Does NME even know what a music blog is?:

The Rhetoric and Social Meaning of MP3 Blogs

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

MP3 blogs and their aggregators, which have risen to prominence over the past four years, are presenting an alternative way of promoting and discovering new music. I will argue that MP3 files greatly affect MP3 blogs in terms of shaping them as: a genre separate from general weblogs and music blogs without MP3s, especially due to the impact of MP3 blog aggregators such as The Hype Machine and Elbows; a particular form of rhetoric illuminated by Kenneth Burke's dramatistic ratios of agency-purpose, purpose-act and scene-act; and as a potentially subversive subculture, which like other subcultures, exists in a symbiotic relationship with the traditional media it defines itself against. Using excerpts from multiple MP3 blogs and their forums, interviews with MP3 bloggers and Anthony Volodkin (creator of The Hype Machine), references to MP3 blogs in traditional press, and Burke's theory of dramatism and Hodge and Kress's theories of social semiotics, I will demonstrate that the MP3 file is not only changing the way music is consumed and circulated, but also the way music is promoted and discussed.

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Introduction

As an avid music fan, I came to a rather surprising realization recently. Though this realization seemed sudden, it had, in reality, been developing gradually over time: within the past three years, I had not been reading nearly as many music magazines nor viewing as many music Web sites as I used to, and my information about and interest in music was being influenced and shaped by a different medium, namely that of MP3 blogs. MP3 blogs, which are defined by *Wikipedia* as a "type of blog in which the creator makes music files, normally in the MP3 format, available for download," can alternatively be called "music blogs" or "audio blogs," and have risen to prominence over the last four years, but I will argue they are much more complicated than their definition suggests. MP3 files, also known more technically as MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3 files, compress musical data, discarding information that is not necessary for the human ear, and the "anticipated praxeology of listening encoded in each mp3 emphasizes distraction over attention and exchange over use" (Sterne 828); in other words, MP3s are designed to be amassed and to be highly mobile, which are characteristics that make them suitable for use in MP3 blogs and which also make them particularly intrinsic to the way MP3 blogs convey meaning and persuade. In order to understand my own predilection for MP3 blogs over traditional music press and discern the influence and significance of MP3 blogs within the context of a music industry currently in crisis, I will explore them as a remediating genre, as rhetoric and as a subculture.

MP3 files are the defining feature of MP3 blogs, and though MP3 blogs can often be more generally known as music blogs, this distinction is a significant one to make when discussing the rhetoric and social meaning of MP3 blogs. Throughout this thesis, I will not be

referring to MP3 blogs as music blogs because I feel MP3-free music blogs constitute a different subgenre of blogs, and the absence of MP3s in such blogs sits at the crux of what rhetorically and socially defines MP3 blogs, setting them apart from blogs which only discuss music without offering MP3s for free download. In fact, I will argue that MP3 files greatly affect MP3 blogs in terms of shaping them as: a genre separate from general weblogs and music blogs without MP3s, especially due to the impact of MP3 blog aggregators such as *The Hype Machine* and *Elbows*; a particular form of rhetoric illuminated by Kenneth Burke's dramatistic ratios of agency-purpose, purpose-act and scene-act; and as a potentially subversive subculture, which like other subcultures, exists in a symbiotic relationship with the traditional media it defines itself against. Using excerpts from multiple MP3 blogs and their forums, interviews with MP3 bloggers and Anthony Volodkin (creator of *The Hype Machine*), references to MP3 blogs in traditional press, and Burke's theory of dramatism and Hodge and Kress's theories of social semiotics, I will demonstrate that the MP3 file is not only changing the way music is consumed and circulated, but also the way music is promoted and discussed.

The issue of illegal MP3 downloading and file-sharing has been discussed extensively in both the media and academia, including the problem and redefinition of ownership in cyberspace ("Introduction," Ayers, 2006; Denegri-Knott, 2004; Duckworth, 2005; Garofalo, 1999; Giesler, 2006; Jones, 2002; Leyshon et al, 2005; Rodman and Vanderdonckt, 2006; Sterne, 2006), but there has not yet been a study of how sharing MP3s is affecting the way music is promoted and written about. Intellectual property issues are perennial in the music industry, especially as new technology is introduced; for example, when the blank cassette tape was introduced in the 1970's, a home-taping controversy ensued, leading to a levy on blank cassettes (Whelan 59).

However, the digital developments and Internet progress of the late 1990's led to a much more complicated scenario. Those in positions of power, including major record labels and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), saw the sharing of MP3 files as theft of intellectual property, creating a question of whether or not digital copies could be considered the same as physical commodities. Poster argues that those in the RIAA who view MP3 sharing as theft were making errors in their understanding of media differences:

> In their suit of September 2003, the RIAA acted as if downloading music files is *the same thing* as taking a music CD from a retail store without paying for it. This claim of equivalence is a political move that ignores the specificity and differences of each media – CDs and digital files. When the CD is taken from the store, the store no longer has it; when the file is downloaded, the person sharing the file still has it. (189)

This conflict in power relations between music producers and their consumers led to various attempts at control, including the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which holds Internet service providers responsible in court for anything unlawful that their customers post online, and the Copyright Term Extension Act of the same year, which extended the time intellectual property remains under copyright from seventy-five years to ninety-five years (Duckworth 140). The following year, Shawn Fanning created the now infamous *Napster*, a peer-to-peer network in which users could search each other's music libraries and download from each other. Two years later, *Napster* was forced offline and subsequently became a legal music download service with a subscription fee, radically decreasing its popularity. This decline in popularity is very

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likely due to the fact that *Napster*'s "true subversive potential lies in the fact that it offered consumers more agency than the conventional model offered by the major labels, notwithstanding the fact that copyright was violated" (Haupt 116). By initially ignoring the new technology of digital music files and then forcing payment for them, the music industry misunderstood their own consumers and the technology itself.

The music industry, including major record labels, views music as a capitalistic commodity that must be bought and sold, but those who used networks like *Napster*, and now more recently use less easily traceable systems of torrent files, are using music in a what Giesler calls "cybernetic gift giving." Giesler refers to peer-to-peer file-sharing as a "polyadic gifting situation" (23), which multiplies rather than merely exchanges. He argues that "most consumers use *Napster* for the purpose of self-enrichment, seeking to maximize their personal music catalog, not actively considering reciprocation at all" (31). This act of keeping while taking in a recipient-driven atmosphere "can fulfill the split demands of self and other enrichment at the same time" (31), making this particular system of gift giving a more complicated network of interactions than simply giving gifts without expectation of reciprocation or exchanging gifts between two parties. This web-like exchange of gifts, which in this case are MP3 files, must be understood as an "oppositional economy to that of the marketplace exchange" (46) in which a blurring of producer and consumer occurs (Poster 195-96; Ayers 128). Through the act of peer-to-peer MP3 file sharing amongst music fans, consumers created a form of resistance to the way music was marketed and distributed by those in power.

Resistance by music consumers and activists over copyright violation has been countering the music industry for several years now, and one particular incident significantly

involved the blogosphere, which is the collective term for blogs (OED). When Dangermouse, an American music producer, created *The Grey Album*, which blended The Beatles' *White Album* and Jay-Z's *Black Album*, he was ordered by The Beatles' label EMI to cease distribution because he had used The Beatles' material without permission. Because music fans and activists felt that *The Grey Album* was a critically acclaimed piece of art, which created something completely new out of older material and which deserved a proper release rather than legal prohibition, they organized Grey Tuesday for February 24, 2004. On this day, all bloggers who were supporting the release and distribution of *The Grey Album* either put up the full album for download and/or turned the background on their blog grey for the entire day. Ayers argues that this incident, while displaying the impact of bloggers on subversive protest, also shows that "one of the core issues impacting the relationship between individual blog protestors and the larger copyright reform movement, is the ethereal nature of blog content" (134). Though it is true that blog content can be ephemeral and difficult to organize and control as one body for political protest, this ephemeral and disparate nature of blogs has been one of the main reasons that MP3 blogs continue to function under the watchful eye of bodies like the RIAA.

MP3 blogs are highly dependent on the availability of free music downloads and sharing. In the case of music blog aggregators like *The Hype Machine*, MP3s are necessary for being included in the constant crawl and cull of blog posts. MP3 blogs differ from networks like *Napster* and its successors such as *KaZaa* and *LimeWire* in that they do not provide entire music libraries for download, and the giving of files does not form the same web of exchange that cybernetic gift-giving does. While MP3 bloggers may use exchanges of music amongst themselves by downloading the sample tracks off each other – in some cases, reposting the tracks

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on their own blogs – they are also offering MP3s to an unknown public that may or may not ever reciprocate. Despite the fact MP3 blogs do not function in the same way as a peer-to-peer network, the advent of MP3 blog aggregators has introduced a search function for music that would not have been available with just the disparate blogs themselves; so, in some ways, MP3 blogs become a library. However, this library is more ephemeral than *Napster* was because links older than a month are more than likely inactive. Additionally, the search function in aggregators ultimately acts more as a popularity gauge of particular artists and tracks rather than merely a way to locate specific music. Most blogs offer two to three tracks per post, and often the links to these tracks expire after a limited time period, either because the blogger cannot afford the bandwidth required for maintaining that much uploaded content and/or because the blogger is adhering to the principle that artists should be supported financially by their fans. In their support of music artists, MP3 bloggers abide by the aforementioned tacit rules that ensure the artists are not being exploited and that the bloggers themselves are protected from any legal action.

The main concept behind MP3 blogs is artist promotion, and their subversive power primarily lies in the act of promotion, not in illegal distribution like it did for networks like *Napster*; this distinction is important because it both allows the MP3 bloggers to operate without interference by the RIAA or record labels and alters the way music is promoted and thus consumed. Truly independent artists without a record deal can be promoted alongside major label artists while amateur music critics/journalists can express opinions and write about music for a global audience without an "official" outlet like a newspaper or magazine. Just as MP3s and peer-to-peer file-sharing blurred the lines between producer and consumer in the music

industry, MP3 blogs are blurring the lines between the music media industry, including public relations, advertising, and journalism, and music consumers/fans.

Not only is the music industry currently in a period of drastic change, but traditional music press/media, especially that which targets the same market as those in the audience of MP3 blogs, is also facing new changes and competition ("The death of Rolling Stone," 2002; "Do they still want their MTV?," 2007; "Is music journalism dead?," 2004; "Is the party over for the NME?," 2008). Of course blogging has already had an impact on journalism as a whole (Johnson and Kaye, 2004; Munger, 2008; Robinson, 2006; Rugiero and Winch, 2004; Wallsten, 2007), including presenting an alternative way to gather and present news, and as an alternative conduit for political information and opinions with various effects on the perception of information credibility. News and political blogs also have higher numbers, and consequently a higher profile, than MP3 and music blogs; for example, according to *Technorati*, a site which tracks blogs and their popularity, there are currently nearly two million posts tagged as news while posts tagged as music do not quite reach 340 000. Despite their smaller numbers, MP3 blogs have entered this aspect of the capitalist economy as well and present a competitive, potentially subversive force, especially since the relatively recent creation of MP3 blog aggregators has generated a sense of solidarity and power amongst MP3 bloggers, ostensibly challenging the way traditional music press operates. Based on the participatory culture of fandom and word-of-mouth, rather than professional media, MP3 blogs become their own genre within both the general blogosphere and within the more specific music blogosphere. In the following chapter, I will discuss the way in which MP3 blogs remediate preceding media to fashion their own specific genre, but at the same time, how this plurality of remediation can also

make it difficult to posit a solid system of generic rules and characteristics, making the MP3 files

the most identifying feature of the genre.

Chapter 1: The MP3 Blog Genre and Remediation

As metaphor is a "key principle of semiotic innovation" (Van Leeuwen 29), people can only attempt to understand and to make meaning of changes by comparing them with that which is already known and established. In this capacity, MP3 blogs can be seen as a combination of music magazine, diary/journal, pirate/alternative radio, fanzine and mixtape because it uses elements from them all. However, this use of metaphor leads to a discussion on remediation, and the concept of remediation is contentious in that most media can be regarded as a remediation of previous media, or as Bolter and Grusin argue, later media (55). For example, television was the remediation of the film medium that came before it, but so, too, can television remediate the later medium of the Internet by offering a higher level of interactivity. Therefore, "Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media" (Bolter and Grusin 55). This constant spiral of remediation, especially with an interface like the Internet, makes it difficult to pinpoint exactly which medium is being remediated at any given time. However, at the same time, "The imprints of ancestral genres can give us insight into what aspects of generic exigences are no longer addressed, how the new stability is negotiated, how rhetoric accommodates change and accommodates *us* to change" (Miller and Shepherd 2004). In discussing the genre of blogging, Miller and Shepherd not only trace the ancestry of blogs as a genre, but also describe the *kairos*, or opportune context, for blogs to emerge as a popular genre in the 1990s. This *kairos* includes "mediated voyeurism, widely dispersed but relentless celebrity, unsettled boundaries between public and private, and new technology that disseminates these challenges beyond capital and corporations to individuals." While MP3 blogs definitely fall within this particular *kairos* along with the rest of the blogosphere, I would argue

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that, as a genre within a genre, MP3 blogs have their own specific *kairos*, too, and that this

context for their emergence and growth is significant in examining them as rhetorical acts.

However, in order to understand MP3 blogs as their own genre, it is important to understand

blogs as a more general genre first.

Several have already gone into detail about the genre of blogging (Herring et al, 2005;

Herring and Paolillo, 2006; MacDougall, 2005; Miller and Shepherd, 2004; Reed, 2005), and in

many cases, the issue of gender and/or identity have been raised in conjunction with the

relatively recent emergence of blogs as a genre (Herring and Paolillo, 2006; Pedersen and

Macafee, 2007; Rak, 2005; Reed, 2005). A general blog "forms a de facto bridge between

multimedia HTML documents and text-based computer-mediated communication, blurring the

traditional distinction between these two dominant Internet paradigms, and potentially

contributing to its future breakdown" (Herring et al 142), which demonstrates a multitude of

remediations of both digital media and its predecessors. From this broader genre, blogs can be

then further divided into two subgenres of diary and filter; the former is a more personalized and

direct remediation of the paper diary whilst the latter is more focused on hyperlinks and serves as

a guide toward noteworthy information (Blood, 2000). In the latter subgenre of filter, blogs can

also remediate the way news is collected and consumed while shifting the way people negotiate

information and knowledge.

In comparing the epistemology of traditional journalism with that of news blogs,

Matheson argues that blogs can remediate journalism, and in doing so, provide new ways of

looking at the relationship between news producers and news consumers. He identifies three

main themes in the world of news blogs:

(1) weblogs as a space for journalistic thinking for which institutional journalism provides little room;

(2) weblogs as a challenge to corporate journalism; and

(3) weblogs as a democratic, interactive space (451)

These major themes reveal how blogs can ideally work within the system of news production and consumption, and how they can challenge the mainstream and/or institutionalized journalism. In traditional media, meaning journalism sanctioned by official publications like newspapers and their Web sites, "journalists tend to value the ability to judge what readers should or would want to know" (454), and these journalists make a living off this skill of judgement/selection. By looking specifically at the British newspaper *Guardian*'s blog and comparing it with the traditional journalism operating in the publication otherwise, Matheson discovers that the blog provides its users with more choice in information via hyperlinks to multiple news sources, giving the user a more active role in the news he/she is consuming. He states the "communicative interaction invoked here involves the offering of material to the user by the embodied voice of the news producer, rather than the existence of unembodied, self-evident information" (455). This offering of sources, rather than burying sources within a news-story, provides an ostensible objectivity through transparency of sources; however, there is still a judgement and selection process at work. Instead of a journalist as a news generator, a news blogger is a news curator, and through this curating process, he/she is still selecting and deflecting certain realitites in a Burkean sense. In many ways, this selection of reality is the foundation of MP3 blogs and how they function as a genre.

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MP3 blogs, appear to have their naissance as early as 2002 with the creation of *Fluxblog* and *Stereogum*, though the latter started as a LiveJournal and moved into its current domain in 2003. *Fluxblog*, created by Matthew Perpetua, and *Stereogum*, created by Scott Lapatine, came about in the wake of *Napster*'s rise and fall and the attempted corporatization and commodification of digital music files via digital music stores like iTunes, Rhapsody, Puretracks, and the revamped *Napster*. Eric Harvey of *Marathon Packs*, notably a music blog rather than an MP3 blog, identifies a *kairos* specifically for MP3 bloggers:

> 1. all the music they like (or might like) is available free and rather easily online
>
> 2. that same music can be duplicated endlessly and without dissolution of sound
>
> 3. music promotion is ubiquitous and often disguised as entertainment
>
> 4. MTV, commercial radio and Rolling Stone have lost all music-related influence
>
> 5. both intelligent/progressive and popular criticism is more accessible and important than ever before on the Web ("On Shifting the Focus a Bit")

This set of contextual factors points to the significance of technological advances, more specifically of MP3s and the Internet, that have increased more people's agency in both a journalist/critic and fan capacity. Included in this agency is the same access to, and to varying degrees, control over the media that the professionals have. Consumers can replace MTV with *YouTube* and substitute podcasts or Internet radio for local radio stations. As stated in Harvey's

third point, this rapid expansion of media has also had an impact on promotion and marketing, creating a saturated marketplace where attention is a rare commodity and where promotion is most often embedded in the entertainment consumed in order to have an impact. At the same time, this democratizing technology has also had an effect on how musicians both create and promote their own music.

With the advent of new technology and software through which people can produce their own music easily and cost-effectively and with the rise of social networking sites like *MySpace* in which anyone can promote and publicize their own music, there has been a proliferation of the music available and an increased visibility of this rapidly increasing amount of music. Sites like *MySpace* make it very easy for an artist to post his/her own streaming music, photos and videos, and to create a profile without purchasing a domain name and designing his/her own Web site from scratch. *MySpace* also has a function whereby artists and bands can request friendship from strangers and potential fans; by going through the friend lists of artists with similar music styles, or through the favourite music listed by individual *MySpace* users, an artist/band can market themselves more specifically and effectively without enlisting the help and/or finances of anyone else. Taking the current number of pages of musical artists with profiles listed on *MySpace* and multiplying it by the thirty profiles per page, the approximate number of musical artists currently publicizing themselves via *MySpace* is 450 000 ("MySpace Music Directory"), and this number continues to grow every day. This number displays the sheer volume of available music and the artists which are trying to promote themselves through the Internet and social networking platforms. This massive number also demonstrates that no one person could manage to listen to it all or make any substantial commentary on it all, let alone the traditional music press, which has

to consider audience numbers and advertiser money, and thus, are less likely to feature completely unknown and unsigned acts.

In addition to technological advancement and increased agency, Harvey's fourth point demonstrates a *kairos* for MP3 blogs in which there is a general malaise and/or panic over the current state of the traditional music press, opening the scene up to amateurs. In his article, "Is music journalism dead?," Devon Power states:

> The real debate is not between engagement and escapism: music journalism as political and relevant or apolitical and superfluous. To me, the real question seems to be a matter of when music and music journalists lost their revolutionary dream. For there was a point, not that long ago, when people sincerely believed that music had the potential to effect change in the political realm.

This excerpt reflects an increasingly prevalent attitude towards music journalism that concedes there has been a recent shift in music journalism that has made it more impotent and less relevant socially and politically. At the same time, this attitude demonstrates an apparent expectation for music discourse, namely, that music has revolutionary, counter-cultural power, especially for those who take music seriously and are the most likely to read music press in the first place. Reflecting a similar attitude towards what music journalism should represent, Sean Elder's article entitled "The death of Rolling Stone" discusses the reaction to and criticism of the hiring of a new "lad mag" editor for the long-running American music magazine *Rolling Stone*. Elder argues that "by trying to reach a younger audience even as it holds onto the old with the other hand, Rolling Stone is starting to look contorted, like some aging hipster playing Twister until

his back gives out." He goes on to explain that *Rolling Stone*'s power used to reside in its counter-cultural approach:

> As Rolling Stone has slowly morphed into a magazine just like dozens of others, it has lost its reason for being. It was never meant to be the ultimate magazine of the music business (Billboard still does that just fine, thanks); if anything it was meant to give the finger to that business, as well as magazine publishing in general, television, Madison Avenue, the Pentagon, etc. Without that contrary attitude -- or any attitude at all, for the most part -- Rolling Stone seems like an anachronism, the Ladies' Home Journal of rock journalism.

While Elder faults *Rolling Stone* for its loss of purpose and lack of adherence to the music discourse of revolution, he also attributes the magazine's decline to difficulties in finding an audience in a rapidly splintering market. This splintering market, which includes numerous niche-targeted publications, is also a result of a growing online presence of traditional music press; in effect, some print magazine are in danger because most readers use their rapidly-updated Web sites rather than purchase their print counterparts. In the *Times Online* article, "Is the Party Over for the NME?," Stephen Dalton discusses the drastic, farthest fall in circulation for the British weekly music magazine, *New Musical Express (NME)*, and the possibility of it ceasing its printing while maintaining its much healthier online presence. Once again, the lack of counter-cultural music discourse is presented as a major part of the cause. Dalton writes: "To many of its former readers - and writers - NME has sold out its 'soul' and 'edge' to corporate partners, such as the beer and hair-grooming companies that now sponsor its tours and awards

ceremonies." While these problems are not confined to the music press, especially in the current climate of a post-print culture and globalized competition, with music journalism, it seems discourse that views music as counter-cultural and revolutionary and/or transcendental plays a large role in defining its genre, and thus has bearing on the way MP3 blogs remediate that genre.

Having explored the *kairos* for MP3 blogs, it becomes evident that advances in technology in combination with the counter-cultural, revolutionary discourse for music put forth by music fans and critics have converged to produce the genre of MP3 blogs. Using Hodge and Kress's definition of genre, which classifies genres as "typical forms of text which link kinds of producer, consumer, topic, medium, manner and occasion" (7), I will argue that the MP3 blogs are a genre with its own rules and structures, and with the aid of MP3 blog aggregators, this genre becomes a more distinct subgenre of blogs; however, this genre, with its many remediations of other media, can also be fraught with blurring its genre with others, especially that of music e-zines. With their blend of the diary and filter entries, MP3 blogs straddle the line between personal diaries and journalistic conveyance of information, and some MP3 blogs lean more in either of these directions. Because MP3 blogs not only remediate diaries and traditional music journalism, but also pirate/alternative radio, and especially the mixtape, they place a significant emphasis on the links to MP3 files provided for free download (See Fig.1). As MacDougall states, "Blogs are themselves constituted by the hotlinks they reference. Any effort to constrain blogs to the content residing at their 'first level' is to obliterate the definition, meaning, and function of the blog" (581). In MP3 blogs, this feature of hotlinking takes on an even more genre-defining role because MP3 blogs depend upon MP3 download links for their

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inclusion in the MP3 blog genre and for their inclusion in the MP3 blog aggregators, thus the

demonstrated solidarity with others of the same genre.

