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DIGITALLY ENHANCED: ADORNO FOR THE 21ST-CENTURY

BY

STEPHEN MESSA

Communication BA, University of New Hampshire, 2009

THESIS

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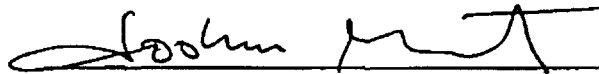
_____
Thesis Director, Michael Albrecht,
Lecturer in Communication

_____
Rob Haskins, Associate Professor of Music

_____
Joshua Meyrowitz, Professor of Communication

_____
Date

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ABSTRACT

DIGITALLY ENHANCED: ADORNO FOR THE 21ST-CENTURY

by

Stephen Messa

University of New Hampshire, December, 2011

Theodor Adorno is an influential figure in cultural studies, philosophy, and musicology. However, a re-examination of Adorno's framework in the context of contemporary media studies is necessary because audio production and distribution technologies have changed dramatically since Adorno's time of writing. In this thesis, I apply Adorno's critical framework to the electronic artist Owl City. In doing so, I enhance Adorno's model of analysis in order to allow for both regressive and progressive interpretations of contemporary music culture. I argue that social media facilitate a more efficacious culture industry, and that digital media facilitate a progressive form of escaping from the culture industry's oppression.

INTRODUCTION

As a scholar of media studies and a fellow musician, I inevitably crossed paths

with the work of Theodor Adorno. While reading his essay, "On Popular Music," I found

that many of Adorno's ideas resembled the ways in which I had grown to view my own

world of music. I call myself a musician but, when that classification is broken down, I

believe myself to be a drummer with an ear for music. I do not use a formal system of

music theory or notation when I write music. I use a literacy that I have developed from a

general understanding of rhythm and sound. I write by recording, and I edit by listening

and altering those parts that sound "unfitting." The act of listening has given me an

understanding of how music should sound. For instance, consonant chords and eloquent

transitions sound natural and familiar when I hear them, and an instrument's

"appropriate" position in a mix is pleasing to my ear.

However, Adorno suggests that sensing naturalness and familiarity when listening

to (and creating) music is culturally regressive. To him, these characteristics are a

byproduct of standardized structures and homogeneity within the music industry.[1] This

suggestion is disconcerting to me and likely to other artists who understand music

through the acts of listening and recording. Adam Young, the creator of Owl City,

exemplifies a similar musical literacy. Young is a self-taught audio producer, and writes

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[1] Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," in *Essays on Music,* ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), 438.

and records his music entirely in the basement of his parent's house.[2] Yet, he produces commercially popular music simply by utilizing the staples of contemporary production technology: a personal computer, recording software, and microphones. These technologies ultimately enable Young's musical literacy to flourish in the current music industry.

Nevertheless, Adorno condemns this literacy, and this condemnation alienates nearly an entire generation of contemporary musicians. This diminishes the value of Adorno's theoretical framework, and in turn, specific elements of his framework are in need of revision and enhancement for compatibility with the ways in which musicians operate in the digital era. Adorno provides a powerful and unique frame through which to observe music culture, but since Adorno's time of writing, few researchers have strived to connect his analog generation to the 21st-century digital generation. In response, I attempt to bridge these two generations of musicians in this thesis. In Chapter One, I explore Adorno further and develop a model to enhance Adorno's framework for media research. In Chapters Two and Three, I test Adorno's continuing relevance by applying this new model to Owl City's utilization of social media and digital production technology.

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[2] Kristi Kates, "Going Underground: Adam Young Heads to the Basement to Craft His Owl City Debut," *Electronic Musician* 25, no. 12 (December 2009), 18.

CHAPTER I

FINDING ROOM FOR ADORNO

Theodor Adorno is a philosopher, a musicologist, and a composer. As such, his background in music performance and theory is profound. He was born in Germany in 1903, where his attention centered on aesthetic, political, and musical interests.[3] As his intellect developed, he affiliated himself with the Frankfurt School's Institute for Social Research, and the school's critical theory. In 1943, Adorno brought his critical frame of mind to the United States, where popular culture was in full swing.[4] In light of this, Adorno's grim interpretation of Hollywood and popular music seems almost expected. His critical mindset merely grew comfortable in its new environment.

