order to gauge responses from listeners, to correspond with compelling artists from other parts of the world and listen to what they're doing, and to be sought out by other musicians who may be interested in crafting instrumentation for my compositions. (Helm, 2008)

Helm states that although he does not rely on Myspace to build his career, he does recognize its contribution to the building of networks with other musicians who may be interested in collaborating on musical projects. His statement is in line with Pierre Levy's (1997) idea of art in an age of "collective intelligence": "the accent has now shifted from work to progress. Its embodiment is manifested in moments, places, collective dynamics, but no longer in individuals. It is an art without a signature" (p. 123). Although Levy believes that cyberspace art has no signature, many artists on Myspace beg to differ. Collaborative aspects on Myspace do not necessarily suggest that one's art is lost through a fusion with others' ideas, or that individuality is lost.

Craig McGorry (a jazz musician) echoes Helm's response in regard to the

collaborative and networking elements of the Myspace experience:

The main value I have found with MySpace has been the interaction with other musicians. It serves as a cyberspace business card. I have my own website, a MySpace account, and now a Facebook account. Most of the interaction on MySpace has been with musicians I meet saying "Hey what's your MySpace site?" This is so they can hear how you sound and figure out how serious a player you are. But I meet most musicians I know either from other musicians, playing situations, or by posting ads on Craigslist. The Craigslist responses are the ones where typically the responder typically asks for your MySpace address and offers theirs as a "resume" of sorts. (McGorry, 2008)

According to McGorry, his Myspace page essentially functions as a resume, a commonly shared communication space amongst musicians. In addition, he finds connectivity and the opportunities to perform with others as the “value” that comes out of Myspace. Thus, collaboration in the musicians’ community is a highly valued asset, and Myspace provides such opportunities by promoting connectivity with other musicians. Myspace phenomenon has become a bridge toward potential convergence with the mainstream media outlets, and users claim that it has also attributed to the rise in independent (unsigned) musicians’ sales and success. In his response on my blog, Helfrich affirms the way in which Myspace benefits independent artists who want to skip the labor or cost of building a website:

Perhaps an unrecognized advantage of myspace is its benefit to the artist who does not want to pay for a website - and has little to no html skills/connects to build an aesthetically pleasing and functional site. Myspace allows the unknown artist to post music and easily give their work instant access to a greater community/audience - and thus has been instrumental in exposing fans to breaking artists. (Helfrich, 2008)

As revealed by these statements, one cannot necessarily conclude that the teleological aim of Myspace participation lies in mainstream acceptance and popularity; yet at the same time, one cannot completely dismiss the fact that the desire to amplify one’s

popularity and success on Myspace and to hopefully gain access to the mainstream outlets is a contributing factor to Myspace activities. The problem, however, has more to do with these type of fame-driven activities as a collective whole, since the overall popularity of the site could paradoxically lead to its decline and over-saturation.

### Is Myspace on its way out?

Myspace may still have been considered worthwhile by some users, but in mid-2009 was it already entering a state of decline? The last part of this chapter will explore a few indicators about the future trajectory of Myspace's prominence. In the article, "Rumors of the decline of MySpace are exaggerated," Duncan Riley (2007) discussed the controversial rumors about the decline of Myspace in reaction to the rising popularity of Facebook. At that time, Riley argued that Myspace was not being threatened.

Two years later in an article titled "Myspace shrinks as Facebook, Twitter and Bebo grab its users," (March 29, 2009). David Smith reports as in an article published "MySpace had 124 million monthly unique visitors last month, a decline of 2%, according to the marketing research company comScore. Facebook, by contrast, racked up 276 million unique visitors, an increase of 16.6%" (para. 5). Smith further explains that the reasons for Myspace's decline were linked to the increasing number of employee resignations at Myspace. According to Ryan Nakashima (2009) in *Huffingtonpost*, Myspace reportedly cut 30% of its staff in order to increase efficiency and to more closely resemble the make-up of the Facebook staff. Myspace is definitely aware of its rival Facebook as revealed by the hiring of former Facebook executive Owen Van Natta by News Corp. as its new chief executive. It is no exaggeration to say that Myspace is in need of new ideas for success, especially from someone who has experience creating

success on Facebook.

An informal blog survey at answers.yahoo.com titled “Is Myspace a dying trend?” created in 2008, reports that Myspace is no longer considered a groundbreaking and hip social networking site. One commentator on this survey pointed out that all things go through fad phases and that everything ends eventually:

I have never understood it and probably only once went on it. Things are fads and fade out soon enough - this is probably just another thing that will live in the past. (Kincaid1, n.d.).

Another user seconded this opinion:

Yeah I think it is dying, I don't mind though. I'm so sick of my myspace. I hate all the messages about buying your friends and joining mobsters and take this dumb movie quiz. The only reason I go on there is that I've found a lot of my old friends on there and its nice to be able to be in contact with them again. I've never done facebook or any of the other ones but I imagine they are about to be swamped with all the same problems that myspace has. I'm ready to just go back to email already. (Aurora, n.d.)

It seems clear that the reasons behind Myspace's decline are an increase in commercialization and a lack of organization of information. The above commentator assumes that Facebook may develop similar type problems in the near future.

In general, the participants in this blog survey express delight and relief that Myspace is losing its popularity:

Maybe it's because there are so many scams on MySpace with identity theft and a lot of people I know are getting viruses from being on there with things that are sent through the web site. I'm glad it's dying down - cuz I don't have a MySpace account and why does everyone need to advertise themselves anyway? (Telling it like it is, n.d.)

According to this commentator, Myspace has not only lost its popularity, but it has become a place that is potentially dangerous.

Although most of the commentators indicate that they believe MySpace to be in

decline, not everyone seems to believe or want to believe such hype:

Facebook is only popular with school-age people (college, high school, etc), and that only because it's "safer." Myspace is still blowing and going with people who are out of school and beyond. I prefer Myspace. There's a lot more you can do on Myspace. Facebook is so restricted. (Love My Hubby-Hate His Mom, n.d.)

This commentator defends Myspace and prefers Myspace over Facebook, since he or she thinks that Facebook is only for college people. However, it is important to note that this person's comment is inaccurate, since Facebook is now popular amongst people of all ages and professions.

Although Facebook may presently be attracting more attention than Myspace in 2009, some commentators, such as the one quoted below, have a strong aversion to Facebook:

Facebook is lame, it sends you a note every time one of your friends takes a \*\*\*\*. And all those stupid applications to delete. Invitations to imaginary crap, Bleagh. I am on there ONLY to play Wordscraper... It's not good for much else. (Chloe, n.d.)

Several commentators (paperxxD and Frankie) also shared opinions, which indicated distaste for both Myspace and Facebook: "hate myspace n facebook. i rather do myyearbook or friendster. =]," "all those websites are \*\*\*\*. i think the people who go on there every single day need to get a job n a life," "I've been there or done that."

A review of a limited number of personal blogs revealed similar sentiments on the topic of Myspace's decline in popularity:

Why is Myspace Dying? How did the once omnipotent social networking site 'Myspace' suddenly become unpopular and uncool? There are a lot of reasons we could focus on such as too many fake profiles, profiles that are too busy, and the fact that 'Myspace' seems to be doing many things well, but nothing great (music, film, classifieds, etc.). But what's really going on with 'Myspace' is that they stopped being cutting edge. They stopped leading and started following. Right now 'Myspace' needs a game

changer. A user experience that makes people talk about it, use it, love it. They need to change the rules or get used to being increasingly irrelevant. Wishing you continued success! (Christopolis, 2009)

Numerous other bloggers seem to share this quoted blogger's opinions. Evidence of this can be easily spotted when one types the key phrase "Is Myspace dying" into any search engine.

Although Myspace's diminished popularity did not occur overnight, it is important to note that this development was neither sudden nor unforeseen. For six years after founding in 2003, Myspace experienced a gradual decline in membership, resulting in a loss in popularity, and a devaluation in the eyes of its users and others. As a discrete group of users, musicians have long argued that popularity generated on Myspace can help launch or enhance their professional careers. Thus, there has been an increase in the various services that assist musicians in quickly attaining popularity. Despite attempts to cater to musicians and to stay relevant in the current cultural climate, there were numerous indications in mid-2009 that Myspace might be turning into a less popular and trendy social networking site.

In addition to the results from an informal survey of random users' views on Myspace and a collection of various news reports, my personal profile e-mail account is currently filled with countless spam and advertising messages. In the month of April 2009, a random review of the e-mail subject lines included the following announcements: "Last call for tickets to detour: NYC's premiere Film Noir & Arts Festival @ Galapagos in Dumbo Brkyn, Thurs April @ 7:30 pm"; "Hey I'm playing a show in New York"; "Bride has new stuff"; "Tania Stavreva Piano Recital at Yamaha Artists Services, Inc 05/08/09"; "Discover Sound- Join our online community"; "Download the new silent

disorder EP now”; “Sin.sex.art. detour: NYC’s premiere Film Noir & Arts Festival”; “booking: live shows, photo shoots, and more.” As the titles of these Myspace messages clearly indicate, few of the emails filling my mailbox were actually personal in nature. (Prior to 2006, these types of spam efforts were rare.) Thus, contrary to the experts’ recommendations on effective means for social networking on Myspace, the striving for popularity mitigates interactivity on the website, and this in return impacts individual artists’ efforts to promote themselves.

The spam mails and overtly ubiquitous promotional efforts on Myspace have been mentioned by the user of Myspace, Craig McGorry. He explains that similar to craigslist.com, a commonly used classified website used by musicians to network, Myspace might be experiencing a debilitating problem of over-saturation:

I'd like to comment on Craigslist. About a year or two ago, I could get about 1 gig a month from that site. However, in the last year or so, it has become so saturated, that I haven't gotten a single gig from that site. I think that when someone posts looking for a "Jazz Band for Cocktail Hour" or some kind of event, they receive an overwhelming amount of responses. This is because it is difficult to find paying jazz gigs. It may be different for pop music (actually, about 8 months ago I did get a pop gig and made some money. This was through a posting on CraigsList). I wonder if MySpace has a similar saturation effect. With CraigsList, I know that it's helped created a commoditized situation. If I want to charge someone \$150 per musician for a trio gig for 2 - 4 hours, they can probably find someone to do it for much less. \$150 per musician is not even that high a price for a skilled group of musicians, but many students and professionals are all in the same boat looking for gigs. They all have MySpace accounts and can look good "on paper" (on either?). So, it seems to have leveled the playing field, but maybe in a negative way. (McGorry, 2008)

As the above commentary reveals, Myspace may be suffering from the same problems that plague Craigslist.

## Conclusion

According to user testimonies as well as the authors of the books on Myspace, Myspace's fame has not simply come out of nowhere. The more work one puts in, the higher the chance of networking with the right people, since Myspace does not exclude the traditional ways of getting "discovered" by music industry decision makers (those who have the authority over determining a musician's marketability and value). However, by and large, the interesting philosophy and operation of Myspace lies in its "contested terrain" (Kahn & Kellner, 2004).<sup>v</sup> By simultaneously acknowledging the contested nature of the internet and Bourdieu's (1993) notion of cultural production as "a site of struggle"<sup>vi</sup>, Myspace's cultural field of production can be summarized as being characterized by constant tensions between artists, both established and unknown. This occurs as unknown artists seek fame with the aid of mainstream exposure, while already established artists use Myspace as an effective marketing tool.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the self-branding, marketing, and promoting of musicians are a form of immaterial, affective and free labor. Musicians, as well as self-help books, have shown that it takes much hard work to maintain and generate interest in personal and professional profiles. However, it is ironic that despite hard work, success is not always guaranteed, especially given the trends on Myspace. As Myspace continues to lose its popularity and to downsize its staff, the construction of a "celebrity status" on Myspace may not play a major role in the building of careers much longer. In addition, as everyone receives similar kinds of ingratiating emails and advertising from one another, these will also impact Myspace's overall value. Too much repetitive social interaction could be disastrous, as even the experts warn. However, it is

also important to understand that the decreasing popularity of Myspace cannot solely be blamed on over-saturation and countless spams; as the reports show, Facebook may greatly impact Myspace's gradual downfall. In this case, Myspace's popularity and convergence culture closely parallel the increasing popularity of other social networking sites.

In tracing the trajectories of Myspace from its inception to the year 2009, a few noteworthy issues arise. While the demarcation between independent, unsigned and the major artists is clearly posted in the top artists section, the actual activities and the process of gaining value do not occur or operate in a systematic and isolated fashion. Moreover, Myspace does not function as a passive conduit for independent musicians where they have the authority to claim the value of their music.

With the rise of media convergence, Myspace clearly embodies the spirit of bottom-up and top-down impulses towards convergence. Although the site was initially conceived as a way to counteract the top-down approach, I argue that what has actually occurred is a shift in power from the traditional type of cultural intermediaries to a diversified body of cultural intermediaries, which now includes the network bodies, the judges who select Myspace's featured musicians, and the authors of published works that explicate the protocols. As Andrew Currah (2007) asserts, "the emergence of the digital networked environment has sparked a battle between, on one hand, these corporations and, on the other hands, advocates of 'digital freedom,' 'free culture,' and 'cyber liberty'" (p. 468). In other words, while there are certainly many artists on Myspace who cherish the opportunities to share their music online and build their careers independently, one cannot ignore that Myspace is closely working alongside mainstream

media outlets, such as MTV. Ironically, this fact is reinforced by the fact that the book that provides advice for Myspace users (the one examined in depth in this chapter) was published by MTV.

While sites such as Myspace are mergers of bottom-up and top-down approaches, mainstream convergence may possibly threaten the aesthetic critical judgment of tastes and value. The mainstream media corporations' interest lies in profits<sup>vii</sup>; hence, the convergence could give rise to music that merely echoes the popular sounds of mainstream music. If the internet holds the key to the celebration of underestimated and underexposed works by independent musicians, the rapid growth of Myspace is symptomatic of post-modernity, where the line between the underground, marginalized and mainstream cultures are blurred.

## CHAPTER IV: A CASE STUDY OF YOUTUBE.COM

### Introduction

The Youtube phenomenon resembles that of Myspace in that it has an enormous impact on today's culture. While Youtube's influence on our culture touches diverse social frameworks, it continues to also function as a musician's social network. Being able to network on Youtube is one of the "must learn" tactics for becoming a successful online promoter (Kallongis, 2008). These tactics are considered a form of labor as musicians learn 'social protocols' from the experts to become popular. To this end, the definition of popularity in the age of convergence culture needs to be re-conceptualized to reflect the theoretical evolution that has occurred since the early days of popular culture studies.

While this chapter will examine the complex notion of popularity on Youtube, it will also examine the general impact of such popularity. Many Youtube users have reported that popularity generated on this site can directly help launch a successful career. Youtube has, thus, frequently been touted as a place where people can easily see the fruits of their labor. This chapter will juxtapose these optimistic narratives with other commentaries which challenge this view. One such ambivalent and non-celebratory view is presented by Jean Burgess and Joshua Green (2009) in their recent book *Youtube: Online video and participatory culture*. Similar to their line of argument, this chapter will reveal that Youtube is neither a utopia nor a dystopia for signed and unsigned musicians.

The final section of this chapter will describe a variety of competitions held on

Youtube, all of which utilize crowdsourcing methods. Through the exploration of various competitions held on Youtube, the reader will see how the site functions as not only a conduit and a channel for independent and mainstream cultural contents, but also as a producer of cultural events—bridging both mainstream and amateur music cultures. Through this illustration, it will become clear that a complex dynamic exists in the tension created by major corporate and grassroots cultures. As a whole, this chapter will study how this tension contributes to the shaping of cultural values in convergence culture.

### What is Youtube?

Youtube was created by three former PayPal (an online service through which money can be sent and received) employees in mid-February 2005. The unique feature of Youtube is that this site not only displays movie clips, television clips, and music videos from mainstream culture, but it also makes accessible contents created by amateurs, such as videoblogs and short original videos. In October 2006, Google, Inc., purchased Youtube for US \$1.65 billion. The videos on Youtube can be accessed by unregistered users; however, by registering, users are given the ability to upload unlimited numbers of videos. In the second year of Youtube's operation, more participatory and feedback features were added. In July 2006, Youtube announced that its daily viewer total now numbered more than 100 million, and in June 2006, 2.5 billion videos were reportedly watched. By August 2006, Youtube claimed to host about 6.1 million videos, and its user accounts topped 500,000 (Youtube, n.d.). Youtube's popularity has soared ever since its creation. For example in Britain, Youtube was the most popular video website in November 2007; in 2008, Youtube was consistently

ranked as one of the top ten most accessed video sites in the world (Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 2).

### Labor on Youtube

Because Youtube's popularity provides opportunities for mainstream exposure and fame, there has been an increase in the number of self-help books on the subject of how to become popular or successful on Youtube (Miller, 2008; Ying, 2007; Weber, 2007; Levy, 2008). With the help of these books, independent cultural producers can follow certain steps and protocols to gain popularity on Youtube.

Similar to other social networking sites that focus on music production and networking, Youtube allows for social networking (Lange, 2008)—this, in and of itself, is considered a serious type of labor. Laboring is often time-consuming and requires great attention to details, but most importantly, all of the labor that takes place demands a social component. Kalliongis (2008), the author of Myspace Music Monster, advocates the same thing:

the most important way to increase your exposure on social networking sites like Youtube is by being a constant presence online. Join as many groups as you can, leave comments, and post new video, broadcast live, and give fans a reason to want to return to your page. (p. 126)

Thus, participating in the discussion carried out in the commentary section of a website is one of the vital ways that one can increase and build one's fan base (Lastufra and Dean, 2009, p. 134). The online promotion strategies on Youtube do not only rely on blatant and obvious tactics to gain people's attention. Similar to Myspace, on Youtube, making "friends" and being polite to each and every one of them is crucial. One must master the "social protocols" on the social networking sites in order to win the true interest of the

fans. In this way, the linking of one friend to another functions as a form of free labor.

The key component to musicians' social networking practices on Youtube is the combined efforts of immaterial and affective labors and the way in which they drive the free labor of audience members. Besides commenting on each other's pages on Youtube, users can gain more popularity by responding to each other's videos through the creation of other videos. Basically, by tracking website visitation (hits), one can learn much about the viewers who could be transformed into fans.

One further way to propel the free labor by viewers is by staying active within the community. By "borrowing" and collectivizing the free labor of audience members, immaterial labor is generated.<sup>viii</sup> This idea echoes Andrejevic's (2007) elaboration on surveillance and i-commerce in the digital age. Andrejevic explains that although on the surface, the interactive media seem to invite harmless interactivity from the audience members, in the end, users come to a site for a variety of motives. The monitoring of users is justified by the following rationale: "if watching workers helped make them more efficient, monitoring consumers [is] an integral component of managing the 'problem' of distribution... Might a comparable method be developed for managing a dispersed mass to make them prolific and 'productive,' not just as workers but also as consumers?" (p. 74-75). This important question relates directly to our current discussion.

As Andrejevic's statement illustrates, monitoring one's audience is highly useful in understanding and building potential fan bases. This strategy can also be applied to Youtube, where one can surf around the comment section and analyze the types of music preferred by other users. Based on the information gathered, one can then make recommendations directly to other users or invite them to subscribe to a particular

Youtube channel. Although exploring Youtube may seem like a pleasant pastime, this activity offers many opportunities for gathering information about the site users. At this juncture, the question arises as to how to interpret these collective activities and networking endeavors, all of which are driven to harness mass energies and to focus them toward the acquisition of fame.

### Affective Labor

On Youtube, in order for a musician to gain popularity, one does not just act as a personal “agent,” but he or she also becomes a recruiter of multiple “agents” who represent the mass networks. Therefore, one must accrue as many friends as possible just like Myspace. As mentioned above, musicians can create their own Youtube channels from which they can broadcast videos. Viewers can sign up to become regular viewers of a specific individual's videos. The more viewers acquired, the higher the exposure and popularity for the musician in question. Increased viewership can ultimately attract the attention of the record labels. (This phenomenon will be explained in the latter part of this chapter with specific reference to musicians signing contracts with major record labels). However, in order to achieve this, one must exert immaterial and affective labor. These forms of labor also become a pillar for the free labor of fans. By learning certain tactics and mastering the process of befriending people online, laboring for free becomes seemingly natural and fun for the artist/recruiters.

Nevertheless, there are other broader issues to explore in the overall process of befriending. In order to become an independent brand, one must learn to relate to the massive channels of networks; this is paradoxical because standing out on its own seems almost impossible in a society of control in which wide-scale networking is required.

Thus, on Youtube, a logic similar to that on Myspace is employed. The key to this kind of networking is to understand that in convergence culture, one must tap into the accessibility of others. This does not merely apply to working with the large social networks, but requires social networking with agents to help foster the emotional labor of complimenting favorite artists' music and inviting others to join in. The ultimate teleological aim of this kind of labor is to distinguish oneself from others by creating a celebrity status online. In reference to the fame-centric focus of many activities on the social networking sites, Hearn (2008) argues that "the fascination with the paparazzi format and the specific way of being seen that this format signifies reinforces the argument that fame and attention are now significant cultural values" (p. 210). At this juncture, how can we create a unified concept of popularity on Youtube, given that it is constructed by various forms of labor?

### Popularity on Youtube

According to Burgess and Green (2009),

understanding how popularity works on YouTube requires more than simply identifying and describing which of the videos have been watched the most... Is the 'popular' simply a matter of degree - how popular a particular cultural product is, measured by its reach or sales? Or is it a matter of a kind - the cultural forms that are loved intensely, or that are 'of people'. (p. 39)

The criteria used to define popularity on Youtube are numerous: "Most viewed, most responded, most discussed, top rated, most favorite, previously popular, and most active" (cited in Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 39).

Given this description, it is important to revisit Adorno's notion of popular and serious arts since he dichotomizes the values linked to these art categories by

distinguishing between quality and quantity. This perspective can provide a framework in which to evaluate the current practices of the social networking sites on which the number of viewers is frequently equated with the quality of specific performances. Thus, I will examine how his concepts might be negotiated and modernized for the digital era, applying them specifically to the context of Youtube.

In the article “On Popular Music,” Adorno (1941) expounds on what he considers to be the crucial distinction between true art and inauthentic art. For him, the issue comes down to separating good music from bad music. This specific viewpoint aids us in grasping more fully his underlying motivation behind critiquing culture industry. Adorno distinguishes serious music from popular music by means of an “historical analysis of the division as it occurred in music production and of the roots of the two main spheres” (p. 197). He criticizes popular music for its characteristic of “standardization;” this attribute is typified by hit songs in which no originality is found and which are created solely by mechanical methods.

Robert Witkin (2003) in *Adorno on popular culture*, points out that Adorno “dismisses the question of what psychological effects are produced upon the audience by the features of music or by the impressions made by hit songs” (p. 59). Furthermore, Adorno’s depiction of audiences is not specific in terms of who makes up the audiences and how these individuals are affected by popular music. On the other hand, Adorno presents a very favorable view on what he classifies as “serious” music. What distinguishes this kind of music from its more popular counterpart is the fact that it is more detail-oriented and complex, and is characterized by carefully developed themes. Despite Adorno's extensive illustrations, drawn from both serious music and popular

music, his positions are rooted in a broad argument about the roles played by the market and commodity forces. It is this particular point that has been criticized by various scholars.

While earlier critiques of Adorno's distinction between popular and serious music were constructed in terms of the dominance of market hegemony, these critiques may seem as obsolete in the Youtube era because the market is definitely no longer seen as "monolithic." However, when the audiences have the power to actively contribute to the creative content, there are still ways in which to manipulate audiences, as argued by Andrejevic (2007):

The fact that interactivity fosters audience creativity and productivity raises the question as to who will benefit from and control the labor of an increasingly (inter-) active audience. It is by no means a given that interactivity is automatically empowering. (p. 32)

Andrejevic maintains that "interactivity" has been used as a way to control and manipulate consumers in the current media culture. He contends that although any type of participation for users may seem empowering, upon closer investigation, control and surveillance usually accompany the more developed technologies. He states that the type of participation that occurs in the interactive era is "a form of manipulation insofar as it is passed off as a form of democratic empowerment" (p. 244).

In examining the protocols given by the authors about popularity on Youtube, audiences definitely have more power than ever before as creators of content. However, making one's creative work public as a cultural producer is one thing, while learning to master various marketing tactics to become popular on Youtube is another. When the desire to become popular becomes strong, people often adopt a "whatever it takes" strategy, and this is when problems arise and the notion of popularity becomes distorted.