Figure 1 – *The Vinyl Villain* MP3 blog

Not only do MP3 blogs depend on MP3 files for inclusion in the genre and aggregators, but they also use MP3s in various ways for different types of posts. MP3 blog posts tend to fall into two broad categories: posts in which the text determines which music is posted and posts in which the music determines the text. Of the former category, posts can be prompted by a personal event with an attachment of appropriate music or prompted by a current event or media story with an attachment of appropriate music; of the latter category, posts can be prompted by discovery of a new artist/band with an attachment of the new artists' music or prompted by promotional effort on the part of either a promotional department or artists themselves with an attachment of music from the promoted artist/band. While the diary remediation aspect of blogs is most readily present in MP3 blogs in those posts which are prompted by a personal event, diary elements appear regularly in the other types of posts because of the affective relationship bloggers have with music and the generally subjective position from which they write. In addition to situations in which text and music interact and influence each other, there are MP3 blogs in which little or no text is offered along with the MP3 files; for example, some blogs prefer to post *YouTube* videos in place of text, or, in the case of an MP3 blog like *Nevver* (see Fig.2), which features only an image and an MP3 file for each post, to replace text with visuals. This disparity in terms of content or presentation of content points to stylistic differences, but also to rhetorical differences, which will be discussed in the following chapter. Needless to say, in all cases, music in MP3 form is the commonality and necessity for all posts in this genre.
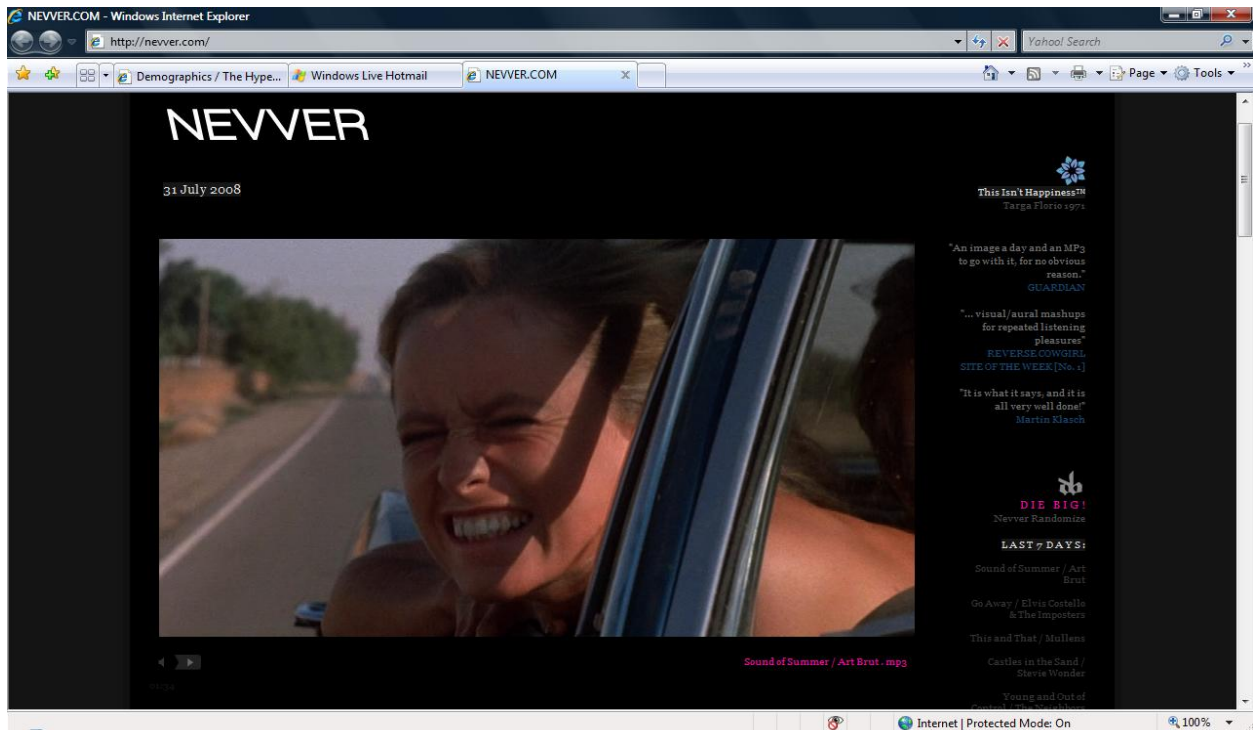
Figure 2 – Screenshot of *Nevver*

As MP3 blogs can be seen as a remediation of music journalism/criticism, it is beneficial

to look at how music journalists/critics, who are also bloggers, feel about this online remediation.

A post from October 2007 on *Rockcritics Music Blog*, a blog and forum that "explores all aspects

of writing about popular music: the ideas, the practical tools, the scandalous rumours, the puffed

egos, and of course, the people and personalities who call themselves 'rock critics,'" acted as an

online symposium about the state of music blogging (it is important to note that this symposium

was not specifically about MP3 blogging). The participants included Maura Johnston, music

journalist and editor of the music blog *Idolator*; Rich Juzwiak, author of fourfour and a co-writer

of the VH1 blog; David Moore, a correspondent for *Stylus* magazine; Simon Reynolds, a music

journalist and author of *Rip It Up and Start Again* and co-author of *The Sex Revolts*; and Carl

Wilson, a writer and editor at *The Globe and Mail* in Toronto and a freelance critic. In response

to the question, "Is your blogging voice or the material you cover in your blog different than the voice you use or the material you cover in your professional music writing? If so, how?" Juzwiak wrote:

> Yeah, it is. I never use "I" when I write for print outlets and I always use it on my blog. It just makes sense–my blog is my media journal, a record of the things that make me react [...] I also feel freer on my blog, but I'm not sure it has to do with the personal nature. I think at least part of that feeling of freedom comes from having no limits when it comes to length. If I have 100 words for an album, I can be that brief, and if I have 1,500 words for it, I can put that up, too. That's extremely liberating. It's really wonderful to have the space and opportunity to explain yourself completely, or to be as succinct or even glib as your subject calls for. Everyone needs an editor and I'm particularly verbose, but god, I'm so glad that I'm able to say exactly what I have to say. It may sound ridiculous to some, as criticism and especially "blogging" aren't considered to be art forms, but I can say that I feel completely fulfilled as far as self-expression goes.

This response highlights several key differences between music journalism and its remediation in blogs. Juzwiak first points out the personal, subjective position he can utilize when blogging, but cannot use when he is writing professionally. He then discusses the freedom provided by blogs as opposed to journalism. Finally, Juzwiak mentions that his blog allows for "self-expression" in a way that professional journalism does not. Examining these ideas, it becomes clear that, for

him, the absence of editors and professional considerations changes the style of music writing

when moving between the genres of music journalism and music blogging. This freedom of self-

expression and opinion appears to be more closely related to the counter-cultural discourse of

music that the music press is being criticized for lacking. Reynolds expresses similar

observations:

> Sometimes I think of blogging as similar to MC-ing. There is a bit of a
>
> swagger to it. But then the best rock writing always had that–at least
>
> the kind of rockwrite I have always been into. And like with MC-ing,
>
> the persona conjured in the writing is a kind of super-self that bears
>
> some relation to the real you but it is amped up and altered in certain
>
> respects. It's the you that you'd like to be, perhaps.

Notably, though Reynolds identifies a different "voice" and "self" for blogging about music than

those for writing journalistically about music, he also presents a connection between music

blogging and the "best rock writing," blurring the lines between an ideal music

journalism/criticism, which uses the revolutionary, transcendental discourse of music, and music

blogging.

　　　　While many of the arguments presented in this symposium, including those about more

subjectivity and freedom, could also be applied to MP3 blogs as much as to music blogs, they

elucidate the fact that there is a difference between music blogs and MP3 blogs. In examining the

music blogs which journalists and critics like Reynolds write, it becomes apparent that the

absence of MP3s creates a different genre apart from MP3 blogs, and that this more general

music blog genre focuses more on lengthy expositions on music-related topics along with hyperlinks to other music bloggers' posts and often an interplay between opinions, forming a dialectic. In these characteristics, music blogs resemble more general blogs, which rather than focusing on political opinion or sports, concentrate on music-related topics. For example, some of Reynolds' earliest posts on his blog, *Blissblog*, tracked a textual argument between him and Kirk Degiorgio, a British techno producer and DJ, which began with Reynolds posting on October 15, 2002: "Kirk Degiorgio gets in a right [tizzy](#) with me for saying he's a bit of a soulboy snob (but what really rankles is the suggestion that he's not that dapper). See how many holes you can spot in his argument. Riposte to follow, if it's not *too* much like shooting fish in a barrel." The link to Degiorgio's original comment is no longer active, but his strong difference of opinion can be inferred by Reynolds' responses. On October 28, 2002, Reynolds then constructed a 1300-word deconstruction of Degiorgio's argument, and after a response from Degiorgio, he wrote another 700-word counterargument. Through this set of posts, Reynolds writes essay-like arguments, informally, but logically refuting Degiorgio's remarks, making obscure references to music subcultures and discussing the concept of reverse racism in Degiorgio's musical preferences. Notably, his writing is lengthy and verbose and demonstrates a specialized knowledge of music subcultures, and in defending his opinion on music-related issues instead of focusing on reviewing or recommending music, he displays the way music blogs differ as a genre from MP3 blogs. However, the length of posts does not strictly define the music blog genre as different from the MP3 blog genre because not all music bloggers write verbose posts on a regular basis and some MP3 bloggers do; the content of posts, which in the case of MP3 blogs, includes MP3 links, is the more significant factor in what distinguishes the two genres.

There is, of course, overlap between MP3 and music blog genres, complicating definitive genres. In a December 18, 2002 post, Reynolds lists his "Fave Singles of 2002," a common type of post among MP3 bloggers; however, unlike MP3 bloggers, Reynolds does not provide download links for each track. The main difference between the manner in which Reynolds presents his favourite tracks and the manner in which MP3 bloggers present their songs is largely dependent on the inclusion of MP3 files or not, and the differing manner of their genres demonstrates a difference in type of authority. Reynolds' post emulates print journalism more closely than MP3 bloggers' posts because of both an implied authority that does not allow for the audience to participate or form their own opinions. Reynolds does not offer his audience a chance to listen to his selected tracks, which is the same way music journalists/critics operate in the traditional music press, putting the audience in a more passive position. For this genre of music blogging, persuasive power lies in the textual evidence/rhetoric alone while in the genre of MP3 blogging, persuasion is achieved by offering the reader the freedom to agree with the blogger and implying correctness by supplying the direct source.

Not only does Reynolds not provide MP3 files, but he also disables any comments on his post and does not provide any contact information, ensuring that only those who have access to his personal contact information can directly express their opinions to him and any other readers of his blog; the disabling of comments is a feature of several other music/popular culture blogs like *K-punk* and the now-defunct *Woebot*. This contrast between the participatory manner of the MP3 blog genre and the far less interactive manner of the music blog genre demonstrates Matheson's distinction between "the embodied voice of the news producer" and "the existence of unembodied, self-evident information"; even though Reynolds writes from a first-person,

subjective position, he is not providing his readers with a way to decide for themselves about the presented music based on actual sources, making his opinion more authoratative and utilizing a seemingly more powerful social position. This powerful social position and authority are reinforced by the fact Reynolds provides links to his other music blogs, which display collections or extensions of his published work. Bourdieu states: "the use of language, the manner as much as the substance of discourse, depends on the social position of the speaker, which governs the access he can have to the language of the institution, that is to the official orthodox and legitimate speech" (*Language and Symbolic Power*, 109). Of course, Reynolds, who is also a professional music journalist/critic, does use his specialized knowledge/language about music and his social position, which includes both cultural capital and experience, to wield symbolic power; this reliance on printed text for both persuasion and authority points to a more literacy-based genre as opposed to oral, a distinction that will be made clearer in the following chapter on rhetorical purpose. While text is still often a significant part of the MP3 blog genre, the inclusion of MP3 links displays a different focus in which MP3s become the language, thus the symbolic power. Through the ownership and selection of MP3s, rather than "language of the institution," the MP3 blog genre demonstrates its power and solidarity as a genre apart from music blogs.

Compared with MP3 blogs, music blogs are not as readily available as a seemingly cohesive genre and social group, nor are they as easy to locate in cyberspace. This difference in accessibility and presentation is due to the relatively recent development of MP3 blog aggregators. These aggregators, through their organizational and selective function, have solidified MP3 blogs as their own genre and gained publicity for them as a social entity. Furthermore, by displaying MP3 blogs as a collective group, aggregators like *The Hype Machine*

and *Elbows* have ostensibly given them more power as a genre than if they existed as disparate

voices in cyberspace. In essence, MP3 blog aggregators have increased MP3 blogs' power and

solidarity, which are the basis for Hodge and Kress's theory of social semiotics; they argue that

both elements are intrinsic to the way meaning is made in a social context, influencing the

semiotic acts between participants (46). While MP3 blogs are the same as other blogs in regards

to the option for readers to "subscribe" to their feeds, remediating subscriptions to print media,

their presence on MP3 blog aggregators remediates music journalism, placing the aggregators in

an editorial role of sorts.

This editorial role is evident in the fact that aggregators collect and promote individual

MP3 blog posts in one place, namely the aggregator's Web address, making it easy for any

Internet user to find and read them, clicking rather than flicking through thousands of pages of

music commentary. *The Hype Machine* (see Fig.3), created by Anthony Volodkin in 2005, is

arguably the most famous MP3 blog aggregator in terms of media coverage and the fact that

many MP3 bloggers desire to be included on the aggregator. This desire stems from the fact that

The Hype Machine sets specific rules for inclusion on the aggregator in which a blogger:

> 1. Advocates responsible use of copyrighted material, includes buy
>
> links in the posts, does not post unauthorized works.
>
> 2. Regularly posts updates, generates discussion.
>
> 3. Has a working, valid RSS/Atom feed.
>
> 4. Has been around for 2-3 months. ("Add a blog")

Additionally, in a side bar that is entitled "Community," *The Hype Machine* states: "Still not sure

if your blog is a good fit for Hype Machine? Check out the full list of bloggers we've already

accepted for some inspiration." These restrictions serve as rather explicit rules for what

constitutes rules for the MP3 blog genre, including commitment, currency, and copyright

responsibility, the latter of which tacitly ensures that MP3 blogs can operate under the "fair use"

clause of the Copyright Act ("U.S. Copyright Office – Fair Use"). By encouraging potential

bloggers to look at other MP3 blogs that have already been accepted, *The Hype Machine* is both

shaping the genre and exercising an editorial standard. All the MP3 blogs I have looked at

include some form of disclaimer that states that the blog only posts MP3s for sample purposes

and that any artist who wants their work taken down can contact the blogger for the immediate

removal of the file(s). While this feature of the genre did not likely develop solely because of

aggregator rules, it does point to conformity between aggregators and MP3 blogs, reinforcing the

notion of genre. Notably, *The Hype Machine* staff do not directly influence or alter the content of

those blogs included on their aggregator, nor do they censor or remove blogs unless they disobey

the rules or request their own removal – Volodkin says that over the entire time *The Hype*

Machine has been in operation, he has only had to remove three blogs: "two because they

requested it and one because we've received complaints about their postings." If an MP3 blogger

applies without meeting these requirements (i.e., before the blog is two to three months old, etc.),

he/she is rejected and locked out from adding his/her blog using the add blog form; to try

applying again, the blogger must email the aggregator personally.

Unlike in music e-zines, posts do not undergo an editorial procedure before showing up

on the site, placing e-zines in a more direct remediation of journalism than MP3 blog

aggregators. *The Hype Machine* significantly shapes the MP3 blog genre through a large focus

on the music itself, as opposed to the text written about it; this focus is apparent in *The Hype*

Machine's practices of only accepting blogs that feature MP3s, only displaying those posts that feature MP3s, and making MP3s the most prominent and salient text on their site (over the name of the blogs, post titles, and text from the posts). With their focus on the aural, these practices point to the MP3 blog genre's remediation of pirate/alternative radio and mixtapes; to further reinforce this assertion, *The Hype Machine* actually features a radio function, which streams non-stop music posted in MP3 blogs, and one of the aggregator's latest offerings of branded merchandise is a Hype Machine Mixa, a USB port built inside an audio cassette casing,
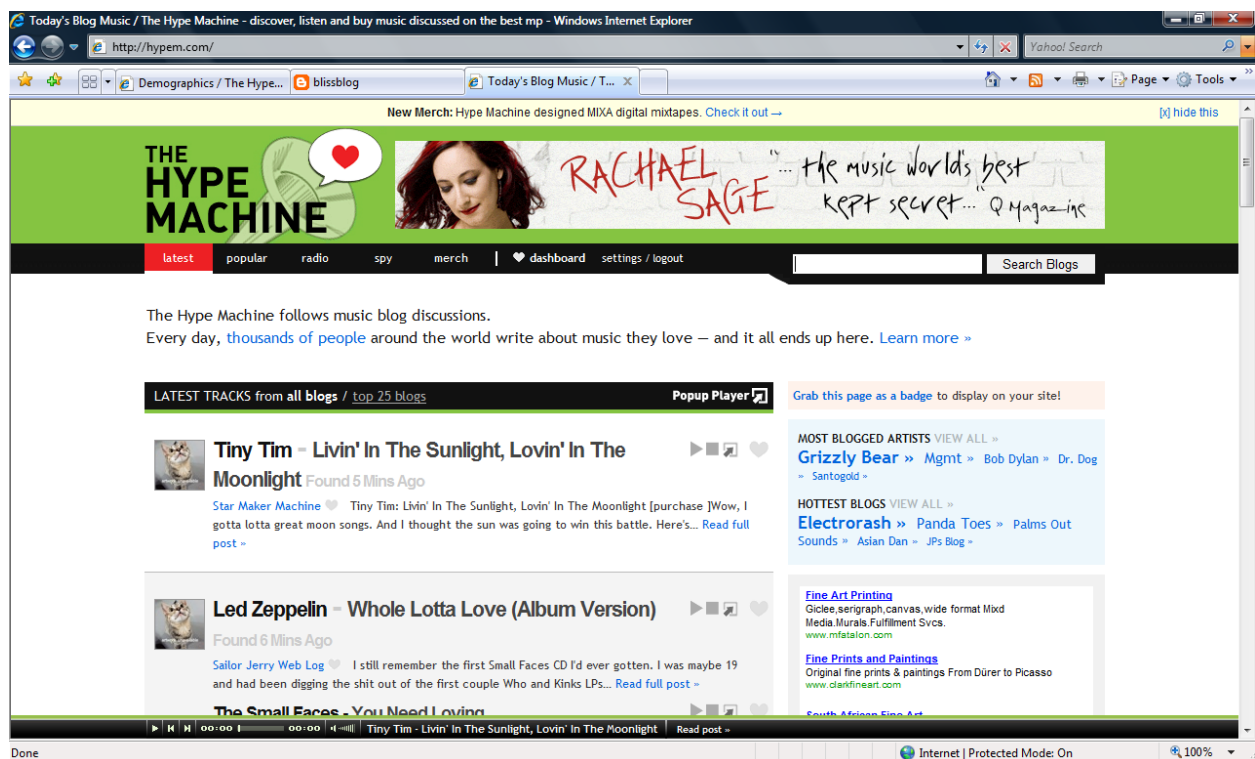

Figure 3 – *The Hype Machine*'s home page with constantly updated content emulating a mixtape.

     Elbows (see Fig.4), the other major MP3 blog aggregator which was created by itMayBe Media, a "collection of web applications," in 2005, has many similarities to *The Hype Machine*, including a constantly updated home page that lists the latest blog posts, a list of the most

popular music artists at the moment, and a search function which allows the reader to find specific MP3s and posts about artists; however, *Elbows* also has several significant differences that make *Elbows* more of a remediation of journalism than radio/mixtapes. Unlike *The Hype Machine*, *Elbows* does not just collect posts with MP3s in them, and because of this difference, the way *Elbows* displays posts focuses on and emphasizes the title of the post rather than the MP3s and features a longer sample of the post's text. These contrasts with *The Hype Machine* give *Elbows* a more literate than oral function. In addition to differences in collection and display, *Elbows* differs slightly in its selection/editorial process. Its stipulations read:

> To be included in the aggregator, more than 50% of your posts **MUST** be music related. If you include links to mp3s, you stand a greater chance of being included in the crawl, but it is not required. **PLEASE** only link to mp3s that are approved by the artist and do **NOT** hotlink to an mp3 hosted on someone else's server [...] We **DO NOT** condone the downloading of full albums unless the artist has agreed to it (this happens very rarely) [...] If you'd like to expedite the approval of your blog, please note that we give priority to blogs that use our badges. ("Add Your Blog")

As with *The Hype Machine*, MP3s are an important feature for inclusion and responsible use of copyright is stressed. Contrary to *The Hype Machine*'s rules, *Elbows* does not place a minimum on the amount of time the blog has been operating and expedites those blogs which reciprocate promotion, making inclusion easier and less exclusive. Once again, the rules for inclusion in the

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aggregator shape and reinforce MP3 blogs as a genre built on their MP3 links and fair use of
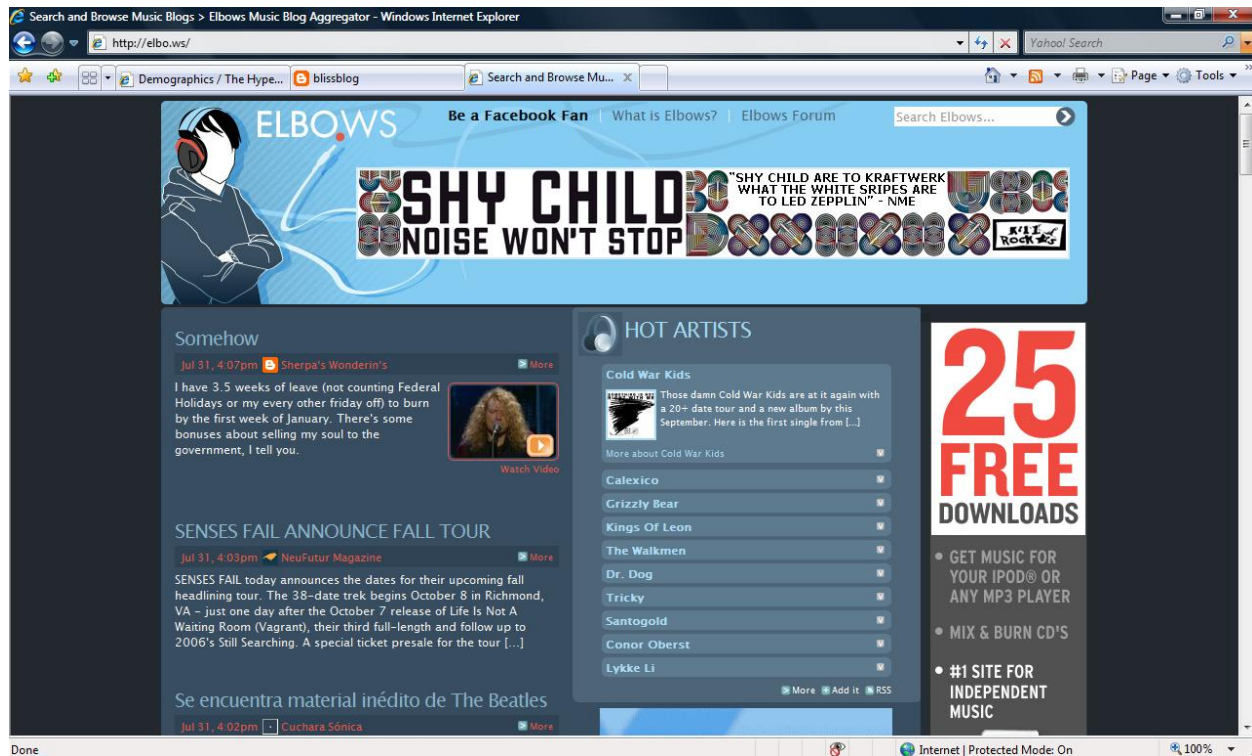
copyright.

Figure 4 – *Elbows* home page

As mentioned in discussion of *The Hype Machine*, MP3 blogs as a genre not only

remediate music journalism, but also audio-based media like pirate/alternative radio and

mixtapes, and this extra remediation significantly sets MP3 blogs apart from general music

blogs. Though music blogs remediate diaries and music journalism/criticism like MP3 blogs do,

they do not remediate aural media. In their links to MP3 files and often brief and conversational

commentary (as opposed to article-length stories/arguments) pertaining to the music offered,

MP3 blogs can be thought of as textual podcasts. Where a podcast (defined as a "digital

recording of a radio broadcast or similar programme, made available on the Internet for

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downloading to a personal audio player" (*OED*)) remediates exclusively radio, MP3 blogs, with

their visual text, images and video clips, remediate many other forms of media and can be

engaged with differently with the possibility of users only visiting the blog to download/listen to

the songs without reading or reading without downloading/listening. Furthermore, some MP3

bloggers either run their own podcast or participate in a collective podcast with others, as is the

case with the numerous bloggers involved in *Contrast Podcast*. In addition to remediating radio,

MP3 blogs also closely remediate a mixtape, which is defined by *Wikipedia* as a "compilation of

songs recorded in a specific order, traditionally onto a compact audio cassette" and which was a

popular form of sharing music before the advent of digital music, remaining a nostalgic form of

media for music fans because of its tangibility and the effort it takes to make one. As a medium,

the mixtape both promotes music in a word-of-mouth fashion and fosters a sense of community

and interactivity as more people trade and share specific songs with each other, often with certain

themes. In some cases, MP3 bloggers band together to contribute songs along a particular theme,

including the MP3 blog called *Star Maker Machine* which allows anyone to contribute MP3s for

the weekly theme, which when consumed together could be viewed as a mixtape. Another

example of this type of sharing and compiling is the post entitled "A Collection of Of Montreal

Covers" from the MP3 blog *You Ain't No Picasso*; the post was created with the objective of

collecting every cover version that the band Of Montreal ever did, urging all readers to

contribute MP3s of the covers that were not already part of the post. The post was then updated

accordingly as more MP3s were sent to the blogger. Like other oral-based media, in their

remediation of mixtapes, MP3 blogs generate a sense of the participatory and communal (Ong

45-6).