Adorno's critical interpretation is a common entryway for those who are beginning to explore popular music intellectually. In his critique, Adorno highlights the ways in which commercial processes influence popular music's production and consumption. Popular music's "standardized" structure of verses and choruses, and the music's reliance on repetitive and catchy hooks embody these commercial processes. Adorno's concept of "pseudo-individualization" refers to a popular song's illusory cloak that provides consumers with a sense of free choice when differentiating between these standardized forms of music and products.[5] If this freedom did not exist, then the culture

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[3] Gerhard Schweppenhauser, *Theodor W. Adorno: An Introduction,* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 2.

[4] Schweppenhauser, 1.

[5] Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," 445.

industry's insidious cycle of production and consumption would falter, and audiences might begin to observe music in the manner that Adorno does: as the product of an industry rather than an individual. When Adorno listens to popular music, he hears music contrived to sell records at the expense of artistic expression.

A tension between "serious" music and "popular" music provides the foundation for Adorno's analysis. Serious artwork is of the utmost importance to Adorno. An artist's significance rests in his or her ability to expose an individual's social subjugation within the capitalist system. To Adorno, artwork that fails to reflect this subjugation is only commercial and culturally regressive. However, Adorno's critical interpretation of popular music has been subject to criticism of its own. Robert Witkin argues that Adorno's conception of art is idealistic and "pre-modernist."[6] His conception is pre-modernist because it leaves no possibility for a serious artwork to embrace the process of commodification. In turn, his idealistic conception may have predisposed him to overlook the potential for aesthetic value in newer forms of popular music. For example, Adorno never confronted rock 'n' roll music, but if he did, then he would likely dismiss the music as commercial despite the variation in form and structure that surfaced in the 1960s. While the hits of Tin Pan Alley might apply to Adorno's notion of industrial standardization, scholars who research rock 'n' roll music often dismiss Adorno's framework entirely.[7]

Yet, by dismissing Adorno entirely, researchers also dismiss the potential for theoretical links and connections that Adorno's framework and critical mindset could

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[6] Robert W. Witkin, *Adorno on Music* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 190.

[7] Bernard Gendron, "Theodor Adorno Meets the Cadillacs," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 19.

illuminate. Since Adorno could not foresee the technological alterations in music culture that have taken place since his time of writing, scholars must continue to explore Adorno's ideas and borrow what they find to be relevant to today's context. In this thesis, I continue this exploration by ultimately challenging Adorno's fundamental claim that popular music is only regressive. While I argue that contemporary music culture still has the regressive capacity that Adorno associates with the culture industry, there is room to enhance Adorno's critical interpretation to include opportunities for artists to exhibit forms of sociopolitical awareness and expression. To make this enhancement, I develop a new model of analysis by examining the ways in which new media alter the environment in which artists, audiences, and record labels interact, consume, and create music. In my case studies, I demonstrate the ways in which social media reinforce an ideology that affords economically elite social groups an advantageous position for oppressing artists, but I also highlight a potential for digital media to facilitate a progressive form of escaping from this oppression. Specifically, digital production tools afford artists an ability to immerse and convey meaning in ways that Adorno could not have foreseen.

In the remainder of this chapter, I build a foundation for my subsequent case studies by outlining where Adorno's framework is compatible with media research. To accomplish this, I describe two competing discourses surrounding a new medium's emergence in society: the idealistic discourse and the critical discourse. The idealistic discourse is one of valorization and progressivism; it is the notion that new media and technology bring social progress. Contrary to this, the critical discourse is one of pessimism and insecurity; it is the notion that new media and technology might appear to bring social progress, but oppressing qualities accompany that ostensible progress. Each

discourse provides a unique interpretation of the ways in which new media alter the music industry, and I argue that understanding the strengths and limitations of each perspective is vital to enhancing Adorno's framework for compatibility with the digital media environment.