No longer can we equate popularity solely with a commercial definition, as reflected in the following statement: “masses of people listen to them, buy them, read them, consume them, and seem to enjoy them to the full” (Hall, 1998, p. 446). In the interactive era, it is important to recognize the evolution of the notion of popularity. By tracing immaterial, affective and free labor, and by studying the various recommendations on the building of fan bases, we may begin to wonder if “popularity” in the Youtube era can be equated with a commercial definition after all. This commercial aspect to popularity is the reason why Adorno questioned culture’s obsession with popularity and the equation of popularity with value. Adorno was concerned with the potential negative consequences of these perspectives.

In addition, Andrejevic further argues that democracy does not exist on the participatory media:

There were plenty of spoof and critical ads, which were promptly circulated on the popular viral video site YouTube, but in the end, even the critics ended up spending more time on the Chevy Tahoe Web site than they would have otherwise—and ended up sending email links for the site to their friends. (p. 244)

Overall, the critique that Andrejevic makes does not represent fully the situation of cultural producers / consumers, because the control that he describes is more relevant to major corporations and industries. Andrejevic criticizes the major corporations and governments for using audience participation for their own advantage. However, this outlook should be tackled with some sensitivity in the context of independent cultural producers. Although manipulation and surveillance still occur in terms of cultural producers, the end reward is not necessarily the same. For big corporations, the end goal is to make profits, while from a cultural producer’s point of view (i.e., independent

musicians), the two possible teleological aims are: 1) to gain popularity to start a successful career path, or 2) to simply share one's music with more listeners, just for the sake of one's own pleasure. While the two goals intersect and it is difficult to demarcate the fine line between the two, from an artist's point of view, wanting more listeners with whom to share one's art is not a negative goal.

Therefore, the commercial problem does not lie at the heart of helping others for free or of laboring to gain visibility on social networking sites, but it relates to the mainstream perceptions linked to the very nature of the democratic virtual media forms, such as Youtube. People may often think that popularity in the digital era is based on pure talent because there is no filtering of media content, as far as who is permitted to post videos and who is not. If one truly desires to gain popularity, as determined by the tactics proposed by authors and internet users, a certain degree of manipulation exists. In other words, regardless of talent or quality, one can gain popularity, but this popularity should not necessarily be perceived as the result of democratic actions, or be equated with aesthetic values.

The statement above then leads to the following question: can the number of people that view the videos be the ultimate indicator of one's quality? This is what caused Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) to despair; they were concerned that the "true" arts, which are defined as possessing autonomy, are frequently debased and transformed into commodities for the sake of increasing profit margins. Their greatest fear was that this phenomenon threatened art's ability to aid in the development of cultural and societal enlightenment. However, the argument made by the Frankfurt theorists, namely Adorno and Horkheimer, invite us to think anew about the recent problems linked to Youtube and

the other sites: the paradox that underlies cultural production in the midst of interactive era.

In the Youtube era, we can distill the essence of Adorno's argument and ask - will artists' creative content be affected by the counterproductive mechanism that only seeks to receive favorable rankings and comments from audience members? While the definition of and constraints on popularity in the pre-digital age fade, the emergence of a new type of popularity in the Youtube era confronts us with reverberations from past tensions in the field of cultural production: the inextricably complex relationship between the quality of art and the quantity of people who consume it. In the next section, the concept of popularity on Youtube will be problematized through the examination of various musicians who have used Youtube to gain popularity.

#### Youtube for signed musicians

Youtube is extremely popular among signed and unsigned musicians. However, before introducing the methods used by unsigned musicians to gain recording contracts, one should examine how Youtube is utilized by already signed and prominent musicians. Youtube is instrumental to signed musicians in several ways: 1) to preview albums; 2) to interact with fans; 3) and regain or increase popularity.

Gary Graff (2007) states that Def Leppard's front man, Elliot, informed Billboard that the band had no need to preview their upcoming albums on the road because of Youtube. Instead of physically previewing the album, the band uploaded an upcoming singles on Youtube. Similarly, artist such as Monica also use Youtube as a way to directly interact with their fans by releasing statements about upcoming albums (Crosely, 2008).

Youtube is also a place for once popular recording artists to regain their popularity and increase album sales. According to a Billboard (2008) article titled “April fools gets rickrolling,” British Dance Pop sensation Rick Astley’s 1987 song “Never gonna give you up” became popular again when Astley posted a video of himself in a funny dance performance. The article reports that the video utilized the “rickrolling” method, which is defined as “tricking internet users into clicking on a link but instead redirecting them to [another link]” (Billboard, 2008 para. 3). The end result of this was that sales of the song increased twofold.

### A Case Study of OK Go

While the signed musicians described above were famous prior to the inception of Youtube, this was not the case with the band OK Go. Although signed by Capital Records, the band was not very successful until the year 2006, when it filmed a homemade, low-budget music video of four band members dancing on a treadmill. In the USA Today article “Blend of old, new media launched OK Go,” Kevin Maney (2006) describes in detail the journey that OK Go took to attain massive popularity through the use of Youtube. If the video of treadmill dance by OK Go has indeed “[became] a cultural milestone—the YouTube Age version of Michael Jackson’s moonwalk” (Maney, 2006, para. 1), understanding the trajectory of this band’s journey is important as it sheds light on how signed but unpopular bands use Youtube to create fame. This begs the following question: what is the hype and how did or did Youtube help to achieve such success?

Clearly there are countless videos on Youtube vying for viewers’ attention, but OK Go’s plan to use Youtube was not accidental. According to Maney, Capital Records

took part in the distribution of the video as part of a viral marketing strategy. The video was choreographed by the band singer's sister, and according to Damien Kulash, a band member of OK Go, the band decided to videotape the routine in the backyard of one of their houses "just to see what it looked like" (cited in Maney, 2006, para. 20). This took place right before the start of their second tour.

Interestingly enough, the video, which was solely made and directed by band members and the singer's sister, got into the hands of the CEO of Capital Records, Andy Slater. Although the band filmed the video without informing Capital Records, (thereby technically violating the song's copyright), Slater told USA Today that he decided not to pursue legal action because he "thought it was the band exercising its right to have some sort of homegrown punk ethic, and [he] embraced it" (cited in Maney, 2006, para. 25). While Slater's decision to not pursue legal recourse might be perceived as an implied endorsement of the video, the senior vice president of marketing at Capital Records explicitly wanted the video to be posted on various video sites, such as ifilms. He was the one who gave permission to post the video online.

In the meanwhile, OK Go created a different marketing strategy by having Kulash hand out the DVD to kids that "looked the nerdiest" (cited in Maney, 2006, para. 29)). Kulash informed the kids that the DVD was not supposed to be out in public, and that if their record label found out, the band would be in trouble (cited in Maney, 2006, para. 29). Kulash told USA Today that the day after he handed out the DVDs, the video was everywhere on the internet. This occurred during the year that Youtube was launched. The article reports that "the timing was unintentionally perfect" (Maney, 2006, para. 31). At the peak of its popularity, the treadmill video on Youtube was watched more than one

million times within one week's time. As a consequence, OK Go started to make major television appearances: Good Morning America, The MTV Music Awards, The Colbert Report, and J.C. Penney ads. The video was even spoofed on The Simpsons. To top it all off, OK Go even won a Youtube "Oscar" for their video (Nichols, 2007).

Analyses of OK Go's Youtube popularity were reported in many news articles (Ultimateguitar, n.d.), but the article "OK Go chart shows growth from YouTube" deserves some attention since the author created a graph to analyze the correlation between album sales and Youtube exposure.



Note: imported from [http://www.coolfer.com/blog/archives/2006/08/okt\\_go\\_chart\\_sho.php](http://www.coolfer.com/blog/archives/2006/08/okt_go_chart_sho.php)

This graph appeared on the website [www.coolfer.com](http://www.coolfer.com), which is a blog that reports on the music industry. The Coolfer graphs shows that in the two weeks prior to August 17, 2006, OK Go album sales rose to nearly 2,500 from 457, and the sales of the track "Here we go" skyrocketed from 43 to 3,600. The article attributes the significant increase in the

album and single sales to “Youtube exposure and the resulting press” (Coolfer, 2006, para. 2).

While the article focuses on Youtube’s role in OK Go’s market success, one should be wary of the carefully constructed marketing strategy behind the Youtube campaign. To this end, Jenkins (2009) criticizes the outlook that blindly celebrates Youtube:

In a hybrid space like YouTube, it is often very difficult to determine what regimes of truth govern different genres of user-generated content. The goals of communicators can no longer be simply read off the channels of communication. Witness the emergence of Astroturf-fake grassroots media-content produced by commercial media companies and special interest groups but passed off as coming from individual amateurs. Historically, these powerful interests could exert overt control over broadcast media but now, they often have to mask their power in order to operate within the network. (p.122-123)

Although the OK Go video concept was somewhat accidental (although definitely homemade), its success cannot be viewed as completely unexpected, since the record label and the band wanted the video to create a buzz on the internet. What is important to note in this case is that gaining popularity on Youtube is not a simple matter; there can be many deceptive marketing practices wherein major corporations hide their true identities behind amateurs hired to create grassroots content. In the next section, several case studies of unsigned musicians will be presented. All of these individuals were “discovered” on Youtube due to the enormous popularity they generated. These descriptions will be juxtaposed with the above narrative to more fully analyze the involvement of mainstream corporations in grassroots activities.

#### Unsigned to Signed: Youtube Musicians

Youtube is also of critical significance to unsigned aspiring musicians who wish

to increase their audience base. One example of this is Esmee Denter, a young Youtube sensation from the Netherlands. Caroline McCarthy (2007) reports that Justin Timberlake, a former boy band star, signed Denter to his new record label. According to the article, Timberlake founded Tennman Records in a joint venture with Interscope Records, a major record label. The popularity Denter won on Youtube has resulted in a recording contract, but she will also gain more fame by touring with Justin Timberlake as an opening act.

Sometimes Youtube popularity and stardom can be accidental or at least reported as such in the rhetoric of various press outlets. For instance, the singer-songwriter Zee Avi uploaded her music to Youtube, purportedly without the intent of getting signed to a label. That is what the artist told Billboard magazine in an interview: “I went on there without any expectations or intentions for it to be a marketing tool, because I’ve never perceived YouTube to be that... I saw it as an outlet for entertainment and for me to share my music” (cited in Herrera, 2009, para. 2).

After signing up for an account in 2007, her channel soon attracted subscriptions from thousands of viewers. Fan labor was exerted in this case when one fan, Racounteur’s drummer Patrick Keller, sent a clip of Avi’s “No Christmas for Me” to White Stripes manager Ian Monotone. Monotone signed up with her immediately as a manager, and eventually signed her to Brushfire Records. Her song “No Christmas for Me” became a single on Brushfire Records’ holiday compilation album. On May 19, 2009, Avi released her first solo album.

Stories like this one help build the hopes of many aspiring musicians. Whether Avi wanted this to happen or not, this case reveals that the popularity of Youtube is not

tied solely to the enormous number of people who use Youtube. The issues of popularity are also inextricably linked to the hype surrounding the “accidental stardom” type of discourses.

A similar series of events occurred to the group Straight No Chaser, a 10-man acappella group, which became popular on Youtube and eventually signed a contract with Atlantic Records. One of the members of Straight No Chaser, Randy Stine, describes their experiences as follows:

Initially what happened was that he emailed me on YouTube, with some kind of vague username on YouTube," says Stine. "And I kind of thought, 'Who's this guy, Craig from Atlantic?' When he called me on New Year's Day this year, I'm sitting and Googling his name, trying to figure who I'm talking to exactly. I'm thinking, 'Am I being punked? Is this a fake call?'" (cited in Novikov, 2008, para. 4).

Stine further explains that when he realized that Craig was not a fake but instead the CEO of Atlantic Records, he answered the phone call, which eventually resulted in a contract and a five-album deal. Like Avi, there was no apparent intention or ambition from the band's end. According to one of the other members, the contract was completely unexpected: “Randy put our video on Youtube—just for fun, just so we could relive the glory of our days. We did not expect it to lead to a record deal” (cited in Novikov, 2008, para. 7).

Obviously not every artist gains fame on Youtube through unintentional luck. The rapper Soulja Boy knew exactly what he needed to do to get noticed and become famous. Soulja Boy gained enormous online attention after joining Youtube. He relayed this account to Billboard:

I was one of the first artists to have a YouTube account, if not the first. I joined two months after the site launched... I faked it until I made it. I acted like I was a celebrity. I was signing autographs, taking pictures, but

I had no record deal. I was living the life of a star, but I was just a regular kid then. (cited Concepcion, 2008, para.5)

Soulja Boy knew how to create the persona of a “celebrity” before he was even one. After he had countless people following him on Youtube and Myspace, he landed a record contract with Collipark/Interscope Records. After he signed to the label, his sales records soon matched his enormous popularity on Youtube. When Soulja Boy released the single “Crank That,” it sold 3.9 million digital copies, and was considered the third biggest song download since 2003. His debut album, “SouljaBoy TellEm”, sold 943,000 copies. According to Nielson RingScan, his single “Crank That” has tallied a total of 2.4 million sales (Concepcion, 2008a).

Besides the musicians mentioned here, there are other instances of musicians getting record deals through exposure on Youtube, such as Bo Burham (Kit, 2008) and Phatfffat (Concepcion, 2008b). Considering the descriptions above, it is difficult to describe Youtube’s fame as simply sheer happy accident or carefully constructed marketing strategy. By describing both sides to the narrative (signed artists’ use of Youtube vs. unsigned artists’ use of Youtube), one cannot escape the debate over Youtube’s impact on cultural values and ethics. As Burgess and Green (2009) note,

debates around good or bad uses of YouTube come down to ideas about ethics. But the ethics of participation in YouTube should not be reduced to making judgements about whether or not pre-determined moral standards are being lived upto. More pragmatically, ethics can be defined as the freedom and capacity to act reflexively—that is, to think about the ethical implications of ethical awareness, relative to a particular context. (p. 21)

In this particular context, can one problematize the strategy of signed musicians using Youtube for additional exposure? From the perspective of independent unsigned artists, this use may be considered a wise step to make; however, when viewed in the context of

signed artists, there could be a negative connotation, if a record label is pretending to be a grassroots entity. Here, I argue that it is important to understand that the dichotomies surrounding Youtube (discussions pertaining to good vs. bad uses, negative vs. positive influences, and conducive vs. harmful impacts) are solely based on the users, their practices, and their motives.

If musicians decide to use Youtube as a way to share their music for fun, the popularity generated on the site can be understood as based on “accidental” stardom due to personal talent; if the site is utilized as a promotional tool, the popularity could possibly be viewed as a result of labor. However, one cannot cleanly divide these types of activities between the categories of work and fun, since in the midst of working, one can also have fun. In describing the narrative and discourses surrounding Youtube’s fame and discovery of talent, it is critical to note that popularity on Youtube cannot be understood in one single way because the site creates a framework wherein amateurs and professionals meet and create their own persona. Ironically, Soulja Boy acted like a professional rapper, while some signed artists use grassroots strategies, such as homemade videos, to gain more fame.

Given these various methods for increasing popularity, another factor needs to be explored in order to better understand how Youtube’s mainstream and grassroots activities affect cultural values: the battle between Youtube and major record labels over copyright issues. In the next part of the chapter, I will explore various problems that Youtube has encountered with the major record labels, and will attempt to outline this conflict’s consequences and implications.

## Youtube and the Major Record Labels

On December 20, 2008, Greg Sandoval reported that Warner Brothers Records had pulled its videos from Youtube after choosing not to renew its licensing agreement with Youtube. Warner Brothers Records is not the only label demanding that its videos no longer be played. According to O'Brien (2009) in *New York Times*, Youtube had to withdraw various videos from its German site after a falling out with GEMA, an agency that represents numerous songwriters, composers, and music publishers. The previous contract had lasted 17 months, but when GEMA raised its fee to 1 euro (1.3 U.S. dollars) a video, the contract renewal negotiations failed. Three months prior to this event, Youtube had a similar experience with the Performing Rights Society, a British agency that provides artist representation.

The Youtube - Warner Brothers dispute has angered many musicians who are signed to Warner Brothers. Mike Masnick (2008) reports that Amanda Palmer, who was signed to Warner subsidiary Roadrunner, was unhappy about the current state of affairs between Youtube and Warner. In the article, Palmer clearly stated her opinion that Warner Brothers' actions did not materially protect the artist's rights. Furthermore, she claimed that if Youtube had surrendered to Warner Brothers' demands, the artists would not have gained any benefits from the deal. The removal of videos of all songs associated with artists contracted with Warner Brothers Records not only angered artists signed to Warner Brothers Records, but also led to the deletion of some amateur musicians' videos.

According to a *New York Times* article by Tim Arango (2009), Juliet Weybret, a high school sophomore, posted a video of herself singing the song "Winter Wonderland" on Youtube in December 2008. Weeks later, she received an email notification from

Youtube stating that her video had been removed due to the fact that Warner Brothers owns the copyrights to that popular Christmas song. Weybret is not the only aspiring singer to whom this has happened. According to a staff lawyer for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, “thousands of videos disappeared” (Fred von Lohman, para. 4). Among the videos that vanished were some that only used copyrighted songs as background music and for other non-commercial purposes, such as sign language videos. Warner Brothers explained that the wholesale video removals were due to Youtube’s inability to distinguish copyrighted material pirated in professional videos from amateur, non-commercial videos.

In light of the full-fledged battle between Warner Brothers and Youtube, non-performing Youtube users, aspiring musicians, and even professional artists signed to major labels feel that their outlet to express their art and showcase their talents is being taken away. The angry voices of musicians protesting against Youtube’s removal of their original videos are rising (Wauters, 2009). Clearly Youtube may have been considered a haven for independent musicians, but the division between the video site and the major labels has caused deep anguish for many aspiring artists. Even when Youtube made a settlement with the major labels, the artists signed to the major labels complained that they were not receiving additional royalties. In the article “Musicians waiting on a Youtube payday,” Sandoval (2008a) reports that some musicians are not seeing the results of the financial deal that was made between Youtube and its four large music label partners.

The dissonant voices of unhappy Youtube users may soon become even more agitated. In a *L.A. Times* article, Dawn Chmielewski (2009) reports in that Universal

Music has forged a partnership with Youtube, which will result in the creation of a new site (Vevo.com), where viewers can watch a variety of videos from Universal Music's artists. Soon after, Sony signed up to join the same deal (Sandoval, 2009). Although Warner Music and EMI have not yet signed contracts, negotiations to do so are underway (Sandoval, 2009).

As these news reports suggest, Youtube's continuing battles with its major label partners are affecting many independent artists, as well as artists signed to the major labels. Robert Gehl (2009) presents a complex view of the site and its problems in "Youtube as archive: who will curate this digital Wunderkammer?" Gehl argues that unlike the common belief that Youtube is democratic, Youtube's structure resembles that of the traditional corporate media outlets: "its lack of a centralized 'curator of display' actually sets the stage for large media companies and entrepreneurs to step into the curatorial role" (p. 43). Gehl's point here is an important one to consider for several reasons. Firstly, his arguments compel us to think about the democratic characteristics of Youtube. Not everyone who uploads a video will have a chance to share his or her posting. This reality is discussed in detail by Jenkins (2009):

Youtube's utopian possibilities must be read against the dystopian realities of a world where people have uneven access to the means of participation and where many are discouraged from even trying. If Youtube creates value around amateur content, it doesn't distribute value equally. Some forms of cultural production are embraced within the mainstream tastes of site visitors and the commercial interests of the site owners. Other forms of cultural production are pushed to the margins as falling outside dominant tastes and interests. (p. 124)

Jenkins argues that even if a video is uploaded and is given an opportunity to be shared with others, the way in which the video receives exposure is an issue that needs to be addressed. In addition, constant vigilance and surveillance are growing issues on

Youtube; these are causing alarm and creating an anxious environment for the Youtube users who wish to upload their videos.

It seems that in the end, Youtube could possibly function no differently from the mainstream media. This is ironic in the age of convergence culture. As the mainstream corporations continue to dominate the participatory media, individual practices and endeavors to gain attention are becoming not only fierce, but also unpleasant. Burgess and Green (2009) have noted this new reality: “some of the most active members of Youtube social network have expressed discomfort with the interjection of corporate players into a space they experience as community generated” (p. 5).

In the next section, the skeptical view expressed above will be contrasted with the various competitions that are being held on Youtube. The nature and procedures of these competitions will once again complicate the binary views of Youtube; nevertheless, a common thread will be picked up in terms of the inevitable role of the mainstream music culture in the collecting and organizing of competitions for amateurs.

### Competition on Youtube

Although Youtube is most readily conceived as a video-viewing media platform, Youtube has expanded its role to include worldwide competitions, offering opportunities for striving and amateur musicians to compete in the contests. The reward for each competition is different but there is one commonality: more exposure, which often entails partnerships with major corporations.

In 2006, Youtube teamed up with Cingular and ABC to promote new unsigned bands in a competition called the Youtube Underground. Unsigned artists were invited to submit their original music videos, footage of live concerts, or their best songs or most

creative films between October 2 and 18, 2006. The winning clips would be featured on *Good Morning America*, and the clips would also be turned into a Cingular ring tone.

This competition may have not been widely known, but it is significant that although the competition was limited to “underground” talent, the reward had nothing to do with being an underground artist. Rather, the award provided mainstream exposure and used this exposure as a way to motivate musicians. In addition, one should note that the media convergence was not limited to just the Youtube community but involved many different media platforms: ABC, Youtube, and Cingular (television, internet, and cell phone company).

On a similar note, Katie Hasty (2008) reported that for the 50th Grammy Awards show, Youtube held a competition for unsigned instrumentalists to perform on stage with Foo Fighters. String, woodwind, and brass players were invited to submit 60-second audition videos of performances of the Foo Fighters’ song “The Pretender.” These videos were judged by Grammy-affiliated judges, who ultimately chose forty-five finalists. After that, the voting was opened to the public on Youtube, and the result of the voting was the selection of three finalists. Once again, Youtube coordinated a national event, providing an opportunity for musicians to gain prestigious mainstream exposure; not only did the winners share the stage with a popular band, but they also gained the honor of being chosen by Grammy-affiliated judges.

Another interesting development with Youtube is the extension of their competitions to the classical music genre. Youtube established the first Youtube Orchestra by extending invitations to all musicians to submit audition recordings online. On December 1, 2008, Youtube released the following announcement:

Starting today, musicians around the world can submit audition videos to [www.youtube.com/symphony](http://www.youtube.com/symphony) for a chance to participate in the YouTube Symphony Orchestra and Summit, the world's first collaborative online orchestra connecting aspiring musicians with leaders and stars in the classical world. The first YouTube program of its kind, the YouTube Symphony Orchestra will transform individual performances into a global symphony and change the way musicians connect over the Internet. This is your opportunity to perform alongside world-renowned conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, learn from composer Tan Dun and many members of the London Symphony Orchestra, consult with pianist Lang Lang, and collaborate with YouTube users from around the globe. Selected musicians will have the honor of participating in an April 2009 summit where you'll learn from today's classical masters before stepping out at New York City's Carnegie Hall for a performance. (Youtube Orchestra, 2008)

It is clear from this advertisement that anyone regardless of location could become involved with the Youtube orchestra by submitting audition videos for consideration. The entries had to be received by January 28, 2009, and each submission had to include two pieces, one of them an original piece titled “The Internet Symphony” composed by Tan Dun specifically for this project. The second piece could be chosen by the contestant to demonstrate individual musical skill and talent. The contestants were then judged by musical experts affiliated with the London Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Royal Concertgebouw, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and other renowned orchestras around the globe. After the experts narrowed the applicant pool down to the semi-finalists, the Youtube community at large then voted on the finalists. The finalists were invited to a three-day classical music learning summit followed by a performance opportunity at Carnegie Hall.

As the description indicates, this competition strove to combine the classical music genre with experimental perspectives in the hopes of discovering talented musicians around the world through the utilization of Youtube’s crowdsourcing methods.

Various media outlets provided press coverage for the Youtube Orchestra. Many articles were written about the groundbreaking method of auditioning musicians around the globe. Aspen Steib (2009) in “Youtube orchestra wows Carnegie Hall” quotes Youtube’s marketing manager Ed Sanders on the topic of the goals for this competition: “we hope this is game changing in the sense it redefines audition space, it brings people closer together and lets them collaborate, transcending geographical and linguistic boundaries” (para. 4).