This participatory and communal nature of the MP3 blog genre leads to the issue of globalization, which becomes an issue in relation to any genre. Van Leeuwen discusses a case study of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in its relation to genre and globalization (131-8) to prove how the magazine's genre pervades several diverse cultures around the world in order to preserve the magazine's specific genre qualifications, and thus, its recognizable brand. While there are subtle changes from culture to culture, Van Leeuwen argues that *Cosmopolitan* generally remains the same generically. When looking at the MP3 blogs available on both *The Hype Machine* and *Elbows*, which are both based in the United States, there is a dominance of English-language sites even from countries that do not use English as a first language, and the majority of MP3 blogs featured are from the Western world, including North America, Europe and Australia; however, there are still several MP3 blogs in other languages including French, German, Spanish, Swedish, Italian, and Hebrew, and they still all fit into the MP3 blog genre with their inclusion of MP3 files for download and disclaimers about copyright. There are also design similarities, which point to both a globalization of Web site/blog design elements and the prevalence of blog platforms like *Blogger.com*, *Typepad.com* and *Wordpress.org* that allow users to choose from templates. In comparing a post about the same British musical artists, Dan Le Sac and Scroobius Pip, from a French MP3 blog (see Fig.5) with a post from a Hebrew MP3 blog (see Fig.6), these similar design elements and provision of MP3 links are apparent. Though the links to these particular songs are in English because the artists themselves are English, links that are for songs in other languages appear in those languages. These rules and patterns in MP3 blogs are consistent across different cultures, demonstrating a definite genre that can be adopted and adapted worldwide through the global language of MP3s.
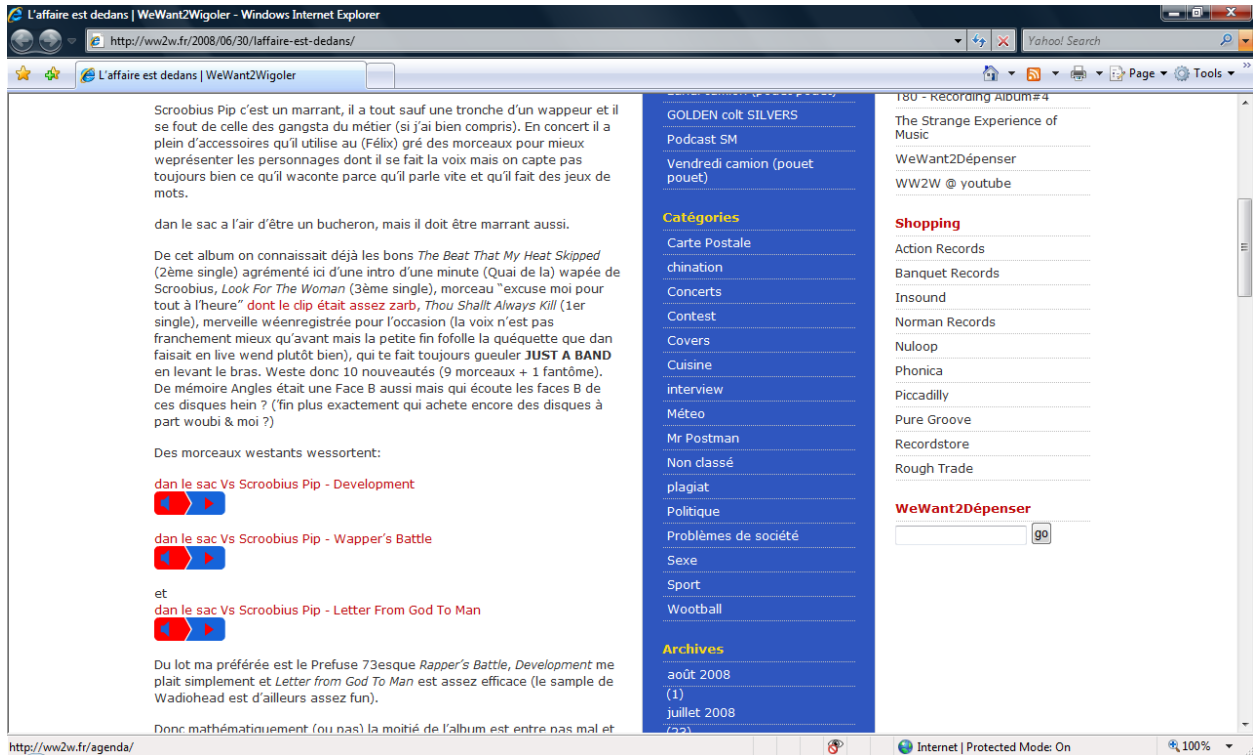
Figure 5 – Part of post by French MP3 blog *WeWant2Wigoler* (http://ww2w.fr/2008/06/30/laffaire-est-dedans/)

Figure 6 – Excerpt from Hebrew MP3 blog *Haoneg.com* (http://haoneg.com/oneg/393)

As significant as genre is for MP3 blogging, it can also be problematic because of the

multiple remediations and constant blurring of genre in the online world, especially between

MP3 blogs and music e-zines. When one compares the arguably most successful and publicized

MP3 blog *Stereogum* (see Fig.7) with the music e-zine *Pitchfork* (see Fig.8), it becomes quite

difficult to make strong distinctions. While the former is included in MP3 blog aggregators like

The Hype Machine and uses the reverse-chronological, time-stamped format of regular blogs
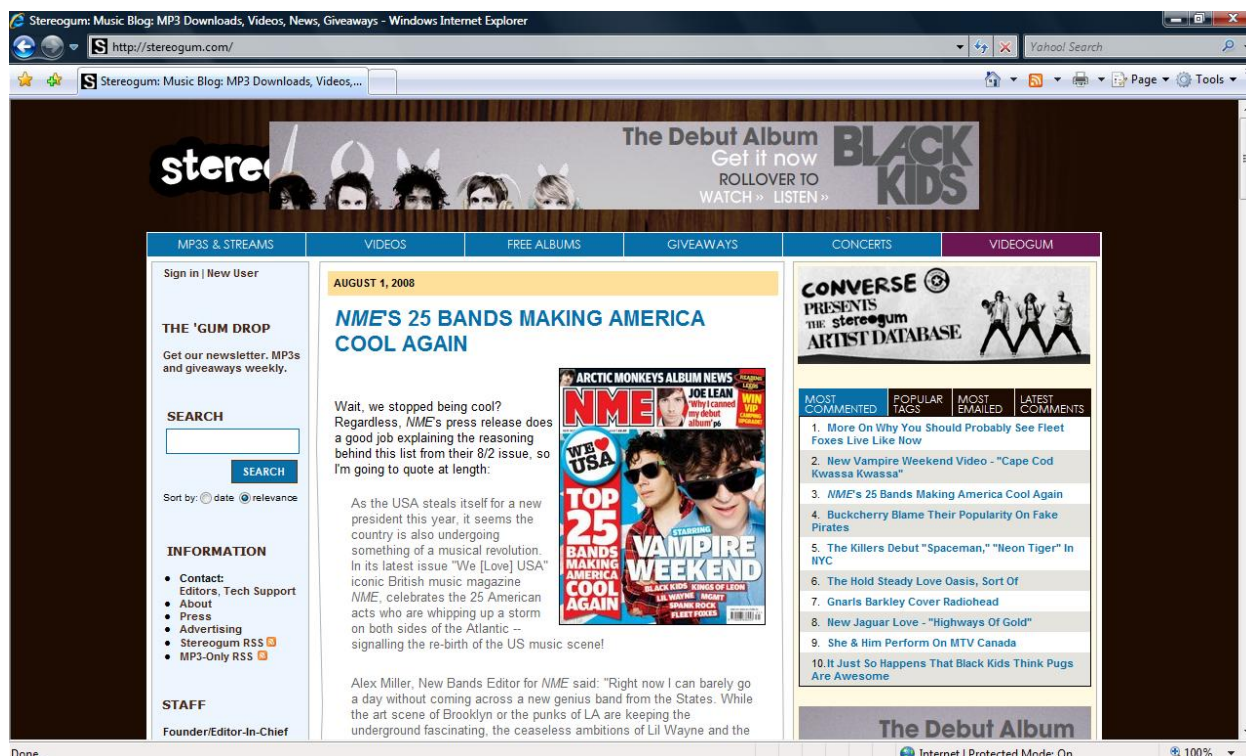

Figure 7 – *Stereogum* MP3 blog

along with MP3 download links, it also features a staff with editors and writers, contests, a

separate video site (*Videogum.com*, which is comparable to *Pitchfork*'s equivalent *Pitchfork.tv*),

regular features, and advertisements which *Pitchfork* has. It also has a newsletter in addition to

two different feeds a reader can subscribe to, including one general one and an MP3-only feed,

which *Stereogum* describes as "like a podcast" when one's mouse rolls over it. With these

different choices for feeds, it appears that *Stereogum* fits the genre of MP3 blog via its MP3-only

feed, but not necessarily with the general feed, which features music news in a similar manner to

Pitchfork. Furthermore, while *Pitchfork* does not post pieces in a reverse-chronological order, it

occasionally features free MP3 downloads along with its reviews, continuing to blur genres. To

complicate this comparison even further is the fact that several less prominent and less
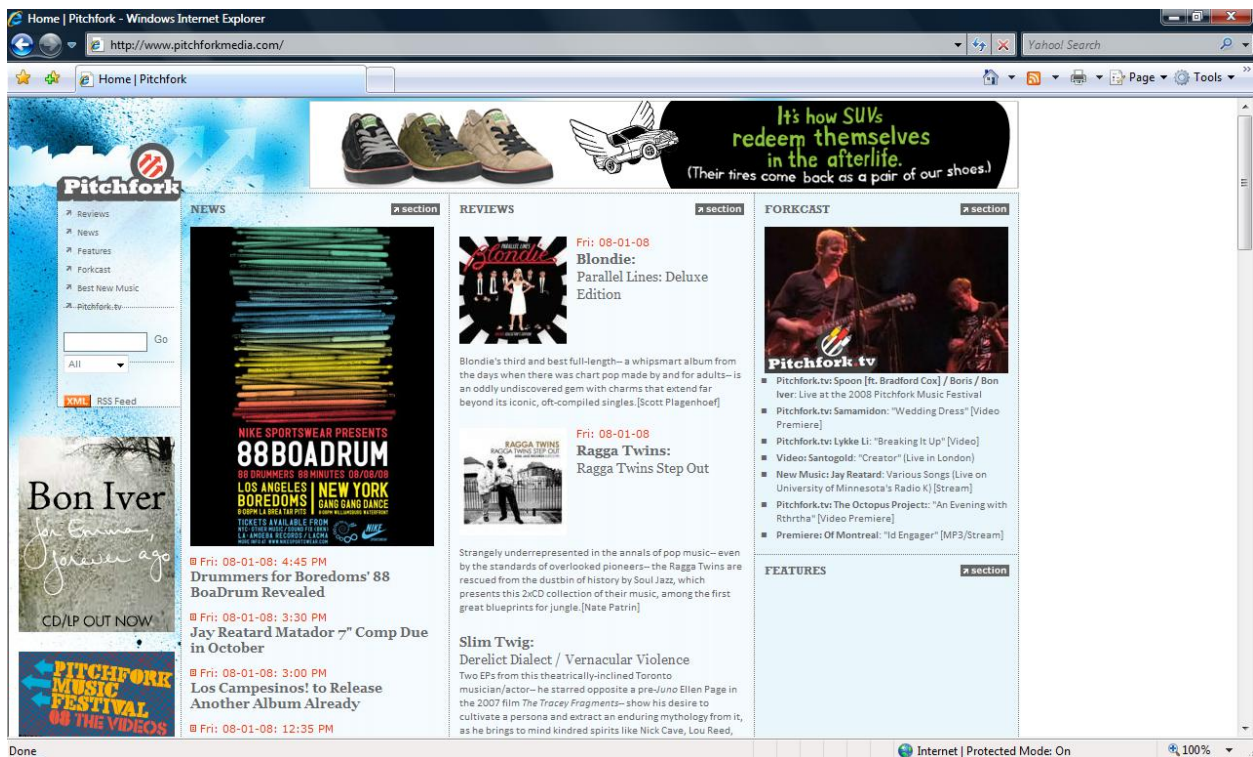

Figure 8 – *Pitchfork* music e-zine

professional MP3 blogs also feature advertisements, contests, regular features, and in some

cases, though not explicitly stated as having staff, an MP3 blog can have several people working

on it at once. Essentially, graphic style cannot become the sole basis for classifying a MP3 blog,

nor can linguistic style when both MP3 blogs and music e-zines can achieve the same level of design and can alternate between informal, more subjective language and journalistic, more objective language.

MP3 bloggers themselves have a difficult time definitively stating what makes an MP3 blog an MP3 blog. While many MP3 bloggers consider an MP3 blog to no longer fit the genre when the blog no longer focuses on music and/or stops allowing music to be downloaded from the site, there are a few who name specific aspects, which reflect various expectations and purposes. Cory Greenwell of *BackseatSandbar.com* says that MP3 blogs stop being MP3 blogs "when people stop putting time into it and only post youtube clips or links to other pages. There needs to be some information about the band and some degree of opinion or at least newsworthy information." In a similar vein, Morten Stytzer of *Hits in the Car* highlights this ambiguity: "As soon as posts aren't written from an 'I' point of view. A blog voices your personal opinion on music. As soon as people start posting too many tour dates posts etc. they are no longer music blogs in my opinion," and Marcy Cornell of *lost in your inbox* states, "I suppose blogs that are regurgitating press releases and only post about music they know is going to attract hits kind of defeats the purpose. If a blogger subsumes his or her own personality, what's the point of blogging?" All of these opinions reflect a need for the remediated diary element with a subjective, opinionated view on the MP3s being presented rather than a more journalistic/news remediation, which would be arguably more of a music e-zine. Also notable is the preference for text over merely *YouTube* clips and hyperlinks to other pages and a resistance to blogging just to attract the most traffic possible, implying a level of integrity in this discourse of music. Matthew Young of *Song, By Toad* reiterates the need for more diary remediation in defining the MP3 blog

genre while adding the aspect of professionalism: "Some become proper sites when they start to become very professional, but I don't know where that line is. As far as I am concerned a blog should be a personal journal, however you wish to interpret that. Many music blogs have moved well beyond this, but exactly when they did is hard to say." By distinguishing "professional" blogs as "proper sites," Young points to an amateur/professional binary that places MP3 blogs ideally on the amateur side in order to remain within the genre. Ultimately, it appears that the only ostensible way to tell the MP3 blog genre apart from other genres, including music blogs and music e-zines, is by other bloggers' reactions toward them and how they as a social group define them and themselves; part of these social definitions is bound to the rhetorical function of MP3 blogs, and in examining what MP3 bloggers actually write and create, it becomes apparent that *how* they form this genre affects *why* they form this genre. And the why is by no means singular nor is it simple.

Chapter 2: MP3 Blogs and Burke's Dramatism

In examining the rhetoric of MP3 blogs, Burke's Dramatistic Pentad is useful for illuminating the relationship between the remediation within the MP3 blog genre and the rhetorical motives of MP3 blogs. The Dramatistic Pentad, which is composed of five terms (act, agent, agency, scene and purpose) that can be arranged into various ratios according to which term appears to be influencing another, can be utilized to ascertain human motive (139). Burke asserts that because human motive is "essentially enigmatic" and will "manifest itself in inevitable ambiguities and inconsistencies" (142), it is important that these terms be used in multiple conjunctions with each other. Burke states that even "if you reduce the terms to any one of them, you will find them branching out again" (143). For the purpose of this argument about MP3 blogs' rhetoric, I will focus on the agency-purpose, purpose-act and scene-act ratios; while it may appear that agency-purpose and purpose-act could be conflated into agency-act, I will argue that these two ratios need to be drawn out to demonstrate how significant purpose is as a bridge between the way media shapes the content of MP3 blogs.

Using the agency-purpose ratio and purpose-act ratio, as defined by Burke's Dramatistic Pentad, I will show that MP3 blogs' purpose is significantly shaped and framed by their agency; however, their purpose is not singular or unified, and there are ultimately several potential purposes that often intersect and overlap in the actual act of blogging. These purposes are also closely linked with the media that MP3 blogs remediate and with the medium of MP3 files themselves; in effect, MP3 blogs absorb the purposes of these older media, but in the process of remediation and mixing of genres, they complicate any straightforward reason for their existence. Depending on how one views MP3 bloggers, either as fans or as new media music

critics/journalists, idealism and realism in MP3 blogs' rhetorical purposes can clash; the

seemingly explicit motive of altruistic promotion of music that the mainstream media ignores

can be challenged by the reality that MP3 bloggers are often blogging to promote themselves and

gain validation. At the same time, there are varying types of MP3 bloggers and MP3 blogs; some

prefer to use a lot of text to support what they are promoting, others use little or none, preferring

to post a video clip, image and/or only MP3s for others to sample. This variation relates to the

idealistic/realistic divide and once again varies amongst MP3 bloggers themselves; for some,

MP3 blogging should ideally be original posts, as opposed to repetition of press releases, and

there should be substantial text about artists the blogger truly loves while others realistically

want more traffic to their blogs and post what they believe will promote their blogs the most

effectively. Because of this clash of purpose, which can often exist within the same MP3 blog, it

becomes complicated, and leads me to the argument that the agency, meaning how the act of

MP3 blogging is achieved, is actually first responsible for the purpose, which, in turn, influences

the rhetorical act. This influence of agency on purpose can also be expressed by using Marshall

McLuhan's famous aphorism "the medium is the message"; in explaining this aphorism,

McLuhan states that "the personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any

extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each

extension of ourselves, or by any new technology" (23). Of the remediations at play in MP3

blogs, the most obvious ones are that of the written diary, traditional music journalism/criticism,

fanzine, pirate/alternative radio, and mixtape. By exploring what these media are used for, I will

argue that the reasons why MP3 bloggers create and maintain MP3 blogs are: self-

expression/identity formation, self-disclosure, music selection/curation and promotion, self-

promotion, community formation and subculture definition. These purposes, in turn, manifest themselves in the act of MP3 blogging.

Agency-purpose and Purpose-act Ratios

As noted in much of the research done on blogs as a genre, the printed diary is demonstrated to be an obvious predecessor for the blog with its personal tracking of life experiences and self-disclosure (Blood, 2002; McNeil, 2003; Qian and Scott, 2007; Reed, 2005; Sorapure, 2003). In other words, diaries' purposes are significantly linked to impulses for self-expression/identity formation and self-disclosure. In its remediation as a blog, however, the diary becomes public in a way that hand-written diaries generally are not, and in this publicity, blogs invite commentary and interaction with others reading them. According to Miller and Shepherd, this blurring of public and private is an effect of the *kairos* of the recent period and the rise of social networking sites and reality television:

> Both voyeurism and exhibitionism have been morally neutralized and are on their ways to becoming ordinary modes of being, subject positions that are inscribed in our mediated discourse. The cultural moment in which the blog appeared is a *kairos* that has shifted the boundary between the public and the private and the relationship between mediated and unmediated experience.

It is this public nature of blogs that also takes the self-disclosure purpose of the written diary and remediates it into a need for validation by others in a way that diarists were less likely to have. McNeill argues that "Writers who create online diaries express their desire for

acknowledgement, perhaps praise, for their life or their writing – some assurance that their voice

is being heard" (35), and this desire for acknowledgement and praise can translate itself into

monitoring one's blog with services like *Technorati* or accessories like site traffic meters, which

appear on many MP3 blogs. Even those who do not monitor their site for traffic can gauge their

impact on visitors by the amount of comments left on their blogs. For MP3 bloggers, this diary

aspect works in conjunction with the music being discussed and/or promoted in each post, but

the very fact that their writing is published for a worldwide audience points to a motivation other

than altruistic. In an informal examination of MP3 blog fan culture, Eric Harvey of the music

blog *Marathon Packs* argues that music bloggers are a "demographically slim group of (largely

indie rock) music fans, avidly promoting themselves as much if not more than the music they

post" ("On Shifting the Focus a Bit"). This purpose of self-promotion can appear in the desire to

monitor site traffic, to be linked to frequently by other blogs (including on other blogs' 'blogroll'

or list of links to favourite blogs), to be included on the major aggregators, and then to be

popular on these aggregators. This awareness of aggregator popularity and self-promotion in

conjunction with the music being promoted is evident in the post "MMMatthias: a contemporary

blog saga" by *The Lemur Blog*:

> Capricious be the mood swings and erratic be the hypes here and there
>
> in the blogosphere. Blesseth be thee glorious day when a simple man
>
> of German descent with nothing but two myspace views sent a home-
>
> made track to a little music-loving lemur in the kingdom of Sweden.
>
> The little lemur liked it, even loved it and thusly posted it on his
>
> humble little blog. In only three days it then climbed to the number

two spot on [The Hype Machine](#)'s list of the most popular tracks in the

blogosphere. Was it fate? Was it mere luck and coincidence with the

masses' current affections? Was it pure musical skill? I think the three

combined make out the ground for the most gripping and touching

saga of success and fame in the blogosphere. The dazzling story about

the simple man of the people, [MMMatthias](#), goes on...

Despite the playful tone, this post demonstrates an awareness of one's own popularity and

recognition by others in the same genre, implying an underlying motive for publicity that not

only encompasses the music a blogger promotes but his/her blog as well. There is also an

awareness of the difficulty of gaining attention in the current climate of do-it-yourself media

saturation. Another example of self-promotion is from *Swedesplease*, an American MP3 blog

with a focus on Swedish music, which is written by Craig Bonnell, a blogger who also writes the

MP3 blog *songs:illinois*. The "About" section on *Swedesplease* states that it has "gone on to be

recognized by Swedish Public Radio, Swedish press, The London Times, The Guardian, The

Chicago Tribune and on and on," and Bonnell also sells promotional t-shirts, advertising this

blog, via this site. In a post entitled "Swedesplease featured in Paste Magazine's world issue!,"

Bonnell notifies readers of his recognition in traditional music press: "Here's the piece I

mentioned the other day that's running now in this month's issue of [Paste Magazine](#) [...] Paste

has risen from an also-ran into a great publication poised to overtake Spin and Rolling Stone.