Critical and Idealistic Media Discourses

Adorno recognizes that studying media is an important, but complex, endeavor. In his essay on the radio symphony, he argues that studying what the radio "does musically to a musical structure... would be a vast undertaking."[8] Such inquiry would require interdisciplinary collaboration between musicians, social scientists, and radio engineers. Moreover, technology transforms at such rapid pace that the primary function of one medium can seamlessly shift to another. This poses a challenge to scholars who attempt to keep up with the implications of technological progression. For example, the radio was a relatively new medium during Adorno's time of writing, but the radio is now much older and seemingly understood. Newer media, such as satellite radio and radio with digital transmission, are in the process of replacing the older radio's technical function of broadcasting news and entertainment. This succession of media illustrates one reason why scholars have a difficult time defining exactly what a "new medium" is. The term new media can mean social media, such as MySpace, or it could mean the computer software used to program and create MySpace. New media could also refer to a technology that is new to a specific group of people, but old to a different group of people. One scholar even references the term "new new media" to highlight the

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[8] Theodor Adorno, "The Radio Symphony," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), 251.

interactive nature that denote contemporary new media from older new media.[9] One can

also argue that all media are, at one point, new media, and they will each inevitably lose

their new quality with time.

At least one certainty exists in new media research: a new medium's emergence

has implications on its surrounding society and culture. Historically, discourses of

idealization and criticism surround a new medium's emergence. Marita Sturken and

Douglas Thomas argue that "the pervasive sense that technologies transform us in

irrevocable ways means that idealistic concepts of technology are always accompanied

by the anxiety that they will also promote some kind of loss."[10] The idealistic discourse

refers to the promise of technological progression, whereas the critical discourse focuses

on the potential regressive impact of the new medium. The internet is a strong example of

these two discourses. The internet has the ability to facilitate meaningful connections

between individuals and institutions on a global scale. The internet has the capacity to

spread information, such as text, image, video, and music files, exposing people to ideas

and sounds from outside of traditional mass media. In an idealistic sense, the internet

opens the information floodgates so that citizens no longer need to rely on mainstream

sources for news and information.

While the internet's idealistic conception illuminates democratic empowerment,

the internet also facilitates forms of democratic loss and control. For example, Lincoln

Dahlberg references the corporate "domination of online attention," and the development

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[9] Paul Levinson, *New New Media* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2009), 4.

[10] Marita Sturken and Douglas Thomas, "Introduction: Technological Visions and the Rhetoric of the New," in *Technological Visions: The Hopes and Fears that Shape New Technologies*, ed. Marita Sturken, Douglas Thomas, and Sandra Ball-Rokeach (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 4.

of "megaportals," such as *Yahoo* and *Google*. These megaportals guide and control an internet user's networked experience in a manner that is similar to the ways in which mass media systems traditionally operate.[11] Forms of advertising often appear within or around search results, and the manipulation of data can directly influence the algorithms utilized by search engines to categorize content. In addition, the internet also facilitates criticized social phenomena, such as the interaction between children and strangers. Cases of cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking are permeating public discourse. The "craigslist killer" brings anxiety to those who use Craigslist and similar services, and cell phones with video technology are instigating new forms of sexual experimentation in the nation's youth.

Fragmentation in Media Research

Sturken and Thomas contend that overtly idealistic or critical perspectives are prominent in popular discourse,[12] but just as Adorno's preconceptions shaped his analysis of popular music, preconceived perspectives also shape the ways in which researchers approach and observe the media they choose to study. In effect, when researchers observe media, they often see different forces at work. Joshua Meyrowitz illustrates this by tracing three "root narratives" that underlie the ways in which scholars from different "research camps" observe media. These narratives are the *power and resistance narrative*, the *purposes and pleasures narrative*, and the *structures and patterns*

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[11] Lincoln Dahlberg, "The Corporate Colonization of Online Attention and the Critical Marginalization of Critical Communication," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (April 2005): 163.