On the day of the final performance, Carnegie Hall’s seating space was 90% occupied. Despite the successful outcome on the concert day, many musicians voiced frustration and anger about the logistics of the application process. The problem was that Youtube did not upload the piano score of Tan Dun’s composition to assist musicians in their audition endeavors. Many musicians panicked over this omission:

Hey guys, pianists all over the world, interested in that thing and mad cuz of that crap. join a group that i created on facebook with title "Petition for Youtube to Upload the Piano Score for Youtube Symphony" we need to gather as many ppl as we can ...we have to say no for this shit .. if they didn't upload the piano score as soon as possible we have to gather other musicians of other instruments other than piano and they have also to refuse participating in that competition and that event.. when they upload the piano sheet say at the end of december when will we practise it ?!! please guy, musicians, pianists .. we will boycott youtube if they didnt upload the sheet cuz if they cant upload a piano sheet they cant manage a whole website and make it great for us as users. (Youtube Orchestra, n.d.)

While many postings such as this one complained about the missing piano score, many other musicians expressed great excitement and enthusiasm for the orchestra opportunity. The competition on Youtube clearly created a wide array of emotions and reactions amongst musicians. However, laboring to win votes from both judges and Youtube users did not seem to be the main concern of the auditioning musicians. When I viewed the

audition videos, I could detect no visible signs of gimmicks or tricks to aid in the winning of votes. After the winners had been determined, there was some disagreement as to why certain musicians were not chosen, but overall, ingenuous efforts to win votes were absent.

One growing trend on Youtube involves competitions that apply the free labor of fans and musicians. Often these types of competitions are sponsored by major record labels. For example, in the Ben Folds competition, the Sony/BMG record label released the following statement:

The very unique Ben Folds is inviting all college singing groups and musically inclined individuals in the U.S. to submit YouTube footage of a Ben Folds cover song. The ten videos with the most YouTube views will be featured on BenTV when the all new BenFolds.com website launches in mid-August. (Sonybmgmusic, 2008)

Although the competition is advertised for everyone, it seems clear that the goals of the competition are to disseminate Ben Folds' songs as widely as possible and to promote the new website. Thus, the motives for these types of competitions frequently involve the promotion of a particular musician's future career plans, such as upcoming albums, websites, and tour. In a similar way, Def Leppard will also use Youtube as a way to interact with fans. Ayers (2009) reports that Def Leppard will invite fans to submit their favorite videos of Def Leppard songs on Youtube. The reward for winning the competition is two concert tickets and an opportunity to meet the band members backstage.

Besides working alongside mainstream record labels, Youtube is also used by music software companies to promote their products through contests. On sonicstate.com (a website that caters to electronic musicians), the announcement of the "Notion Music

YouTube Competition” was made. The description of the competition is worthy of examination, as it points to a few important features of the contest:

NOTION Music has kicked off the inaugural PROGRESSION YouTube Competition, an online contest inviting composers from around the world to write and perform their own compositions their PROGRESSION guitar-based program music composition program, as their backing band. The competition, which will be judged in summer 2008 by a combination of selected artists, is designed to give new composers the chance to demonstrate their talents for a chance to win NOTION Music software and a NOTION Music endorsement. (Sonicstate, 2008, para. 1)

Obviously the competition used the crowdsourcing method to attract talented audition performances. Crowdsourcing is a concept that is rooted in the ideology that “labor can often be organized more efficiently in the context of community than it can in the context of a corporation” (Howe, 2008, p. 8). The irony here is that corporations have started to use this method as a savvy marketing strategy. In the following description of the “Notion Music YouTube competition,” the managing director of Notion Music, Kris Karra, listed the motives and benefits of this competition:

We believe there is a huge amount of undiscovered talent out there and we want to give up and coming musicians the opportunity to showcase their skills. We can provide the means to inspire aspiring musicians to create their own music with the help of professional quality performance software. (cited on Sonicstate.com, 2008, para. 2)

Although the notion of crowdsourcing will be explicated in depth in the last case study chapter on Indabamusic, it is important to introduce what it means and why such a method is dominating the social networking sites’ competitions. Most of these major corporations phrase the competition descriptions to mask their motives; although the competitions are targeted at “undiscovered talents,” it seems quite obvious that the sponsors of the competitions use musicians’ free labor for promotional purposes. In the end, the reward for the winner is just receiving the product they are advertising. Without

having to hire anyone to develop promotional ideas or campaigns, the sponsor company benefits from the free labor of the competitors.

While it could be argued that the Youtube competitions are groundbreaking and innovative since they allow undiscovered musicians to get more exposure, they are often held to generate greater popularity for the sponsors and to function as advertising campaigns at the expense of the competitors' free labor. To this end, these competitions do not solely benefit "the undiscovered musicians." Despite these aspects, these types of competitions are becoming a popular trend.

What may be the ramification of these competitions? To address this question, the key concept of "cultural intermediaries" is critical. Although these competitions are run by major corporations, depending on the judges that are deciding the winners, these competitions actually hold a potential to shape aesthetic tastes in convergence culture. Like the shows *American Idol* and *America's Got Talent*, judges often initially screen the contestants before presenting them to the mass audiences for the final selection of winners. Although not all judges can be considered "experts" per se, the competition judges are often working musicians or composers. After the contestants have been reduced to a few people, the final winner is selected by Youtube users. It could be easily argued that popularity is important to the contestants. While this chapter did not seek to analyze the actual process of contestants' laboring efforts in the competitions, this will be explored in the *Indabamusic* chapter, as we examine the actual process of musicians taking part in the competitions.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, Youtube was analyzed in terms of several major factors. The first

issue pertained to laboring practices, seeking to answer the following question: How do musicians network on Youtube, and what are the experts' recommendations on finding success on Youtube? A close analysis of the tips' sections revealed a consistent message about the need for serious work in order to achieve popularity. Of course this does not mean that people cannot become popular under other circumstances; however, in most cases, a concerted effort must be exerted in order to gain more visibility. All of these efforts take the form of immaterial, affective, and free labor. It is, thus, clear that Youtube popularity must be interpreted through a critical lens. Similar to Myspace, a passive attitude does not always result in enormous popularity on Youtube. However, if a person has already become famous on the mainstream media, then fame on Youtube may occur with little or no effort. This was the case with Susan Boyle, who experienced overnight success after being on the 2009 season of *Britain's Got Talent* television show. As a result of her established fame, Boyle also gained enormous popularity (as measured by the number of video hits) on Youtube. Youtube has a symbiotic relationship with the mainstream media, as revealed by instances such as this. If a previously unknown person becomes popular in the mainstream media, that person can gain worldwide fame with the help of Youtube.

On the other hand, the commercial aspect of Youtube has not always resulted in positive outcomes. Youtube has faced various legal battles over ownership and copyright issues, which has caused the site to delete numerous videos, especially those connected to artists signed by Warner Brothers Records.<sup>ix</sup> In addition, many videos by aspiring musicians have also been removed. Although Youtube provides opportunities for average consumers and citizens to voice their opinions and share their music, its actions

do not necessarily benefit the average users. Youtube continues to focus on forging various partnerships with major corporations; the recent partnerships with Universal and Sony are clear examples of the direction being taken by Youtube, a direction that indicates the implementation of mainstream ideologies. However, the concern here is not necessarily always about the rules and regulations that will be imposed upon Youtube, but rather the analysis of how such transitions complicate the notion of free labor.

The success stories related to Youtube have inspired countless aspiring musicians to sign onto Youtube, hoping for similar experiences. There is a discrepancy as far as noting the result of their free labor. In some cases, the musicians do not consider the act of acquiring friends or increasing popularity to be labor, but others admit to working hard to generate and pique the interest of Youtube viewers. For some, it is important to earn some kind of financial return for their effort. There is a gradual change in people no longer wanting to work for free, as many reports suggest that musicians are waiting for their activities on Youtube to pay them back. We can conclude that there is a growing unwillingness among musicians to work for free, as pointed out in the article by Greg Sandoval (2008) titled "Musicians still waiting on a Youtube payday." This seems to be combined with reluctance to work and to materially profit. Youtube is reflecting the reality that the site no longer functions as just a medium for everyday people to share their videos. This new situation emerges most starkly with the various competitions that have been held on Youtube.

One striking aspect of the Youtube competitions was the fact that the rewards were about exposure in the mainstream media outlets. It seems that Youtube is capable of creating numerous opportunities pertaining to larger cultural events. Youtube's

activities transcend the limits of virtual reality, bringing musical events into the actual, physical environment. However, the implications of the Youtube Symphony Orchestra, performing with Foo Fighters and various other competitions run deeper than the fact that Youtube can organize an event outside of the virtual world. This event intersected with mainstream culture through the involvement of the famous composer Tan Dun or popular band such as Foo Fighters. Both amateur and lesser-known musicians were invited to perform on stage together. The performance space, Carnegie Hall or the cultural event Grammy Award also symbolizes success for many classical musicians. Overall, Youtube is a major purveyor of a new type of culture, which is neither mainstream nor underground but which combines both in an indefinable way.

## CHAPTER V: A CASE STUDY OF SECONDLIFE.COM

### Introduction

According to Steve Jones (2002), “the distribution of music, the intermediate step between technological production and popular consumption, continues to be ignored” in the field of popular music studies (p. 215). Even fewer research studies have focused on the distribution of live performances on the internet. Hence, this chapter strives to interpret how real-time music performances distributed through the participatory media contribute to new ways of tackling the issues related to values and popularity. To this end, this chapter examines Secondlife as an example of a highly popular participatory media site onto which people enroll in order to network with other users, as well as to experience life in a virtual world as avatars.

Despite the participatory nature of Secondlife, a paradoxical dimension exists in the independent musicians’ laboring practices. The first section of this chapter will place the practices of Secondlife within the context of major corporate and grassroots activities. After noting how Secondlife is used by mainstream signed musicians, I will explore the nature of Secondlife concerts performed by independent musicians. The findings of this virtual ethnographic study will emphasize the importance of learning social protocols and will reveal how musicians labor during their performances. This section will also analyze the advice and tips given by Secondlife experts in order to more fully explicate the performative and interactive elements of Secondlife. A textual analysis of [www.slusic.com](http://www.slusic.com), a now-inactive website that was solely designed to function as a social music network for Secondlife, will be pursued to explore the theme of popularity.

Although this site no longer exists (the reason for its cancellation is unknown), the site's content may indicate a possible reason for its termination.

The last section of this paper will strive to interpret how live performances on Secondlife contribute or affect levels of popularity. Thus, I will analyze the discourse of participants on Secondlife to understand how they communicate with each other about the value and desirability of live performances. The goal of this research is to study and explain the complex relationships created by contemporary music practices on participatory media websites, where the praxis of popularity, virtual live performances, and social networking influence the process of gaining value. This will be achieved by examining the issues of live performance and protocols on Secondlife, various social networking sites, such as Slusic, and analyzing the discourse on the blogs directly linked to the live performance aspect of Secondlife.

### What is Secondlife?

Secondlife is "a 3-D virtual world created by its Residents. Since opening to the public in 2003, it has grown explosively and today is inhabited by millions of Residents from around the globe" (Secondlife, n.d.). Secondlife is owned by Linden Lab, and has an area of over 1, 577 million square feet (Bonsu & Darmody, 2008). In Secondlife, participants create their own avatars, which can buy and own land, teach classes, create objects, perform, and participate in virtually all types of real-life activities (Diehl & Prins, 2008). On the other hand, various studies have argued for the educational merits of the site, where people can gradually learn to overcome the barriers of intercultural communication (Diehl & Prins, 2008).

Although Secondlife offers a wide array of activities, it is important to keep in

mind that not all activities on Secondlife are either educational or pursued in leisure. In fact, a significant number of Secondlife activities are based in money and labor. Tom Boellstorff (2008) explains the concept of creationist capitalism by stating that “workers are not just sellers of labor-power, but creators of their own worlds” (p. 209). In his anthropological analysis, Boellstorff (2008) describes the thriving of creationist capitalism on Secondlife in the context of an annual contest for residents to produce the best machinima in Secondlife (p. 210). The winners’ films then became promotion tools for the virtual world: “it is the cultural logic of creationist capitalism that renders intelligible a state of affairs where consumers labor for free (or for a nominal prize) to produce advertising materials for a product they have already produced” (Boellstorff, p. 210).

As the above description indicates, Secondlife is a place where grassroots creativity is often times sacrificed for the promotion of major corporations’ marketing agendas. Demetrious (2008) in “Secrecy and illusion: Secondlife and the construction of unreality” argues against the utopian construction of Secondlife as a community populated by empowered participants: “in Secondlife, the hegemonic use of ideologically invested discourse serves to camouflage traditional power relations between its producers and consumers” (p. 4). He further criticizes the purportedly deceitful aspects of Secondlife by citing Tony Walsh’s article “Who really owns your Secondlife?” (2006). In support of Walsh’s point, Demetrious (2008) argues that even though residents on Secondlife may think that they have much control and many creative outlets for customizing personal avatars, in the end, the ownership of each account is retained by Linden Lab.

A similar line of argument is pursued by Samuel Bonsu and Aron Darmody (2008): “[what] Linden and owners of other user-generated MMOGs do so successfully is mobilize unpaid consumer labor and convert the intangible fruits of the ethical economy into actual revenues” (p. 359). This background is a critical starting point for this chapter’s goal of understanding the nature and structure of musicians’ live music performances. What influences determine the values of musicians’ performances? What types of labor are applied to create popularity? Before taking a virtual ethnographic look at Secondlife music performances, it is important to understand how musicians have utilized Secondlife and its impact on the music industry.

### Secondlife Music Scene

While various studies emphasize Secondlife’s potential exploitive nature, there are other beneficial aspects of Secondlife, such as the providing of performance space for amateur as well as professional musicians. Secondlife’s online live performance functions assist musicians in gaining attention from record label scouts. According to Daniel Kreps (2008), Nashville blues musician Van John was signed to a Reality Entertainment Label as a result of performing frequently on Secondlife. The article reported that a scout had been visiting Secondlife for several months before signing Von John. In a different case, another artist, who was signed to a major record label, used Secondlife as a way to market and release an album on eBay. Todd Leopold (2007) reported on *CNN* that Michael Penn, who had been signed and later dropped by both RCA and Epic Records, created his own label, Mimeograph. After going through a tumultuous journey with the major record labels, Penn told *CNN* that he is enjoying the freedom of being independent, and is practicing his artistry by actively participating in

the Secondlife music scene. On an interesting note, the EMI record label hired Secondlife co-founder Cory Ondrejka as a senior vice-president of digital strategy as they struggle to make strides in the digital era (Sandoval, 2008). This implies that major record companies are reacting to the ever-growing influence of social networking sites.

Besides the use of Secondlife by new and emerging artists, Robert Andrews (2006) reports that famous musicians from various genres, such as Duran Duran, Suzanne Vega, and Talib Kweli, have performed on Secondlife. Actual performances are not, however, the only activities in which mainstream artists participate. For example, singer-songwriter Regina Spektor (who is signed to Sire Records, a subsidiary of Warner Records) held a listening party on Secondlife. Similarly, Ben Folds launched his new album on Secondlife (Hutcheon, 2006), while the rapper Chamillionaire and the grunge band Hinder have used Secondlife as a way to connect with their fan bases through the meeting and greeting functions on Secondlife (Andrews, 2006).

Secondlife is also endorsed by major classical recording labels. According to a *New York Times* article (September 18, 2007), Anne Midgette reported that the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic held a virtual concert in the virtual Art Deco hall in Secondlife. Universal Classic had also “acquired” land in Secondlife, so that visitors could view a virtual exhibition of artifacts related to legendary mezzo-soprano Maria Malibran, who toured Europe to promote Cecilia Bartoli’s new Malibran-theme album. The article also reported that in May 2007, pianist Lang Lang performed a live concert as an avatar. Jonathan Gruber, the vice president of new media for Universal Music Group, expressed the following opinion of Secondlife’s potential usefulness: “We’re not 100 percent sold on it. It’s experimental. We are interested in making sure that if there are opportunities

for us to reach people through a medium like Second Life, we're there for it" (para. 17).

The audience members of Secondlife also showed appreciation for this type of opportunity, since it removes the limitation and confinement of one's geographical location.

Universal Classic is not alone when it comes to experimenting and using Secondlife as a promotional and marketing tool. The renowned classical music label, Naxos, featured the young Italian pianist Alessandro Marangoni in a concert that took place on February 23, 2009 in the main auditorium on Utwig Sim. On this occasion, Marangoni was interviewed by David Schwartz, a noted American composer, about the pianist's new recording of Rossini's piano music from which the pianist showcased a few excerpts (Naxos, 2009).

Until now, I have clearly demonstrated that Secondlife is actively utilized as a place where major record labels market and promote their artists. Changing direction slightly, how is Secondlife endorsed by amateur and independent musicians? How do they labor to gain popularity? Does the presence of major record labels on this social networking sites impact unsigned musicians in any way? In order to address these questions, it is important to conduct a virtual ethnographic study of Secondlife live performances.

### Virtual Ethnography of Secondlife Live Music Performances

The website [wiki.secondlife.com](http://wiki.secondlife.com) explains how musicians can perform live on Secondlife:

A live performance in Second Life is presented by a person who is represented in-world by an avatar, and is creating the performance in real-time, streaming the audio (or audio and video) portions into Second Life

as they are being created. Playing back a previously recorded performance, whether audio, video or Second Life machinima, is generally not considered to be a live performance if there are no live elements performed while the audience is watching the show (although even this definition will likely raise some “discussion” from some corners). (Live performances, n.d.)

Given this explanation, Secondlife’s live musical performances challenge the traditional meaning of live performances. Nevertheless, the important point to keep in mind is the manner in which independent musicians attempt to gain recognition by performing live in a virtual context. While this is considered a relatively new phenomenon in comparison to sharing music online in an already-produced form (as exemplified by Myspace, where musicians network with listeners and other musicians), real-time live performances may possibly change the dynamics of the way in which musicians work on such sites.

For this examination of Secondlife, I conducted a virtual ethnographic study in order to fully understand the issues surrounding live musical performances, especially in the context of the relations between performers and audiences. Given the fact that all users are disguised as avatars, real-time live performances on Secondlife are difficult to analyze without actually entering the site to experience what it is like to be an audience member. In the month of April 2009, I visited several Secondlife live musical performances. My selection of performances was based on the convenience of particular times and days. Because I was already a member of Secondlife, I simply logged on and clicked on the “search” button. Inside the search function, I chose my selected dates and typed the words “live music” into the search box. After entering these keywords, I was given variety of selections from which to choose. At this point, I chose the performances based on my availability to devote an entire hour to the observation of the concert. All told, I was able to analyze a total of ten performances on Secondlife.

In the Secondlife, although I had not taken account to the genres in terms of selection process, it's important to point out that pop and hip-hop music, which usually rely on a backing track for performances, are not prevalent on this site. Many performances performed on Secondlife are, instead, mainly live performances. Although live music performances on Secondlife may represent specific subgroups of musical styles, I focused my attention on the musicians' laboring practices, and did not necessarily seek to create links between genres and laboring practices. In fact, in the context of this dissertation, several reasons exist as to why there will not be a heavy emphasis on the importance of genres.

My first attempt to observe a Secondlife performance was not successful; however, although I decided not to view this performance, my experience was significant in that it made me aware of specific cultural issues that exist on Secondlife. I entered this first venue approximately two hours prior to the actual concert time. As a newcomer to this venue, I asked about the time of performance. In my attempt to learn more information about the Secondlife performance, I was quickly criticized by one of the members, who happened to be the venue performer herself. This person was extremely condescending and challenged me rather belligerently every time I asked a question. It was such an extremely unpleasant experience that I ended up changing my mind about including her performance in my study.

Later, one of the other Secondlife members who had witnessed my interaction with the performer approached me in a separate chat-room. He informed me that deceptive activities seem to thrive on Secondlife. Since everyone hides behind a self-constructed avatar, a higher-than-usual degree of skepticism exists when dealing with

issues of identity and authenticity. Apparently, because my avatar was created a few months prior to accessing this particular venue, the performer in question doubted my genuine desire to learn more about Secondlife live performances. She assumed that I should have known all the details and understood the culture of Secondlife by this point. However, because I was not an active member in the past, I was unaware of all the technical complexities that come with interacting on Secondlife. Although I ended up not attending the concert, this encounter provided me an opportunity to learn about certain protocols and the culture shared by Secondlife members. From this point on, I toned down my inquisitive attitude and mannerisms.

The first actual performance that I attended took place on April 6, 2009. The artist, Clairede Dirval, played guitar and sang mostly cover songs from the popular music genre. The performance occurred in a venue called Zenlive at 6:00 p.m. Secondlife Time (9:00 p.m. Eastern time). During the performance, several incidences happened that were worthy of analysis. First of all, the conversations that were pursued in the chatroom were interesting. In the chatroom, Secondlife members carried on public discourses about the performance or other relevant concerns. The chatroom was a major way in which the members communicated with one another, but it was also a location in which the performer and audience members could communicate. While the avatars could be made to jump, dance, or walk around at their own volition, in order to communicate directly, chatting was utilized. Observing this particular performer, I could see that Dirval was already acquainted with several of the audience members. My impression was that here existed a community of people who already knew each other, perhaps from previous concerts or as a collective body of fans.

The most valuable information garnered from this concert was the manner in which the performer addressed and paid close attention to the chatroom conversation. In between each song, Dirval continuously referred back to the conversations that were going on in the chatroom. At one point, Dirval did not seem to like the fact that various members were busy chatting with one another about issues unrelated to the actual performance. Because the performer possessed a disguised avatar, she could not show direct emotions and was limited to a restricted number of gestures: 1) she called out the names of the members; 2) she engaged in conversations with the members; and 3) she made jokes in the chatroom. As for the audience members, they showed support by pressing the “applause” button, which produced a clapping sound. On a couple of occasions, one of concertgoers also reminded the other attendees to tip the artist. Each time a tip was given to the artist, gratitude was displayed in the chatroom by the typing of the words “thank you.” This also implicitly reminded others to tip as well.

At one point, the performer asked one of the members, “are you drinking tonight or are you staying sober?” From this inquiry, it was clear that the audience member and the performer knew each other from a previous encounter. Gathering from a variety of exchanges that went on during the concert, it was clear that although the means of communication were limited, the performer made repeated attempts to interact with the audiences by closely paying attention to the chatroom conversation. It seemed as if the avatars’ appearances and movements did not matter a great deal; rather, the oral and written communication was the major source of conversation.

During the concert, the performer mentioned that one particular audience member needed a drink. After this remark, the audience members joked about Dirval wanting to

turn everyone into an alcoholic. Quickly after this commentary, Dirval repudiated the accusation by saying that she just wanted everyone to have a good time. Using this interplay as an example, even when not directly relevant to the performance, interaction with audience members in any kind of way seems to be important in gaining attention during the performances.

The second concert that I attended was given by Mike 00 Carnell who sang and played the guitar on April 11, 2009. It was at the location called Kijiji at 2:00 p.m. Secondlife Time (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). The concert did not differ greatly from the earlier concert that I visited. The performer consistently addressed and took note of each audience member by either saying his or her name or asking for specific song requests. The performer also asked the audience members to vote for the specific venue where the performance was taking place. Apparently, there was a competition on Secondlife for the best venue. Although it was unclear whether being voted as the best venue on Secondlife affected the performer's popularity or not, voting reminders were sent out throughout the performance.

At one point during the performance, Carnell told the audience members that he did not know a particular requested song by David Bowie, and offered his apologies. Clearly the performer was making an effort to please the concertgoers by playing requested songs along with some of his original songs. This type of interaction was very similar to a certain kind of real-life live musical concert, where the performers allow attendees to participate in shaping the musical content of the show.

In addition to these interactions, Carnell asked the audience to whistle with him. Apparently the audience members could sing along to the songs by using the "whistle"

function. From time to time, there were also moments where the breaks and pauses in between the songs created awkward moments. Because there was no real movement of the performer (besides the artificial movement of the avatar acting as if it were playing music), it seemed harder to follow the performer's actions. At this point, I became curious as to why people would attend Secondlife live musical performances. I turned my attention to the chatroom where I asked the following question: "Why do you come to live music here?" One of the members soon responded: "cause we don't like to listen to taped performances." Another audience member mentioned that he or she loves the audience members' interaction with musicians. Soon after, another member interjected: "Secondlife reflects real life, it's all the same." For this member, a Secondlife concert did not qualitatively differ from an actual live concert. Yet another concertgoer added to this conversation by noting, "it is more accessible." Considering this brief conversation in the chatroom, the accusation was repudiated by saying that she just wanted everyone to have a good time. Using this interplay as an example, even when not directly relevant to the performance, interaction with audience members in any kind of way seems to be important in gaining attention during the performances.