And I'm not just saying that because I'm in this month's issue (oh alright, maybe I am!!)" In

addition to this piece of text, the actual press clipping is included (see Fig.9). All of these
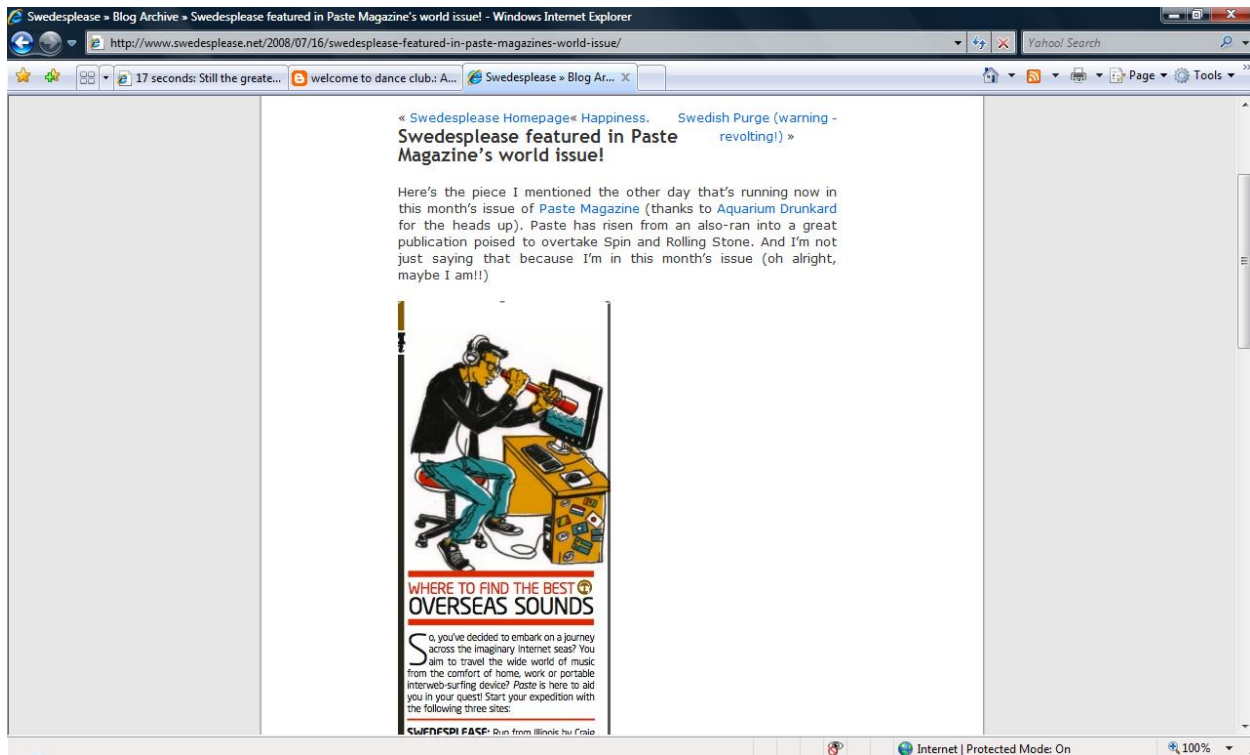
Figure 9 – Self-promotion evident in *Swedesplease* MP3 blog

features demonstrate a concern for self-promotion and for gaining publicity for the blog itself

rather than just for the music being offered. In this post, there is also an implication that certain

traditional music publications have more credibility than others, which is an issue that relates to

the expected discourse for music journalism and that appears in my last chapter along with

notions of subculture.

With the diary remediation in the MP3 blog medium, a purpose of self-disclosure is also

present. JC of the Scottish MP3 blog *The Vinyl Villain* produced a series of posts, entitled "45

45s at 45," which counted down the weeks until his forty-fifth birthday by discussing his top

forty-five favourite singles ("45 45s at 45: The Concept"). In each post in this series JC

explained his affective connection to the single being discussed, often with an anecdote about

how and why he purchased the single at the time. Another example comes from Adrian Bischoff of *ipickmynose* blog: to explain his reasoning for starting an MP3 blog, Bischoff says, "I was blogging on my personal blog too much about music for it to be a personal blog and too much about personal stuff for it to be a music blog," demonstrating this overlap in self-disclosure and music promotion. There are times when MP3 bloggers also use self-disclosure without a direct connection to the music featured. For example, in a post about the top eleven songs by The Wallflowers, one of the authors of the MP3 blog, *The Good, the Bad and the Unknown*, writes about being a father and how his two-year-old daughter is becoming more and more like him; he includes an anecdote about his daughter learning how to swear at basketball games, and notably, this story has nothing to relate it to the music in this post; however, because the blog emulates the diary, self-disclosure can be natural and incidental.

Connected to self-promotion and self-disclosure is self-expression, which manifests itself in each MP3 blog's individual style. Van Leeuwen also discusses style as having three categories: individual, social and lifestyle (140-5). While individual style "foregrounds individual difference" (140), social style "foregrounds the social determination of style, the idea that style expresses, not our individual personality and attitudes, but our social position, 'who we are,' in terms of the socially regulated activities we engage in and the roles we play within them" (143). Within the genre of MP3 blogging, I would argue that social style becomes less important than individual style; the very act of blogging is a personal one that relies on a person's individuality to maintain readership. MP3 blog style can be evident in the visual composition and design of the Web site, in the way the blog is written, in the music the blogger chooses to feature, and to a lesser extent, in their often brief profile information. Information about the blogger's

social position is often incidental; it can surface in some of the personal anecdotes, but it does not dominate the overall style of the blog; instead, individual style becomes apparent in the purpose of self-expression.

Because MP3 blogs' focus is obviously music and the affective relationship the blogger shares with it, the music the blogger chooses to share and write about is the primary factor in his/her public presentation of individuality and identity. For example, MP3 blog titles are often related to specific music references, already setting a style and expectations for the blog before anyone even reads it. *Too Much Apple Pie*, a British music blog, relates to the lyrics to "Kennedy" by the British indie band The Wedding Present; *I Am Fuel, You Are Friends* uses a line from a Pearl Jam song called "Leash"; *Number One Songs in Heaven* takes its name from a Sparks album; and *To Die By Your Side*, *Reel Around the Fountain*, *This Charming Blog*, and *My Big Mouth Strikes Again* all reference lyrics from English indie band The Smiths. The popularity of using Smiths' lyrics in MP3 blog titles is striking and points to the subcultural capital gained in using a band that was seen as one of the truly "independent" bands and a touchstone for independent music culture. Some blog titles can be more obscure musical references like the MP3 blog titled *Louder Than War*, which is a phrase taken from a statement Fidel Castro made about the Welsh band, the Manic Street Preachers, and *Spoilt Victorian Child*, a now defunct MP3 blog which takes its title from a 1993 b-side from the post-punk band The Fall. These more obscure references both act as subcultural capital and as a sign to attract like-minded individuals; if a visitor knows and understands the reference point for the blog's title, it is likely that the visitor will share interests with the blogger and enjoy the musical choices provided in the blog.

This cultivation of subcultural ethos, which is part of self-expression and identity formation, is discussed in much further detail in my final chapter.

In as much as MP3 blogs remediate diaries, they also remediate music journalism by putting forth opinions about music and reporting and/or commenting on music news. Some MP3 bloggers have given this purpose primacy over self-expression and self-disclosure, and many of these bloggers write in a traditional journalistic style that strictly reports tour dates or events in music news in a more objective fashion than those who favour the personal journal remediation. However, as demonstrated with the examples from *The Vinyl Villain* and *The Good, The Bad, and the Unknown*, there are just as many MP3 bloggers who relate the music they are promoting to their personal lives, reinstating the affective purpose of music in their lives and subverting traditional journalism. Unrestricted by word counts and editors, MP3 bloggers have the opportunity to remediate traditional music press and criticism while maintaining the journalistic impulse of publicly promoting and discussing music, ideally the music of those ignored by mainstream press. By including MP3s for sampling, allowing comments on each post and providing direct contact information like email addresses, MP3 bloggers are able to give their readers a more immediately active role in their music journalism. Whether MP3 blogs' journalistic impulse will be influential in a similar fashion to the way that the New Journalism was in the 1960s and 1970s is more difficult to determine.

Just as MP3 bloggers are aware of a purpose of self-promotion, they are also aware of their most explicitly stated purpose of promoting music with the ideal intent to gain publicity for music ignored by the mainstream and traditional music press. For example, in a post called "Matthew Ryan" on the Plague of Angels MP3 blog, Molotov writes: "A little love today for

underrated American singer-songwriter **MATTHEW RYAN**. If that first sentence causes you to quizzically query, "*Who*?"... well... that's exactly why this post is so necessary." Countless MP3 blogs post artists like Matthew Ryan, who are either self-produced and self-distributed, or on truly independent labels, meaning not on independent subsidiaries of major labels. In addition to independent, non-mainstream artists, MP3 bloggers also often report on obscure or rare tracks. A post called "DJ Rob 3" from the MP3 blog IHEARTCOMIX reads: "So I'm usually torn between posting my secret weapons and just keeping them for myself....you know, those songs you play and people go '*what the f*%k is that track!!*' Well, I guess I'll break down and let this one loose. It was initially passed to me via a bloggers email forum (grindin' nerd alert) by DJ Donna Summer from Birthday Party Berlin." This excerpt demonstrates the value placed on posting obscure tracks that not everyone else is aware of yet, and it also shows how MP3 bloggers use alternate networks for finding material to report about; in this case, the blogger uses a bloggers email forum, networking with DJs and music producers directly.

Though MP3 blogs definitely remediate music journalism, the inclusion of MP3 files which can be viewed as a "special offer," and the often positive nature of the posts written, make MP3 blogs a hybrid of jounalism/promotion in which a blogger can both write about an artist to promote the artist or "pitch" him/her to another blogger in a public relations role. An example of this blurring between journalism and PR is evident in the following excerpt about the currently popular band MGMT from the MP3 blog *It's the Money Shot*: "Around the time that the band started touring with Of Montreal, I desperately tried to pitch "Kids" to a number of blogs including **You Ain't No Picasso**. Just sayin'. Despite the fact that "Kids" is dominating on blogs these days, it apparently wasn't good enough back then!" ("boner4mgmt: part three, 2005").

Notably, this blogger attempted to promote MGMT not only as a journalist writing about the band, but also as a public relations person, pitching the band to other blogs so those other bloggers could write about MGMT. The implication in naming *You Ain't No Picasso* is twofold: firstly, that there exists a social hierarchy amongst MP3 bloggers, and secondly, that MP3 blogs can be just as dismissive of artists that later gain popularity as music journalists and record labels can be. In a similar vein of music promotion, *Sixeyes* MP3 blog states: "I'm always seeking something new, a new favourite song, or artist, and when I find something which I like I often share it with Sixeyes readers, hoping against hope that that one little post by little old me will start an internet brushfire à la Beirut and rocket the artist onto the pages of much worthier reads" ("Sixeyes: Reruns"). This blogger also points to a hierarchy inherent in the music blogosphere, where some blogs are "worthier reads" and thus have more sway in getting artists noticed, but this blog post also displays a prominent purpose of public relation-like music promotion that states a goal of starting an "internet brushfire," or in other words, a media blitz within the confines of the music blogosphere.

As MP3 blogs remediate music journalism, MP3 blog aggregators ultimately remediate the editor role. In addition to their aforesaid selection processes, aggregators collect and reify disparate materials, much like traditional consumer magazines do (Thornton 151). Van Leeuwen argues that discourse can be transformed by various processes, including exclusion and rearrangement (110-11). In the process of exclusion, discourses "can exclude elements of the social practice, for instance certain kinds of actors. This can have a very distorting effect" (110). In addition to exclusion, discourses "can rearrange the elements of social practices, for instances when it 'detemporalizes' elements which in reality have a specific order, when it imposes a

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specific order on actions which in reality do not need to take place in any specific order" (111).

Both of these transformative processes are primarily evident in the way the music blog

aggregators operate. Aggregators are fundamentally exclusive in that a MP3 blogger has to apply

for acceptance, and while no one prevents MP3 bloggers from actually acting within this

discourse, those who run the aggregators have the power to exclude certain actors from getting

attention via aggregation. This exclusion is significant in that without inclusion on one of the

main aggregators like *The Hype Machine* and *Elbows*, it is more difficult to attract a readership

because it is unlikely readers would find random MP3 blogs as easily in the overwhelming realm

of cyberspace. *The Hype Machine* and *Elbows* employ rearrangement by imposing a linear

chronology in which the most recent posts appear on the home page, beginning from the top of

the page, while later ones become relegated to subsequent pages, seemingly infinitely. Because

MP3 files are the method by which bloggers can be included most prominently in the

aggregators, they become more significant than text for those readers who are browsing the

aggregators, and in effect, place the reader in the position of journalist, too, as journalists are

traditionally in the position to receive promotional copies of music. Once again, the blogger's

purpose becomes a hybrid of journalist and public relations.

As agency, MP3s and their download links also play a significant role in shaping this

promotional purpose by shaping the discourse of music used by MP3 bloggers. Rather than the

countercultural, revolutionary discourse mentioned earlier in relation to older music journalism,

MP3 blogs use a discourse of music as love and affective meaning. While looking at MP3 blog

rhetoric in terms of Burke's Dramatistic Pentad, and keeping in mind that Van Leeuwen's

anatomy of discourse (104-9) bears a strong resemblance to Burke's Dramatistic Pentad, this

particular discourse emerges from MP3 blogs. Van Leeuwen defines discourse as "socially constructed knowledges of some aspect of reality" (94) while Hodge and Kress identify it as "the site where social forms of organization engage with systems of signs in the production of texts, thus reproducing or changing the sets of meanings and values which make up a culture" (6), and both definitions are highly applicable to the discourse of music found in MP3 blogs. While it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly what music as a discourse is for MP3 bloggers, as it encompasses fandom, communal experiences, and emotional connections, perhaps these factors can be consolidated into the abstraction of "love." On *Say Anything Syndrome* blog, the profile section reads: "this writing of text, this explanation of sounds: this is done out of ***love***. if you like what you hear, buy the album, buy a ticket to the gig, or buy the t-shirt. always promote and support what you love." On the blog *!tashed*, there is a similar declaration of "All songs posted here are also songs i personally listen to and love with all my red meat heart." Roland, creator of *Uberdrivel*, writes, "This is a blog born of passion for music, writing and random tangents," and the author of another blog called *Music Liberation* claims it is "a blog about my passion for new and old music alike. I will endeaver (sic) to post as reguarly (sic) as I can about the music that is doing it for me." *The Swill Merchant* uses a quote from music journalist, Lester Bangs, to express this idealistic passion inspired by music: "Don't ask me why I obsessively look to rock 'n' roll bands for some kind of model for a better society. I guess it's just that I glimpsed something beautiful in a flashbulb moment once, and perhaps mistaking it for prophecy have been seeking its fulfillment ever since." In all of these examples, music means love and passion, equating music to a transcendental experience; essentially, this discourse is benign rather than particularly revolutionary or incendiary.

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This discourse of music as love extends to the aggregators as well. *The Hype Machine* revamped its design last year, and one of the changes was the graphic motif; the new design prominently features a red heart in a speech bubble coming from a gramophone, a logo which now graces their merchandise and extends to the very usage of the site as users can favourite blogs and songs by clicking on small hearts next to them. The tagline that appears on their homepage reads: "Every day, thousands of people around the world write about music they love — and it all ends up here." In a comment responding to an article entitled "If You Love Music, Stop Taking It For Free" from the *Guardian* about the illegality of music collated by *The Hype Machine*, *The Daily Growl* argues that "Most decent music bloggers would agree that it's not about the free music, it's communicating the love for the music and giving your readers a chance to actually listen to what you're talking about." This particular discourse about music is affected by the inclusion of MP3s, which augment a "fannish" rather than critical purpose.

MP3 bloggers most often post about music they love rather than review new music indiscriminately or as an expected routine part of an occupation; this characteristic makes a clear distinction between traditional music press and MP3 bloggers. Rather than waste time on commentary that may be negative, MP3 bloggers, who are also rarely paid for their efforts and time, use their blogs to promote the music they feel positive about and refrain from tearing down artists that they may not like. This positive ethos ties into the purpose of providing download links to free MP3s; if an MP3 blogger were to express a negative opinion about a particular artist, it would seem counterintuitive to offer readers a chance to hear that artist. This is not to say that there are not any MP3 blogs that post negative reviews or critical posts; it is just

generally more common for MP3 blogs to write about music they are fans of and want to promote.

This blurring of journalism and PR in MP3 blog purpose, along with the positive music discourse shaped by the MP3 blog medium itself, can lead to conflict between expectations and purposes. Adam Farrell of Beggars Group and Matador Records says of MP3 bloggers, "there is a sense of entitlement with some... like they are Nick Kent or something. just cuz you write a blog, you don't need to roll VIP to a Cat Power show and do karaoke with her. i also think that while many of them perceive themselves as 'taste-makers' many of them don't have the depth of knowledge of music to be that and are more 'taste-followers.'" This comment makes a distinction between the purposes of MP3 blogs and the music journalism they remediate, emphasizing both an amateur/professional binary and a fan/journalist binary. Also demonstrating this conflict is a post on the music blog *Idolator* about a MP3 blogger's anger over being removed from a musical artist's guestlist. Maura Johnston writes:

> the new culture of writing about music, and how the lines are blurring between fans, members of the "press," and street-teamers by the second […] there have been many times recently where I've felt like the pool of people who were writing about certain (indie-skewing, it should be noted) records and the pool of people who were said records' target audience have overlapped in a really big way. ("We Haven't Had a Post About Music Bloggers in a Long Time")

A comment in reaction to Johnston's post about the music blogger bumped from the guestlist by The Mozfather argues that "Mp3 blogging used to be an outgrowth of obsessive collecting and

appreciating rather than a desire for journalistic fame or ad hits. Not that I think it's particularly wrong to be a PR blog. I just think it's tacky to complain about your lack of swag if you are also claiming to be an obsessive fan." In its criticism of MP3 blog purpose as being promotional rather than love for music, this comment points to yet another MP3 blog remediation – that of the fanzine.

Considering the fact that MP3 blogs are generally informal pieces of writing generated by unpaid fans and that they are often completely positive rather than critical, they appear to be the most recent incarnation of a micro-medium like fanzines. In her discussion of fanzines' contrast with traditional media, Thornton writes: "Free from the constraints of maintaining readerships, fanzines don't have to worry about being identified with a scene that has become passé" (140); in other words, fanzines are born of fanatical enthusiasm and are not bound to the same restrictions and concerns as traditional journalism. Atton expresses a similar opinion about fanzines in that they are "less concerned to create or critique a scene than to celebrate its history" (141). In the nearly overriding positivity in the discourse of MP3 blogging, their remediation of the fanzine becomes readily apparent. Fanzines are also presented as an alternative to mainstream media because of their existence outside of the economics of traditional media, giving them a subversive power and a way to participate in the art they are a fan of. MP3 blogs' remediation of fanzines, however, also share another similarity with their predecessors that complicates any purpose of subversion. As Thornton writes about fanzines, "Although these media are romanticized as pure and autonomous, they are generally tainted by and contingent upon other media and other business" (137), and this symbiotic relationship with traditional media is still apparent in the music blogosphere (see Chapter 3).

Cyberspace has been a fruitful environment for fans in general, and music fans have used the Internet and digital technology to exercise control over the media they consume and to build community. In their essay on the rock band New Model Army's online fan forum, O'Reilly and Doherty argue that this online space allows for a blurring between producer/consumer and performer/audience divides. They describe the forum as "an emotional sanctuary and a symbol of integrity and acceptance, a place to experience solidarity, protection and comfort in contrast to the cynical consumerism of mainstream music" (O'Reilly and Doherty 137). While pointing to a divide between a subculture and the mainstream, this contrast to consumerism can also be linked to the act of being a fan and participating in the fannish behaviour of collection and organization. In a comment in response to *Idolator*'s post "We Haven't Had a Post About Music Bloggers in a Long Time," gilligan states: "Music blogging is the equivalent to running a zine. And the content produced by the Internet zines is rather feeble. [...] Blogs are for obsessives and enthusists, but they don't translate for casual music listeners or people slumped in a cube all day at the office." This remark points to an MP3 blog remediation that moves beyond the text of the diary, journalism, and the fanzine and towards an act of selection, collection and organization.

The only obvious distinction of an MP3 blog from other blogs in other subject areas is the inclusion of links to download free MP3s, and this distinction can be related to the older media of both pirate/alternative radio and mix tapes. Described as the "antithesis to mainstream radio" (Thornton 147), pirate radio stations operate without an official license, playing music that is generally not heard on mainstream radio, and "Arguably, they are not about consumption at all; instead, they are about participation, development and mobilisation" (Atton 116). Closely related to the subversive power of fanzines and pirate radio, the mix tape is also remediated through

MP3 blogs, most specifically through the MP3s provided for readers not only to listen to, but to download and collect. In the case of both of these aural media, the MP3, as a medium, becomes the primary message. As a "container technology," MP3s are essentially invisible but for the content they carry (Sterne 827-8), and in turn, whichever medium contains the MP3s is also subsumed by the content of music; however, the medium which contains the MP3s can also be viewed as significant medium for meaningful consumption. In her essay on the iPod, Cosentino asserts that "As the traditional physical support of music (LPs, tapes or CDs) dissolve into the immaterial, infinitely replicable digital substance of music files, the aura of the work of art moves from the content to the medium – in this case, the playback device" (194), and I would argue that this focus on the medium over the message is an important aspect of current music trends. MP3 blogs themselves have become a medium for music, containing free MP3 downloads and streaming music, and like pirate/alternative radio and mixtapes, they also foster a sense of community.

With their accessibility, easy duplication and transportation, MP3s, by their very nature, are ideal for the fanatical impulse to select, collect and organize. In fact, the nature of the MP3 is also the reason for its use in aggregators; Anthony Volodkin of *The Hype Machine* says his

> systems depend on free mp3s in some ways due to the technical
> openness of the mp3 format. I can easily build systems to analyze and
> process mp3s, people can build flash players to play them, if
> downloaded they play on any device... this all certainly beats an
> assortment of other solutions with DRM or locked streaming/etc.

These features, which make MP3s universally accessible, enhances their immediacy and collectability, the latter characteristic being a significant one for the blog genre in general. In their analysis of the blog as a genre, Miller and Shepherd argued that the blog remediates the "*commonplace book* and the Wunderkammer" the latter of which as a "cabinet of wonders, was the 17th-century collector's personal museum; like the commonplace book, it served as a source of ideas as objects were interpreted in relation to each other." This remediation is remarkably similar to way DJ's radio sets and mixtapes function in their collection, selection and organization.

In light of the *kairos* for MP3 blogs, especially the aforesaid increased ease in self-production and self-promotion for artists and their fans, MP3 bloggers, who are largely not confined by the same circulation and advertising concerns as traditional music press and who have equal access to all of these artists' music, and in some cases, the artists themselves, step in to aid casual music fans or those who do not have the time nor interest in wading through thousands of new bands/artists to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak. This purpose that MP3 bloggers serve points to a new type of authority distinct from traditional journalism. Rather than an authority derived from a single source with an institutionalized position of credibility, Matheson says that news blogs "depend upon a different kind of authority instead, implying discernment, an ability to locate needles in the haystack of the internet and therefore a claim to breadth of knowledge, even comprehensiveness" (456). MP3 bloggers utilize this new kind of authority of discernment to point their audiences in the direction of music worth listening to in the face of overwhelming music choices. In a remediation of older genres that were used to collect and organize information that meant something to a person and that meant something in

relation to each other, blogs, in general, have a "function of information management in a time when the availability and volume of new information and ideas stimulate but also threaten to overwhelm the possibility of invention" (Miller and Shepherd 2004).

Burke's theory of terministic screens is useful in examining this act of selection with its purpose of making meaning from disparate elements of music. Burke asserts that "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (115). MP3 blogs as symbolic action on par with language, and thus as a rhetorical force, then, lies in the selection and arrangement of the MP3s themselves. According to Schmidt, blogging as an activity is framed by rules, relations and code, and amongst the rules, she identifies a subcategory of "procedural rules," which consist of selection rules, publication rules, and networking rules (1411-12). Selection rules "refer mainly to the blogger as the recipient of media content (including, but not limited to, other blogs), who has to decide which online sources to select for reading," placing the blogger in a reader role of information management (1412). In turn, MP3 blog aggregators provide an extra filter for information; Marcy Cornell, author of the *lost in your inbox*, says aggregators, when compared with MP3 blogs, are "much more impersonal, but serve an important function nonetheless, because really, how could an individual ever wade through all the millions of blogs that are out there by herself?" This information management leads to the making of meaning for the community of MP3 bloggers/fans.

Linked to this demonstrative quality of knowledge on blogs, is the allowance and necessity for sample MP3 files; in essence, if the MP3 blog reader is not completely convinced by the text of the post or would like further information, he/she can download the music and

listen for him/herself. This authority is a hybrid of the authority of a DJ/journalist as tastemaker (Thornton 62) and the authority of word-of-mouth advice from a fellow fan/friend. Using their discourse of the love of music, MP3 bloggers view themselves as using word-of-mouth rather than mass media techniques, making them "e-fluentials," who are "those opinion leaders who spread information via the Internet" (Sun et al 105), using online word-of-mouth (WOM). This WOM is more personal and can make meaning and affect out of art rather than treat art as a commodity. In *Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture*, a book edited by Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, Matias Viegener states:

> The mix tape is a form of American folk art: predigested cultural artifacts combined with homespun technology and magic marker turn the mix tape into a message in a bottle. I am no mere consumer of pop culture, it says, but also a producer of it. Mix tapes mark the moment of consumer culture in which listeners attained control over what they heard, in what order and at what cost.[…] an operation of taste, it is also cousin to the curious passion of the obsessive collector. Unable to express himself in 'pure' art, the collector finds himself on obsessive acquisition. Collecting is strangely hot and cold, passionate and calculating. ("Mixtape," *Wikipedia*)

This excerpt demonstrates the participatory nature of mixtapes, which through collection, selection and organization can be made available to a community of fans. According to Anderton, the industry's view of fans is that they are passive consumers, much like Adorno's view of fans as a homogeneous, manipulated mass, but Anderton argues that the act of

bootlegging music is, in fact, an active position through which fans make meanings of social

identity from the commodity of music (165). Mixtapes and their remediation in MP3 blogs, like

bootlegs, allow fans to share music through a medium outside of the mainstream capitalist

system.

This mixtape remediation in MP3 blogs is a prevalent aspect of MP3 blog rhetoric. In the

"About Me" section of his MP3 blog *Silence is a Rhythm Too*, Michael writes: "I love music and

have always loved to share my favorite music. This goes all the way back to the mix tape days of

the early '80s. This blog is an extension of that, a sort of an ongoing mix tape." Another MP3

blog entitled *NYC Friction* created a post in honour of Bastille Day, which was called "A Bastille

Day Mixtape" in which a user could either stream the entire "mixtape" via the Web site

muxtape.com, or download each song in the collection separately. In a similar fashion, the MP3

blog *Captain Obvious*, runs a series of mixtape posts which feature an image of a cassette tape

and divides the music mix into sides A and B like a cassette tape would have (see Fig.10).

Notably, there is no other text in the post. This absence of text is also apparent in a post called

"August Mix Yo" on the MP3 blog *Welcome to the Dance Club*, which with its selection of

exclusively remix tracks, emulates both a mixtape and a DJ set at a club. In these cases,

Figure 10 – A mixtape post from the MP3 blog *Captain Obvious* (http://www.thankscaptainobvious.net/)

text is not necessary to convey meaning; the MP3s themselves and the way in which they have

been selected and organized convey the meaning not present in actual language. According to

Burke's theory of dramatism, "Even if the act is non-verbal, it must be affected in some way by

the symbolic ingredient that is intrinsic to the human mind and constitutes part of man's essence"

(Rueckert 134), thus these acts of MP3 blogs continue to carry meaning because of the symbolic

value inherent in the MP3s.

Of course, MP3 blog posts that are not explicitly mixtape collections still function as

radio and mixtape remediation by the fact that bloggers select and arrange this music for their

audience; those posts with text emulate the banter of a radio DJ before playing tracks. Some

MP3 bloggers act as curators or DJs who preside over a niche audience and fosters community in that specific audience. For example, on the MP3 blog *Eet U Smakelijk* the blogger writes:

> after 86 posts I've felt I've said about all I had to say within the narrow
> confines of this blog, plus posting mp3s is getting more and more
> useless since just about everything has already been posted/ is
> available on CD/ can be found at p2p programs like soulseek, etc. [...]
> But the last straw for me was when, inspired by [Erich](#)'s posting of the
> first Bad Religion EP, I decided to post the first Offspring 45; after a
> bit of Googling it turned out that not only had [KBDrecords](#) already
> posted it 2 years ago, but I had commented on the post and totally
> forgotten about it! [...] I'm thinking of starting another blog but it
> won't be (strictly) about punk (or even music), i.e. it won't
> automatically attract a niche of interested people like this blog did, in
> which case I wonder if it's any use... ("Jubilee Edition")

This post demonstrates that this blogger's main purpose of selecting and presenting punk music was greatly affected by the availability of said music. In this case, the fact the music he was presenting was becoming less rare and more accessible through other channels made his blog redundant, placing an emphasis on the curating of music rather than the words accompanying it. It is also apparent that this blogger believes an MP3 blog should attract a niche community.

While music blogs are text-heavy and often read like personal essays or editorials found in the backpages of music magazines, in their remediation of radio and mixtapes, MP3 blogs can feature little or no text. For Carl Wilson, this aspect makes a clear distinction between MP3

blogs and music blogs, and he argues that the former are part of the reason there is less interaction and actual discussion amongst MP3 bloggers than there initially was when music blogging began. He states that MP3 blogs:

> turned the music-blog scene into an acquisitive feeding frenzy which spares little time for reflection and contemplation. It's a shame, as the earliest mp3 blogs such as [Said the Gramophone](#) and [Fluxblog](#) present an entirely different model, but few are the people who have followed in their model, compared to the here's-the-latest-leak-with-200-words-of-hype model. The earlier, more criticism-oriented bloggers lost some focus and, more so, I think, have been turned off by all that. ("Rock Critics Music Blog Symposium")

This argument takes an important position on music blog purpose, namely, that the purpose of a music blog should be about discussing the music rather than just "hyping" or promoting it and offering free music, taking MP3s out of the medium, thus changing it drastically. Maura Johnston, of *Idolator* notes a divide in purpose between MP3 blogs and music blogs, and MP3s are at the root of this divide:

> today, with the rise of the MP3 blog and the idea that a person doesn't need to write *about* a record in order to communicate what it sounds like, the space hasn't become just for critics–while there are some great writers running blogs that have MP3s and music samples on them, there's also been a rise in blogs that are much more enthusiasm-driven and interested in sharing music directly, without any verbal

clutter. There's a definite divide between the two generations of music

bloggers, with a few people (Matthew Perpetua of *Fluxblog*, Sean at

Said The Gramophone) straddling it. ("Rock Critics Music Blog

Symposium")

While Johnston does not take as accusatory a stance as Wilson does, she points to a shift in

purpose that came along with the MP3 blog genre. At the crux of this criticism and distinction of

MP3 blogs from music blogs, is the agency of MP3s and the resulting multiple remediations that,

in turn, shape the purpose and its attendant act.

Scene-act Ratio

In addition to the agency-purpose and purpose-act ratios, MP3 blogs' rhetoric can be

analyzed using a scene-act ratio, which examines the way in which the context of the act

contains the act, "expressing in fixed properties the same quality that the action expresses in

terms of development" (Burke 147). MP3 blogs' location in cyberspace significantly affects the

act of creating and maintaining MP3 blogs, and also generates interesting comparisons and

contrasts between the music blogosphere and the traditional music press, or its online

counterparts. Beyond the context of the music blogosphere, which includes other MP3 blogs and

their aggregators, is the larger realm of cyberspace with its myriad music applications, and

beyond this sphere, is the current state of the music industry. Because the concept of scene can

be "widened or narrowed (conceived of in terms of varying 'scope' or circumference)" (Burke

136), the act of MP3 blogs can be viewed in relation to a scene that encompasses the music

blogosphere, the realm of cyberspace and the general music industry.

Because MP3 blogs are specifically within the context of blog genre, which can be defined by its diary-like format of daily posts, they become more personalized and accessible for those writing them. In effect, anyone with a computer and Internet access can create their own blog. Since blogs can be updated at any minute, one gets a sense of hyper-immediacy. Within the specific context of MP3 blogging, this hyper-immediacy results in the apparent need to stay as current and forward-thinking as possible. Frank Yang of MP3 blog *Chromewaves* argues that this need is amplified by MP3 blog aggregators: "The nature of the aggregators in listing only the first sites to post a specific track creates a culture of 'must post first' in order to get the traffic, often at the expense of actually offering any sort of insight or commentary on the track." Though Yang and several other MP3 bloggers and journalists see this competitive aspect of MP3 blogs as a potentially negative characteristic, it is an inevitable result of the music blogosphere scene these MP3 blog acts find themselves in.

In addition to the speed of Internet technology, the technology of MP3 files has made the proliferation of music on the Internet difficult to control, and this development also has an influence on the act of MP3 blogging, contributing further to the hyper-immediacy of the MP3 blog act. In a post called "the first 8 tracks of weezer's *red album* have leaked...an obsessive fan's liveblog reaction" found on *Twelve Major Chords*, its author, Angus, provides an insight into this scene-act ratio:

> And I thought this week's big geek leak was Oasis' "Stop The
> Clocks" and scrapped Death In Vegas sessions. Little did I know that
> first eight tracks of Weezer's highly anticipated (at least around here)
> sixth record, *Weezer (The Red Album)*, would be mysteriously making

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their way online. Never one to let other's claim to have heard more

Weezer songs then myself, I grabbed them faster than you could say

'Buddy Holly.'"

Angus then goes on to describe his reaction to each track as he listens to it in real time. This post demonstrates how MP3 bloggers, in a specific context of the music blogosphere and the broader context of the immediacy of the Internet, are often in competition with each other over posting new music. Its description of the blogger's first listen and reactions in real time also points to the speed with which information can be posted and disseminated in the blogosphere.

This hyper-immediacy and access to so many other bloggers' opinions via the Internet and aggregators can also have an effect on perceived credibility or "hype." An example of this way in which the scene of the Internet affects the act of music blogging is found in a regular feature called "Buzzworthy or Not" of the New York-based MP3 blog *Pop Tarts Suck Toasted*. This feature takes an artist/band which is ranked high on the regularly updated popularity list on the home page of aggregators like *Elbows* and *The Hype Machine*, and then rates whether this popularity buzz is actually warranted. This particular example follows the American indie band This Is Ivy League:

Thoughts: All over the world people are writing about This Is Ivy

League. Obviously the band has a lot of left over buzz thanks to their

hand in Cobra Starship, but because of that band I have resisted and

written bad things about this band since I first heard their first song.

But as I've read review after review, comparing this band to the likes

of Belle & Sebastian and The Beach Boys, I have broken down a bit

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and actually listened to the album. Despite my preconceived, Cobra

Starship influenced notions I actually kind of like *This Is Ivy League*!

In looking at this one particular example of this feature, it becomes apparent that the act of writing about music in the music blogosphere is greatly affected by the environment of cyberspace immediacy and the trend-shaping of MP3 blog aggregators. Because the Internet is such an immediate medium with its speed and global reach, and the genre of blogging, with its time-stamped posts in real time, is a genre based on immediacy, MP3 blogging can often be affected by the need to compete with other MP3 blogs in the discovery and/or promotion of new music. The fact that the aggregators place disparate posts into a more collective context also generates a sense of hype or buzz around the artists/bands that most bloggers post about. With this sense of collective buzz, there is a danger that MP3 bloggers are not being original or any better than traditional music press, resulting in many MP3 bloggers attempting to resist this innate issue of the music blogosphere.

Within the same context as MP3 blogs, e-zines like *Pitchfork* operate in similar fashion of hyper-immediacy and the needed selectivity that comes with it. In 2006, Kiera Butler argued that *Pitchfork* functions in much the same way I would argue MP3 blog aggregators do, which is aiding overwhelmed music fans by sorting through the masses of new music for them and directing them to the "good" releases:

For those who don't have forty hours a week to devote to panning for gold in the vast muddy river of new releases, there's *Pitchfork* (www.pitchforkmedia.com), the eleven-year-old Web magazine that does the sifting for you. The main thing that distinguishes *Pitchfork*

from the *Rolling Stones* and *Spins* of the world is its focus: album

reviews — five new ones every day — that are aimed at helping the

overwhelmed listener. "In some other magazines, what this band or

that band did on the road gets more words than 'Is the record good?'

and 'Should you buy it?'" says Ryan Schreiber, *Pitchfork*'s thirty-

year-old founder and editor in chief. Not so at Pitchfork, where the

other features on the site [...] are merely extras.

This excerpt is notable in its criticism of traditional music press in much the same way MP3

blogs can be; however, *Pitchfork*'s focus on the music as album reviews and the fact *Pitchfork*

actually employs editors who directly read and oversee the reviews, make them different from

aggregators, which though exclusionary in certain ways, do not take an active role in influencing

or "editing" each post an MP3 blogger publishes. In essence, each post does not first go through

Anthony Volodkin at *The Hype Machine*; once an MP3 blog is accepted on *The Hype Machine*,

all of its posts are made available on it.

Expanding the scope of scene beyond MP3 blogs, their aggregators and their

predecessors/contemporaries of music e-zines, it is apparent that Web sites like *Last.fm*,

muxtape.com, *The Sixty-One*, *Amie Street* and *RCRD LBL* are further diversifying the way music

is consumed and shared on the Internet, and MP3 bloggers are often participants in and

proponents of these sites. These sites place emphasis on discovery of new music, self-identity

through music choices, social networking, and the individual's power over how music is

promoted; notably, these aspects correlate with the characteristics of MP3 blogs. *Last.fm* is a

Web site that combines aspects of social networking sites and Internet radio, where users can

build their own music profiles by creating public playlists, and by downloading the *Last.fm* software to their computers, users' preferences can be monitored via "scrobbling." Scrobbling is a process by which the Web site monitors the music interface that that specific user has on his/her computer and then makes recommendations based on which tracks the user listens to. This process also tracks which songs the user listens to the most, generating a more complete public profile on the Web site. *Last.fm* users can also network within groups and add friends to their profile much like social networking sites like *MySpace* and *Facebook*. Though *Last.fm* includes an extensive music library that is more inclusive than many other digital music libraries, it also often only includes a sample piece of a song rather than the full version, and users can only stream music from it rather than download from it. Many MP3 bloggers use their *Last.fm* playlists as widgets on their blogs to show their audience what their current tastes are, or they provide a link to their *Last.fm* profile, so that their readers can get an even more specific demonstration of who the blogger is musically.

Muxtape.com is a very recently developed site (Justin Oullette created it in March 2008) in which users can create their own "digital mixtape" from the site's music library or songs they upload themselves to share with others. In many ways, this concept correlates with the way MP3 bloggers view their blogs, but *muxtape.com* does not allow for commentary or searches; instead, it relies on a sense of serendipity where a user just stumbles across a stranger's mixtape and discovers something new. Of course there is also the option to share your specific mixtape URL with others, as though you were giving them an actual mixtape. In a similar fashion to MP3 blogs, *muxtape.com* provides the obligatory links to Web sites where you can legally purchase

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the tracks included on each playlist. This site's function is nearly identical to the non-textual posts on MP3 blogs.

The Sixty-One, a Web site which describes itself as a "browser- based game that turns music listening into an interactive adventure: earn experience points for finding cool music before other people do, unlock a diverse set of achievements as you play, [and] level up and gain new skills to flex your influence in the community," is yet another music-related Web site involved in the same scene as MP3 blogs. By awarding points to those with the "best taste" and allowing any musician to upload his/her music, *The Sixty-One* is blurring the boundaries between producer/consumer and fan/critic in much the same way MP3 blogs are.

The Web site *Amie Street* is included in *The Hype Machine* though it is actually an independent music download site that uses a "social network that facilitates music discovery and because we price music right - all songs start free and rise in price the more they are purchased. Our dynamic prices allow fans to buy music without breaking the bank and they serve as a useful tool for finding great music." Like *Last.fm* and *The Sixty-One*, *Amie Street* is purported to build community amongst music fans through WOM recommendations. This relatively recent and alternative way of selling and promoting music, with music's monetary worth increasing along with its popularity, is representative of the current climate of change and crisis in the music industry. This attempt at a new and creative way of still making music a commodity is apparent in other sites like Sellaband.com and Slicethepie.com, which both allow fans to invest directly into musicians' careers (Borzykowski 83), allowing for more interaction between producer and consumer without the ailing middleman of the traditional music industry.

Another site which takes elements of both MP3 blogs and alternative music retailers/labels is *RCRD LBL*, which is an exclusively online record label that was established a year ago, offering all of its music for free while generating its revenue through advertising and sponsorship. The online *New York Post* explains this method by saying, "In employing a business model similar to broadcast television, RCRD LBL is trying to counter the continuing decline in physical music sales by capitalizing on the swelling flow of advertising dollars online as well as the enormous traffic on peer-to-peer Web sites" ("On the Download"). Essentially, the success of RCRD LBL depends on an audience that is already linked to peer-to-peer Web sites. On coolfer.com, a blog that discusses issues involving the music industry, Glenn Peoples writes:

> those who already frequent music blogs for music will give RCRD
> LBL good traffic. But how much room for growth is there? The key to
> stardom for this business model is getting middle of the road
> consumers to visit on a regular basis. I wonder just how much
> potential traffic exists for music -- even free music -- that lies outside
> of the mainstream. ("RCRD LBL Launches")

Like MP3 blogs, then, *RCRD LBL* appears to be preaching to the converted by providing another resource for the subculture of MP3 bloggers, but not for those in the mainstream. *RCRD LBL* also further blurs the lines between MP3 blogs and record labels in that its "posts" featuring free downloads mimic the style of an MP3 blog, including access to an RSS feed. MP3 blogging has developed in step with the recent changes and developments of the music industry as new media radically shifts power away from the corporate sector of the music industry and into the hands of the musicians and their fans. In some cases, MP3 blogs themselves develop into independent

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record labels, including *Hate Something Beautiful* blog and its associated record label

IAMSOUND, and *Song, By Toad* and its Song, By Toad Records. In a climate where major

labels are scrambling to save themselves and their position as middleman for artists and fans,

MP3 bloggers are attempting to fill gaps.

By taking control of the media and artistic products that they consume in a scene which is

becoming more and more conducive to this type of control, MP3 bloggers and their aggregators

are not only persuading their readers to buy into both their blogs and the music they are

featuring, but they are presenting themselves as a subversive force and persuading readers to see

them as different from and against those who represent the "traditional" and "mainstream." This

brings us to an exploration of MP3 blogs' final purpose: subculture definition.

Chapter 3: The Subculture of MP3 Blogs

In his introduction to Kenneth Burke's *On Symbols and Society*, Gusfield argues that Burke does not use drama as a metaphor for human action because all thought and language is necessarily metaphorical; instead, Gusfield states that theatrical drama is dependent on human action because "human life contains conflict, contradiction, disobedience, negation as well as affirmation" (36). Burke's assertion that humans are "inventors of the negative" because they are symbol-using (63) is a significant one for the study of rhetoric and motives of persuasion. This inherent use of negativity in human understanding and explanation of the world around them is a useful tool in examining the rhetoric intrinsic to MP3 blogs. The world of MP3 blogs, also known more generally as the music blogosphere, increasingly becomes a site for conflict and drama as ethos and motives are questioned and re-defined, importantly, in terms of what they are not. The music blogosphere thrives on diversity and blogs can vary in several ways; some write within very confined niches/genres of music while others give a more general overview of music; some are highly professional Web sites while others are strictly a hobby built from a blogging site template; and some have a team of bloggers working on the same site while others are the product of one person's effort. Despite this diversity, there are commonalities in the way MP3 bloggers define themselves against what they perceive as negative aspects of traditional music press and even other bloggers. This use of the negative is both related to MP3 bloggers' formation of identity and bound up in an purpose-act ratio of Burke's dramatism, making the act of writing an MP3 blog highly dependent on and influenced by the MP3 blogger's purpose in defining the MP3 blogosphere as a subculture.

The Devil Has the Best Tuna, a British MP3 blog that defines its purpose as "dedicated to unearthing unknown, unheard, unseen, unheralded or downright unbelievable new or old, that have not yet hit the radars of the music papers, magazines and the British public," provides an example of the antipathy towards and criticism of the music press found in MP3 blog rhetoric. One of the most frequently targetted music publications is *New Musical Express* (*NME*), the British weekly music magazine, which has been in publication since 1952 and primarily targets young demographics, contrasting with monthly magazines like *Q*, *Mojo*, and *Uncut* that mainly cover older artists for older audiences; in essence, *NME* is the most likely to define and cover current trends, thus the closest to what most MP3 blogs, like *The Devil Has the Best Tuna*, do. In the post, "The Essence of Indie," the writer, who uses the pseudonym, The Devil, writes:

> Now the Devil has not been a big fan of the NME over the past couple of years. From the avoidable spat with Morrissey to the enduring obsession with self appointed "indie" celebrity non entities such as Amy Shitehouse and Lilly (sic) Allen; from the decline into an inkie Smash Hits to the seemingly endless promotion of sub standard childrens daytime pop acts such as Kate Nash and Jack Penate; from the dumbing down of journalistic standards (read review and interviews from the 70s and 80s and compare them to today it's like comparing a maths paper from 1950 with one from 2007!) to the frequent aborted attempts at creating scenes the NME has managed to depress more than inform or excite.

Notably, The Devil then goes on to praise one particular journalist from *NME* for writing a piece on what "indie" truly is; while this act may seem inconsistent with the blogger's attitude and

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ethos, it, in fact, further strengthens his position against *NME*. This contrast of praise serves to strengthen and highlight the perceived differences between traditional music journalism and MP3 blogging or what The Devil perceives music journalism discourse once was. By giving an example of what was positive about *NME*, The Devil actually emphasizes what the *NME* is generally not. By making this instance of positivity seem like a surprising and rare occurrence, The Devil further accentuates the contrast between the ideal state of music journalism and its opposite, which he believes is the regular state of *NME*. He aligns himself with the renegade/exceptional reporter from *NME* rather than *NME* itself, thereby persuading his audience of his own credible ethos.

In a similar act, *Turn the Page*, a blog maintained by two writers, Josh and Marc, utilizes a seemingly conflicted rhetorical stance to forge its identity in relation to the traditional music press. Josh states in a February post: "The fact that the NME awards went by last night unnoticed by myself just goes to show my opinions on them, naturally they are going to produce better results than most other awards shows, but still - I just don't really pay attention to the NME anymore." This convoluted statement simultaneously negates and praises *NME*, albeit in a backhanded fashion; while Josh declares that he no longer pays attention to *NME*, he does acknowledge that it will produce better results than other awards shows. Further complicating this stance, Josh then goes on to praise some interesting musical collaborations from the NME Awards show he just negated and actually includes links to download two of these collaborations. Like The Devil, Josh forges his own identity and ethos by contrasting it with the implied negative ethos of *NME*. In expressing surprise at the fact there were notable musical collaborations at the NME Awards, he implies that the normal state of *NME*, and what it, as a

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publication, represents, is negative and easily dismissed by "true" music fans. Josh positions his blog as a more credible source for music criticism and promotion by associating his blog with the exceptional surprises of *NME*, and not the regular state of the publication, creating a difficult tension to negotiate.

In a post by *The Cold Cut*, an MP3 blog run by a seventeen-year-old student in the UK, a more cursory remark reveals a similar tension between criticizing and actually utilizing the *NME*. The blogger writes: "I don't think Oasis are 'the best band ever', nor do I think that they 'haven't been relevant for 10 years' (quoted from the font of all knowledge *sic*: NME)" ("Glossy new Oasis demos...and a slamming?"). Though this blogger is being ironic and critical about *NME*, he is still using it as a reference point and an informational source about music, giving *NME* acknowledgement as an influential agent in the world of music criticism and journalism. By placing the *NME* on the negative side of the debate about Oasis, this blogger attempts to persuade his audience that he is the more balanced critic, acknowledging a middle ground of opinion.

This simultaneous reference to and criticism of the traditional music can also be used rhetorically to open up a forum for personal opinion. On the Scottish MP3 blog, *17 Seconds*, Ed writes a post called "Still the Greatest Video Ever" in which he states: "The other day, the [NME] were doing a vote on the greatest videos of all time. I was extremely disappointed that they hadn't even nominated Cloudbusting by Kate Bush, which I consider to be a way better video than ['Smells Like Teen Spirit'](#) or even [Hurt by Johnny Cash](#), or is that just heresy in this day and age?". After this piece of text, Ed embeds the *YouTube* clip of Kate Bush's "Cloudbusting" video, encouraging readers to view it and decide for themselves whether he or *NME* is correct.