The third concert that I attended was on April 11, 2009, at the Cocoa Beach Music venue by Winters Kanto who played the piano. This performance started at 5:00 p.m. Secondlife time (8:00 p.m. Eastern Time). The performance was supposed to last one hour; however, I was unable to view the entire performance due to a negative encounter with one of the other members. While enjoying the jazz pianist's performance, I realized that my avatar was not moving. If not moving around with some frequency, I discovered that my avatar will eventually hang its head down, making me appear

inactive. Although I did not care that my avatar was inactive, someone in the chatroom wrote, “move, you idiot.” I was startled by this remark and asked: “Did you just call me idiot?” This person then confirmed that he or she had indeed called me an “idiot.” After reading this, I wrote: “I will not move.” As soon as I typed this, my access to view the concert was taken away. This experience revealed one aspect that distinguishes Secondlife from real-life performances. An insignificant and trivial bickering between audience members usually does not result in the removal of someone from a concert. Apparently though, Secondlife allows misbehaving as a reason to exclude members from concert settings. A certain kind of propriety and attitude is advised in the Secondlife setting. Not all users have the authority to exclude others from the chatroom (one must be the owner of the shop or performance venue, or otherwise officially affiliated with a location); only a few people are empowered to restrict who is permitted in the room. Obviously, whoever called me “idiot” had such power.

The fourth concert that I attended was on April 17, 2009. It was a performance by Blindboink Parham who sang and played the guitar at the Blues Fabrik venue. The performance started at 1:00 p.m. Secondlife Time (3:00 p.m. Eastern Time). I entered the venue a few minutes early, which gave me an opportunity to chat with the artist briefly. I asked the artist if he enjoys performing on Secondlife more than in real life. Although the artist said he likes performing in real life better, he mentioned that they are similar experiences: “people listen, and it’s live, no karaoke.” This statement should not lead to a generalization of the experience of Secondlife performance as inferior to actual live performances. Grace Buford, an active Secondlife performer, actually prefers Secondlife live performances over other kinds of live events:

I can go into a club or a venue in the real world and people aren't listening. They're talking, laughing, carrying on. And as an artist, we're all a little bit narcissistic. We've created this work and we want to share it and have an intimate connection," she said. "On stage, you kind of think, "What's the point of me being here?" In *Second Life* ... you're having that intimate conversation with the listener. (cited in Sutter, 2009, para.30)

Despite the differences of opinion in terms of their preferences, the key issue is not necessarily which type of performance is better or worse. Rather it is important to recognize that both have advantages and disadvantages connected to them.

During Parham's performance, I observed how he interacted with the audience members. Once again, the method of reaching out to the audience members was similar to the earlier performances that I had observed. This performer also called out the audience members' names and greeted them one by one. He had a poster on the stage which displayed a direct link to his professional homepage, myspace page, music shop, and group-add. The poster also provided information about the performer's work and background. His merchandise and music information were just a click away.

During the performance, Parham mentioned that his CD was for sale and that free guitar lessons were available on his website. One of the concertgoers repeatedly encouraged the other concertgoers to tip the artist and the venue, and also thanked them for doing so. This gesture was consistent with the other concerts that I had observed; thus, I inquired what this person's role was. After briefly chatting with the person, I learned that every venue hires a person to promote the venue and to encourage the audience members to tip both the venue and the performer. While the performer encourages others to tip the venue and him- / herself, another person usually runs the venue. This person helps facilitate the flow of concert; sometimes the manager assists newcomers, like myself, to learn more about the artist and the venue.

The fifth concert that I observed also took place on April 17, 2009 at 4:00 p.m. Secondlife Time (7:00 p.m. Eastern Time). This concert was held at the D2Tk venue, and it was a live musical performance by Damian Carbenell (he sang and played guitar). At this point, I was accustomed to the general etiquette and culture of Secondlife live musical performances. Unlike my initial mishap, I now related well with the audience members, and I felt like a part of their Secondlife community. People at this venue seemed to be much more open to my presence, which may have been because I was becoming more adjusted to the culture of Secondlife. I casually chatted with other audience members and joined in praising the artist's talent. When I showed that I was enjoying the concert by writing positive commentary in the chatroom, one member even sent me the list of requested songs. In the listing were five original songs and other popular cover songs. This member also made the following announcement to the audience members: "if you want to join Damian's group, the Carbenell street team, just IM me." By joining Damian's group, one can receive updates about the artist's upcoming shows and other events.

Throughout the concert, the artist repeatedly addressed the concertgoers by either calling out their names or asking if they were having a good time. He also reminded them to "hit up that tip jar." In appreciation, Carbenell dedicated a number of songs to the audience members. From this concert, it was clear that "casual" chatting and interaction functioned on Secondlife as a means of promotion. This was essentially a form of affective labor, but more importantly it showed how conformity was required as a prerequisite for participation; while positive comments were rewarded with attention, negative comments, and dismissive or inactive attitudes were punished with

marginalization and expulsion.

After the concert, I asked how the performer had gotten started on Secondlife. At one point, the owner of the venue, noticing my interest, kindly invited me to wait around after the show to chat with her. When the show was over, she asked me to get on “voice-chat,” which is another way to communicate on Secondlife. Just like the telephone, people can talk to one another using their real voices. Although I did not have voice-chat set up on my computer, I was able to hear the owner’s voice while I typed my responses to her and another member who participated in the conversation. We casually discussed how performers get started on Secondlife and how popular Secondlife has become. The owner said she was often asked for interviews by students doing research papers on Secondlife. She also told me that Secondlife is no different from real life in that many people nowadays use it as a way to actively start music-related careers, such as becoming promoters or managers. The owner even cordially invited me to perform on Secondlife, should I ever be interested. I thanked both the owner and the other member for being kind to me as my previous experience as a novice Secondlife member had not been so pleasurable.

The sixth performance that I attended also occurred on April 17, 2009 at the Pond Live Venue at 5:00 p.m. Secondlife Time (8:00 p.m. Eastern Time). The concert was given by Shannon Oherlihy who sang and played the guitar. This performance did not begin punctually due to a series of technical problems. During the delay, the concertgoers chatted with one another on issues not necessarily connected to this performance. When Oherlihy was finally ready to perform, the audience members showed support by clapping and paying compliments to her voice and music. Although

the actual performance was short in duration, I was able to observe how audience members react when artists have technical difficulties. They were mostly patient and remained in the performance room until the end of her show.

The seventh performance I attended was on April 17, 2009 at the same venue by Donlizard Hunt, (he sang and played the guitar) and it started at 6:00 p.m. Secondlife Time (9:00 p.m. Eastern Time). Just like every other performance, the artist acknowledged everyone in the concert venue by calling out their Secondlife names. At this venue, the voice-chat function was activated, which bothered some audience members. One of the audience members asked those talking to pursue their conversation in a private setting. During this performance, the artist called me out for not dancing. I told the performer that I did not know how to make my avatar dance. Another audience member kindly told me to click on the ball next to her arm. After I clicked the ball, my avatar was suddenly dancing in sync with the rest of the girls. When I started dancing, the artist noticed right away and commented on the fact that I was now moving. Throughout the performance, the artist invited the concertgoers to check out his website for upcoming shows.

The eighth performance I attended was on April 17, 2009 at the venue Massine I and it was given by the performer Astronimus Randt at 7:00 p.m. Secondlife Time (10:00 p.m. Eastern Time). In this performance, the artist played a variety of instruments (violin, flute, guitar, and keyboard) and sang. He played cover songs, as well as his own original music. In the chatroom, one member distributed the performer's Myspace page. It was apparent that this person was playing the role of assistant or manager. In between each song, Randt usually called out the names of audience members, but he also made

comments about the music industry. For example, he observed that the music industry has changed in a major way in recent times, and that now he gets to perform in a virtual world to an international audience. He then added, “that’s the way I like it.” Without my asking any questions about his experiences as a live musician on Secondlife, Randt revealed that he enjoyed this experience and appreciated the change in the music industry. From his testimony, it was clear that Secondlife live concert opportunities were opening doors for many independent musicians. One of the audience members agreed with this performer by typing “Fuck MTV.” Aside from this discussion, an unrelated conversation was going on in the chatroom, which was lewd in its content. Two of the audience members seemed more interested in exchanging sexual innuendos between one another than in concentrating on the concert.

The ninth performance I attended was on April 18, 2009, at the Pond Live Music venue. The concert was by Iriskaye Siamendes, and it started at 2:00 pm Secondlife Time (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time). This performance was similar to a karaoke performance, since Siamendes had a pre-recorded track and sang on top of it. She sang only cover songs, and the genres of music were country, blues, and pop. During the performance, Siamendes announced her merchandise for sale, such as T-shirts. She also mentioned that her manager was present. At this point, I asked in the chatroom who the manager was. Siamendes responded to my inquiry, and referred me to her manager by typing his name. The manager contacted me, and I asked if he was Siamendes’ manager in real life as well. The manager responded that he is her boyfriend, but on Secondlife, he helps her book and run her shows by sending out notices and assisting with anything that she may need.

From this example, it was clear that free labor may be offered by people with whom a performer is connected in real life. The manager / boyfriend, however, told me that having a manager on Secondlife is not necessary if one wants to start up as a performer. To this end, Siamendes added that simply talking to people at a venue may lead to opportunities to perform as a musician / singer. She also stated that she started singing on Secondlife in July 2008, and since that time, her circle of acquaintances has grown tremendously. Through these informal chats, I was able to better understand how Secondlife live performances happen and to gauge the enjoyment that the performer receives by performing.

The last performance that I attended was on April 18, 2009, at the Pond Live Music venue at 5:00 p.m. Secondlife Time (8:00 p.m. Eastern Time). The concert was by Glaisne Osternam, who sang and played the guitar. On stage, there was a poster that announced, "Join Glaisne's fan club here." As was the case with the seventh performance, this performer interacted with me by recognizing my movements. I initially watched the performance from afar, and later decided to move to the front by the stage. The performer immediately commented on my change of position. Osternam also responded to the audience members' song requests. When an audience member requested a Jeff Buckley song, the performer apologized for not knowing it, but then told the requester that he would look it up. This performance did not differ significantly from the other nine performances in terms of the interaction between the performer and the audience members.

After attending a total of ten concerts on Secondlife, each an hour in duration, I began to understand the common trends and patterns inherent to the Secondlife live

music venues. There were at least three major social protocols that the artists adopted and utilized. Firstly, all of the artists paid close attention to their audience members. Each artist addressed the audience members directly during the concert. The performers called out the names of the concertgoers and / or responded to the chatroom conversations. When I asked questions, most of the artists politely and promptly responded to them.

The interaction between performers and audience members was a form of self-promotion; any curious inquiries about or interest in the artists were always answered and addressed with care, while tangential comments seemed to be neglected. Sometimes a performer joined a conversation to reprimand the audience members and to call attention back to the performance. To some extent, the artists may have an easier time performing on Secondlife, because unlike real live performance venues, the audience members cannot talk to each other loudly, thereby distracting or insulting the performer.

Secondly, it seemed important to have at least one person who acted as a manager or assistant in the venue. This person was either the owner of the venue or someone hired by the artist or the venue. This manager had three typical roles. First of all, during the performances, this person repeatedly reminded the audience members to tip the performer and then expressed gratitude to those who did. This person also invited the audience members to join the artist's fan club or so-called "street team." (When a person joins the street team of the artist, he or she receives notifications of when and where the next performances will take place.) Thirdly, the manager played the role of a groupie and an avid fan. After each song ended, this person always cheered the artist by making loud clapping sounds, bravos, or other types of pre-recorded cheering sounds.

However, one should not presume that this labor is free. These individuals are usually compensated, as are the artists performing on Secondlife. Each artist who performs on Secondlife can earn tips, which come in the form of “Linden dollars”: 260 Linden dollars equal \$1.00 US. The performances occurring in these spaces may appear to be simply leisure activities, but they actually require serious labor that is merely disguised as fun and pleasure. My virtual ethnographic observation coincides with what has been reported in one particular CNN article. John D. Sutter (2009) in “Artists visit virtual Second-life for real world cash” reports that the Secondlife phenomenon is becoming increasingly popular among both professional and amateur performers. Sutter points out that while the music industry is crumbling in an era of economic recession, Secondlife musicians are thriving well by making “real money.” Sutter (2009) reports that one Secondlife musician (Cylindrian) made approximately \$10,000 (which including CD sales) over the course of one year’s time. While major recording artists mostly use Secondlife as a way to generate buzz around their upcoming albums or to promote themselves, for independent musicians, Secondlife is a place where moderate incomes can be made.

The third type of social protocol practiced by Secondlife performers is active involvement in the Secondlife community. Unlike many live performances where the backstage separates the performer from the audience, on Secondlife, there was no backstage; rather, the artists created close relationships with the audiences by hanging around after the shows. Although not all performers mingled with their audiences, a few of them lingered after the shows, either attending the next performance or just hanging around to chat with their friends on Secondlife. While these three types of social

protocols were clearly evident to audience members, the experts on Secondlife provide the performers with more detailed recommendations. Studying the tips given to the Secondlife performers, thus, is useful at this juncture.

### Labor Tips on Secondlife

To better understand the interaction between the performer and the audience, and the manner in which musicians labor on this site to generate economic interest, Andrew Ross's (2007) article "Live music on Secondlife: Part two" on TheStreet.com provides many insights on the protocols tied to performing on Secondlife. In this article, Ross gives advice about how to gain exposure. Each tip reveals a different aspect of how Secondlife's network intersects and diverges from other types of music social networking sites. The first tip addresses venue design: "when designing a space for a live event, try to keep all of your seating within 20 meters of the prim microphone, and preferably within 15 meters, especially if there's an entire band. This will make sure that performers can hear all of the audience kudos" (Ross, p. 1). This recommendation is noteworthy for it invokes aspects of "live" performances, specifically the ability of musicians to hear audience reactions.

Ross next recommends purchasing a dance ball to prevent audience members from "standing around like a bunch of junior-high kids at their first formal" (p. 1). He also maintains that not everyone comes to the performance with a date, referring to the social aspect of live performance venues. The third tip is to keep the stage clear of clutter: "try to remove rotating spotlights and any invisible prims between the audience and the performer, because these can get in the way when trying to tip the artist or trying to look at his profile and get the information that a fan needs to become a stalker" (Ross,

2007, p. 2). The issue of direct interaction has not yet been considered in the framework of the social networking music websites, since it is a new form of user – creator interaction in terms of the virtual world.

The fourth tip addresses event notices. Ross states that while sending out event notices is advisable, one should not go overboard by repeatedly sending the same information. The notices informing viewers that another set will be played is fine, but one should refrain from sending out repetitive and unnecessary reminders. Unlike Myspace where the rampant marketing of one's music involves the solicitation of "friends," on Secondlife the live interactive component highlights the dynamics of interaction in real time. As Wellman (1999) notes in "Living networked in a wired world," "the absence of direct feedback in most CMC [computer mediated communication] encourages more extreme forms of communication. People input messages to screens that they would never say to another person palpably present in person or on the telephone" (p. 4). However, the dynamics of the real-time virtual live chat / performance space challenges this characteristic of computer-mediated communication.

The fifth and sixth points strive to heighten the experience of musical performances happening in virtual reality, because they pertain to both the aural dimension of performance and its social aspects. In encouraging viewers to tip the performers, Ross states that the requests should be tasteful and subtle. One acceptable way is exemplified by the following statement: "If you're enjoying the music, please consider donating to the artist to help support live music in Second Life" (Ross, 2007, p. 2) A statement, such as "Tip the (bleeped expletive) band or I'll kill you, you cheap

(beeped expletives)” would be considered in poor taste (Ross, 2007, p. 2). While this example makes sense in a non-virtual performance space, Ross’s sixth tip blurs the boundary between virtual space and reality: “Make sure to have at least one person available the entire time with full security privileges, just in case you catch a random griefer<sup>x</sup> or an overly enthusiastic fan. Musicians talk, and a good reputation will go a long way to helping you book great acts in the future” (Ross, 2007, p. 3). In other words, just as there is a security presence at real performances, Ross emphasizes the same need in the virtual world.

Ross’s tips seem to substantiate Jones’s (1993) claims in “A sense of space: Virtual reality, authenticity and aural”:

virtual reality is perhaps the ultimate such technological activism. It is all the more modern since it concentrates not on nature per se, but on human nature, on the means by which nature is apperceived. To a degree it relies on the notion that humans are hardwired, so to speak, that they will respond to stimuli (in this case visual and aural) in a predetermined fashion. (p. 249)

Given this statement, virtual live performances may actually heighten the state of experience rather than simply replicate the pseudo-experience of live music performances. While noting this aspect of virtual performances, Ross also gives specific advice to the performers, and these tips overlap with common characteristics shared by all of the social networking sites.

In his article, Ross emphasizes the dangers of three particular pitfalls linked to “groups,” “tip jars,” and “promotion.” Firstly, he mentions that creating a network group is useful so that performers can inform interested viewers about upcoming gigs. As far as tip jars are concerned, Ross recommends that performers bring along their own. He also states that while using an unconventional tip jar is acceptable, it is important to inform

audience members about the function of whatever object has been selected. Finally Ross emphasizes the issue of promotion. Promotion is extremely crucial on Secondlife, as is the case on all of the social networking sites. He mentions that it is important to decorate and update one's personal website:

pimp your Web site, pimp your CD, pimp whatever you want. But try to do it no more often than every couple songs. Don't be that radio station that's 60% commercials and 40% content. Not that I dislike those stations -- bad radio keeps us podcasters in business. (Ross, 2007, p. 3)

Through these recommendations, Ross points out several issues about which non-Secondlife users may not be aware. What becomes strikingly noticeable is that there are certain particulars that overlap with the etiquette linked to actual live performances, such as making sure that tips are not requested in an overt and rude way. In addition, promotion is very important since the way in which musicians build a large following is based on their abilities to promote music online. This actuality overlaps with the laboring practices connected to Myspace, where musicians feel that they have to devote much time to networking in order to build their followings. It can be said that the relationship between affectivity and commercial promotion is symbiotic; they both thrive off of each other.

In addition to Ross's recommendations, important insights can be gained by understanding how veteran live performers advise newcomers to Secondlife. Under the posting title "What do I do during the shows?" on Second Life Music Community Forum, a new performer to Secondlife asked for advice about social protocols:

My band is in the prepping stages to begin performing in SL. I am looking for advice on what to do during the performance, beyond the songs. How does one build a rapport with a crowd? How much of a stage show should an artist create? Are there any technical issues I need to be concerned about in regards to this? For instance sim lag if I use a lot of

special effects, or even getting permissions from the landowner. Any advice on how I can make the performance (beyond the music) more interesting for the audience is greatly appreciated. (What do I do, 2008)

Many users responded to this poster's questions. The advice given resonated with the data I gathered from the field study:

Talk to the people in the audience, as in directly, one to one. Get some patter happening between tunes, not just words to fill up space but talk to people. It's much easier to do that in SL compared to RL so long as you don't turn off the display of names above people's heads.

The stage show doesn't mean much. People go to venues because they like the person running it, they like the act, or both. It's more fun with an elaborate stage show, but it won't change too much how many people come to your show. I've tried everything up to a stage that materializes out of the floor while it shoots fireworks and fog. I even built one early on that would shoot flaming cannonballs out over the audience. It's fun doing that, but it'll eat a lot of time that would be better spent working up your act.

If you use a lot of pixel poofer stuff as with fireworks, slow computers will hate it. I'm not going to tune my gig for the slowest computer in the room so hexx Triskaidekaphobia and I will do rock / fireworks shows all the time. ALWAYS ask the venue owner's permission before doing this. As to make it more interesting, you're the most interesting thing in the room; you're the only one with the mike. Call back all the stuff yer mama would tell you: don't mumble, blah, blah... Those are real people out there - Entertain them! (What do I do, 2008)

Considering these tips, it is clear that Secondlife live performers can interact frequently with audience members despite the obstacle of not sharing the same physical space as audience members.

Slightly different advice was provided by another member:

The usual way... a bit of chat before the set and between numbers. Some performers go as far as greeting each audience member and thanking them individually for tips / donations. Personally I feel that's unnecessary: a good old 'Welcome to the show, great to see you here' and a 'Thank you for your donations' at the end of the show feels better for me so long as it's sincere and not rote formula. (What do I do, 2008)

Another member openly disagreed about the manner in which the performer

should show appreciation to the audience members:

I disagree about the blanket thanks for the donations. I'm always disappointed when that happens. People love hearing their names. It makes them happy and it's one of the reasons they tip. Is it so much to ask to thank them by name for choosing to give you money they didn't have to give? I've heard some artists go around the room and mention by name every person there, which can get a little tiresome. Otherwise, good advice here. One of the real tricks is learning how to connect and chat with your audience with a 20-30 second lag between what you say and when they hear it. That takes some getting used to. You have to acknowledge applause you haven't heard yet and trust it's forthcoming. (What do I do, 2008)

Although there were differences of opinion in terms of how to approach interactivity between audience members, given the advice above, musicians should individually thank their listeners and work hard to build their online fan base. This is handled much more delicately than in face-to-face live concerts, where non-verbal communication can also contribute to creating artistic aura.

Considering the large number of people who participated in the discussion about performer-audience interactivity on Secondlife, it seems that interactivity is active and well-constructed on the site. The “collective intelligence” (a phrase coined by Levy in 1997) in this virtual world is focused on coming up with effective ways reach out to audience members; the result of this is a continuous upgrading and rewriting of the social-protocols.

At this juncture, we have a clearer understanding of how Secondlife live performances operate, and have gained insight into some of the issues that musicians should take into consideration when marketing themselves. However, while these recommendations illuminate various social and interactive aspects of Secondlife musical performances, the social networking site connected to Secondlife also provides

information about the pursuit of fame and stardom in the Secondlife network.

### The Social Music Network for Secondlife

Unless one is an avid participant in Secondlife's music scene, one may not have heard of [www.slusic.com](http://www.slusic.com), which was the social music network for Secondlife. Although this website no longer exists (the reason for its termination has not been publicized), the study that had been pursued prior to the website's discontinuation is still valuable because the research findings reveal insights into how musicians network and labor in order to gain popularity, and how users strive to gain a certain ranking status. To understand this site fully, it is important to specify which particular aspect is being highlighted. Joining this network brought a number of advantages to active Secondlife. The site advertised to artists and bands by stating that creating a Slusic account would provide valuable services such as the ability to create online stores, reach out to the fans, get in touch with Slusic booking agents, learn about the future loyalties programs, and network with the radio stations. Before delving into the details of content, a general introduction to Slusic's components must be provided. Slusic was divided into thirteen categories: Music, Radio, Videos, Artists, Charts, STV, Downloads, Events, Blogs, Photos, Forums, Residents, and Clubtruspots. Although some of the categories were self-explanatory, it is important to explain how some of the categories operated.

The music category features a specific song, and also ranks the top ten Secondlife music performances. In the rankings category, the user can click on the profile of the artist and listen to the songs displayed on the chart. In addition, fans and audience members can comment on the songs. In some ways, this functionality resembles Myspace in that it allows for direct interaction with the audience. Below the section of

charts, the highest ranked songs are featured. While the difference between the Secondlife “Hot 10” and the highest ranked songs is not obvious, in the latter category, participants can rate the musicians as excellent, very good, good, poor, or dismal. In addition, a user can also write a review of the artist’s music. This section of the website, however, does not seem heavily developed since hardly any reviews have been written.

The “Blog” section is open for Secondlife users to write about any open subjects. The blog is divided into two tabs: one is for the newest blog topic, and the other is for the featured blog topic. Under “Newest Blog,” one mainly finds a selection of advertisements. Artists often post a blog to advertise the existence of fan clubs, inviting the fans to sign up for the club. Other blog posts announce live music festivals on Secondlife. Another post invites musicians to come play live in one of various venues. On the “Featured Blog,” one interesting report and update could be found related to Secondlife’s convergence with mainstream media outlets. The post was titled “Rock Giants enter Second Life.” In this blog entry, the author notes that twelve renowned rock and metal bands will play on Secondlife. It is worth noting that this event had been set up by Bravado, which is the merchandising division of Universal Music Group and The Sine Wave Company. This event is very important in that we can now see the merger of mainstream and participatory media. What might this type of merger contribute to the grand scheme of Secondlife live performances? The answer to this inquiry hinges on the legitimacy of venues where the impact or the scale of Secondlife exceeds that of the amateur alternatives. If amateurs share the same performance spaces and online venues as famous rock and metal bands, the significance of live performances on Secondlife is certainly validated. Similar to the operation of Myspace, where both famous and

unknown musicians simultaneously market, promote, and distribute music, Secondlife is becoming acceptable to all kinds of musicians.

The content related to Slusic's other sections is predominately driven by the ranking systems. Examples of these are evident in the sections related to music, radio, videos, artists, and chart. Apparently, ranking is significant in this site, as the content of each category seems to be predominately run by different types of charts. In Videos, one can find the charts of Secondlife videos, while on the Artists' page, there is a featured artist's profile and two types of charts: one is for new artists, and the other is for the ten most popular artists. These rankings are determined by the number of times a particular song is played. While social networking websites, such as Slusic, promote the building of a larger fan base, this website does not seem to have much relevance to live performance or to the legitimacy that one gains by performing live.

Although Slusic was terminated, one should not assume that Secondlife's competitive aspect is diminishing. According to the website [www.thebestofsecondlife.com](http://www.thebestofsecondlife.com),<sup>xi</sup> the competitions reward the best live musicians with a 50,000 Linden prize. The rules and procedures of one particular competition were as follows:

First Episode: January 5th, 1:00PM PST/SLT  
 Venue: SS Galaxy Zodiac Ball Room  
 Judges: JenzineWebzine Miles, Preciousse Moody, Doubledown Tandino  
 Contestants: Edward Kyomoon, Janor Slichter, Angel Stormwind, Djai Skjellerup, Thumper Boucher, Kim Seifert, Nikita Lumet, KevinMThomas Carpool  
 Audience voting opens immediately after all the contestants are done performing and will continue through 3:00PM PST January 6th. Results will be announced immediately. Four (4) performers will move on to the next round. (Aabye, 2007)

The fifth episode in this competition narrowed down the number of contestants to

two. The final episode was featured on January 19, 2008, and the winner was Kim Seifert. Although I did not closely examine the actual concerts and competitions held on Secondlife, these details alone indicate that Secondlife live performances still rely on a framework of competitions and ranking through audience votes. This leads to the next facet of the Secondlife experience, which is the issue of ranking.

### Secondlife Live Performances and Ranking

What does this chart imply in regards to popularity, and do live performances help artists to move up the charts? Do live performances on Secondlife ever influence the music charts? With these questions in mind, I closely examined the website [http://www.rikomatic.com/blog/2007/02/second\\_life\\_mus.html](http://www.rikomatic.com/blog/2007/02/second_life_mus.html), where the users discuss live performances and their relationship to the rankings and the genres. This study is the result of a quantitative analysis that incorporated the responses from Secondlife users, whereby the researcher (who is the author of this blog) initiated the research with the following hypothesis: “Similar to streaming radio, Second Life music performances are filling unfilled music niches that are not being served by traditional radio” (Rikomatic, 2007, para.1). Given this hypothesis, the researcher observed 203 music videos and concluded that the two top genres during this period of musical performance (between June and July 2006) were “Alternative” (31) and “Folk” (27), followed by Techno (20), Country (16), Rock (16) and Blues (15). The value of this research is debatable since it was reported in a blog (not in a scholarly outlet), and the results may have changed drastically since the report was written in 2006. Nevertheless, the relevance and significance of this article to the current research endeavor is not in the actual research findings. Rather, I examined how the participants responded to the study. The rationale

behind the discourse analysis of the commentary section was to learn how Secondlife participants conceive the effects of live musical performances on the popularity rankings and their relation to genre classifications. In short, this study exemplifies a discursive practice, focusing on how some users discuss and generate value from the Secondlife live performances.

In the commentary section, there were a total of sixteen thoughtful and engaging comments, and these were elicited in an interactive way, whereby the researcher himself was also involved in the discussion. Most of the commentaries showed genuine interest in Secondlife live performances, but some of commentators also pointed out the limitation of this study, noting on how it could not accurately compare whether Secondlife live performances are equivalent to streaming radio stations. In responding to the questions of the researcher (“Is going to a SL music event qualitatively different from listening to the radio? Is the closer analogy going to a live music performance?”), one commentator responded:

For gigs like NBC etc etc it was a one way radio experience for me to attend any of them [ty for the free cd rr!] but for the small gigs it's a live music performance paradigm, pure and simple..at least for people able to be at the venue. Ever read the chat from a live gig? Cracks me up every time! For people in overflow areas you are probably creeping back into one-way radio territory, but then there is still chat and IM as well... so maybe not? (Tokugawa, 2007).

From this response, it is clear that since there is an interactive component to the live performances in Secondlife, the performances themselves produce attributes that are different from those associated with the streaming radio. The chat room in Secondlife exists to provide for interaction between and among the audience members and the performers.

Another commentary thread sheds light in regards to the quality of live performances and how this is contingent upon the genres. One commentator suggested:

Trying to examine what kinds of music over time are being performed and what isn't is relevant for understanding what kind of medium for artistic expression SL is evolving into. Does it create opportunities for certain kinds of musicians and formats over others? Does it better support niche audiences that aren't being served by other traditional media like radio? How will the more international nature of the population of SL effect the kinds of music that gets performed and listened to? These are I think valid questions to ask, and ones that statistical analysis can help unpack. Otherwise we're talking based on hearsay and opinion, which doesn't advance knowledge or understanding. (Tokugawa, 2007)

In understanding the relationship between virtual live performances and the genres, the tension existing in the dichotomy of mass vs. niche consumption becomes apparent. The above commentator continues by describing personal experiences of performing live on Secondlife, emphasizing the manner in which popularities may vacillate depending on the genres of music one plays:

I probably play 5 or more of those styles in one set. It would be hard to rate it that way. If hip hop or any type of live dance musician started hitting SL they would probably be the most popular based on how many people go to the dance clubs there. There was one guy Kevin Michael who did R&B and sounded very good but his sound was so bad it was difficult to tolerate it. I think the interest is not there to the musician and the lack of knowledge on streaming for many of the unheard styles. (Coleman, 2007)

Another commentary expressed a different opinion: "Sure you can use backing tracks, but as any live performer will tell, too much karaoke backing makes the music sound like, well...karaoke! [and I use a robot rhythm section too - good part is no waiting!]" (Rikomatic, 2007).

Proceeding from this earlier comment, another blogger defended the value of Secondlife live musical performances scenes:

You guys may be missing the obvious, when you wonder why hip hop and other kinds of pop music are very poorly represented in SL. The pop charts represent a \*manufactured\* ranking of musical interest, manufactured by the mammoth hype and image machine of the music industry. And in SL there is, as yet, no possibility of manipulating interest that way. What's more, only the youngest (and weakest) members of society fall for that kind of brainwashing of musical taste. In contrast, the demographics of the SL population are very wide indeed, so there is not much fertile ground for barely-musical plastic creations to find appeal as interesting music. And finally, popular music is infused into the minds of the impressionable using a very potent heroin: the image of extremely healthy-looking young adults in substantial states of undress wiggling their lovely bodies provocatively in clip after clip. To not succumb to it is almost impossible, when all your young peers have it in their blood. In SL of course, there is no such imagery available. (Rikomatic, 2007)

In analyzing how the discourses on Secondlife live performances have been carried out by the participants (the musicians, as well as the audience members), there were a couple of important themes that emerged from the conjuncture of virtual live performances, popularity rankings, and genres. While the commentaries definitely do not represent the sentiment or opinions of the entire body of Secondlife concertgoers or musicians, and although these discourses are only a marginalized discourse, the responses show a wide array of opinions that were not in unison about the value of live performances on Secondlife. Some commentators found that live musical performances actually exist as an alternative medium to mainstream media. Others believed that if a singer relied heavily on a backing track (as is the case in the genres of hip-hop and R & B), his or her performance might be perceived poorly in terms of the value of live performances, since the only live factor exists in the singing or rapping. In short, this music resembles live karaoke.

The testimonies discussed above indicate that Secondlife's live performances may actually defy or limit the rampancy of the popular music depicted in the mainstream

culture, in part due to technical complications. “Liveness” relates to the notion of authenticity and value. Jones (2002), in “Music that moves,” states:

there is continuing and growing, elitism associated with live performances, in the aural construction of recordings, and in the social construction of over-determined narratives about and by musicians, fans and critics. Musicians and fans seek to express and communicate authenticity by way of sound, itself made explicit through the interwoven discourse surrounding technology that makes that expression possible. (p. 224)

In this respect, virtual live musical performances on social networking sites such as Secondlife should gain more value over time, since live performances imply authenticity; nevertheless, given the earlier analysis and exploration of Slusic, live performance components do not seem to significantly impact a performer’s popularity. Rather, the ability to market oneself on the internet by taking advantage of marketing services, such as [www.theslagency.com](http://www.theslagency.com), may be more advantageous to increasing popularity.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented a case study of Secondlife, utilizing various angles to produce a multi-faceted perspective. Secondlife is widely used by both mainstream and unsigned musicians; however, their activities on Secondlife do not intersect in a concrete, visible way. Secondlife seems to represent a microcosm of the real-life music scene, where both independent and signed musicians utilize various venues for their own purposes without having much impact on each other. The best way to understand the tension that exists between mainstream musicians and independent musicians on Secondlife is to consider the site’s activities in terms of the accessibility of venue space. For signed musicians, arranging for a venue in which to perform is much easier than it is for independent musicians. The signed musicians clearly have a larger

array of resources and venues at their disposal. Thus, the infiltration of signed musicians into Secondlife, a virtual user-generated three-dimensional avatar world, is noteworthy. Does this mean that in the future there will be less exposure for independent musicians? Will unsigned musicians now be able to gain increased exposure through the higher visibility of the signed musicians? The answers to these questions are both negative.

From an independent, unsigned musician's viewpoint, Secondlife's live performances provided an outlet that was truly liberating in terms of a minimized amount of the politics required for procuring performance venues. Booking a gig seemed pretty straightforward, as it only entailed talking to the owner of a Secondlife music venue and requesting a time slot. The presence of signed musicians on Secondlife does not limit in any way the opportunities for unsigned musicians to perform. Actually, the success being generated by unsigned musicians is motivating some signed artist to learn more about the Secondlife scene. As Andrew (2006) states, "the big names, however, are following in the footsteps of members of Second Life's growing unsigned music scene. To many amateur artists, the virtual world represents a good way to build a following" (para.11).

Often these artists are contractually linked to major record labels, such as Naxo, BBC, and Sony. In this context, it is important to understand the differences between the use of Secondlife by major and unsigned musicians; the differences are grounded in the site's tip-driven economy. Secondlife amateur performers work in order to earn tips, while signed musicians utilize the site as a promotional platform. In other words, Secondlife performers have to "hustle" to get a gig or to cultivate audience approval, while signed musicians already have a significant fan base acquired through mainstream

media exposure. Thus, performers were required to pay attention to diverse aspects of social interaction and networking connected to the owners of the venues as well as audience members.

Because a significant barrier existed between the performers and the audiences, in terms of the absence of face-to-face interaction, musicians had to work hard to appeal to their listeners. This often took the form of affective labor, specifically reflected in the giving of compliments to the audience members or the showing of gratitude. Although signed musicians are also there to “labor,” their labor is more oriented toward press coverage than the earning of real tips. For unsigned musicians, the labor also entailed learning social protocols explained both by site experts and by fellow live musicians on the Secondlife forum. Thus, understanding the emergence of social protocols was highly instrumental and vital to independent musicians’ chances of success in the Secondlife environment.

In analyzing different types of websites dedicated to the growth of the Secondlife music scene, the driving question centered on the impact of live performances on the work that musicians put into social networking sites to gain popularity. Despite the effort to make Secondlife music more popular and prominent, it was determined that the actual content of the site, sluic.com did not reflect the authenticity of live performances; rather, much of the content was similar to other music social networking sites, such as Myspace. Perhaps this is the reason why the site was permanently terminated—as the major difference lies in the fact that Secondlife artists do not use real pictures, but avatars, to brand themselves. The popularity, hence, does not seem to be contingent upon the appearance or physical attributes of artists; rather it seems to be more focused on music

and networking. Because the live music aspect is not a main source of increased popularity rankings on this website, the values of real-time Secondlife performances may be irrelevant to the overall popularity of the artist. In short, on Secondlife, no strong correlation exists when comparing artists' live performances and their popularity on social networking.

## CHAPTER VI: A CASE STUDY OF INDABAMUSIC.COM

### Introduction

Until recently, social networking sites mainly allowed for the following kinds of networking: communication between large numbers of fans and artists ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)); networking among aficionados of live performances ([www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com)); and linking of musicians selling their music online ([www.musicfreedom.com](http://www.musicfreedom.com)). Although Indabamusic shares common features with other networking sites, (such as the ability to add friends and to comment on one another's profiles), Indabamusic also hosts various competitions, which result in opportunities for collaboration with highly established artists, such as Yo Yo Ma, Mariah Carey, The Roots, John Legends, Alkline Trio, and Kos to name a few.

The aim of the first part of this chapter is twofold: 1) to explore the various cutting-edge communication mechanisms (features) on Indabamusic; and 2) to understand how these communication mechanisms affect the creative and collaborative processes. Drawing from Levy's theory of "collective intelligence" (1997), which posits that all users contribute to knowledge formation in cyberspace, Jenkins optimistically believes that collective cooperation can potentially lead to a widespread reshaping of the commodity culture. The cooperation and merging of mainstream and grassroots media lie at the center of this framework. Any study of the changing cultural climate must take into account the cooperation between these two entities. This chapter will focus on the following questions: What are the implications of the Console software?

The second part of the chapter will concentrate on the competitions hosted by

Indabamusic. In this section, I will examine the types of contests hosted by Indabamusic, and will conduct a case study of one particular competition: Celebrate and Collaborate with Yo Yo Ma. I will focus specifically on the ways in which musicians strove to win the competition, subsequently problematizing the newly emerging issues linked to this competition and others. Considering the divergent ideologies of major record labels and independent or user-centered social networking sites (i.e., major companies are profit-driven, while many sites place a high priority on the needs of artists), will partnerships between mainstream and grassroots entities ultimately lead to conflicts of values and goals? This chapter will explore how Indabamusic's user-centered business model is thriving as a result of the dominance of collaborations and partnerships involving mainstream media companies and corporations.

### What is Indabamusic?

Indabamusic was founded by Matthew Siegel and Dan Zaccagnino in April 2007. In an e-mail interview, Zaccagnino explained how he and his friend came to establish Indabamusic:

Matt [Siegel] and I met in college, where we founded a student-run record label together. As we got closer to graduation, we knew we wanted to have the label continue under student management so we started thinking about other ideas. We were fortunate enough to hook up with Mantis Evar, who had years and years of experience in the music industry, and Jesse [Chan-Norris] and Chris [Danzig], who had great technical skills, and we got to work building a platform for artists to collaborate with one another. (Zaccagnino, personal communication, March 13, 2009)

As reflected in the story quoted above, Indabamusic was created by two Harvard University students, who were not affiliated with any major record labels or corporations.

Zaccagnino further described how Indabamusic differs from other types of social

networking sites:

First, it is a social network focused on musicians, engineers, producers, and anyone who touches the creative aspects of music. It wasn't designed as a destination for fans, although happily there are lots of interesting content to explore, and many fans do visit the site. Second, it is a collaborative platform where people are actually creating music together. They exchange instrument tracks, build on one another's work, give each other feedback, and so on. (Zaccagnino, personal communication, March 13, 2009)

Unlike other social networking sites, Indabamusic's major activities are oriented around collaborative production. This site was not solely created to help artists gain fans and build large followings. Rather, its purpose was to offer easy access to collaborative opportunities with others, to function as a resource to help meet artists' musical needs, and to provide a feedback forum for peer groups of musicians.

In terms of membership, Indabamusic offers three different options: the basic membership is free of charge and provides five public sessions, one private session, and 100 MB storage; the next level offers a higher number of public and private sessions; and the platinum level allows unlimited sessions and storage space. Upon signing up for an Indabamusic membership, each user is given a personal profile space on which to upload music, pictures, and blog entries, similar to the functionality of Myspace. In addition, payment functions, such as PayPal (an online service through which money can be sent and received) are incorporated into each profile so that members can easily hire session musicians for their recordings. Besides adding contacts, users can also comment on other users' profiles. However, unlike Myspace, the profile features do not emphasize the accumulation of contacts as a major way to network. (Upon joining Myspace, each new user becomes the "friend" of site founder Tom Anderson. This in return connects the new user to Myspace's entire user body.)

As the founder of Indabamusic, Zaccagnino currently has 226 contacts (as of August 2009), a moderate number of contacts in comparison to other social networking site founders. The primary emphasis of the Indabamusic experience does not seem to be about gaining numerous contacts. This is indicated by the number of contacts that most users have in their profiles, a number that seems to be much smaller than those found on Myspace. This observation was made by visiting various, randomly selected Indabamusic profiles. The discrepancy may be linked with the fact that Myspace was established years earlier than Indabamusic; however, one should not think that networking is unimportant in the Indabamusic environment. This networking, however, is pursued through other features on the site.

Indabamusic lists nine function headings on its user homepage: My Studio, Community, Session, People, Featured Programs, Groups, Events, Forums, and Chats. In order to understand the full spectrum of Indabamusic's activities, it is important to examine each function.

"My Studio" offers several options for the user; one can create a session, edit one's profile, find a friend, or create a blog post. In addition, this function offers a "studio feed" of ongoing news related to Indabamusic. A "share this" link appears at the bottom of the page, which "allows you to easily share any page on the site to a veritable plethora of social networking sites, including facebook, twitter, wordpress, delicious, blogger, myspace, stumbleupon, reddit, digg, technorati, friendfeed, linkedin, and even fark!" (Indabamusic, n.d.). Another interesting aspect of My Studio is its convergence with Iphone. Through an Iphone application, one can arrange to have message updates about the status of one's ongoing sessions sent directly to one's Iphone. Clearly,

Indabamusic promotes exposure and connectivity through other social networking sites as well as personal cell phones.

“Community” provides updates and information about the activities of Indabamusic users. The obvious motive here may be to create a community environment, but at the same time, this function has turned into an automatic self-promotion platform. It is important to explain a few details here, as they are tied to the concepts of self-promotion and cultural intermediaries. The community section is often overwhelmed with information related to featured people, “hot” sessions, featured programs (competitions), and upcoming events on the Indabamusic. A close analysis of this section reveals the presence of immaterial and free labor, especially in the section titled, “Happening Now on Indabamusic.” Here, users are encouraged to provide project updates; for instance, every time a user uploads an image or a music file to their sessions list, a link will automatically appear on the feed. With the constant updating of information on this feed, the more work one puts in, the more visible one will be on the site. This function is contradictory and paradoxical when compared to other sections, where active self-promotion is not encouraged.

In the category “forums” they are divided into five groups: Site Help, Music Discussion, Gear Talk, Content Discussion, and Feedback and Requests. Under the “Content Discussion,” there is a one-line disclaimer: “please note that contest promotion in other forums will be removed.” This means that the promotion of oneself in unrelated topic rooms will not be allowed; obviously Indabamusic employees are overseeing the users’ activities. This may also indicate that the Indabamusic staff does not want this site to become devoted to relentless pursuits of self-promotion. Ironically, though, the

competitions that are held on Indabamusic require self-promotion, since they involve a voting component. The voting aspect of the competitions will be explained in depth later in this chapter.

By examining the “Session” category, it quickly becomes clear that being active on Indabamusic is critical to gaining more exposure. A list of active sessions is featured along with a detail account of the current activities being pursued on Indabamusic. Members can upload auditions here, ask to join a group, leave comments, or list what parts are needed for an upcoming session. Session allows members of Indabamusic to watch the development and recording of music, and invites users to leave input and feedback about others’ endeavors. Members can also view new sessions that have been created, and suggest new projects or sessions. (One must enter in one’s profile, the names of artists who have influenced one's music in order to receive a recommendation list). In the latter part of the chapter, I will explore in depth how the sessions are influenced by the software program “Console.”

Under “People,” various artists are either featured or otherwise organized according to categories. The category of “Recommended Artists” specifically reflects each user’s personal preferences. Recommendations are made based on the information provided in the “influence” section of each user's profile. “Recommended Artists” functions similarly to the “Suggested Session” category on the “Session” page. The artist recommendations reflect Indabamusic's role as an intermediary between artists, although the suggestions and recommendations are generated automatically to reflect the influences and interests entered by the users.

In my personal correspondence with Zaccagnino, I learned about the process

involved in the choosing of featured artists. Zaccagnino stated that the factors that determine featured artist status are both quantitative and qualitative in nature:

Mantis Evar, who is the EVP of Artists and Community at Indaba Music oversees the selection of featured artists and sessions. The criteria are both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative in the sense that the more music you have on your profile, the more sessions you are involved in, the more you tell us about yourself the easier it is to learn about you and feature you. It is qualitative in the sense that we find and pick members of the community that we admire, whose music we enjoy, and who are actively making Indaba Music a better place every day. We are mostly musicians ourselves so it's easy to get us excited when we hear and see things that we like! (Personal communication, Zaccagnino, March, 13, 2009)

Although the judges are mostly musicians, they do not necessarily share the same taste in music. Despite this divergence in taste, Indabamusic imposes the staff members' collective taste onto other members through the competition and judging process.

Indabamusic is not only driven by the preferences of a select body of judges; like other social networking sites, such as Myspace and Youtube, Indabamusic utilizes a rating system. A five-star rating standard shows how each composition and performance is perceived by others in the network

“Featured Programs” (competitions) is the next category on the functions list. Due to its relevance to other parts of this study, this section will be explored extensively later in the chapter. The “Groups” page provides a list of groups which musicians can join for the purposes of networking: songwriters / lyricists, guitar players, engineers, producers, amateur recording groups, etc. This page helps musicians of similar interests to interact with one another in a discussion forum.

“Events” publicizes information about various musical events and projects. On this page, users can learn about the events happening near their geographic location, and

help create new networks outside of the Indabamusic virtual environment. The last category, “Chat,” is similar in function to other sites—it offers real time communication for members.

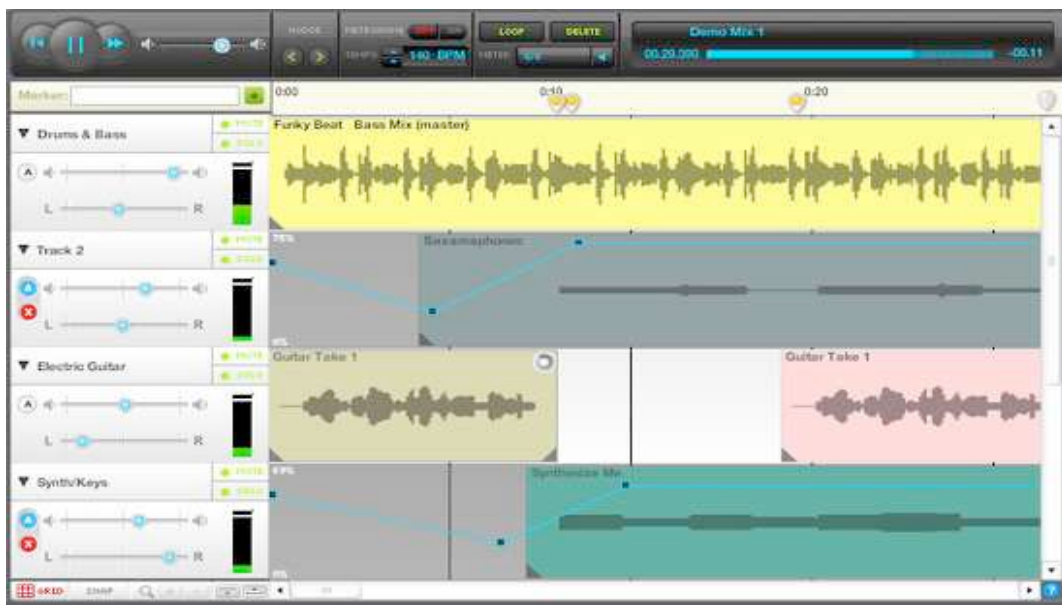
In an attempt to better understand the functionality of Indabamusic, I conducted a textual analysis of Indabamusic, providing an overview of the site’s main functions. At this juncture, attention will shift to Console, the important software program that drives the main activities of Indabamusic.

### The Evolution of Console

Console's basic goal is to promote collaboration between musicians. When a musician wants to collaborate with someone else, he or she can simply upload a track and add music to the already-existing program. In a traditional recording process, musicians must record various layers of tracks in order to create a final piece. The complexity of this process depends on the type of music being recorded. For example, in the case of recording a piano solo, all that is required is one track of solo piano (unless one desires additional technical interventions, such as the addition of reverberation or the application of an equalizer, a function that can sharpen sound quality). However, if a pianist wants to invite a singer to sing on top of the piano music, then two tracks are required. Console functions like a virtual recording studio, since it can be shared with others around the world via the internet: “the Indaba Session Console is an online digital mixer that allows you to mix and edit audio in your web browser from any computer. It includes standard digital audio workstation features such as looping, panning, cropping, and mixing down” (Indabamusic collaboration, n.d.).