This excerpt, though not as condemnatory as the previous examples, still criticizes *NME* for its criteria for music videos. Implied in this criticism is *NME*'s lack of breadth in musical knowledge in its predictable choices. In comparing himself against the traditional music press, Ed is able to express his own music knowledge.

Beyond this contrasting and criticizing of the general ethos of music publications, MP3 bloggers also attack and condemn specific practices found in connection with music journalism. For example, in February 2008, the men's magazine *Maxim* included a review of the new Black Crowes album without actually hearing the album. This incident then incited several comments from MP3 bloggers, including *Merry Swankster*, a blog run by a team of six bloggers, and *Song, By Toad*, a Scottish blog written and maintained by Matthew Young. *Merry Swankster*'s post, "Maxim reviews new Black Crowes without hearing it," and *Song, By Toad*'s "Rumbled!" both satirize the situation, placing MP3 blogging in a position of higher integrity than traditional journalism. *Merry Swankster* concludes the post with:

> Using a relevance scale similar to mother nature's food chain, legitimate magazine writers for magazines occupy a higher slot of influence than music bloggers. Naturally within the magazine caste exists its own separate hierarchy depending on the reputation of each publication, but surely due to immense reach and cultural penetration, even the sleaziest magazine gets more eyeballs than the best music blog. So while it's easy to write off a lazy, stupid decision by a "journalist" at Maxim, truth is it does matter.

In contrasting MP3 blogs with traditional print and positioning this blog against the practices of magazines like *Maxim*, its writer persuades his/her audience that this blog is the more credible and honest of the two. Additionally, by positioning *Maxim* within a hierarchy of print publications, *Merry Swankster* demonstrates its own set of standards and ideals of journalistic integrity. Notably, this post acknowledges the disadvantages of MP3 blogs, more specifically their lack of influence, but only to chastise the traditional press establishment.

In a similar condemnatory fashion, Young from *Song, By Toad* begins his post by dismissing the credibility of *Maxim* as a publication and questioning why this incident would be surprising. He then offers possible explanations for why this incident with *Maxim* occurred:

> Firstly, the limp, self-righteous one above basically masquerading a case of laziness and a total absence of integrity. No surprise there then. Secondly, perhaps they downloaded an illegally leaked copy beforehand and felt that the legal connotations of admitting to that would be too dubious so they were left with so few options that was the best they could come up with. ("Rumbled")

Through these remarks, Young specifically attacks *Maxim*'s integrity, once again, expressing a lack of surprise. He then raises the issue of illegally downloading music, which not only implies that publications like *Maxim* lack ethos, and are thus likely to commit illegal acts, but that they are also far more restricted by being such a widely-circulated publication – their official status makes them far more liable for legal issues than those without such a legitimized position. As *Merry Swankster* stated, publications like *Maxim* are more visible than the average MP3 blog, thus they must be more careful about how they obtain their music than an MP3 blogger. At the

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same time, it is implied that while MP3 blogs do not have the same influence and visibility traditional publications do, they deserve it and would not be as likely to jeopardize their ethos as the traditional press.

This type of criticism of traditional music press can also be conveyed as part of the mockery of old media by newer media that has ostensibly superceded it. One of *Stereogum*'s regular features is called Oldstand, in which the staff say, "Take our ink-stained hands and join us at the OldStand, where Jon McMillan goes to remind everyone what an honest-to-goodness music magazine is supposed to look like." In a post about the April 1992 issue of *Spin*, which chose the top seven bands of all-time, McMillan writes: "Yawn. *Rolling Stone* wants its canon back! Although, in fairness to *SPIN*, the world would not become thoroughly listified for another fifteen years (thanks for nothing, blogosphere!), so at the time this must have provoked heated arguments among the slacker set." This commentary demonstrates a critical attitude towards the traditional music press represented by *Spin* while simultaneously displaying the difference between the music press and the blog medium, implying the obsolescence of the former in the advent of the latter. McMillan also creates a comparison between *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*, which denigrates the former even more than the latter, supposedly more alternative, publication. In a similar mocking manner, McMillan examines the January 2000 issue of *Q* and states:

> So, you ask, who took home the (not so) coveted 1999 *Q* Award?
> Short answer: Travis. Long answer: also Travis. Look, I don't have
> any problem with the Stereophonics beating out Suede for Best
> Performance (although I maybe perhaps do have a problem with the
> Stereophonics in general), but can you believe Basement Jaxx won

Best New Act? What a joke. Gay Dad was robbed! The moral: as with
most lists involving Gay Dad, it's best not to take the results too
seriously.

Rather than criticize the magazine's pedestrian approach like he did *Spin*, with this post,
McMillan implies that the traditional music press is out-of-touch with "good" music and that it
cannot be taken seriously by true music fans. One more example from McMillan solidifies this
attitude of negative definition. Discussing the June 1994 issue of *Q* which featured a cover story
about Kurt Cobain's suicide and the headline "Why Kurt Cobain Had to Die," McMillan writes:

But here's the thing about *Q*, or at least the June 1994 issue: Despite
the shock & awe cover, it's a weirdly wonky affair. The writing, while
never quite approaching the depth of late-'70s *Rolling Stone*, or the
bite of early-'90s *SPIN*, has a thick formality that's completely at odds
with the joyful prose vamping of British cousins *NME* and *Melody*
Maker. It reads -- gasp -- like a corporate magazine, not a pre-
incarnation of a blog.

This particular piece clearly defines the discourse of the various members of the music press as
delineated by members of the MP3 blog subculture, and by doing so, reveals that certain
discourses, particularly the revolutionary/countercultural one of heydays for *Rolling Stone* and
Spin, are the most acceptable within the subculture. McMillan also implies that these admirable
journalistic discourses about music are the predecessors for MP3 blogs rather than more
corporate, thus mainstream, publications.

However, to complicate this aversion towards traditional music institutions further, MP3 bloggers also position themselves against other bloggers, whom they deem are less credible than themselves. A post in *Disco Delicious*, an Australian blog run by two bloggers named Andy and Trentertainment, demonstrates this conflict. Posted by Andy, "I'm Tired" reads:

> I could spend forever bitching about blogs and how (particularly in the
>
> case of new blogs) they seem to have become everything they started
>
> out being against and how I'm really disheartened. But that would take
>
> too long. [...] In any case, I'm far less enthusiastic about blogging than
>
> I used to be, hence the awful lack of posting.

These comments attempt to convince Andy's audience that he is morally above some of the "new blogs" and that these blogs are the antithesis of his blog, thus negative. According to Andy, older, more established MP3 blogs are closer to an ideal than more recent ones. While he does not explain the specifics of "everything they started out being against," by stating that they were "against" something, puts them in a revolutionary, seemingly anti-establishment position, which is a similar one to those positioning against traditional press. Once again, the ethos of MP3 blogging is tied to what it is not and what it is against.

In many cases, MP3 bloggers also employ *apologia*, a rhetorical defense of their opinions and actions, to justify and convince their audience of their subcultural credibility. In the music blogosphere, as in other subcultures, "subcultural capital," which "confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder" (Thornton 11), is important in ethos-building. The context of MP3 blogging, with its general position against the mainstream press and the popular music it promotes, creates an environment of hypersenstivity toward what constitutes popular, thus less

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credible, music. *The Blah Blah*, a primarily Christian music blog, posted a piece called "Jon Abel – Sometimes You Need Normal," in which the blogger writes: "I do like some "normal" music once in a while too. I really do enjoy quite a few songs by Delirous?, Shane and Shane, Lifehouse, and even Newsboys. I try not to be a total music snob, though I fear I'm becoming somewhat of one." This post demonstrates the perceived need to be discerning in music taste to the point of snobbishness in the realm of the MP3 blog subculture, further implying a purpose to operate against the traditional, mainstream press and promote music that is more obscure and outside the mainstream.

Much like *The Blah Blah*, but also bearing similarities to Andy's "I'm Tired" post on *Disco Delicious*, *Fat Planet*, an Australian MP3 blog, made a post that both defends its position while positioning itself against other MP3 bloggers. In this context, popularity among the general public is no longer the only aspect to be shunned by MP3 bloggers; artists' popularity among bloggers themselves becomes problematic. To defend promoting a "popular" Swedish singer Lykke Li, *Fat Planet* writes:

> I'm certainly not the first to write about **Lykke Li** and I'm sure I won't be the last. And while there's a tendency for blogs to swarm around hyped artists in an effort to stay painfully relevant, I'm jumping on this bandwagon for good reason - the reason being that 'Youth Novels' is a remarkable album, worthy of the attention it has already received; an album that has been on repeat rotation in the Fat Planet house since its Swedish release earlier this year. ("A Little Bit of Lykke Li")

By using terms like "painfully relevant" and "bandwagon," *Fat Planet* is being critical of MP3 blogs that appear to have less integrity and the wrong motives; in effect, *Fat Planet* is saying that it is more credible than other blogs because its motives are purely about the quality of music rather than whether the blog is relevant and/or popular or not; in essence, the blog does not follow the whims and hype that other blogs might, a quality which can be applied to the mainstream and music press.

In a highly revealing post, "Jesus Christ, That Was Fucking Boring," in *Song, By Toad*, Young expresses this internal conflict about alternative and mainstream music cultures. After several posts about bands on major record labels, he writes:

> Fuck me, I'm glad that's over with. Did you find that as dull as I did? Four consecutive posts about major bands on major labels that you could all just as easily have read about in Q Magazine. I even liked the Elbow and REM albums, but I still felt slightly dirty writing about them, although I don't know why [...] Why has it suddenly become so unsatisfying to write about bands of that stature? I don't think the answer lies in snobbery, per se. I have no shame in enjoying the really big and famous bands that I like, nor do I think anyone else should apologise for liking famous music - or fluffy, superficial pop for that matter [...] Maybe it's the club-ism; the exclusivity. We share something that *They* don't have their hands on yet so it feels more special, like a secret or something. There's also the issue of making a contribution, I suppose. Me bigging up the new REM album is utterly

irrelevant to the band whereas when I write about really small groups I

might just double their sales if a few of you go and buy something.

And they are much more delighted to see a positive review of their

music of course, and that always makes this a more satisfying thing to

do. Ultimately, I think it's about ownership, really. Pop culture is not

something most of us get to participate in in any meaningful way

whatsoever, so by writing about smaller bands it almost forces REM

and Supergrass to become Pop Culture, whereas the little unsigned

acts become Our Pop Culture - more personal, more involved and,

crucially I think, a smaller community to be a part of. One which may

be global in reach but is not global in numbers.

This lengthy excerpt is telling in its initial sense of apologia, strengthening Young's position in

the MP3 blog subculture by acknowledging that writing about mainstream and/or major label

acts is both boring and a chore. For Young, it becomes apparent that the purpose of MP3

bloggers' rhetoric is to remain distinct from mainstream culture, including major labels and

traditional music press, in order to promote those artists who are not already famous and/or

successful. Young's definition of "pop culture" is notable because it demonstrates how fluid a

concept like "pop culture" is, where bands, though considered "alternative" in one context, can

be "forced" into the realm of "pop culture" when compared with bands that are even more

outside the mainstream. Also significant is his use of the term "ownership," which implies that

once a band/artist is known outside the subculture, that band/artist is public property; whereas,

the lesser known, unsigned acts are specifically property of those within the subculture. His final

statement, in which he desires a pop culture community that is "global in reach" but "not global in numbers," reveals the purpose working at the heart of MP3 blogs' rhetoric: to expand worldwide attention for the artists, but only to those deemed part of the subculture, and thus, worthy of such attention. This pull between global reach and restricted numbers is expressed in a different way by Miller and Shepherd in their article about blog genre: "There's a frequently expressed tension between the desire to be noticed by large numbers of readers and the desire to be valued by a few loyal fans." This tension perhaps, then, not only points to the workings of a subculture, but to the generic features of the blog, which shape the purpose of MP3 blogs as well.

Like Young's musings over why he "feels dirty" writing about major label acts, the MP3 blog *So Much Silence* wonders about this inexplicable ambiguity between alternative and mainstream music. A post by Kevin entitled "Kidz in the Hall: Drivin Down the Block (El-P remix)" muses over the differences between indie and mainstream rap music and their fans: "What makes it OK now to dig a track that celebrates aimless cruising – 'got my seat on recline, turn up the Alpine' – when the same track by a mainstream artist would be shunned by the cool kids [...]? I don't really have an answer. It's just a curious phenomenon." This intangible, ostensibly inexplicable difference between what is acceptable to fans of alternative music and what is not acceptable demonstrates a similar contradiction to Young's piece on why he "feels dirty" writing about artists on major labels. Kevin's contradictions and ambiguity within the alternative/mainstream binary create a distinction between those within the subculture and those who are not; these feelings and choices, which do not seem logical, can only be understood by "the cool kids" themselves, making the idea of a subcultural identity among MP3 bloggers more apparent. Unlike Young, Kevin chooses to go no further in exploring these contradictions and

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feelings about why he may enjoy and/or write about certain alternative artists more than mainstream artists even when the content may be similar at times; however, both his post and Young's post reveal significant information about MP3 bloggers' purpose.

The purpose apparent in these posts and in many others is twofold: MP3 bloggers want to distinguish and define themselves against mainstream music and the traditional music press, and they want to expose their readers primarily to those independent artists who can afford very little promotion through mainstream channels. Other purposes, which are less explicitly stated, can be comprised of the need for subcultural capital and credibility. Essentially, MP3 bloggers' value to other bloggers and readers is communicated through the music they choose to post about and how they react to it; the more obscure and alternative the posted artists are, the more likely the MP3 blogger is to gain credibility. Therefore, not only does MP3 bloggers' rhetoric support Burke's theory of definition through the negative, but it also works with the concept of subculture. Thornton argues that the "social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn't" (Thornton 105), which is very congruent with what I have already demonstrated using the rhetorical acts of MP3 bloggers. If subculture is primarily a "form of Refusal" (Hebdige 2), the MP3 blogosphere appears to be a subculture. This form of refusal extends to an identity based on a position contrasted with others via a classification system known to MP3 bloggers specifically; as Bourdieu states, "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (*Distinction* 6). In addition to their general refusal of traditional music press and largely mainstream music, MP3 blogs are also sites of subcultural capital, where ethos and credibility are proven by which music a blogger recommends or has knowledge and/or possession of in the form of MP3 files.

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In her study of club cultures in Britain, Thornton describes subcultural capital as the "linchpin of an alternative hierarchy in which the axes of age, gender, sexuality and race are all employed in order to keep the determinations of class, income and occupation at bay" (105). In many ways, MP3 bloggers do create an alternative hierarchy based on music knowledge and taste, but I would argue that the axes of age, gender, sexuality and race are nearly just as denied as class, income and occupation; many MP3 bloggers keep such aspects of their identity a secret by using pseudonyms, and often it is impossible to determine what age and gender an MP3 blogger is without contacting them. I will acknowledge that age can sometimes play a role in the amount of subcultural capital an MP3 blogger has in that the older a blogger is, the more musical knowledge and actual music they are likely to amass, including older and rarer music, but this factor is less significant than the fact a blogger has knowledge about obscure or "cool" music; MP3 bloggers are more likely to judge and classify other MP3 bloggers by which bands and artists are featured and written about than any other factor. In this way, the subcultural capital used in the music blogosphere is a

> discursive means of 'distinction,' articulated through specialized knowledge. Those in possession of subcultural capital are conversant with, and able to an extent to define, the parameters of 'cool,' thereby accruing subcultural status. How subcultural capital is elaborated varies contextually, but possessing it implies knowing what is (and *being*) 'hip,' and seemingly intuitive. (Whelan 62)

As with other subcultures, in order to be a member, one must appear fluent in the specialized knowledge of music, but this specialized knowledge must seem to be innate.

This specialized knowledge can then be parlayed into power in the music marketplace. Jenkins argues that

> Bloggers take knowledge into their own hands, enabling successful navigation within and between these emerging knowledge cultures. One can see such behaviour as cooptation into commodity culture insofar as it sometimes collaborates with corporate interests, but one can also see it as increasing the diversity of media culture, providing opportunities for greater inclusiveness, and making commodity culture more responsive to consumers. (151)

This element of participatory fan culture demonstrates the power MP3 blogging can potentially wield in a reformed model of the music industry. In this way, MP3 blogging can be considered, in Bourdieu's words, "symbolic production" in which one

> has to consider as contributing to production not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artist, writer, etc.) but also the producers of the meaning and value of the work – critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such. (*The Field of Cultural Production*, 37)

MP3 bloggers already engage in symbolic production by assigning meaning and value to music through selection and organization.

Despite the way MP3 blogs position themselves as a subculture, issues arise when treating MP3 bloggers as such in that subcultures are most closely linked to and defined by youth

movements, often with a sartorial element. MP3 blogs are not confined to youth; while several bloggers are teenagers, a large portion of bloggers are between the ages of twenty and fifty, and because music criticism requires knowledge of the music being discussed in its relation to other artists, especially those from the past, maturity can be valued. This aspect of music criticism is mentioned in Butler's examination of *Pitchfork*, the music e-zine, which employs many young people, often in their teens. Butler states that "youthful passion has its limits" and that those younger music critics are often opining without knowledge of a context, leading to a less credible and extensive evaluation. In fact, of those who use *The Hype Machine* aggregator, a higher percentage of those between twenty-five and thirty-four use it than those under eighteen years of age, and eight percent of users are actually over thirty-five years old ("Demographics"). Also, while other subcultures often arose from the resistance of working classes (Hebdige 51-63), the majority of those using *The Hype Machine* are college-educated with fourteen percent of them either currently enrolled in or graduated from post-graduate school. Unlike other subcultures that can be identified by way they look and where they congregate, often garnering public notice, MP3 bloggers' visibility is generally confined to the realm of cyberspace, which though public, is global rather than local and less likely to be connected with a public face.

In any study of subculture or alternative media, it is necessary to be cautious when creating a subculture/mainstream binary. While the concept of the mainstream "grows out of the inextricability of the media and lived culture" (Thornton 109), meaning that the seeming universal accessibility of popular culture is what makes it popular and mainstream, it can have shifting definitions depending on perspective. As demonstrated in the rhetoric of MP3 bloggers, the MP3 blogger's ethos is often tied to a conflict between alternative and mainstream, whether

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the mainstream is perceived as the traditional music press, the major label music industry, or other, less legitimate, MP3 blogs; however, in the music blogosphere, this binary, though seemingly clear-cut and identity-defining, is problematic for several reasons, including the fact that there are subcultures within the "mainstream media," the lack of complete consensus among MP3 bloggers' attitudes toward music, and the difficulties in defining what fits into the categories of alternative and mainstream.

Music journalism and music fandom can be seen as subcultures in and of themselves – a music fan goes beyond a casual listener by desiring to increase his/her knowledge of it. The audiences who regularly purchase and read music press are already defining themselves against a mainstream culture that includes the cursory coverage of music via other popular culture/mass media outlets like Top 40 radio and music television. In other words, the traditional music press falls into its own self-defined subcultures, which manifest themselves in which musical genres each magazine covers and/or creates, who their target audience is, who their advertisers are, and what style their journalists write in. Though all music magazines would fall under the same discourse, they are of different styles, which create their subcultural identities in relation to each other. These distinctions are most prominent in genre-specific publications like *Metal Hammer*, *Mixmag*, and *Hip Hop Connection*, which very obviously exist to cover and critique a particular subculture, but every other music magazine fits into a specific subculture and style, even if it is not immediately apparent. These magazines often "pull together and reify the disparate materials which become subcultural homologies" (Thornton 151), and without a mission statement or editorial vision, a magazine cannot function. For example, although the British music magazine *Mojo* is not immediately recognizable as having a specific subculture (as many rock magazines

do not), it does cater to a specific audience and does so knowingly. In their online About Us section, *Mojo* states: "we like to think it's the music magazine you go to when you've grown out of all the others." This rhetorical statement both defines *Mojo* against "younger" and "trendier" music publications, increasing its particular ethos of mature credibility, and establishes its subcultural identity as a refusal of the trendier content of publications targeted at younger audiences.

An additional example of the difficulties in defining traditional music press as strictly mainstream is *Spin*, an American music magazine that began publication in 1985 with a focus on "alternative music," which Finnegan calls a "structure of pop culture resistance." He argues that *Spin* "offers a form that combines (sub)cultural opposition and mainstream fun, and it's a form that proved itself capable of keeping pace with the shifting forces of cultural Reaganism and the New Right in the late '80s and early '90s," and that this specific style of journalism takes on a postmodern stance that utilizes irony and self-analysis. I agree with the fact *Spin* does blur the line between subculture and mainstream, but though *Spin* may have proved itself capable of adapting throughout a decade, I would argue that this adaptability needs further evaluation in light of major editorial and staff changes at *Spin* within the last three years. Though irony and Generation-X postmodernism were highly popular in the decade Finnegan writes about, these aspects have faded along with the notion of Generation-X; as new editors and writers take over, especially those who do not identify themselves with the earlier generation, the style, and thus the subculture it serves, change. These kinds of "zeitgeist" music publications are always in danger of becoming irrelevant as time passes and attitudes change. *Select*, a British music magazine that was published from 1990 to 2000, is an illustration of how dependent music

magazines are on their specific subcultures and how precarious this position can be when a subculture is too restrictive or unstable. *Select* was closely tied with the "Britpop" or "Cool Britannia" music movement of the 1990's, which identified itself as a refusal of Americanization and a celebration of British nationalism, and thus, *Select* rose and fell with the subcultural group itself, a genre which famously blurred the lines between what was considered "indie" or alternative and "pop" or mainstream.

Further complicating the binary between a subculture/mainstream binary is the lack of consensus about attitudes toward music among MP3 bloggers themselves. Though a large number of MP3 bloggers position and define themselves against the mainstream, there are others who either embrace the mainstream or draw upon it in select cases. For example, there is an American MP3 blog called *Viva La Mainstream*, which has a profile that states: "I'm a music fan who's sick and tired of only reading music blogs dedicated to deifying pretentious indie bands and damning the run of the mill alt-rock acts you hear on the radio everyday as being corporate drones or whatever. So this blog gives everyone a fair shot." This blog, then, positions itself as against the MP3 blogs that, in turn, position themselves against the mainstream. With this kind of subversion of subversion, it becomes complicated to use a subculture/mainstream binary when discussing MP3 blogs as belonging to a subculture. Related to this difficulty in finding a consensus among MP3 bloggers, is the issue of defining what is alternative and what is mainstream. As demonstrated by the MP3 bloggers' rhetoric, opinions can vary about what kind of music and which artists qualify as alternative; as evidenced earlier in the *Song, By Toad* post about "pop culture" and the *So Much Silence* post about the ambiguity between indie and mainstream rap, the alternative/indie genre itself has become a difficult to categorize definitively.

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Though the alternative/mainstream binary can be ambiguous and blurred, MP3 blogs, in their rhetorical position against what *they* define as mainstream, demonstrate their own system of social semiotics to make meaning. Hodge and Kress base their theory of social semiotics primarily around the concepts of power and solidarity (3). In this model, those who control social meaning, control reality and the way the world is perceived. This control is generally in the hands of the mass media, which, in the world of music journalism and consumption, would include those journalistic institutions with capital and financial backing, whether through advertising or subscription. Hebdige relates this power imbalance to subculture formation by arguing that

> it should be obvious that access to the means by which ideas are
> disseminated in our society (ie: principally the mass media) is not the
> same for all classes. Some groups have more say, more opportunity to
> make rules, to organize meaning, while others are less favourably
> placed, have less power to produce and impose their definitions of the
> world on the world. (14)

In an act of subversion of this power, subcultures take aspects of the mainstream culture and re-assign their own meanings to them, thus creating their own solidarity in opposition to the mainstream and its meanings. As discussed earlier, subcultures use subcultural capital to establish their identity and ethos, and tied to this notion of subcultural capital is the concept of authenticity, which is "valued as a balm for media fatigue and as an antidote to commercial hype" (Thornton 26). Nevertheless, what happens when the subculture itself becomes a "hype machine"?