Console is similar to Pro-Tools, a commonly-used recording software, and is

relatively user friendly. Any member can upload a track on Console and invite others in the Indabamusic network to collaborate on the project. According to Harmony Central, Console offers other features, such as “looping, automated pan/volume and the ability to export session tracks and information directly to ProTools, Logic, and all other desktop audio applications” (Harmony Central, 2007, para. 2). In addition to all these features, Harmony Central reports that those collaborating on a track can chat with one another in real time and also “save multiple mixes of the session” (Harmony Central, 2007, para. 2).



Note: The sample picture of Console imported from <http://www.synthtopia.com/content/2007/05/22/indaba/>

On July 9, 2009, Indabamusic announced the launch of an advanced version of Console: Console 2.0. The upgraded version provides an array of functions similar to that of Pro-Tools. Console 2.0 has many new features that the earlier version lacked. For instance, in addition to editing and mixing functions, one can now record music directly and import hundreds of audio samples from the Indaba library. Eliot Van Buskirk (2009) explains the new advantages of Console: “the key to Indaba’s breakthroughs in several key areas (improved audio quality, real-time effects, offline mode, and non-destructive

editing) was its switch from running on Flash, which hampered some audio features, to Sun's new JavaFX platform" (para. 4).



Note: The sample picture of console 2.0. imported from <http://www.techcrunch.com/2009/07/09/indaba-lets-musicians-collaborate-through-revamped-digital-music-workstation/>

As Buskirk indicates, Indabamusic focuses its efforts on promoting collaborative opportunities for recording musicians. When a group of individuals decides to collaborate on a project, each person can lay down either voice or instrumental lines; all of the collaborators are involved in making early, pre-recording decisions about ownership and pricing (Ziv, 2008). In addition, during the time of composition and deliberation, Indabamusic can manage the transaction records, noting which members have the rights to particular tracks (Ziv, 2008).

### Crowdsourcing

The term “Crowdsourcing” was originally coined by Jeff Howe and Mark Robinson (Howe, 2006). Caren Brabham (2008) explains this concept succinctly:

“crowdsourcing is an online, distributed problem-solving and production model that has emerged in recent years” (p. 75). Brabham provides various examples of different websites whose operations revolve around crowdsourcing (thredless.com, istockphoto.com, InnoCentive.com). In briefly outlining how these sites operate as a problem-solution business model, Brabham emphasizes that “crowdsourcing is not merely a web 2.0 buzzword, but is instead a strategic model to attract an interested, motivated crowd of individuals capable of providing solutions superior in quality and quantity to those that even traditional forms of business can” (p. 79).

According to Brabham (2008), the essence of crowdsourcing lies in the “crowd,” in which it is presumed that a large number of people can collectively produce creative products, as well as corporate research and innovative solutions for scientific problems (p. 78). This does not necessarily infer that quantity is equivalent to quality. The underlying assumption here invokes Levy’s notion of “collective intelligence,” as previously discussed. While Levy is concerned about the demise of individuality, Brabham’s concern relates to the gains and losses perceived from the political / economic angle. Brabham notes how the benefit one receives from crowdsourcing is not necessarily monetary in nature, but is, instead, measured in intellectual labor (p. 83). Thus, Brabham compares and contrasts the exploitative nature of crowdsourcing while also highlighting its invaluable, immaterial benefits.

As Brabham claims, “crowdsourcing offers individuals in the crowd a chance at entrepreneurship, or at the very least an outlet for creative energy” (p. 84). This is the core reason why Indabamusic continues to thrive. Although it offers a variety of contents and does not involve monetary compensation, many Indabamusic musicians speak of the

collaborative outlet as the main source of value. Through an online survey, I attempted to study the opinions of musicians on their experiences with Indabamusic; only seven musicians responded. While four of the responses were irrelevant in terms of the survey's focus, these responses directly addressed my survey call.

I joined recently - effect of a Colbert Bump. I found several great musicians to collaborate with and just finished a project with Patton M. from Korea that I was very pleased with. I'm in Southampton NY and although I have other collaborators, time and geographical constraints most often interfere with projects. To be able to find collaborators and actually get work done is fantastic. Now I see that a lot of people seem to think that this is a place to promote themselves and I guess to some extent that is so, but it's missing the point. Feedback on how listeners experience the music is very pertinent, but to actually collaborate is where it's at. (Indabamusic project, 2009)

Another member of Indabamusic responded to the above posting, echoing the earlier remark.

Sounds great I too agree with [name omitted]. Collaboration requires an extension of self, and an open mind. As a musician/producer, I want to think as far outside of my normal boundaries as possible. In doing so, I try to put myself in the shoes of the other artist that I am collaborating with. Since joining Indaba, I've been humbly asked to become a leader of the group Hip-Hop's Finest, as well as met several like minded artists. I also see this site as a way to gain exposure and help others to gain exposure through collaborating, not only with musical ideas, but with creative business ideas. I've only been a member since December 08 and already I'm involved in producing a series of compilations. Let me know what you need from me and I will try to make it happen. Thanks. (Indabamusic project, 2009)

As can be seen from both members' testimonies, it is clear that the collaborative tool on Indabamusic has been favorably received by at least some users since it provided a chance to sharpen one's musical skill. More than gaining popularity or exposure, these two musicians value the way this site provides a platform for them to exchange musical ideas; it also fosters creativity through easy access and functionality. Although my

survey attempt was not successful in terms of the number of respondents, *NPR*'s article on Indabamusic, titled "From broadband to bands jamming," included several useful testimonies from users of the site. According to Oresti Tsonopoulos (Oresti),

Indaba is a great way to create music you'd never expect to make otherwise. Had I not posted my idea on the site, I would have never run into Steve Small, who brought the hip-hop concept into the mix. It's really a way to expand your musical horizons and create fresh new musical themes which would otherwise be untapped (*NPR*, 2008).

Another user also commented on the article whose session (music) had actually been featured on the *NPR* program.

Hey guys, I'm so glad that you like the session. I just think that its such a brilliant concept that an amateur vocalist, trying to break into the industry with very limited funds such as myself is able to sit in their home at a computer and and do something that they love in helping to produce professional sounding music with such talented artists such as Oresti, The If, TW and Rochelle. I have met so many friends on Indaba and one in particular that I have teamed up with to create a electro pop duo called "Felsite". (You can myspace that if you want) The possibilities with Indaba are endless. By far the best music creating and collaboration website I have come across. And it's free!!!!!!! (*NPR*, 2008).

These two musicians are clearly excited about the platform that Indabamusic has provided for its users; however, this is not to say that these few commentaries represent the full gamut of sentiments among Indabamusic users. Although the point here is not to evaluate whether users of Indabamusic are content with the site's functionality, it is important to understand the influence and ramifications of this program.

### Implications of Utilizing Console

Various online magazine articles have been written about Indabamusic's pioneering collaboration tools; most of these articles have praised the website's innovations. For example, Michael Smith (2007) states: "While Radiohead and Madonna

openly challenge the industry's current distribution scheme, websites like Indaba challenge the industry's current, lackluster system of developing new talent. Looks like there is another wagon in the ever-growing circle of industry change”(para. 19). In *Electronic musician*, Marty Cutler (2007) also lauds the website: “I can't say enough about how web-based collaboration has helped me to realize ideas that have been in my head for years” (para. 38). David Chartier (2009) provides yet another positive commentary: “The entire Indaba Music experience is impressive and refreshingly devoid of silly games and other social networking nuisances” (para. 7). In addition to these published reports, the *Discovery Channel* featured a story on Indabamusic’s virtual collaboration framework. On February 2, 2009, Zaccagnino was featured on the *Colbert Report* on which he described the website and introduced the most recent Indabamusic collaborative opportunity, a remixing of the *Colbert Report*. Despite the preponderance of Indbamusic's positive reviews, adopting a neutral position is necessary in order to provide a balanced perspective on the site's role in the virtual world.

Unlike the collective act of contributing to the construction of knowledge or developing solutions to problems, musical e-collaboration has multiple implications in terms of cultural values and in the overall context of the music industry. Firstly, the traditional notion of the music band may be changing. Band members do not have to share the same space to jam and create separate musical parts. Because collaboration can occur at any location that has internet access and at any hour of the day, collectivism no longer connotes “togetherness” in a physical sense. It now signifies decentralization and dispersion. Being able to collaborate with talented individuals anywhere in the world means that the notion of e-collaboration applies to a disembodied form of creativity,

where concrete physical proximity has become less relevant and significant.

Indabamusic's collaborative software is currently used by 200,000 musicians all around the globe (185 countries), and the upgraded version of Console is predicted to draw more musicians who want to directly record and create music (Buskirk, 2009).

Despite this new trend toward collaboration, Zaccagnino firmly believes that the collaborative tool on Indabamusic will not replace the traditional form of collaboration in which musicians gather in one room to jam and record simultaneously:

One thing that we believe in strongly about online collaboration is that it will certainly never replace what it's like to be in the same room with another musician – nor should it. Indabamusic is about creating new opportunities that wouldn't otherwise exist, not about replacing other types of collaboration. We cannot assume that this type of collaboration will be the only type of collaboration existing in the future, but it is clear that this will be the prevalent form of collaboration affecting the landscape of the music industry. (Zaccagnino, personal communication, March 13, 2009)

With the rise of online collaboration tools, one can predict that soon internet-savvy musicians will be searching for the next generation of producers. This type of collaboration will help musicians to empower themselves and to affect change; by not yielding control to the record label executives, a musician can be self-reliant in terms of seeking and finally choosing solutions for a specific set of needs.

Although any user can search for collaborators on Indabamusic, a successful search requires labor and dedication. One must invite others to join a particular session, and then actively network in order to see who may be truly interested in a specific project. While the site itself provides direction to users seeking collaborators, users must be active on the site in order to be best served by the functionality of the site.

Lastly, the final implication of the new Console technology relates to the

extension of online collaboration into real-life situations. Zaccagnino describes this phenomenon:

We have seen bands form from meeting on the site and then go on to play live shows; we've seen auditions held online for real world opportunities, and we've even see major artists like Yo-Yo Ma invite people from the site to record with him in the studio. (Zaccagnino, personal communication, March 13, 2009)

As indicated above, e-collaboration does not only exist in the virtual world, since it can easily intersect with the physical world, thereby transforming the way in which musicians find one another to collaborate. E-collaboration can shape real-life collaboration in a way that does not replace the older form of collaboration, but instead enhances face-to-face interactions through the testing ground of the virtual recording studio.

### Convergence on Indabamusic

One of the core elements of Indabamusic is the site's cooperation with the mainstream media companies, a trend that epitomizes Jenkins' notion of "convergence culture." In the interview with the author, Zaccagnino explained the motivation behind the partnership model:

We often work with major artists, labels, management groups and so on to run innovative marketing campaigns for them, while creating great opportunities for the artists in our community. More often than not, they approach us and want to engage our community... We plan to continue pushing the boundaries here so that we can increasingly provide a valuable marketing service to major artists while providing unprecedented opportunities to independent artists. (Zaccagnino, personal communication, March 13, 2009)

Competitions on Indabamusic are, thus, created with two purposes in mind; not only do the competitions aid in the promotion of prominent mainstream artists, they also provide independent musicians with opportunities to share their talents and skills with a wider

audience. The mainstream-grassroots partnership model is solidly taking root on Indabamusic, according to its founder:

We are always open to working with different organizations and do so already in many ways. Whether that's partnering with companies who can provide additional services to our members, working closely with major brands to run innovative campaigns for them around music, or having brands sponsor the campaigns that we run for major labels and artists. In the coming months there will be many exciting features and opportunities that will come as the result of partnerships with other companies. (Zaccagnino, personal communication, March 13, 2009)

Innovative opportunities to collaborate with mainstream musicians and major brands are common activities on Indabamusic, but one particular question can be raised at this juncture: can partnerships with major label artists occur without the exploitation of lesser-known musician's free labor?

During my interview with Zaccagnino, he stated that because the executives and founding members of Indabamusic are all musical artists of some kind, their business model strives to put the needs of the artists first:

I think being an artist affects the decisions that we all make. Almost everyone at Indaba Music is an artist in some way, be it as a musician, mastering engineer, producer, filmmaker, photographer, and more. We are passionate about creating tools that are going to be valuable to musicians. That said, we are also business people who believe that there is a large economic opportunity for Indaba Music and don't see any conflict in those two perspectives. If anything, we believe that our perspectives as both artists and business people position us incredibly well to run a business like Indaba. (Zaccagnino, personal communication, March 13, 2009)

Zaccagnino emphasized that he perceives no conflict between Indaba's focus on both cultivating grassroots activities and converging with major record labels and media outlets. However, Ziv (2008) questions whether or not the current business structure of Indabamusic can long continue to function effectively without any alterations or

conflicts. The current model is user-centered, insofar as decisions made on Indabamusic focus on the benefits to the users:

Indaba's users are central to the strategy of Indaba and form their core. Indaba's members interact with one another dynamically, that is both the creators of music and its' listeners continually rearrange their interaction with one another depending on the type of music being created and the changing interests of the listeners. (Ziv, 2008, p. 598-599)

Even participation on the feedback forum is meant to provide ideas about site improvements to Indabamusic staff. Although Ziv notes that feedback from the users has been implemented in a conducive and productive way, she also comments that this type of information gathering requires an acute attention to detail. Moreover, the forum monitors must understand and interact with users as closely as possible, all of which takes a lot of time.

Considering the amount of time and work it has taken to make Indabamusic a user-centric social network, one additional significant function must be considered in order to understand whether or not the focus on artists clashes with the partnerships with the mainstream industry. We will now turn to the competitions that are being held on Indabamusic. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2008) assert that competitions invoke negative emotions, such as panic, anxiety and nervousness. A kind of "panic" mode seems to have developed during the Ma competition. This emotional situation will be explored below.

### Contests on Indabamusic

Indabamusic provides unprecedented opportunities for independent and amateur musicians. Before delving into a case study of one specific contest, it is important to briefly describe the types of contests that have been held thus far, and to explain how the winners were chosen and what the rewards were. Indabamusic has hosted many

competitions since its inception. The following list of competitions describes the judging process, as well as the prizes, for each competition, and was found in Indabamusic's competition archives:

#### Berklee Music Contest:

After the 3-week submission period is closed, the community will vote for an additional week nominating the best mixes. A panel of judges, including Joe Lovano, Greg Osby, and our very own Mantis Evar, will pick the winner. One lucky winner is going to get something very exciting. Berklee's online school, BerkleeMusic.com is giving away a free course to the winner (retail value of about \$1,000 dollars)! Get your producing muscles warmed up 'cause it's all or nothing in this one - all for the best and none for the rest. On your mark... get set....

#### High Tech Remix Contest:

After Leo's fans and the Indaba Music community nominate the top 3 auditions, Leo will choose the best version to become the new Tech Guy theme song, to be played at the beginning and end of every Tech Guy show! Note: there won't be any royalties or monetary compensation for the chosen entry - but hundreds of thousands of people will hear your song every week!

#### Darla Farmer Contest:

After the Indaba community nominates the top three finalists for each song, Darla Farmer and the guys from Paper Garden Records will choose two remixes to appear on their upcoming album! The winning artists will receive royalties from all album sales. Additionally, the winner will receive a free copy of the album as well as two tickets to an upcoming Darla Farmer concert.

#### Mariah Carey Remix Contest:

Over 1,200 remixes were submitted and there were many, many excellent submissions. Below you will see the judges' final decisions on the Winner and Runner-up (chosen from the Top 10 as voted by you), as well as some Honorable Mentions (chosen from all submissions) that were particularly noteworthy. Winner. \$5,000 cash! Their remix will be featured on MariahCarey.com, IslandRecords.com, and Mariah's MySpace page. It'll also be listed as Mariah's "top friend" on MySpace for a month. Runner-up. Receives a Digidesign MBox 2. Top 10 Finalists. Each receives a copy of E=MC2 autographed by Mariah

#### The Roots Remix Contest:

The finalists will have only one-week to come up with the hottest remix of another track from The Roots latest album, Rising Down. The winner of

Round 2, as selected by Judges, will be featured on OkayPlayer and will have an opportunity to record an original song with members of The Roots and special guests. Each of the finalists will also receive an autographed copy of *Rising Down*.

**K-OS Studio Access Contest:**

The 11 contest winners will be featured on the companion album to *Yes!* scheduled to be distributed by Universal Music Canada in the spring of 2009, and will be paid \$1,000 each for their work. Sign up for the K-OS Studio Access program and be part of music industry history. Check back here often for blog posts, videos, and other updates from K-OS.

**John Legend:** If you are out there **Remix This Judges:** John Legend, Trevor Horn (Producer), and Indaba's Mantis Evar (EVP Artists and Community) will be deciding the winner of the contest from among all of the entries.

Winner (selected by judges from all entries). The winning entry will be streamed on John Legend's MySpace page and on JohnLegend.com. The winner will get a personal phone call from John! Public voting will not decide the ultimate winner - the judges will. Honorable Mentions (selected by voting). The top 10 entries will receive signed copies of *Evolver!* (Indabamusic contest archives, n.d.).

Although these are only a few examples of past competitions (as of July 2009, Indabamusic has hosted a total of 26 competitions), it is clear from the descriptions of the judges and prizes that the selection process consists of a combination of popular votes and decisions made by experts in the music field, who are usually either producers or professional artists. However, there are also cases in which the judges are not musicians or experts in the field.

On February 3, 2009, Zaccagnino made an appearance on the television series, *The Colbert Report* (Van Buskirk, 2009). Not only did this opportunity increase Indabamusic's exposure, but Zaccagnino also announced yet another high-profile collaboration opportunity for musicians: a remix of Colbert's show segment into any musical style. Although Colbert jokingly warned the audience to not remix his interview segment, this warning instigated a viral marketing campaign for *The Colbert Report*

online. As fans tune in to the show, they will discover a musical track which will function as a viral marketing advertisement. Although the winner of the Indabamusic competition will not receive a monetary reward, Indabamusic has posted a statement on its website explaining that the winner will be chosen personally by Colbert, and the prize will be “the look on Stephen Colbert's face when he hears how jaw-droppingly, ear-poppingly fresh your remix is!” This competition exemplifies the addition of non-monetary rewards to the norms linked to e-collaboration.

At this juncture, we must take a closer look at one of the Indabamusic competitions in order to learn more about the nature of the competitions for which the judge and cultural intermediary is a renowned artist. When a prominent musician, such as Yo Yo Ma, judges a competition, what is the impact on musicians laboring to win the competition? What concerns about the competition process exist?

### 2009 Yo Yo Ma Competition

In October 2009, the announcement for the Yo Yo Ma competition was publicized on the Indabamusic site and on National Public Radio. Contestants were invited to listen to Yo Yo Ma’s pre-recorded track “Dona Nobis Pacem (Give Us Peace),” and to compose a counter-melody or other form of variation. Upon completion of this task, each contestant was asked to record and then upload the track to Indabamusic for Ma and others to hear. Each entry would be available to the entire community to hear and would automatically be placed into the competition ranking system. Every contestant’s personal profile, on which pictures and other music could be uploaded, could be easily visited by clicking on the user's name as it appeared next to the entry title. Musicians and vocalists of any genre could participate in this competition. During the

competition, musicians were invited to share their thoughts about the experience, and to raise any issues or questions on the forum particularly created for this competition.

Between January 1 and January 10, 2009, I examined the entire discussion board devoted to the Ma competition, and reviewed a total of 500 relevant responses. In doing so, I qualitatively categorized the messages based on a few emerging themes. The discussion focused primarily on two facets of the competition: 1) the voting system; 2) self-promotion. The first theme of voting pertained to the competitive and stressful nature of competitions such as this. The second topic of self-promotion was analyzed by linking it with the concept of immaterial, affective, and free labor to answer the following questions. How do musicians and fans labor to gain more exposure and votes? Are there any common strategies that are used by the majority of musicians? Unlike the earlier case studies of Myspace, Youtube, and Secondlife, no specific tips have yet been written for Indabamusic musicians. This may reflect the relatively new and experimental nature of this site. However, it is important to keep in mind that this characteristic could change in the future.

At the conclusion of this particular competition, the winners were chosen by Ma after a week-long period of listening to the 354 submissions. The winner was announced on the National Public Radio program All Things Considered on January 16, 2009. Instead of choosing one winner, Ma selected two winners, claiming that the experience was like comparing “apples and oranges” (NPR, 2009). The winners were Toshi O, who had composed a heavy metal version of the classical piece, and Kevin McChesney, who used hand bells to complement Ma’s track. The winners of this competition were announced on Indabamusic with comments and explanations provided by Ma. In

addition, Ma chose five runners-up and gave each individual personalized constructive criticism. This aspect of constructive criticism reflects the fact that Indabamusic's community represents more than just a competition framework—it also allows for professional feedback opportunities, which could potentially serve as a platform for discussion about the aesthetics of music. Understanding the political dimension of the competitions is extremely crucial as it provides valuable insight into how the competitive dynamic alters the cultural values tied to virtual music performance.

#### Voting Mania: Is my vote being counted?

The first theme that rose out of the discussion board pertained to the practice of voting. Many musicians wanted to make sure that their efforts to gain votes would pay off in a verifiable, concrete way. Some musicians questioned why their status remained unchanged even after their friends and family members voted for them; this caused others to wonder about the accuracy and fairness of the competition.

I would love to enter this contest, however Indaba etc. must realize that if you have a simple open voting system like this, the winner will invariably just be he who spams the most. Sorry but that is just how the web works. A better alternative would be to give the whole community 5 votes and have them vote for their favorites. Or elect a panel of judges. A new voting system needs to be adopted, I love making music but won't bother entering contests like this if the system is solely based on number of hits. Otherwise, it just goes to the biggest web spam hustler. Edgar Meyer would lose this contest himself, because I highly doubt he is the kind of guy who wants to stay up all night copying and pasting spam emails on myspace. You need to fix this. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

While thanking other members for clarifying the voting procedure, another member posted the following comments:

Thanks for the reply, Mantis Evar! Yes, i had been using the "sort by votes" option up to now, but i thought that in such an open contest, the option of seeing how the voting evolves and what

percentage of votes are allocated to each submission would be very enlightening, or entertaining at the least :-) Perhaps it's not of such great importance. Anyway, may you have a Happy new year everybody! With health, love and joy, Theodor. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

Clearly for this contestant, the contest was a unique opportunity and not one plagued by any voting problems.

On the other hand, the voting procedure was one of the top concerns for other users.

I don't understand what is happening with my ranking. It seems that the more my friends and family vote for me, the lower my ranking goes. Also when they go to is no widget and they can only post a comment at the bottom of the page. I think I am losing out on votes or the 60 plus ahead of me have way more friends than I do. LOL. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

Some members, such as the ones below, were straightforward and honest about their discontentment with the voting and critique procedure:

I really don't like the voting procedure here. People should be able to select their friends and not have to browse through endless, amateur submissions before they get to the one they want. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

Does every submission get listened to, or only a certain range such as the top 20 or 40 submissions? I hope it's the former, since voting can be easily manipulated to make you number one regardless if it is number one material. Cheers everyone, and good luck! (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

As exemplified by this statement, many musicians were unsure whether their votes were truly being counted.

In an interesting digression, one user made the point that without the voting system, Indabamusic cannot attract traffic. Thus, voting functions as a way in which Indabamusic increases its activities and presence.

Amy S. You raised a good point. I think that the voting is only a way for Indaba to get hits. Then again, Indaba is a good site, so it does not bother me. Objectivity in voting is nearly impossible, because who could possibly listen to all submissions, then decide. That must be too much even for Ma. Additionally, Widgets or not, voting seems to be cumbersome, if not impossibly complicated for some. Many friends have asked for more info how to vote. What about people voting for themselves? I did, because I had to understand how the process works, to get my friends to vote. They should have a 5 star system, where people rate submissions. But I am not sure how to make that fair. Well, good luck to all. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

This member noted that the ratings seemed to be problematic; however, this musician did not believe that an objective voting system could be easily established.

It is interesting to note that in this competition, although the votes were problematic for some, the outcome of the competition was not based on the actual number of votes. The ultimate decision was made by Ma. Here we begin to see a shift in the role of social networking sites in music production. Unlike Myspace and Youtube where the number of viewers and ratings matter a great deal, Indabamusic seems to strive for a power balance between popularity and expert criticism. This model of social networking sites does not necessarily result in increased popularity for individual musicians.