MP3 blog aggregators like *The Hype Machine* and *Elbows* have had a large impact on how MP3 blogs are perceived as a social group and/or community. By appearing to create a sense of solidarity, they have altered the perception of blogs as "passive in how they present their information and rely on an audience to seek them out" (Ayers 131), and in doing so, they have generated an image of power; by crawling the Web and collecting hundreds of posts from their respective MP3 blogs, a peak or wave of popularity can be discerned just by looking at how many of the posts feature the same artist or band, whether or not this popularity is truly representative of reality. While readers of MP3 blogs must still seek out the blog aggregators themselves, these aggregators have made it very easy for music fans to find MP3 blogs, and in a sense, they have become a synchronic syntagm of music tastes and trends. *Elbows* has a section entitled "What is Elbows?," where it presents itself as a "collection of great music blog posts and is meant to provide you a snapshot of what's going on in this new genre of blogging." Since the home pages of MP3 blog aggregators are updated every few minutes, they generate a sense of what is popular at that very particular moment in time. Because there is constant movement on this page as posts shift onto subsequent pages, these aggregators can also serve as a diachronic syntagm of music tastes and popularity (Hodge and Kress 17); a reader can track back as far as they want to see when certain artists or songs were popular.

The very rhetoric of *The Hype Machine* and *Elbows* is also evidence for a power to generate "hype," "buzz" or "popularity." They both constantly track which blogs and which artists are the most popular at any given moment by posting lists on their home pages, and *The Hype Machine* even has a link to a page entitled "2007 Music Blog Zeitgeist," which states: "Forget the magazine editors & big label marketing budgets. Our roundup is from some of the

most passionate music fans alive: music bloggers." These features all create a sense of collective

power akin to that of the traditional music press the MP3 bloggers position themselves against;

in effect, they create their own alternative hype with editorial staff replaced by those who run the

aggregators. This "alternative" hype is further complicated by the fact that the most popular

musical artists, as featured in the constantly updated polls on MP3 blog aggregators, are more

often than not artists on major labels that also promote themselves through traditional media, and

this hype fluctuates according to official releases. Examples of the artists featured in the "most

blogged artists" portion of *The Hype Machine* are Coldplay, MGMT, Radiohead, Katy Perry,

The Rolling Stones, and R.E.M, which are all major label artists who are also being covered in

both general mainstream press and music press. On August 3, 2008, the most blogged artist was

Grizzly Bear, an American band which is gaining popularity for its opening slot on the

Radiohead tour, demonstrating an attention garnered by association with another major label

artist. Despite its general propensity for hyping artists that are not truly independent, it is this

perceived ability to hype that has been noted in various ways in the traditional music press.

    In one strong example of the way the power of MP3 blogs has been noted by the music

press, the American music journalist, Andy Greenwald, wrote a cover story for the March 2008

issue of *Spin*, in which he focused on the sudden ascent and popularity of the indie rock band

Vampire Weekend due to their popularity with MP3 bloggers. He argues that Vampire

Weekend's

> unprecedented rise – Vampire Weekend are, for example, the first
>
> band ever to be shot for a *Spin* cover before they'd even released an
>
> album – inevitably makes them a target of the very same machine that

brought them this recognition: influential music blogs that champion

unsigned, unheralded acts, only to often turn their backs once those

acts become signed and heralded. (62-3)

Greenwald's criticism of MP3 blogs is based on the hyper-immediacy aspect of the MP3 blog

act, which is a result of both the agency and scene that MP3 blogs operate in. According to

Greenwald, this hyper-immediacy publicizes and popularizes bands before they are necessarily

worthy of this level of praise and attention, and he implies that MP3 bloggers are fickle,

abandoning bands as quickly as they hype them.

Similarly, in the April 2008 issue of the free Canadian music magazine, *Exclaim*,

MP3/music blogging is mentioned in a casual way in Cam Lindsay's feature on Canadian indie

band, Tokyo Police Club. Lindsay refers to "endless blog love" as one of the main factors in

generating buzz about this particular band, normalizing the presence of MP3 blogging and its

influence on generating hype for artists. In addition to this casual acknowledgement of blog

influence, Lindsay writes: "Message board and blog chat about Tokyo Police Club has recently

moved from praise for *A Lesson in Crime* to bitching about the delay in releasing their full-length

debut. A full two years have passed since the EP made a splash [...] an eternity for bands, and

especially for impatient fans with short attention spans seeking the next hot band" (27). This

passage implies similar sentiments to Greenwald's piece on Vampire Weekend – in short, MP3

bloggers need speed and immediacy in their music consumption in order to keep abreast of hype

and to stay loyal to an artist/band, implying fickleness. However, notably, both Greenwald's

article and this one are including the influence and opinions of MP3 blogs as evidence for the

value of the bands being featured, legitimizing the subculture even as they condemn it.

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When confronted with these common accusations of "hype and retreat" from the traditional music press, MP3 bloggers do not deny that this issue occurs; they vary slightly in their opinions as to why this behaviour happens while maintaining that truly good artists will not fall victim to this phenomenon. Matthew Young from *Song, By Toad* states: "Bullshit. Most people do this, never mind just music bloggers. I remember when this used to happen with singles: a group would stir a frenzy with a couple of great 7"s only for the album to disappoint. Remember that a great many groups only have a couple of good songs in them to begin with." Allan Cheng of *Allan's World of Music* agrees by saying, "I believe this happens in all avenues of music promotion and not just music blogs. People are always looking for the next best thing, whether it's a blog, magazine or newspaper [...] I think all avenues such as publications, tv and fans in general abandon artists once they've had success." These counterarguments point to the fact that MP3 blogs are remediation of previous media, including music journalism, and because hyper-immediacy and reach are aspects of the agency used, this negative characteristic of "hype and retreat" is remediated into a quicker, and more noticeable, cycle. Positioning MP3 blogs that belong in the subculture against those who do not, Thomas of *A.M. 180* claims that this issue comes from "the shitty blogs [...] that are just posting the newest mp3 from the latest band that they consider newsworthy. What they are doing is generating the illusion of excitement about a band that they don't really care about in the first place." At issue for Thomas is the ideal purpose of altruistically promoting bands conflicting with the reality of self-promotion amongst MP3 bloggers. Utilizing the previously discussed purpose of self-promotion, Matt Tyson, who writes the blog *Ear Farm*, says, "It's something I make a conscious effort to not do myself. It's kind of going to have to be expected though, since the only way thus far for blogs to make a name for themselves is to break bands." This tension between idealistic and realistic purposes is inherent

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in the genres of media that MP3 blogs remediate, and, like their hyper-immediacy, this tension can lead to a "moral panic" of sorts over how MP3 blogs are affecting the music industry.

Just as the traditional media has responded to MP3 blogs in criticizing their speed of "hype and retreat," the media has also attacked the issue of sharing MP3s, which has been a perennial issue since the widespread use of MP3s and peer-to-peer filesharing. Louis Pattison of *Guardian*, one of the UK's prominent newspapers, criticizes MP3 blogs and their aggregators for their seeming illegality in sharing MP3 files for free. In a 2007 online article entitled "If you love music, stop taking it for free" under the blogs section of *Guardian*'s Web site, Pattison writes:

> MP3 blogs - fan-run sites offering free downloadable music MP3s, typically operating without the consent of artist or label - are pretty popular right now. One blog is no big deal. When brought together by something like The Hype Machine - a central hub that tracks and conglomerates activity on hundreds upon hundreds of MP3 blogs - the situation looks pretty different. It is, in short, an HMV store's worth of music, offered up for absolutely nothing, every day [...] I'm coming to think that MP3 blogs are a more insidious - and ultimately, maybe more damaging - threat to smaller and medium sized labels than the likes of the copyright lawyer's most trumpeted bad guy, bittorrents. With torrents, you have to hunt for your files, the download can be pretty time consuming, and ultimately, you're under no illusions that what you're doing is of questionable legality - hey, the largest bittorrent tracker in the world isn't called The Pirate Bay for nothing.

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Blogs, by comparison, are quite a comfy affair: a bit of purple prose, a

nice picture rustled up on Google Images - hey, you could probably

read that 'Please support the artists' disclaimer at the side, pass the link

onto a friend and fool yourself into thinking you're spreading the good

word. You're not, of course. You're just cementing the idea in your

own mind that it's acceptable to take music for nothing.

This piece demonstrates the moral panic that Thornton claims is part of the traditional media's

relationship with a subculture (136). A notable feature of this article is the role that MP3 blog

aggregators, specifically *The Hype Machine*, play in Pattison's argument; the aggregator is the

source of the perceived collective power and solidarity of MP3 blogs, which then threaten the

more "legitimate" system of consumption that keeps traditional power structures and the status

quo intact. In Giesler's article on MP3 file sharing, he argues that this illegal sharing, or

cybernetic gift giving, "establishes an alternative exchange protocol that helps consumers contest

prevailing power structures that have long organized the music marketplace and establish new

patterns of power relations between music consumers and producers" (49), and this subversion of

power can be extended to MP3 blogging, especially since MP3 blogs also provide free music to

others both legally and illegally. Importantly, Pattison does not mention the fact that the majority

of MP3 blogs do not and often cannot provide download links for MP3s indefinitely with most

links expiring within a couple of weeks of posting, and he also errs in asserting that bittorrents,

which are less traceable filesharing protocols, are not easy to search and download; downloading

albums wholesale from torrent sites is a lot less time-consuming than hunting down all the tracks

of an album via blog aggregators. His article definitely takes him into the realm of "moral panic"

as he uses morality as the distinguishing factor between what he considers as openly aware music piracy and a more insidious piracy that he maintains masquerades as morally superior.

In looking at the comments reacting to this online article, several readers, who ostensibly have a deeper understanding and involvement in the subculture of MP3 blogging than Pattison does, submit counterarguments that both defend the subculture and raise larger debates about how consumption practices of music are changing, and with them, the way music and its traditional press are valued. A reader named BlueKephra refutes Pattison's claims by arguing:

> How much longer are people like you going to ignore the various "independent" studies (meaning not paid for by major-labels) that conclude that downloading music leads to increases in CD sales? There was another one published a week or two ago. Speaking personally, downloading music has led me to buy more CD's than ever before, because it's the only way I get to hear new music. There is virtually NOWHERE to hear/hear about new and truly independent music because the music media in this country, and it appears, most of the rest of the world, is so dire.

Her argument turns upon the claim that the traditional music media and major record labels are to blame because they do not allow for publicity of "truly independent" music. This claim of the increasing devolution and devaluation of the traditional music press echoes Anthony Volodkin's reasons for creating *The Hype Machine* in the first place:

> At the time, I found myself not knowing where to discover artists that people are truly excited about and that are outside of what I already

know in music. I felt I couldn't turn to music magazines or

commercial radio to have such an experience. I then found music

blogs and was blown away by the fact that people would write about

music just because they loved it and nothing more.

Another response by TheLetterO creates further counterargument and accuses Pattison of

generalizing MP3 blogs and ignoring the various remediations and purposes of the genre: "There

are a number of mp3 blogs out their specialising in Out Of Print (OOP) material, a lot of which

would almost surely disappear without trace without the bloggers themselves investing some

considerable effort - more often than not, having to rip from vinyl and clean up any

hissing/pops/clicks." By emphasizing this type of MP3 blog, which provides music that is no

longer available through "legitimate" channels of consumption, TheLetterO demonstrates the

fanatical purpose of obsessively collecting and curating. A reader named Dubsi raises a

significant point about the ambiguity of intellectual property rights in the current realm of digital

media "which begs the question about whether recordings should be viewed as art or product. If

we want our music to be considered art, it should follow art's tradition and effort be made to

make it freely available. If it's product, then call in the lawyers." Another reader, MetalMalcolm,

makes Dubsi's argument even more salient by asking, "when I buy a record from eBay, none of

that money goes to the musician or the record label. Am I stealing?" These remarks and

counterarguments about the current context for MP3 blogs point to a changing discourse of

music in which it could be viewed as art rather than a commodity, which is a subversive

discourse in light of the power traditionally held by the music industry. Further complicating this

context of illegal versus legal music downloads, is the fact that increasingly more artists and

labels are allowing legal free downloads of their work, including entire albums ("Free

Albums!").

Though much of the traditional media either criticizes or ignores MP3 blogs, there are

others who attempt to include them, but only to succeed in reinforcing their separateness from

the subculture. *New Musical Express*, which is often the most maligned music press in the music

blogosphere's rhetoric, included the category of "Best Music Blog" in its annual Shockwaves

Awards nominations, which listed *The Hype Machine*, *The Modern Age*, *Nothing But Green*

Lights, *Spinner* and *Stereogum*. The entire transcript of an *Elbows* forum discussion entitled

"Does NME even know what a music blog is?" (see Appendix A) about this incident

demonstrates the tensions between the music blogosphere and the traditional press while also

displaying the importance of correct classification within the subculture of MP3 blogging. By

including *The Hype Machine*, which is an aggregator, and *Spinner*, which is a music e-zine, in

their music blog category, *NME* seemingly misunderstands the semiotics and subcultural

classifications of MP3 blogs and is once again criticized and mocked by MP3 bloggers. In its

revelation of the intricacies in parsing out what exactly qualifies as an MP3 blog, this forum

thread displays the logonomic system at work in this subculture. Hodge and Kress define a

logonomic system as a "set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of

meaning; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive,

understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities

(how, when, why)" (4), and it is evident by this forum thread that those who are part of the MP3

blog subculture are those who meet the conditions of producing and receiving meaning within

the realm of MP3 blogging knowledge. While acknowledging that MP3 blogs cannot completely

replace music media like the glossy monthly music magazines due to time and money concerns along with the limitations of the blog medium, Matthew Young of *Song, By Toad* does call *NME* "obsolete" because MP3 blogs remediate the weekly new music magazine the most closely. Attached to this comment is the assumption that *NME* largely ignores the medium of MP3 blogs because it does not fully understand it and because it feels threatened by it. After performing a search on the *NME* Web site for any mention of MP3 blogs, this music blog nomination is the only mention of MP3 blogs, though *NME* maintains its own set of staff blogs without MP3s, verifying the general avoidance of acknowledging the new medium. Mike from one of the nominated blogs, *Nothing But Green Lights*, takes a slightly different stance to the outright challenge towards the music press presented by other bloggers: "I don't think we need to challenge them, but offer something different, and spark a discussion about music that isn't subject to editorial controls etc... giving away mp3s is on our side... for now." This suggestion still reinforces a sense of subculture in its inclusion of a freedom not available to those within the traditional system, and it also points once again to the significance of MP3s for this genre and subculture. Despite these positions against and/or separate from the traditional press, as with the symbiotic issues presented in MP3 blogs' rhetorical positioning against traditional music press, this discussion thread is dependent on the fact a blogger actually read *NME*, albeit the online version, in the first place. This dependence on what is considered the mainstream media for both information and as a power to define against and subvert further supports Thornton's theory of symbiosis, thus the subcultural identity of MP3 blogs.

In contrast to the traditional media's panic and negative attention for MP3 blogs, there are segments of the traditional media which focus on the legitimacy and profitability of MP3

blogs, acknowledging their position in the current music industry. In the April 2008 issue of *Spin*, David Browne wrote a feature entitled "Who Earns What," which highlights how much people involved with the music industry earn. Amongst occupations like publicists, record label executives, tour managers and producers, Browne includes music bloggers. Its inclusion in this feature tends to acknowledge and legitimize MP3 bloggers as professionals in their own right; by adding them to this article, the traditional music press establishment is acknowledging that MP3 bloggers are a part of the industry surrounding music and its promotion. Other traditional publications like *Rolling Stone* ("The Music Blog Boom") and *The Boston Globe* ("Listen. And Learn") praise MP3 blogs and herald them as the new way to discover and consume music while some advertisements actually reference the reviews given in MP3 blogs, including an ad in music magazine *Under the Radar* for The Acorn's album *Glory Hope Mountain* that quotes MP3 blog *Gorilla vs. Bear*. Along with these positive reactions are articles that highlight the financial and corporate potential of the subculture. An article entitled "Gatekeeper of the MP3 blogosphere" from the online version of *Fortune* magazine discusses the potential for *The Hype Machine* to work with the music industry to make money, but states that the aggregator operates in a "legal grey area," which is currently preventing major investors from supporting its development; once again, MP3s are at the basis of this genre and subculture, generating both genre identity and potential for subversion.

In examining how the traditional press is reacting to the emergence of MP3 blogs, Thornton's study on the media's reaction to the rave subculture in Britain is useful. She argues that the traditional media and the subculture exist in a symbiotic relationship in which "consumer magazines accrue credibility by affiliating themselves with subcultures, but also contribute to the

authentication of cultural forms in the process of covering and constructing subcultures" (155).

In the same way that traditional media uses the subculture, the subculture uses the media as a

reference point to define itself against. However, with more media attention of the sort that

Fortune has given to the MP3 blogosphere, the subculture may be heading ever closer to the

mainstream. Hebdige concludes his discussion of subculture by arguing that each subculture

"invariably ends with the simultaneous diffusion and defusion of the subcultural style" (93). If

each subculture ends with the mass culture co-opting it and thus reducing its power, it is worth

investigating how this effect can be related to the subculture of MP3 blogging. How will music

blogging be diffused and defused? Has this happened already?

One specific issue of contention for MP3 bloggers is that of advertising on blogs and

their aggregators. Because advertising is the basis for the established traditional music press and

is seen as influencing or interfering with the content of music publications, its presence within

the MP3 blogosphere is a conflicted one. Several MP3 blogs, especially those with a more

established, official presence, feature advertisements on their sites. In many cases, the MP3

bloggers who allow advertisers to purchase space on their blogs cite costs of hosting bandwidth

as the reason for this seemingly mainstream act. This conflict of ideology and practice is evident

in the explanations provided by *The Hype Machine* when one clicks on a link called "What's

With the Ads?":

> Many of you have been telling your friends about the Hype Machine
>
> and writing about the site on blogs and even in some publications. I
>
> really could not ask for more. It warms the heart to know that others
>
> find my small project so exciting. Thank you. With the new visitors

also comes an increase in traffic, which in turn ends up pushing my

hosting account over the monthly bandwidth limit. This gets

expensive. The ads are here to make sure you can keep enjoying the

Hype Machine. I am sure you like the site much better without them,

but at this point, they are a necessary evil. I'd prefer to avoid having

them altogether myself.

This apologetic justification reveals the anxieties of defusion for a subculture. The more

advertising MP3 blogs feature, the more they come to resemble the institution they are refusing,

and the more their ethos and contrary position is compromised. As with the conflict of ideal and

realistic purposes, this tension is inherent in the MP3 blog medium.

MP3 bloggers themselves appear divided on this issue of advertising. Like *The Hype

Machine*, several claim that they host advertisements on their blogs to cover the cost of hosting

their site and the bandwidth for their MP3 downloads, and some also use the money from

advertisers to fund their music-related activities (attending concerts, buying music, etc.), which

they argue is important for the content of their blogs. Conversely, many bloggers adamantly

refuse to host advertisements because they would compromise their integrity, and some cite the

negative impact ads have on the aesthetics of a blog. Paul from *Setting the Woods on Fire* says

he will not host advertisements on his blog because "it would be legally and morally wrong for

me to profit from sharing music that I did not create [...] making money from a music blog just

cheapens the whole enterprise. I want to be a blogger whose *only* motivation is passion for

music." Linda St. John of the blog *Speed of Dark* does not host advertisements on her blog

because she and her blog partner "do not run the blog as a business; we run it as a hobby [...] I

have also heard that an MP3 blog is more susceptible to notice by the RIAA if the blogger is making money, and that a blog could be liable for lawsuits if an artist does not like the blogger's opinion." While legality is a concern for both of these bloggers, what is more apparent is the need to maintain credibility and ethics to remain in the idealistic subculture against the mainstream. In contrast, Tim Dickinson of *The Blue Walrus* states that he does host advertisements: "I spend a decent amount of time on the blog and spend money on records and going to live shows which I then write about. It is only a hobby so I don't expect much money." Though St. John and Dickinson both consider blogging a hobby, Dickinson views the money he makes as a way to keep promoting the music that he is while implying the value of MP3 bloggers is equal to the value of the music being promoted. These arguments over advertisement also appeared in the *Elbows* forum thread entitled "Exchange of Guest Posts" (see Appendix B), which was started by Allan Cheng of *Allan's World of Music*, and which initially asked other bloggers if they would be willing to guest post on each others' blogs to increase each others' online visibility and promote each other. However, this thread about self-promotion eventually turned into a discussion about Cheng's use of advertisements with several bloggers debating the ethics of advertising on MP3 blogs. Similarly, some MP3 bloggers have also taken issue with *Stereogum*, which is one of the MP3 blogs with blurred genre lines between blog and music e-zine, for its use of sponsored music. In a short *Elbows* forum thread, "Converse presents: stereogum artist database," bloggers discussed the possibility that Converse's involvement with *Stereogum* as an advertiser was now influencing which artists get prominently featured. These debates and concerns over advertisement demonstrate how MP3 blogs, as a subculture, are in a constant conflict between idealistic and realistic purposes, which in turn, are greatly affected by the media that this subculture remediates.

Related to the issue of advertisements is the possible corporate ownership of MP3 blogs

and their aggregators. As with most online developments that initially served an

underground/subcultural audience in defiance of mass corporate involvement, including

YouTube, *MySpace* and *Facebook*, there is a threat that those who own mass media outlets and

conglomerates will purchase these subcultural developments and make them both mainstream

and subject to the rules and limitations put in place by those in power. Buzznet, a photo, journal,

and video-sharing social media network, has already acquired both *Stereogum* and *Idolator*. This

possible corporate acquisition is also an issue for aggregators. In a discussion post in the *Elbows*

forum, entitled "No one is saying, 'HEY ANTHONY, CAN YOU LEND ME SOME DOUGH?'

yet?" MP3 bloggers discussed a rumour that Anthony Volodkin, the founder/owner of *The Hype*

Machine, was being offered $10 million to sell *The Hype Machine* to media conglomerate

Viacom. Regardless of whether this rumour is true or not, the fact this situation could be a

prospect shows the possibility of diffusion and defusion for MP3 blogs in the future. Notably,

MP3 bloggers appear to have differing opinions on this possibility, including excitement over the

possibility of bloggers profiting, cynicism over the steady corporatization of the Internet and its

communities, and relative indifference, displaying diversity within the subculture and ultimately

depending on purpose. This diversity of responses is also evident in the forum thread reacting to

the Fortune article on the financial potential of *The Hype Machine* ("Fortune Article on MP3

Blogs" – See Appendix C).

Another major issue of diffusion and defusion for the MP3 blog subculture is their

relationship with the music industry, including record labels and their promotional departments

and public relations companies. The majority of MP3 bloggers I interviewed receive between ten

to thirty emails per day that promote bands/artists, but interestingly, very few or none from major labels. The bloggers I interviewed most often cited public relations companies, promoters and the artists themselves as those who communicated with them the most. This low number of promotional emails directly from labels may be linked to the difficulty in being a major, thus mainstream, label promoting to a subcultural medium. For example, in 2004, Warner Brothers Records became the first major label to ask MP3 bloggers to promote their signed band The Secret Machines. According to an article in the *New York Times*, which covered this incident, this plan backfired with only one blog, *Music For Robots*, posting the music provided by Warner, and this blog posted it with the apologetic title of "Music For Robots Sells Out," implying an issue with the MP3 blog subculture posting anything at the behest of what is considered to be mainstream corporations. In this same article, Matthew Perpetua, who publishes *Fluxblog*, said "he decided against posting the song, in part because 'I didn't want to look like the person who was going with anything the label was sending me.'" Furthering their failure, Warner tried to post anonymous positive comments about the band on various blogs, attempting to generate hype; instead, this tactic was discovered, and not only did the traditional media pick up on this story, but the MP3 bloggers themselves generated commentary and "reported this issue to death, mainly sneering at a corporate attempt to 'manufacture' cool" (Ayers, "Introduction," 9). With these fraught relationships emerging more and more frequently between MP3 bloggers, their aggregators, the music industry and advertisers, the future of MP3 blogging as a subculture remains in flux as bloggers negotiate between self-promotion and selling out.