Although the popular votes were only influential in the selection of the top ten finalists for recognition, it is important to note that the cultural intermediaries in this particular social network were peer musicians and fans, as well as accomplished artists. On Myspace, Youtube, and Secondlife, the body of cultural intermediaries are mainly restricted to fans and listeners. (At times, Artist & Repertoire (A & R) scouts may search these sites for new, rising acts; however, in

almost every case, the A & R scouts do not grant record contracts, unless there are large numbers of listeners.) Nonetheless, as noted above, Indabamusic employs a different model for the discovery and recognition of talent.

One positive aspect of participating in the Indabamusic competitions is the awarding of honorable mentions by professional, accomplished artists or experts in the music field. In the Ma competition, Ma provided constructive comments to the five runner-ups. His comments were posted on the page devoted to the competition, where the winners were also announced. Ma explained why the two winners were chosen. For Toshi O, Ma stated: "I thought this piece was virtuosic, well-constructed, and most importantly, fun! The structure is very well thought-through yet it has the spontaneity of improvisation, and that combination is very hard to do." Kevin McChesney received the following praise from Ma: "This is a lovely, very impressive arrangement, especially harmonically. The intricacy is stunning. It's also performed impeccably well, and handbells are really difficult to play." As indicated by this specific event, Indabamusic has created a community in which musicians can receive feedback from experts in the music industry, and this advice can be applied to help further their skills and careers.

Voting clearly creates an alarming and anxious environment for musicians, which is reflected in the fervent conversations that appeared on the Indabamusic general discussion forum. These discussions reveal much in regards to the newly emerging social protocols on the social networking sites. While musicians now have a collaborative platform through which they can share their music in a democratic fashion, the problem of voting was considered

controversial in terms of its methodology:

....The thing is that you can pay companies that will build your friend list for you. You know, send out requests and all for a fee. So if a person is getting their votes primarily from their mammoth friend list then it could be said that they paid their way to the top if they indeed used such methods to build their Myspace, Imeem or whatever. Now I would say that is a bit unfair. But since it's not against the law what can you do? Don't get me wrong. What I am saying in no way excuses all of the whining and belly aching that I heard in both comps. Seems there are a lot of prima donnas that think they're too good or talented to lower themselves to picking up the phone and asking their cousin to vote for them. Forget them. They don't deserve to win. But there are some truly hard working people who want to win the right way but have to compete with folks who have 100,00 plus "friends" on a website. What to do? (Tassili Bond, 2008)

According to this individual, musicians should stop being arrogant and should actively work at promoting their own work. The perspective that good work will survive on its own without any additional effort is completely dismissed by this musician.

While this user suggested an alternative to the current voting process, many other members actually rejected the entire voting system. This viewpoint is exemplified in the following quote:

In my opinion there should not be a voting system at all. If an artist wants a bunch of free remixes to choose from... let them take the trouble to dig through the pile and listen to each and every one of em. After all, it's in the best interest of the artist to pick the most suitable candidate. (HammaHouse, 2008)

Following this commentary, another posting clarified and confirmed the current voting procedure.

You guys make really interesting points - most of which we've been sharing with the artists we're working with. You'll see for example that in the K-OS program he's going to pick winners from all the entries - his selections will have nothing to do with the

voting. However, voting will still enable the community to show which ones they like. Different contests have different objectives though, and we try really hard to meet all of them every time we launch one of these programs. Keep the feedback coming. (Siegel, 2008)

This second statement described the mutable nature of the cultural intermediaries; at times, they are composed of the mass network, and at other times, they are reduced to one single judge, who is often an established artist. While the discussion forum contained heated postings on this topic, another member, a teacher by profession, candidly confessed that he or she has increased personal popularity rankings by asking students for their votes. Despite the fact that this member recognized that this practice is unethical, he or she argued that voting inevitably results in political games:

Honestly, I agree that there should not be a voting system. I plan to enter a contest soon and I asked my students to vote for me, which is wrong. They should be able to vote for whoever they feel is the best musician. They shouldn't vote for me just because they are my students. However, I know that those whom I will be competing with will indeed have family members and friends voting for them, so it provokes the same preparation from me. (Titus, 2008)

After this posting, another member actually defended the described behavior, claiming that it was the “smart” thing to do: “You BETTER get your people behind you if you want to have a shot at winning here. The voting system is most likely here to stay. People need to just accept that and learn how to play the game” (Tassili Bond, 2008).

As indicated by all of these examples, it is clear that voting creates a new type of politics and a stressful environment for those entering the contests. Similar to the culture of the major record industry, in which the Billboard

rankings are viewed as a measure of one's success, the voting on Indabamusic is considered a standard against which to measure one's value as musician.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that Indabamusic is a microcosm of musicians, since it was specifically designed for professionals and amateurs in the field, not necessarily for the broader category of fans.

As a new member of Indaba I was really trying to understand what the voting was all about, because although I have heard great things at the top of the K-OS competition, there is also a lot of recycled crap. What's great about K-OS judging, is that he is purely going to go with the track he thinks is the hottest... I was just afraid he would only listen to the top 10 or something. Why is there voting at all before all submissions have been made? It seems like it encourages you to submit a more rough mix so you can spend time essentially "marketing" your track, which really isn't what this should be all about. I don't want to submit mixes until I absolutely have to, and time spent emailing all my friends is something I would never factor into my creative process. (Beck, 2009)

This member made an important point in regards to the role of voting in the selection process. Instead of spending time focusing on one's craft, voting-driven competitions can distract and deter musicians from perfecting their skill and craftsmanship. Instead of creating music, musicians in such competitions must also become their own personal promoters. For the commentator quoted above, self-promotion adversely affects the quality of the music being produced. Instead of being judged for one's work, the final result at least marginally reflects one's ability as a marketer. This observation leads to the next theme: the rise of self-promotion. How do musicians labor to gain increased exposure and votes from the competitions?

## The Era of Self-Promotion: Immaterial, Affective, and Free Labor of Musicians

The self-promotion efforts on Indabamusic are active, as one would logically expect. The recognition from an already established and acclaimed artist, such as Yo Yo Ma, is interpreted as an indication that a musician really has “what it takes.” This recognition adds an air of legitimacy to one’s craft and professional efforts. A type of brand association develops (in this case, the brand is Yo Yo Ma), thus heightening one’s perceived value.

Although no monetary compensation is involved, the association with Yo Yo Ma was in and of itself extremely desirable. This aggrandized the brand of Yo Yo Ma to a certain extent, since musicians entered the competition because of the renown tied to Ma’s name. An article in the Yale Daily News featured one of the contestants in the Ma competition, Kevin Olusola, a student at Yale. The article first opens by emphasizing Ma’s status and importance:

James Taylor, Alison Krauss, Diana Krall — these are but a few of the world-famous musicians who have collaborated with Yo-Yo Ma, the celebrated cellist who will perform next Tuesday at the 44th Presidential Inauguration. Kevin Olusola ’10 would like to see his name added to that list, and he is nerve-wrackingly close. (Jannise, 2009, para. 1)

In terms of the desired association with Ma, the competition winners were not the only ones to benefit. The overall popularity of the competition also mattered to a certain extent. The Yale article reflected this nuanced truth; Jannise (2009) did not just address the winning of the contest, but also recognized the value of popular votes:

Olusola’s submission, which has garnered enough online to put it in second place out of over 350 entries, combines his own cello playing and beatboxing with Ma’s recording. But no matter:

Whichever submission Ma likes the best will win, regardless of votes. Tomorrow at noon, the winner will finally be announced. (Jannise, 2009, para. 3)

Commentaries by other musicians also added value to Olusola's entry when they were cited as legitimate critiques of Olusola's performance:

A contestant named Jack Dermody sent Olusola a message that read: 'Your sounds sailed around my house like some heavenly gift ... I won't be surprised if you win.' Another contestant, professional composer Raffi Bandazian, told Olusola he 'loved' his submission and that it 'made [him] smile the whole time.' (Jannise, 2009, para. 9)

Although receiving exposure in a college newspaper cannot be interpreted as pivotal in a musician's future career, this article revealed that the perceived value of this competition was not solely tied to the final selection of winners. The overall heightened value of entering the contest with the possibility of collaborating with Yo Yo Ma was seen as significant.

Throughout the contest, many musicians explained how hard they worked to submit their materials and what the opportunity meant to them. However, inasmuch as the reward for the Ma competition was non-monetary, the notion of immaterial labor (Hardt & Negri, 2000) is useful in analyzing the competitors' laboring practices. For musicians, the act of self-promotion was done intentionally. However, some members of Indabamusic criticized the self-promotion that took place on the contest discussion board. This consequently incited discussions on the negative aspects of marketing. Significantly, the key difference between grassroots media outlets and mainstream media outlets is the labor that a performer must exert on self-promotion. In the instance of this particular case study, many Indabamusic members promoted themselves on the

discussion board. While the immaterial, affective, and free labor of Indabamusic musicians is very similar to the labor linked to the other social networking sites discussed in previous chapters, slight differences do exist.

Firstly, the kinds of labor are similar in that the immaterial labor on all of the sites consists of actively promoting oneself, although on Indabamusic the solicitation on others' profiles does not occur. The self-promotion efforts also possess an affective dimension. Many users expressed their gratitude towards Indabamusic for their opportunities, and also showed respect for others' submissions. For instance, one user stated:

I would just like to say hello to everybody, and Happy New Year! I'd also like to extend my gratitude to the Indaba staff, and say how thrilled I am to be able to be a part of all this. I hope many of you will take a moment to listen to my submission, as well as those who, like me, got theirs in only very recently (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

Although this competition did not inspire much promotion of other musicians' work, free labor by various members did occur:

[name omitted] version is as gorgeous as she is! If you haven't had the pleasure of doing so please check it out. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009).

Unlike Myspace and Youtube, free labor by non-musician fans is relatively infrequent on Indabamusic. This may be due to the nature of the website, whose membership is solely composed of musicians. Everyone who signs up for Indabamusic is a musician, ranging from the professional to the amateur. Although the site does not currently have a system to filter out non-musicians, it is generally assumed that everyone who creates an account is a recording musician, since Indabamusic's benefits only involve recording capabilities. On

Indabamusic's discussion board, the act of complimenting others' work did not dominate the discussions.

On a related note, the act of self-promotion as a form of immaterial labor was often limited to offering critiques and explanations of one's own craftsmanship and methods.

My submission is layered amplified cellos, played through some stomp boxes (overdrive, delay, and wah) and a Fender Showman tube amp. I wanted to use these tools, which can create so much noise and power, to create something ethereal and perhaps even peaceful. I improvised a bunch of layers, reharmonizing a few sections, then subtracted from there. A last minute project, wish I'd had a little more time... you know, complexity is easy, simplicity is hard. Anyway, enjoy. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

Although these types of postings were typical on the discussion board, other members criticized this behavior and expressed a strong aversion towards all forms of self-promotion:

I hate shameless self-promotion, which is why i will make this post so fully shameful: a 5/4 groove, subtle chromaticism, subtle dissonance... what's not to like? check my song out, folks. let me know what you think. did i mention my 19 month-old daughter thinks it rocks??? pacem out. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

Other members argued that shameless promotion is an important part of the process and should be pursued unapologetically:

Unfortunately, all musicians who chose not to hire an agent are bound to spend an enormous amount of time on self-promotion. It is a sad reality. The more time one spends as her/his own agent, the less time is left for composing. That's why the contests like this one are such a great opportunity to do both – to work on some new musical ideas and to exercise self-promotion at the same time. (Yo Yo Ma contest, 2009)

Although self-promotion may permeate the do-it-yourself model of social networking sites, it is important to recognize that gaining popularity was not a primary goal, as much

social networking was (and still can be) based on the actual merits of a specific work. However, this evaluation is not meant to valorize and praise Indabamusic as a superior site for musicians, but to distinguish between the different types of laboring practices.

In the previous analysis of increasing popularity on the social networking sites, self-promotion was determined to be integral to success; usually promotion is achieved and propelled by fan labor (Baym, 2007). On Indabamusic, due to the less visible nature of fan labor and free labor, the importance of self-promotion is even greater. This may initially give rise to negative reactions, since such efforts can be perceived as a form of intense narcissism. However, in the field of cultural production, especially in the nexus where the forces of the grassroots culture combine with the endeavors of major corporations, a fierce environment driven by self-promotion is rampant. Not only must musicians spend time creating music, they must also learn to market and promote themselves. This new skill set makes the act of self-promotion unique in the context of the social networking sites, especially those oriented toward musicians.

While some musicians embrace the opportunity to become promotional intermediaries and view this as a natural and inevitable duty, other musicians find this new role to be a waste of time, perceiving it as an unjust and unethical requirement. Being a successful promoter requires skills not typical to most musicians, but instead entails a mastery of techniques related to professional promotional intermediaries. The ethical problem of value comes into play here because promotional intermediaries can be bought and sold like any commodity value.

The issue of self-promotion needs to be analyzed in the specific context of a site on which non-musician fans do not carry much, if any, power. Promoting one's work is

not necessarily negative in nature; however, this can lead to the emergence of a certain type of social protocols linked to gaining more votes or increasing popularity. When musicians are exposed to an environment where the value of their work is ultimately decided by the act of winning or by a ranking system, a conflict of values can occur. Some people who may not be skilled at mastering the social protocols (or who do not want to devote time to this task) will challenge the system, while others who are adept at it will not find such a system to be problematic. This tension became a central theme in most of the Indabamusic competitions, including the Ma contest.

Of course, in any competition, negative and dissident voices will be raised by the losers and those who felt that their works were not justified or treated fairly in the contest. Indabamusic should not necessarily be viewed in a negative light because of the complaints; nonetheless, a careful analysis highlights the interesting paradox that exists on Indabamusic. While the site fosters a community-like environment through various communication and collaborative mechanisms, the competitions create a divide between the musicians. In this context, it is important to understand the impact of the competitions. To what extent, can the goal of fostering “community” develop when the intensity of the competitions creates a hierarchy of music values?

### Conclusion

In this chapter, Indabamusic’s two major functions (collaborations and contests) were analyzed. The aim of fostering community was emphasized through the numerous communication methods available to users (blog, chat, messages, forums). User communication now has a new mobile dimension since a software application allows one to connect to Indabamusic via one’s Iphone. This means that one can engage in the

Indabamusic community from any location that supports a portable device. This functionality was developed to increase efficiency by enabling users to easily connect with one another for collaborative purposes, but at the same time, this highly touted communication method seems to indicate that constant contact with Indabamusic is being encouraged.

While on one hand, one can see that Indabamusic is helping musicians through its site functions, but on the other hand, one can also infer that the immaterial labor of musicians is being utilized to drive the programs offered by Indabamusic. Without busy traffic and ongoing member activities, the chances of partnerships with the mainstream industry are less likely to occur. Likewise, without high profile collaboration opportunities, the press coverage and exposure of Indabamusic would be seriously reduced.

Although Indabamusic does emphasize self-promotion, the act of self-promotion does not entail bombarding others' profiles with e-mails, as on Myspace. Instead, self-promotion on Indabamusic takes two different forms. Self-promotion is done as musicians constantly update their profiles and are otherwise active on the site.

Indabamusic strongly encourages musicians to pursue these activities. The more active musicians are on the site, the more likely musicians are to be "featured" on the site. The other type of promotion occurs on the competition discussion boards where users describe how they created their music and offer critiques of each other's postings.

Besides intersecting with the issues of self-promotion and networking, labor on Indabamusic also has a financial component. Thus, fan or free labor does not occur as often as on other social networking sites; however, affective labor is often exerted during

competitions when contestants promote their entries.

Finally, despite a great degree of enthusiasm and appreciation, the competitions create a hyper-inquisitive and sensitive environment for the contestants. The founder of the site must intervene from time to time to assure the contestants that the number of votes does not matter, as was the case with the Yo Yo Ma competition for which Ma himself was the one who ultimately decided the winners. Thus, even though the competitions have generated much enthusiasm among musicians, they have also put musicians in a state of anxiety and inspired them to challenge the voting system. A large number of postings on the competition forum addressed the voting procedures and debated the role of voting in ascribing value to musical work.

Therefore, in understanding Indabamusic's convergence with the mainstream record companies, it seems clear that the competitions on Indabamusic play a major role in drawing people into the network. While Indabamusic functions as a bridge between the promotional efforts of mainstream recording artists and the collaborative endeavors of grassroots musicians, it seems unlikely that this type of partnership can continue without any value exchanges or value clashes. As Dolfma (1999) notes, "institutions change when people perceive a tension between what single institutions or an institutional setting stand for, on the one hand, and what in fact results from them, on the other" (p. 80). To this end, although Indabamusic purportedly functions without any clashes with the outside institutions with which it is converging, the site's values could gradually change in the future; it is yet unclear whether the direction will result in more concessions from the record labels or from the independent artists.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

This dissertation examines how three theoretical concepts (popularity, aesthetic tastes, and values) have mutated in an age in which social networking sites play a pivotal role in convergence culture. In doing so, the goal is to understand how the convergence of mainstream industries and grassroots activities creates conflicts while simultaneously contributing to the mutation of popularity, cultural values and aesthetic tastes. An analysis of the mutation of these three keywords requires an exploration of the evolution of these four concepts: social protocols, cultural intermediaries, labor and self-promotion.

For the purposes of this study, Hall's (1998) three definitions of popularity as presented in "Notes on deconstruction of 'the popular'" was adopted. To revisit the definition, Hall's first and the most common meaning of popularity states: "the things which are said to be 'popular' because masses of people listen to them, buy them, read them, consume them, and seem to enjoy them to the full" (p. 446). Prior to the convergence era, "popular music" was usually distributed through the outlets of the mainstream media. However today, music's popularity is not so fully dependent on the mass media's distribution functionality. Rather, any work of music can be considered "popular," even if it fits into the bottom-up approach of grassroots activities. The key point to understand is that this new form of popularity, like the older form, can be manipulated and can be bought and sold like a commodity.

As the Myspace chapter clearly reveals, many tips have been written about gaining popularity in the online environments. These tips and recommendations have been examined in this dissertation as a series of social protocols. Ranging from the constant messaging and posting on Myspace to the recruitment of listeners in an

Indabamusic competition, gaining popularity requires paying attention to a large number of details. Affective labor is essential to this endeavor. Without a “personal touch,” musicians’ advertisements for their CDs and shows would be lost in the hundreds and thousands of emails generated by users of the various websites. Although no written social protocols have yet been developed for Indabamusic, the forum applies the power of collective intelligence in determining how much of a role the social protocols will play in the competition process.

However, popularity does not mean that people are necessarily consuming and buying music. For example, on Youtube, popularity can be gained by increasing the number of video plays. Thus, popularity begins to take a slightly different meaning, and is recognized by having numerous friends on the network, having people comment on music, and having people listen to music. While these meanings intersect with the former concept of popularity, insofar as large numbers of people are emphasized, the implications of this new configuration of popularity are slightly different.

A large number of music plays or a higher ranking may do not necessarily mean that people are actually consuming music or even enjoying it. Neither does this mean that popularity generated on the social networking sites is always artificial and contrived. There are certainly reports of accidental stardom as a result of random postings on the internet. Regardless of a musician's intent, popularity is a concept that no longer signifies being liked by numerous people nor does it necessarily reflect the fruit and extent of one’s labor.

While the conceptualization of popularity has been problematized by various cultural studies scholars, namely Fiske (1998, 1989), Hall (1998), Frith (1991), and Frow

(1995), definitions of popularity have become more complicated in the convergence era. For example, one must acknowledge that neither the mass media nor the participatory media play an integral role in the conception of popularity today although popularity is often valorized or justified in the context of the participatory media. Rather, popularity in the convergence era mutates in a decentralized direction where favoritism and hard work intersect and clash against each other.

The third definition of popular utilized in this dissertation locates popularity in particular time periods: “this looks, in any particular period, at those forms and activities which have their roots in the social and material conditions of particular classes; which have been embodied in popular traditions and practices” (Hall, p. 449). This definition also deserves a renegotiation of its meaning. In Hall’s attempt to come up with a more complex and comprehensive explanation of popularity, he focuses on “the process by which these relations of dominance and subordination are articulated...its main focus of attention is the relation between culture and questions of hegemony” (p. 449). While hegemonic tension is integral to this conceptualization of popularity, in convergence culture, popularity also has a more complex nature.

Popularity today has, at its center, a combination of social protocols and self-promotion. One cannot escape, however, the labor aspect of popularity, since by adopting and using self-protocols, one labors to promote oneself. Popularity in the convergence culture is thus mutating in a direction in which the elements of hard labor and serendipity are intertwined---such a combination is further complicated by the fact that not one but multiple conceptualizations of popularity exist. The various dimensions of popularity, however, do not result in eclecticism or conflicting definitions of

popularity. Instead, it becomes increasingly difficult to discern the differences between multiple types and means of popularity generation: 1) popularity is generated by large numbers of consumers; 2) popularity is the antithesis to aesthetics, and therefore pertains only to everyday, common culture; 3) popularity involves one working hard to gain popularity by learning protocols; 4) popularity is created because one has hired someone to do the promotion work; or 5) popularity is merely a matter of luck. It is important thus to conceive of popularity in the convergence era as an oscillating entity that integrates huge numbers of people, successful use of social protocols, and luck.

Although the social protocols have changed with time, the actual meaning of popularity has not been drastically altered. However, the hegemonic relationships within the notion of popularity have shifted. In other words, prior to the era of convergence culture, hegemonic relationships were focused on mainstream culture's representations of the "popular" and underground / grassroot culture's representation of the "outsider." In convergence culture, the hegemony between popular and non-popular cultures revolves around an intricate web of power issues. This is due to a decentralizing tendency reflected in the assumption that popularity can be acquired as a result of hard labor. Thus, instead of a tension between dominance and subordination, many subordinate figures are now in hegemonic tension with other subordinates.

In addressing the mutation of aesthetic tastes, the most important issue is the role played by cultural intermediaries. With the rise of the social networking sites, the cultural intermediaries have predominantly been ordinary citizens, the users of the various social networking sites. However, this group of cultural intermediaries recently began to join forces with actual experts in the music field. Thus, while social networking

sites have provided an efficient platform for musicians and non-musicians to discuss aesthetic tastes and the value of music, there has been an increase in the voices of authority - professional musicians, critics, and experts. Therefore, rather than amateurs creating a neutral platform where all voices are equally heard and valued, at times judges have played the main role in selecting winners and determining quality. To a certain extent, aesthetic tastes have mutated from a few individuals' imposition of tastes on the "masses" to a broad-spectrum bickering among the populace over individual taste to experts imposing a certain aesthetic standard in reference to "quality" work. This development belies the democratic promise of interactivity.

Cultural intermediaries are also visible and integral in the process of selecting "featured" musicians, bands, or artists on the social networking sites. On Myspace's home page, a section is dedicated to featured bands, artists, and musicians. Similarly, a featured artists section is visible on Youtube. The featured performances are selected by Youtube editors, and they can differ from the most highly watched videos. Thus, Youtube distinguishes editors' tastes from popular preferences. Secondlife has no featured section per se, but it does provide a list of the most popular music venues on the front page of the website. On Indabamusic, "featured artists" and "featured sessions" categories can be found. These are chosen by a relatively small number of Indabamusic staff employees, all of whom are musicians.

As can be seen, the cultural intermediaries that influence convergence culture are not limited to the users of social networking sites. Instead, a select number of individuals act as taste-makers, and impose what they perceive to be "good music" onto others. There are two ways in which to interpret this new situation. The first way is to claim that

the new democratic medium has allowed too much leeway. One could argue that quantity of music does not equate with quality, nor does diverse people's involvement as taste makers always result in improved works. On the other hand, the second way to view this phenomenon is to argue that due to the diversity of creative ideas and voices, aesthetic tastes have progressed significantly. People are exposed to various non-popular genres of music as often as they are to popular music produced by a few hit makers in the industry. To this extent, aesthetic tastes may now be elevated because of audience eclecticism, as well as artists' new roles as judges and cultural intermediaries.

I espouse the view that the two stances have no concrete merits and that determining whether this trend has elevated or degenerated aesthetic tastes is perhaps an impossible task. While this position may be a cop-out since I refuse to make any evaluation, it is important to remind readers that the goal of this dissertation is not to develop a unifying or universal understanding of aesthetic tastes. The aim here is to understand how aesthetic tastes mutate without getting lost in the debate between high aesthetics tastes and low aesthetic tastes. Aesthetic tastes in the age of convergence culture can no longer divide or unite people in a dichotomous way. No clear cut boundary exists between what was once clearly divided: aesthetics vs. popular. Aesthetics is no longer a concept that only pertains to elevated tastes. To this extent, Fiske's conceptualization of popularity as "anti-aesthetics" is moot.

Finally, in accessing the mutation of aesthetic tastes in convergence culture, the discussion on crowdsourcing and collective intelligence should be revisited as they relate to competitions. Three of the websites studied in this dissertation actively hosted a variety of competitions, in addition to the running of various systems of ranking and

rating on all four sites. The large number of competitions held on each site reflects the transient nature of popularity. On Myspace, popularity measured in a quantifiable manner, determined the winners of competitions (and drew attention from mainstream media outlets, such as MTV). Popularity was, thus, equated with value. However, as the different types of competitions indicated, popular vote was not the sole determinant in the selection of winners on every website.

On Youtube, many of the competitions are used by already-famous musicians to achieve one of several goals: to enlarge fan bases, to promote upcoming albums, or to interact with fans. There is a growing trend in the music industry, as well as other sectors of the commercial industry, to use competitions as a promotional tool. Given that a wide variety of competitions entail music software, instruments, and other products, the competitions could lose their appeal as time passes. On Secondlife, competition prizes are monetary in nature, but they also serve the advertising purposes of those who sponsor them. However, Secondlife's competitions do not seem to be the driving force of Secondlife's music culture. The competitions on Secondlife occur sporadically. Some of the websites dedicated to enhancing the Secondlife environment have already vanished (specifically, slusic.com), while a few others, such as thebestofsecondlife.com, exist but seem to be relatively inactive. On Indabamusic, competitions are integral as activities that bridge the gap between lesser known musicians and well-known musicians.

As a result, what we experience is collaboration between mainstream artists signed by major record labels and unknown amateurs. While these types of competitions invite amateurs to take advantage of new opportunities, the contests impact the mutation of aesthetic tastes because the judges of competitions include a variety of individuals

ranging from non-professionals to major recording artists. Thus, aesthetic taste in the convergence culture mutate in the middle ground. This middle ground is what I call an osmosis area, borrowing a term from biology. According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary, osmosis is defined as “movement of a solvent (as water) through a semipermeable membrane (as of a living cell) into a solution of higher solute concentration that tends to equalize the concentrations of solute on the two sides of the membrane.” Aesthetic tastes mutate in a manner that resembles *osmosis*, because of the collapse of the valuation process attached to capitalism and commodities. The "membrane" separates commercial music from non-commercial music, resulting in the concentration (the aesthetic tastes of convergence culture) becoming neutralized.

To address the mutation of cultural values, multiple findings must be discussed in order to come up with a unifying and systematic theme. This is a very complex undertaking because this it requires wrestling with various paradoxes in the context of each case study. All four of these social networking sites employ a concrete measuring standard to determine values, although there are differences in the degree of usage of these standards. For example, Myspace and Youtube are more fiercely driven by issues of popularity in the generation of high ratings and rankings, while Indabamusic is propelled by competitions in which the selected winners are ranked. On the other hand, although there are no rankings of Secondlife music performers, the performance venues on Secondlife are rated. This could potentially influence the popularity of artists, since the more popular venues will attract a larger number of audience members.

The impact of popularity is most clearly seen in the examples of musicians signing contracts with major record labels. Only those who have created enormous fan

bases seem to win such contracts. On the other hand, already-signed, famous musicians are also using the social networking sites as a way to generate high ratings and to increase album sales, both of which are motivated by profit. The alternative value structure of grassroots cultures, many of which are based on the idea of fostering creativity, are no longer the norm on the social networking sites. Yet, to view the cultural values of convergence culture as synonymous with the mainstream culture is reductionistic and simplistic.

While grassroots creativity has adopted some values from the mainstream media (such as, the growing emphasis on popularity and merit, and the focus on celebrity and fame), the mainstream media is also producing a rhetoric oriented around “ordinary” people being “discovered,” thereby emphasizing the value of ordinary (non-celebrity) culture. To this end, the cultural values of convergence culture are developing in a somewhat paradoxical way. The grassroots media outlets, such as the participatory media sites, now highlight the importance of their activities by constantly focusing on “success stories” that have come about because of the platforms provided by Myspace, Youtube, Secondlife, and Indabamusic. At the same time, the mainstream media is trying to strengthen the value of their practices by disguising their capitalistic intent through the utilization of ordinary people’s participation. All in all, the fusion of mainstream media and participatory media outlets reconfigures the notion of value as some of previous values become the extension of the new by taking into account the interactive domains.

It is also evident that the tensions connected to “playing the game” vs. refusing to do so ran deep on Indabamusic. This tension contributes to the formation of the convergence culture where users create content. On Myspace, the politics are overt in

nature, which may be because the network is so decentralized. Even though a few members complained about the ranking system, their opinions did not seem to have much impact. There is a similar trend on Youtube; because Youtube is such a large-scale network, the complaints about the editors' choices of featured videos did not seem to have any impact. On Secondlife, the members' views on the politics of selection and intermediary influence did not seem pronounced, while on Indabamusic, there is a continuing debate about the creation of a new political structure for judging quality and popularity.

The competitions, combined with systems for ranking and rating performers, have heightened the politics revolving around the process of winning. The constant pull and push, the negotiation between individual values and institutional values, has allowed for a new exchange of values. Social networking sites represent a judgment culture, just like other outlets of media culture, a fact pointed out by Bratich (2009). Similar to the countless competitions that drive the reality television shows where judges and viewers vote to determine the winners, social networking sites present a cultural landscape defined by constant judgment. The judgmental and competitive environment of the social networking culture has created a new hierarchy.

By joining any of the social networking sites mentioned here, a musician is inevitably integrated into the ranking and rating hierarchy. To some extent, one's position in this hierarchy can often be determined by one's adoption of social protocols. When one effectively utilizes the social protocols outlined by the experts, there seems to be a greater chance of climbing up the hierarchy ladder. On Myspace, the size of one's friend list appears to be directly proportional to the amount of value placed on one's

work. On Youtube, the more views one attracts, the higher the value of one's video. On Secondlife, tips are equated with the level of value recognized by fans. On Indabamusic, being selected as a winner automatically conveys value to one's work. The most problematic aspect of cultural values pertaining to convergence culture is the interactivity that occurs on the participatory media when it is taught, learned, manipulated and carefully constructed. As a result of the heavy emphasis placed on judgment and competition, a value system based on the aggrandizing of one's self-importance over others has developed.

Therefore, the unique aspect of the cultural values emerging on the social networking sites relates to the degree that endeavors are centered on the commodification of self. The Myspace chapter introduces one aspect of branding, while the Youtube chapter describes how one can create a personalized channel and broadcast oneself to the entire Youtube community. On Secondlife, the creation of an avatar becomes an extension of the self. Although this may seem like mere leisure activities, one cannot ignore the fact that Secondlife has become a place used by major record labels to market their artists. On Indabamusic, the debate about self-promotion provides a critique of the competitions, while evincing an array of mixed responses. Here, we glimpse musicians grappling with the issues of self-promotion as they relate to their artistry. Despite the contentious nature of this debate, everyone seems in agreement on the fact that self-promotion is an issue that they cannot ignore.

Rather than valorizing the commodity that is created, of primary importance is the act of networking and creating buzz surrounding one's work. This, in return, generates value for the artist; moreover, the labor related to befriending, marketing, promoting,

competing, and social networking creates a new type of hierarchy and a new body of cultural values wherein cooperation and division co-exist. To a certain extent, joining and promoting the growth of a large network is a means of self-promotion. This paradoxical relationship is essential to fully understanding the cultural values that emerge from the confluence of the mainstream and underground cultures.

It is ironic that while some artists gain record contracts by emphasizing “star appeal,” the music industry leaders are stressing the concept of everyday producer. This results in a clash of cultural values. These convergence culture values no longer mutate separately between the poles of values (personal value) and VALUE (institutional values), as introduced by Dolfma earlier in this dissertation. Rather, the outcome of convergence culture allows for confusion and crisis: no boundary separates personal and institutional values, since now capitalist ambitions are being transformed into personal values under the guise of promoting citizen empowerment.

At this juncture, the goal is to evaluate whether one can refer to this phenomenon as empowerment or disenfranchisement. To this end, I argue that mainstream corporate values are not necessarily being imposed upon personal values. Although resistance to mainstream corporations and major labels may have been the initial impetus behind many of these social networking sites, there is a great degree of willingness on the part of musicians to actively collaborate with the mainstream industry. While there will always be musicians who refuse to succumb to the majority culture, others voluntarily and willingly partake in the many competitions that involve corporate sponsors. Thus, the argument in regards to the exploitation or empowerment of musicians comes down to the issue of free labor.

Myspace exhibited the most visible forms of free labor by encouraging ordinary audience members to become actual fans. On Youtube, the labor entailed creating one's own channel and attracting as many subscribers as possible. Free labor is noteworthy for two reasons. During competitions, free labor is often exhibited when sponsors use crowdsourcing methods to locate talent and generate promotional ideas. However, a growing number of musicians are demanding compensation from some sites, such as Youtube, for the right to distribute their performances on the internet. This has not been the case for all musicians, but the reports of discontented musicians hoping to be compensated for their work are increasing. To this end, there seems to be a growing unwillingness to work for free as Youtube becomes more and more integrated with the mainstream media and record companies.

Secondlife introduced a financial aspect by allowing payment to those aiding in an artist's promotion and performances. Managers, venue owners, and promoters are compensated for helping run the venues on Secondlife. On Indabamusic, free labor is not as evident as on the other sites. This is due to the fact that collaboration is not always voluntary in nature. On Indabamusic, musicians can create PayPal accounts and hire one another for parts in their recordings. Thus, free labor has been transformed into a professional employment set-up in which independent musicians can create their own opportunities as working and earning musicians. To this end, the idea that either musicians or fans are exploited at all times may not necessarily be true. Cultural values are renegotiated in the framework created by the hegemonic struggle of musicians seeking to empower themselves via a reshaping of the role played by the music industry; this happens as they try to impose their values through the larger mechanism of

organizing and collecting manpower as exemplified by the large social network.

Interpretation of the findings of this dissertation can be further enhanced by revisiting Ang's (1996) notion of radical contextualism. Similar to her argument pertaining to the difficulties of understanding television audiences in isolated settings, analysis of the users and viewers of the social media is also challenging. The challenge stems from the fact that audiences in the social media context are not only creators and producers, but they are also dispersed geographically and their relationships are varied. Thus, in order to evaluate the multiple paradoxes that drive the formation of cultural values, one has to pose the following question: for whom are these tensions (*empowerment vs. exploitation, individuality vs. collectivity, competition vs. collaboration, corporatism vs. community, actuality vs. potentiality, mainstream vs. grassroots endeavors*) a threat? What is at stake when exploring these dichotomies?

Speaking from the point-of-view of both a musician and a fan, social networks operate as a means to empower and, to some degree, exploit users, insofar as the musicians' primary teleological aim is to gain attention from the mass media networks and major record labels. From a corporation's viewpoint, the social network is both empowering and exploitative, because they now have easier access to information about audience likes and dislikes. However, it is important to note that the hype and popularity surrounding the social media sites may not be a true indicator of future success in the actual market.

In terms of individuality and collectivity, musicians' close proximity to potential audiences and fan members is extremely useful in the digital era. However, in order for musicians to become popular, the sense of true individuality and "star quality" may

disappear since now “average” people can obtain the tools with which to build and market themselves as stars. This new connectivity is the result of having to work within an already-collectivized body of potential audience members. Instead of the traditional stereotype of an isolated artist living and working apart from non-artists, today's artists are almost evolving their own “star quality,” which no longer emanates directly from the artist's work. Instead, artists have become their own most devout marketers; they must not only accrue a large number of customers, but they must also deal with the task of pleasing.

As noted in the introduction, recommendations given to musicians prior to the social networking era entailed appearing mysterious and self-assured; a completely different type of advice is now being given, as revealed in the chapters on Myspace, Youtube, and Secondlife. Especially on Secondlife, the continuous showing of deep gratitude is a way to gain more tips. This seems to differ little from providing customer service by meeting the consumer's desires, needs, and penchants. The issues related to the adaptability of certain protocols do not necessarily release us from the threat of autonomous presumptions. In other words, despite claims of freedom and empowerment, an imperceptible level of entrapment exists; there is a danger that artists cannot escape being judged in comparison to others' profiles. By choosing not to adopt the protocols of the social networking sites, misleading perceptions of artistic value may be generated. This may result in individuals feeling more limited in their freedom to not follow the status quo.

The tension between individuality and collectivity however can work in the favor of corporations, as what they often need is not a “star” but an agent of sorts who has the

means and ability to reach out to a broad variety of audience members and who can thus generate profits. Thus, corporate profit values have become a new norm for the artistic professional, who is transformed into an extension of the corporate entity.

In regards to competitions and collaborations, these could be a win-win situation for corporations, musicians, and fans, all of whom can participate in the selection of winners. This process also intersects with our sense of community, resulting in a product that resembles a gigantic corporation whose teleological goals are profit, winning, and attaining celebrity. These aims are intermixed with community-based, immaterial values, such as bonding, friendships, and learning from one another. The next set of dichotomies also connects with this issue in terms of evaluations of possible losses.

To understand the tension between actual vs. potential advantages, it is useful to examine musicians' motivations on the social networking sites. The stardom and success created by a few actual musicians serves to encourage and inspire countless struggling musicians to follow in their footsteps. This trend, however, has inspired corporations, services, and publishers to produce a profit-generating industry tied to the tips needed to reach success in this new context. While countless services and books are being created to seduce musicians into actively pursuing fame, it is also important to mention one crucial aspect in this mix: the multiple identities, motives, and aspirations of the musician site users.

While *American Idol* exemplifies one category of musicians who are seeking super-stardom, there are other singers who may *not* want such celebrity, especially if it is gained by entering a reality-show contest. Similarly, while there are musicians use Myspace in the hopes of attracting attention from MTV or record labels, my findings

from the chapters suggest that there are also others who use this site to achieve an individualistic, personal kind of success, which may not be measurable in terms of commercial success. While many musicians may participate in the competitions to gain more recognition, there are other musicians who enter the competitions for other reasons besides the grand prize. Thus, as Ang notes, it is important to consider the multiple contexts created by varying ambitions. The same could be said of audience goals. At this point, a concerted effort must be made to take account of where and to whom these values matter and clash. This will help us as we try to anticipate possible mutations within a group comprised of multiple kinds of musicians, audiences, and mainstream corporations. The key issue is their relationships to the ever-changing social protocols and to the rapidly-evolving technologies.

#### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this dissertation strove to provide a thorough accounting of the newest, cutting-edge developments in the social networking practices of musicians, one major shortcoming was caused by the issue of temporality. Any new technological development could change the narrative of this dissertation and contradict its conclusions, therefore, the key framework for this study is built on the issues of continuum and momentum. During the course of history, certain practices arise and then vanish; as once-prominent social practices fade, they provide a transitional basis for new types of practice.

In a close examination of four different types of social networking site, although some of them may be experiencing major changes over the years, it is clear that the changes may very well be the convergence within social networking sites. Myspace and

Youtube go hand in hand. On Youtube, already there is a function right below the screen where users can connect to Myspace, Facebook and Twitter. While Secondlife and Indabamusic do not surface as the must-have saturated social networking site as of today, in no time, they will also convergence with Myspace, Youtube and Facebook, Twitter and etc. However, on Myspace, one can find the profile of Indabamusic as well as variety of profiles of Secondlife musicians. On Youtube, one can find videos of many Secondlife performing artists as well as promos of Indabamusic.

On Secondlife, one can see a link to musicians' Myspace page while on Indabamusic, some musicians post Myspace profile links as alterative website link. In addition to these websites, Twitter and Facebook was another common social networking site where other social networking sites frequently converged with. As these examples show, already these types of capitals are also coming together; while Myspace may not have the impact it once had, it still provides certain function that other social networking site lacks and vice versa. This dissertation will hopefully function as a basis for further understanding the new social networking practices. The shortcomings of these practices are not necessarily detrimental in the long run, as they can help us understand the continuing modifications that occur in cultural values.

In addition, since this dissertation is limited to only four case studies, it cannot possibly epitomize the dominant trends on all of the social networking sites in terms of the seeking of popularity and striving towards values. Other new social networking sites pertaining to musicians, such as [ilike.com](http://ilike.com), [musicfreedom.com](http://musicfreedom.com), [bebo.com](http://bebo.com), [lastfm.com](http://lastfm.com), [sellaband.com](http://sellaband.com), and [midomi.com](http://midomi.com) could be examined in the future to help craft a comprehensive picture of the social networking practices of musicians in the age of

convergence culture. Also, it is important to keep in mind that these conclusions are the outcome of an analysis of musicians' social networking practices. Thus, the generality of cultural values must be interpreted within this specific context. In addition, I did not have access to those types of musicians who tried and failed in their pursuits, or those who have tried for a few years and have rethought the promises of convergence culture.

Finally, in this dissertation, although numerous music genres have been addressed, no detailed account has been given the possible diverse methods used by specific kinds of musicians to win popularity. The broad categories of musicians described in this study include all musicians who use the social networking sites as vital platforms from which to share their music. While this may be considered a limitation of this current study, it also opens up a new direction for future research endeavors. It would be useful to investigate whether any significant differences exist between the labor methods employed by distinct groups of musicians.

Regardless of the extent of the changes in the near future, this dissertation suggests additional avenues for future research. First, how might the labor exerted by musicians change as a result of the use of mobile devices? What new methods for networking are developing? This study can provide a basis for further examination of the different types of social protocols connected to communicating and networking via mobile phone technology.

Second, what types of competitions, and ranking and rating systems may soon appear, and what will be their consequences and implications? Understanding the implications of ranking will further enrich discussions about the cultural value of hierarchy in convergence culture. Third, what type of culture will emerge in the near

future, as virtual recordings, performances, and production and consumption practices become normative? When virtually every facet of a musician's career can be handled on the internet, it will be important to determine whether or not it has any impact on offline settings, such as the operation of record labels and live performances.

Finally, although the competitions were carefully analyzed in this dissertation, it would be useful to follow the trajectory of the winners of the competitions. Such a study would help one to understand whether the competitions have had any direct impact or influence on individual musical careers. In addition, this dissertation can also help develop other aspects of the virtual world beyond the music community, especially in those environments that involve cultural production.

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<sup>i</sup> This notion will be explicated on Chapter Four and Six in depth.

<sup>ii</sup> Dear Indabamusic community, There has been a growing interest about musicians' production and consumption practices on social networking sites by many scholars today. I am one of those who happened to research about social networking sites and musicians. My current project titled "The mutation of cultural values, aesthetic tastes and popularity: Social networking practices of musicians" examines the manner in which popularity and aesthetic tastes collide and influence issues of cultural values in the age of convergence culture. By providing case studies of various social networking sites, this dissertation depicts and explains the processes behind independent musicians' efforts to gain popularity and to increase the perceived value of their music through various laboring practices by fans and musicians. One of the chapter for this dissertation is on Indabamusic community which is what I consider the newest and cutting-edge development in music social networking sites. I am interested in many of your thoughts, comments and opinions on anything in regards to your experience in Indabamusic. I would appreciate your openness and willingness to participate on my study-- Every voice of yours will be counted in an effort to portray a true reality of Indabamusic community, and you will have a choice to remain anonymous. If you had a lot of thoughts but didn't have an opportunity to share with others in any sort of way, please do share it with me, you can either start responding on this blog or email me separately. Thanks all and I look forward to hearing from you.

<sup>iii</sup> I am writing a dissertation chapter on Myspace.com and I am interested in your responses and thoughts about myspace.com. 1) Particularly, what have you noticed in regards to the interactivity and the fame/popularity that one gains via myspace.com? 2) Does myspace.com indeed help independent musicians gain more exposure? 3) How do you rate the progress of myspace.com in terms of the networks for musicians and audiences? 4) Do you think the rating system on the music section is legitimized and does it accurately report the music's value? 5) How do you reconcile being a part of a massive network while maintaining uniqueness of your artistry? 6) Do you feel that you can still remain as an individual in this network or do you feel that you are in competition with other artists? 7) Do you feel pressure to upgrade pictures and etc? 8) Does myspace.com's popularity help you with your booking process or in building a successful career outside of this network? 9) Care to share good and bad experience that came from this site? Your thoughts, responses and feedback would be very much appreciated. Cecilia

<sup>iv</sup> This is only one example; besides this website, a number of similar website exist: <http://www.adderdemon.com/>, <http://www.addeverybody.com/>, <http://www.addnewfriends.com/>, <http://www.ssfriendship.com/>, <http://uberadd.com/>, etc.)

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<sup>v</sup> Kahn and Kellner (2004) explain that the use of the internet “constitutes a dramatic transformation of everyday life” whether its use is to express oppositional, dissenting perspectives, or to promote new journalistic communities, where opinions are shared and freely expressed (p. 93). This notion of “contested terrain” applies not only to blogging, but also to all domains of creative production, including music.

<sup>vi</sup> Bourdieu (1993) states: “the field of cultural production is the area *par excellence* of clashes between the dominant fractions of the dominant class, who fight there sometimes in person but more often through producers oriented towards defending their ‘ideas’ and satisfying ‘taste’, and the dominated fractions who are totally involved in this struggle” (p. 102). On Myspace problems linked to arguments and conflict with mainstream artists also exist.

<sup>vii</sup> Barbrook (2001) also states that “the profits of commercial Net companies depend upon increasing numbers of people participating within the hi-tech gift economy” (p. 172).

<sup>viii</sup> Kalliongis (2008) provides four kinds of tips that promote this domino effect:

One additional, powerful way to gain inbound links on YouTube is to have a friend mention you in a video and link to you in the description. Occasionally, established, more popular users will upload thank you, or *shout-out* videos. They’ll want to share new channels with their subscribers. Depending on the audience of the person uploading the shout-out video, this could be a big break for your channel. (p. 136)

<sup>ix</sup> According to Michael Arrington (2009) in *Tech Crunch*, “Warner has been complaining about the deal they did with MySpace. That deal has no per song streaming cost, but includes a revenue share on advertising displayed when the song is played. That revenue share hasn’t been what they thought it would be. And the staggering number of plays of songs from their catalog, combined with their newly acquired knowledge that their competitors are being paid per stream, has left them steaming mad” (Arrington, para. 3). Thus, although Warner did not reach any deal with Youtube, the company is still dissatisfied with the deal brokered with Myspace. This deal could potentially be canceled at some point, and Myspace may have to adopt a stance similar to Youtube’s.

<sup>x</sup> According to [mysecurecyberspace.com/encyclopedia](http://mysecurecyberspace.com/encyclopedia), grievers are defined as “individuals who play multiplayer online games with the intent to harass other players.”

<sup>xi</sup> Although the function of this website has not been clearly spelled out on the website, it announces various competitions held on Secondlife and also reports on the winners. As of 2009, the site seems to show a gradual downfall in activities.

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## Curriculum Vita

Hiesun Cecilia Suhr

### Education

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| 2002 | James Madison University, Bachelor of Arts in English      |
| 2005 | New York University, Master of Arts in Media Ecology.      |
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### Publications

- Suhr, H. C. (forthcoming) "Artist Communities" *Encyclopedia of Social Networking*, George Barnett, Ph.D., General Editors, Sage Publication.
- Suhr, H.C. (forthcoming). Understanding the emergence of social protocols on cyberspace: Social networking practices of musicians (invited to participate in Monograph) *Comunicar*. 34.
- Suhr, H.C. (2009) Severing the Disjuncture between Cultural Studies and Aesthetics: New Ways to Engage Aesthetics in the Study of Social Networking Sites. *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*. Vol. 19
- Suhr, H.C. (2009). Understanding the operation and values of live music performances on Secondlife: A textual analysis on social networking sites for Secondlife.com. *International Journal of the Humanities*
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- Suhr, H.C. (invited book chapter, forthcoming). Exploring the implication of new collaborative technology on Indabamusic.com: How does virtual collaboration impact the cultural values and aesthetic tastes? In. M. Anandarajan (Ed.), *E Research collaboration*.
- Suhr, H.C. (invited book chapter, forthcoming). Raising popularity on MySpace: Tila Tequila's fame labor and celebrity status. In. S. Holmes & D. Negra (Eds.), *In the limelight and under the microscope: Forms and functions of female celebrity*.
- Suhr, H.C. (2009). Review of *Ispy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* by Mark Andrejevic for Cyberculture Studies book reviews.

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