Conclusion

"I think we are filling a gap that traditional magazines/papers left and with the musical revolution I think we have a big opportunity." - Yiyo

"As the music industry (and beyond) goes through the sea-change we will see blogs evolving alongside." - Colin

"Everything is moving towards branding; blogs and/or artists teaming up corporations and business. There's money to be made for everyone, which is good." - Scott McDonald

"Eventually all music fans will have some kind of online presence. The end result will be to clutter the market with 'noise.' Therefore, aggregator products will become more and more popular." – Paul

"I hope that music blogging becomes an acceptable part of the music business. If I am going to be persecuted by the RIAA every time I post an MP3 for a few weeks, I would just stop blogging." – Linda St. John

"I think there will be a process of overtaking mixed with merging with incumbent industries [...] When that happens it will be just another established medium, although as long as they don't find a way to drive out the true amateurs then there will still be that special aura about it – the single person talking to you constantly about music the way a friend would." – Matthew Young

"I think there's going to be a certain degree of corporate sponsorship, of conglomeration, of payola...it has already started...if history tells us anything it's that the music industry is going to find a way to get people to say what they want them to say (for money).

Eventually people will find a way to rebel against that and that's when we'll see the next generation of music blogs, which won't look like anything we're used to. They'll probably be built upon cybernetic telepathy and will be here a lot sooner than you think." – Matt Tyson

This is what MP3 bloggers had to say when asked what the future holds for MP3 blogs. It is evident from these predictions that the major issues for the future of MP3 blogs are bound up in what the purpose for MP3 blogs is and what it should become with further exposure to the mainstream. This purpose, as demonstrated, is closely tied to MP3s and the way they shape the medium of the MP3 blog. Just as MP3 files have had massive implications for the music industry in general, they are the primary feature of MP3 blogs, defining their genre, their rhetoric, and their subculture and shaping the discourse used in this medium. In turn, as a social group and medium, MP3 blogs will continue to shape the way music is promoted and consumed while embedding itself into the current context and climate of a music industry struggling to deal with the effects of intellectual property rights in a digital world. Connected to this ability to shape the way music is promoted and consumed is their purported influence and actual reach. As the music industry changes, so will the MP3 blogs.

While I have analyzed the rhetoric of MP3 blogs, and thus their theoretical ability to persuade, the influence of MP3 bloggers on others and on the music market is difficult to gauge without extensive research into both bloggers' and users' consumption behaviour and statistics; however, one might begin with *The Hype Machine*, which does track its own demographics and can illuminate the statistics of those who use the aggregator, thus those who are likely using MP3 blogs. *The Hype Machine* attracts over 900 000 unique visitors per month with forty-six percent of them from the United States, and the most popular countries for using *The Hype Machine*

following the United States are the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Australia, France, Sweden, Japan, Belgium, and the Netherlands ("Demographics"). As expected, these figures show a skew towards first-world Westernized countries with a high number of them English-speaking, showing that, at this point, MP3 blogs and their aggregators may not be particularly influential in a completely global context.

For *The Hype Machine*'s statistics on music discovery habits, like many of the bloggers I interviewed, the highest percentages were online discovery, music blogs, and friends or family, demonstrating an audience that is influenced primarily by word-of-mouth and active searching for information rather than passive consumption. Regarding music consumption habits, the highest percentage of users spent twenty-one to forty dollars per month on music with most towards live concerts and purchases in record shops; however, when interpreting this data, it is important to remember that these statistics reflect those who already use MP3 blogs and their aggregators, so these users are already predisposed to spend more time actively seeking new music, especially online as thirty-eight percent of them spend between four to eight hours online every day. Adam Farrell of Beggars Group and Matador Records recognizes the influence MP3 blogs have and that "they are still quite vital to the overall mix of promoting music"; however, he also adds that " newspapers are still hugely important for promoting tours and raising awareness. The Internet is just a bubble and a vast number of music fans live outside of it." There is still research to be done about the effects of actual influence and authority on consumption behaviour and music trends. In addition to a more extensive examination of MP3 blog impact, and in regards to the demographic information from *The Hype Machine*, it would be helpful to study

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how "democratic" and "global" MP3 blogs are, and whether the statistical information points to more social issues about globalization.

The remediation present in MP3 blogs, especially that of aural media, can also be related to the recent shifts in music consumption behaviour, which may be affected by media saturation and market fragmentation. In this different music economy, selectivity can take on greater meaning and influence on music consumption behaviour; in addition to the mushrooming do-it-yourself music industry and its drastically increasing number of bands/artists, the immediacy and accessibility of MP3 files as a medium is likely a significant factor in this need to filter musical commodities before purchasing. In agreement with many of the MP3 bloggers I interviewed, technopeasant, a reader who made a comment on Pattison's negative article on *The Hype Machine*, states that "One reason that downloads might be cutting into sales is because they allow us to be more selective. Wherever recommendations came from - friends, bloggers, journalists - we can sample before we buy and make up our own minds"; in other words, if an artist's music is not worth purchasing, it will not be purchased. This trend in music consumption behaviour appears to have connections to the way MP3 blogs remediate media that privileges both the aural and oral, allowing for communal sharing of music that puts greater power into the hands of fans and consumers.

Despite the absence of explicit identity markers in MP3 blogs, there is also still further work to be done in the areas of gender, race and social class amongst MP3 bloggers, especially in the possible correlation between the higher number of male music journalists (Davies 2001) and the higher number of male MP3 bloggers. It would be fruitful to explore whether any of these identity markers have an impact on the MP3 blog genre, or whether, in fact, the genre is the

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primary determinant of style and content. In addition to the possible relationships these features of identity can have on MP3 blogs and their social meaning, a longer, more comprehensive study, focused on how music journalism has shifted in the past few decades and whether these changes can be linked to the emergence and impact of MP3 blogs or not, could verify claims of negative changes in music discourse.

Just as the Internet and technology advances at a rapid rate, so does the blogosphere and MP3 blogs, and considering the relatively recent development of MP3 blogs as a genre, there are many possibilities for further and continued analysis. As new applications and new technological services proliferate, MP3 blogs may remediate other forms of media, or they may split into subgenres according to which media they emulate the most closely. With the increasing media attention and blurring of lines between consumer and producer, MP3 blogs are slowly entering into yet another relationship with the "legitimate" system that they have originally defined themselves against, including that of the amateur/professional binary; for example, Mike from *Nothing But Green Lights*, is currently also writing for *The Morning News*, an online magazine ("Hands on Heads"), and as more bands/artists feature press from MP3 blogs alongside more "official" press. In his discussion of bloggers in general, Jenkins proposes that:

> Ultimately, our media future could depend on the kind of uneasy truce
> that gets brokered between commercial media and these grassroots
> intermediaries. Imagine a world where there are two kinds of media
> power: one comes through media concentration, where any message
> gains authority simply by being broadcast on network television; the
> other one comes through grassroots intermediaries, where a message

gains visibility only if it is deemed relevant to a loose network of

diverse publics. (180)

Needless to say, this increase in power and solidarity among bloggers, especially among MP3

bloggers, is an area with both potential for cooptation and subversion, depending on how the

MP3 blog medium develops and remediates music as art and commodity.

Appendix A

[General](#): Does NME even know what a music blog is?

CommentAuthor[the daily growl](#)

So the NME Awards nominations are out. I wouldn't bother mentioning this - it's as mind-crushingly dull as you'd expect - except that them seem to have a new category of 'best music blog'. Interesting. It lists: The Hype Machine (last time I looked, that wasn't really a blog), The Modern Age, Nothing But Green Lights, Spinner, Stereogum

http://www.nme.com/news/nme/33925

I'd actually like to give Mike Green Lights some voting love, particularly since he's up against the biggest blog (and 'blog') in the world, but I just can't bring myself to vote for all the rest of the desperate shite. I mean, would you want to demean yourself by voting for 'Best Dressed' indie star (sponsored by TopShop)? If anyone can find a way to skip all that crap and vote for Mike, I'd be pleased.

CommentAuthor[chromewaves](#)

If I had pockets as deep as AOL's to get exclusive sessions and album streams, I'd be as great as Spinner too.

CommentAuthor[SongbyToad](#)

He has done an amazingly good job to get on that list at all. Given the rest of the rubbish.

And I am going to be the next Spinner. I have decided - so remember you heard it here first.

CommentAuthor[the daily growl](#)

Funny - I had never heard of Spinner and The Modern Age until this award. Well, I might have heard of Spinner, but I'd never been to the site. I obviously move in the wrong circles...

CommentAuthor[SongbyToad](#)

Yeah, music blogs.

NME must hate music blogs though, because we basically replace everything they do. There is no need for them anymore. The thicker glossies that pay writers to go out and research pieces and do proper writing is something we can't challenge anything like as much, partly because of time and money and access, but also related to the experience of reading a long, thoughtful article on a computer screen, which isn't great. But the NME? Obsolete.

CommentAuthor[squashed](#)

anything on the net with "www...." in its name is a blog.

wooo...

CommentAuthorsquashed

SongbyToad should write a complain.HEY my blog is bigger and better than the on on the list... haa haaa

CommentAuthorJ HoaS

This same NME poll was mentioned in the YAYBLOG section three days ago, and there are ten trillion "Who should host my shit" topics.

Look, then leap.

The Modern Age is one of the old-school NYC music blogs. Pretty sure she's never delved into MP3s. Like a lot of us, she's had better days/years/whatevers - she even mocked her nomination (she also has a second blog, So More Scene, that's interested in the sorts of bands that make up that NME poll's "Worst" list). But seeing that "never heard of" statement reminded me of this kid at a Gang of Four show who said, "These guys sound a lot like Bloc Party."

CommentAuthorsquashed

Is the nomination still open? Maybe we should do "p4k is not a blog" type of group voting. Except this time elect a blog that is not representative and make NME readers confuse.

CommentAuthorSongbyToad

Be nice, J. The Daily Growl is both a good bloke and a good blog. I don't know The Modern Age at all either, but that is not a list written by people who know or care at all about blogs, or at least that's how it appears to me.

CommentAuthormike green lights

> (quote) *Posted by: SongbyToad*

1. NME must hate music blogs though, because we basically replace everything they do. There is no need for them anymore...
2. ....something we can't challenge anything like as much, partly because of time and money and access, but also related to the experience of reading a long, thoughtful article on a computer screen, which isn't great.
3. But the NME? Obsolete.

1. I am surprised NME did a list, considering we rival them, in a small but increasingly significant way. Maybe they are looking to increasing their audiences awareness of music blogs (NME have just launched 5 or 6 of their own - not mp3 blogs though)

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2. I don't think we need to challenge them, but offer something different, and spark a discussion about music that isn't subject to editorial controls etc... giving away mp3s is on our side... for now.
3. I certainly wouldn't go as far as to call them obsolete - they serve a purpose, they are relevent and they set an agenda that the music industry pays attention to. But I don't buy it. Except for this week!

CommentAuthorSongbyToad

Yeah, obsolete was going a bit far. They have an audience and massive access to artists which can't be understimated. I guess that I think what they do is now being done better by the likes of Drowned in Sound and, to an extent, Pitchfork. Add the smaller blogs that keep right on the button of the news and I reckon NME might have some quick manoevering to do. Not that they aren't capable of doing it, though.

I hear what you say about offering something different to the glossies. Every time I write something that I'm really pleased with, like the interviews perhaps, I read the glossies' equivalent and it can be a bit depressing how far from being a proper writer it makes me feel. But then, a lot of a proper writers I know envy us the freedom and interactivity we get with our blogs, as well as the direct relationship with the audiences.

CommentAuthormike green lights

 (quote) *Posted by: SongbyToad*

I guess that I think what they do is now being done better by the likes of Drowned in Sound and, to an extent, Pitchfork.

They aren't directly competing with DiS and Pitchfork though - that's why they are placed next to Heat and O.K on the racks in the shops, not next to MOJO etc. Different audiences are being targetting, they offer similar content but are working towards very different purposes. (respect/ user-interaction/ vs international brand enhancement etc)

CommentAuthoranthony@hypem

Haha, yeah I tried to find someone there to tell them we aren't really a music blog, but uhhh...

CommentAuthormaura

fwiw mainstream media's cluelessness about the internet is like pretty much the same as it ever was. and hasn't pitchfork won a bunch of 'best blog' awards from people who should know better over the past few years? (nb that is't meant as a slam at pfork, i am talking about the fact that it's an ONLINE MAGAZINE not a blog)

CommentAuthorloudersoft

(Embedded YouTube clip)

Also: congratulations Mike, I'm going to go vote you up.

CommentAuthor[SongbyToad](#)

I was just talking to a chappie who plays in an Edinburgh band who ended up in conversation with some big cheese at Warner's talking about how his DIY online efforts and iTunes availability meant he had the same reach as any band on the planet, if not the same audience. The Warner's fellow in question behaved, in the words of Bill Hicks, like a dog that had just been shown a card trick.

Major labels may be full of intelligent people, as Adam has explained, but big companies can defeat any level of intelligence or creativity within their ranks. Two weeks of shitey biscuits and piss-weak coffee will do it.

CommentAuthor[torturegarden](#)

congratulations on this anyway mike, even if the NME is silly.

Note: For clarity, I have removed my own posts concerning interest in researching this area and the responses to it.

Appendix B

CommentAuthorchengy

Hey,

Guest posting to promote your own blog happens a lot around the blogosphere and I've seen a few people help each other out for various reasons.

Anyone up for guest posting with each other? We can have a big network and have an awesome blog orgy...

I'd figure it would just be more fun and more challenging if I were writing on someone else's blog and it would benefit all of us involved.

Leave a post and we'll work something out.

CommentAuthorThomas

sure, why not? i'd be willing to do something at some point.

CommentAuthorAutopsy IV

i'd do it so long as my blog and your blog are similar musically.
outside of s:i I don't think anyone here fits that bill.

CommentAuthorInvisible Limb

I was going to take you up on your offer but I decided to buy some ring tones instead.

CommentAuthorchengy

Invisible limb: not a fan of the new advertisements I'm trying out? I'd figure since it's only for the first pageview it wouldn't be that bad of an idea.

Autopsy: Hmm well you could have other bloggers come up with something that fits the bill. I was assuming that instead of just posting what I would on my blog, I would step outside the box and try to review/write something more similar musicially. It wouldn't be that good if we all sticked to what we normally do anyway.

CommentAuthorsongsillinois

no, no, it's a bad idea, I would never return to a blog that had such an intrusive ad. I never quite understand these guest writer things on blogs with ads either. Since you have advertising how will you split the revenue? Otherwise what's in it for the guest blogger? Fame and fortune by way of Alans Music World? I think not.

CommentAuthorThomas

"otherwise what's in it for the guest blogger? fame and fortune by way of Alans Music World, I think not"

i was thinking more in friendly terms, but maybe i was reading too much into the offer. an ad is an ad, but it actually slowed down my computer and made everything run sluggish when i visited your blog, so i have to agree that it is quite irritating.

CommentAuthorchengy

k im taking it off.

CommentAuthorchengy

@songillinois: well that's why it's an exchange...it isn't just one way slavery. In addition, you can broaden your readership by guest posting on another blogs. I never figured ads would figure into the equation...

CommentAuthorolneyce

Yeah, wow. People are free to put whatever they want on their own sites, but I would never return to a blog that punched me in the gut with an ad like that, no matter how much I liked the content.

CommentAuthorchengy

Okay, I took it off, it'll come off at the end of the day. I haven't seen any complaints other then from you but that's beside the point. I was trying different ways of monetizing and this is the 2nd day I had it.

Please just stay on topic. It'll be off and forgotten already.

CommentAuthorPaul S

@chengy - People come to your site because you are giving away free music that you did not create. So why is it OK (morally, ethically, or legally) to "monetize" their visits? A blog that's making money from its "hits" comes a little bit too close to being a bootlegger, I think. We're supposed to be doing this out love for the music--not as a business venture. Or at least that's the hype.

@songs:illinois - I think exchanging guest posts is a nice way to build up the community feel of the blog world. And it also may provide an opportunity to reach a slightly different audience than your normal fare. For instance, Brendan from The Rising Storm posted a bluegrass article on my site because he loves bluegrass but did not think it would really fit in with the psych and country-rock that he usually features.

CommentAuthorchengy

Yeah you're right there's no real arguing with that....but but....I'm a whore? lol thats all I can think of.

CommentAuthorPaul S

LOL

CommentAuthorSean RockSellout

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Paul, do you really believe blogs should be 100% without ads of any kind? Blogs cost money to create (server expenses, travel expenses for shows, etc.). They cost time (and as the old man used to say - actually, I think he still says it - time = money). If they're good, they typically require a great deal of effort. I agree that massive, full-page ads aren't the way to go, but I can't see anything wrong with a Paste ad on the side column or something similar. No one is going to become a millionaire thanks to a blog - well, maybe Stereogum ;) - but I don't think it contradicts my love of music if I want to offset some of the costs involved. We have always made the effort to make sure ads on the site are for things we'd personally be willing to fork out cash for, though sometimes you don't have that option. I'm just curious if you feel it's a blanket rule with no exceptions.

Chengy, I had a comment completely unrelated to ads that's from a purely visual standpoint: The blue/aqua is kind of overwhelming. You might try making the ripped pages (entries) a slightly different color, just to add a bit of contrast. Otherwise I sort of feel like I'm drowning.

CommentAuthorSongbyToad

I think the implication is that as soon as you make money out of it there is a perfectly reasonable, if not entirely clear-cut around the edges, argument to be made that you are using someone else's creative efforts in order to line your own pockets. However wafer-thin that lining may be.

CommentAuthorsongsillinois

I've heard this argument before "blogs take so much time/work/money etc etc" but no one is forcing you to do an mp3 blog. So yes I think accepting ads when you are linking to files you don't have permission to post crosses that line. If you say you love music and just want to support the artists than take that $150-200 hit per year and be happy your helping.

CommentAuthorSongbyToad

It's the permission thing I suppose, isn't it. Ads and revenue are fine but if artists don't then choose to contribute to that process, then that's fair enough. It is certainly a little cheeky to assume that they will.

But given how grey an area 'permission' is in general, what with the tacit permission we have to post plenty of things, and given that income doesn't really equal profit, what with hosting and so on, then I am not sure it's entirely cut and dried.

CommentAuthorSean RockSellout

I agree, no one is forcing me to blog. However, most of the mp3's we share we DO have permission to post. It's not like we're posting music that is pre-release or leaked. I'd say 90% of everything we've ever posted was sent to us either A)from the label, B)from the artist or C)from a third-party marketing company. And in all 3 of those cases, they've clearly seen the site and don't have a problem with the ads. In other cases, we've contacted the artist or label to see if any material is available.

If you feel that strongly about ads, I presume you also don't accept any other perks. Free admission to shows, for instance. After all, concert tickets have a corresponding dollar value, so presumably you would refuse them and choose to fork out the cash for tickets in order to support the artist. I'd also guess you turn back album advances, or at least purchase the full retail version once it becomes available. Plus, if you're

posting 'files you don't have permission to post', isn't that an ethical violation in and of itself? If you don't have permission to post something, shouldn't you not post it then?

I'm not trying to be obnoxious here, I've just seen a lot of holes in the ethics issue when it comes to blogging.

CommentAuthorpuddlegum

I wouldn't view guest blogging on someone's blog with ads as though you're making money for them (so what if you are). If anything, you're exposing your name and blog to a different audience. It's actually an effective way to bring traffic to your blog.

CommentAuthorSongbyToad

Personally, I was talking more about ads in general, rather than making comment on Chengys guest posting idea.

CommentAuthorpuddlegum

Ah... I didn't see the ad so I can't comment.
There is a fine balance with placing an ad somewhere so people will notice/click on it, and making it intrusive. After 12 years we've trained our eyes to overlook ads unless they're in a strange place (in the middle of the content). Even then we immediately notice what's an ad and what isn't.

Appendix C

General: Fortune Article on MP3 Blogs

CommentAuthorsongsillinois

Same old same old but always a little encouraging to read about possibly successful business plans.

(http://money.cnn.com/2008/06/16/technology/music_blogs.fortune/index.htm?section=money_latest)

CommentAuthorsquashed

And even the biggest legit ones are too small to have much clout with big media buyers. Thefader.com, for instance, has 93,000 unique monthly users. RCRD LBL has 125,000. Thetripwire.com, an "indie" rock destination, has 15,000. The hip-hop oriented 1200squad.com has only registered users. That's because it doesn't allow just anybody to join. So far only 2,500 people have qualified.

By rolling the sites into a network, Cohen and Stone can now approach advertisers with an audience of nearly 240,000. "It's easier for our corporate clients to get their heads around this because they aren't buying 12 different sites," says Stone.

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wow, talking about pointing out the boring side of the scene... heh heh.

CommentAuthorchromewaves

who/where/what is this Tripwire network of sites the article is talking about? All I see there is a PR machine/news aggregator with occasional features and downloads.

CommentAuthorThomas

ugh. exclusive industry insider blogs, corporate clients, desirable demographics . . . my god, you'd think these people were in it for the money!?

the commercial side to these "mp3 blogs" makes me sick to my stomach.

CommentAuthorPaul S

I'm with you Thomas.

Of course, I might feel differently if there were big money in pimping Tom T. Hall to the cool kidz.

CommentAuthormaura

rcrd lbl's most 'innovative' aspect to me is the fact that they said 'hey guys don't post our stuff' and it worked

CommentAuthormaura

also, there is a lot of faulty math going on there. i'm sure there is a ton of overlap between the fader's site and rcrd lbl and the tripwire.

CommentAuthorSongbyToad

If an artist emailed us stuff saying 'hey, please don't post this' I think we'd pretty much all comply, wouldn't we? But you're right, it is pretty amazing how well that's worked.

CommentAuthorcatbirdseat

"rcrd lbl's most 'innovative' aspect to me is the fact that they said 'hey guys don't post our stuff' and it worked"

Hee hee, Maura, I've said that here before too, but everyone just points out: it's not that people are respecting RCRD LBL's request-- it's that RCRD LBL never post anything worth stealing.

CommentAuthorsquashed

lol.

somebody ought to rewrite that fortune article. (Is that still a magazine now? or just small subdivision of conde nast? Wired.com is more influential then fortune)

CommentAuthorsongsillinois

what struck me funny is how happy everyone was to get the Zune account, like that's going to be some cash cow. is it me or is that thing dead? how soon til microsoft pulls the plug?

CommentAuthorsquashed

what's a zune?

(on serious note: I think they have a million or so total out there. I doubt they can sell a lot of tune. Top 3 blogs will have bigger revenue than their entire store, probably)

CommentAuthorSongbyToad

Catbirdseat, that's not strictly true. There have been times when I've not posted about something at all because of a combination of being asked not to repost their stuff and general laziness about finding another track to put with the post. I certainly can't be arsed linking to them in a bloggerly fashion on the rare occasion they post interesting stuff, but I get the impression that might just be misplaced snobbery.

CommentAuthormaura

i haven't visited the site in a long time, but does it still force users to click multiple times before downloading? (also, squashed, fortune is a time warner pub.)

CommentAuthorcatbirdseat

It's not like RCRD LBL is going to come down legally on anyone for reposting a song-- they're not gonna give a shit. They're too busy tipping back bottles of champagne and playing foosball with Steve Aoki in some Soho loft somewhere.

You probably think I'm just trying to be funny.

CommentAuthorSongbyToad

I am not trying to say that they're great. I find the site hugely irritating to navigate, not least because of the multiple clicks rubbish that Maura mentions above, and they are clearly a swanky Music 2.0 business trying to capitalise on something made popular by enthusiastic amateurs. That said, I have found one or two decent tracks on there from time to time, that's all.

CommentAuthorbrandon@elbo.ws

i love my zune... though it doesn't have as many cool scratches as my friends' ipods

CommentAuthorsquashed

google trend says Zune is big in Puerto Rico

http://www.google.com/trends?q=zune

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