[12] Sturken and Thomas, 4.

narrative. In effect, these narratives fragment the whole or complete picture of the ways in which media affect culture and society.[13]

Meyrowitz's power narrative, characteristic of critical theorists like Adorno, is a strong tool for understanding the critical media discourse. The narrative focuses on political economy and media ownership, and includes the argument that conglomerates, which own and operate mainstream media channels, are unlikely to "encourage forms of news or entertainment that undermine their own profit-driven activities."[14] In this framework, institutions use their economic and symbolic resources to achieve or maintain powerful social positions. Mark Andrejevic's research on media surveillance technology provides one vantage point from which to envision the power narrative's critical interpretation of digital media. Andrejevic strives to illuminate the misleading nature of interactive media. He states, "there's no need for revolution if the technology is revolutionary," and emphasizes that scholars and citizens should not take the optimistic promises of interactive technology at their word.[15] To emphasize this further, Andrejevic conceptualizes the "digital enclosure," a metaphorical realm in which every "action and transaction generates information about itself."[16] Companies use this information to target users with specific advertisements tailored to their interests. Companies collect data in virtually all of digital culture - from cell-phone calls to credit card usage - and these forms of surveillance often go unnoticed. At its extreme, the digital enclosure is a

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[13] Joshua Meyrowitz, "Power, Pleasure, Patterns: Intersecting Narratives of Media Influence," *Journal of Communication* 58 (2008): 643.

[14] Meyrowitz, "Power, Pleasure, Patterns," 647.

[15] Mark Andrejevic, *iSpy: Surveillance and Power in the Interactive Era* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2007), 16.

[16] Andrejevic, 2.

society in which advertisements tailored to an individual's specific interests and geographical location bombard its occupants.

Andrejevic's critical interpretation highlights the ways in which interactive promises provide false solutions to contemporary social inequalities. These promises simultaneously reinforce the social structure that supports those inequalities. In turn, Andrejevic's analysis presents a system in which oppressed social groups are limited in their ability to stimulate or achieve social progress. An extension of the power narrative's critical interpretation to the music industry reveals the ways in which interactive media might reinforce the top-down power structure of the traditional music industry. For example, National Public Radio's recent report on the ways in which major record labels' utilize "writing camps" to produce hit songs illustrates the notion that industrial processes are integral to generating massively popular music. In these camps, major labels hire industry-leading songwriters to write and produce their artist's music. This phenomenon parallels Adorno's conception of the ways in which commercialization influenced the production of popular music in the 1940s. NPR estimates that the cost of producing a hit song for the music artist, Rihanna, was roughly $1,078,000.[17] The organization reached this estimate by combining the $78,000 that the major label, Def Jam, paid writers to create and produce the actual song, and then adding the approximate $1,000,000 that the label spent for marketing, travel expenses, and the development of relationships with radio executives to ensure airplay. Artists without a corporation's economic support are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to getting airplay and selling music through

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[17] Zoe Chace, "How Much Does it Cost to Make a Hit Song," *NPR.com*, http://www.npr.org/blogs/money/2011/07/05/137530847/how-much-does-it-cost-to-make-a-hit-song (accessed July 13, 2011).

mainstream channels, and the music within the mainstream channels is often a product of the industry's top songwriters rather than the artists themselves.

A number of recent scholars have drawn similar conclusions about the ostensible affordances of new media on the contemporary structure of the music industry. Sherman Young and Steve Collins argue that "the major labels still wield significant market power," and that the "alternative publicity, marketing, and distribution models are still in flux."[18] In addition, because MySpace, Facebook, and other social media cannot guarantee viable connections between artists and audiences, independent artists are relying on commercial services in order to bridge this gap. In her research on independent music in two college towns, Carey Sargent illuminates the ways in which artists must purchase professional services in order to better utilize the new media that ostensibly liberate them from the traditional industry's commercial structure.[19] Sargent even interviews one artist who strongly believes that these services are the next generation of the music industry's business model.[20] In turn, Sargent's research foreshadows the ways in which artists may become reliant on the pervasive tools and services that ostensibly provide liberation.

While the power narrative's critical frame is an important piece of the media-research tool kit, the narrative has limitations. For example, the narrative often dismisses or neglects a media consumer's sense of agency. In turn, there is no possibility for the structurally confined individual to express himself or herself socially and politically.

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[18] Sherman Young and Steve Collins, "A View from the Trenches of Music 2.0," *Popular Music & Society* 33, no. 3 (July 2010): 340.

[19] Carey Sargent, "Local Musicians Building Global Audiences," *Information, Communication & Society* 12, no. 4 (July 2009): 482.

[20] Sargent, 483.

Contrary to this, the *purposes and pleasure narrative* affords the possibility of such

agency. The pleasure narrative illuminates an idealistic interpretation of the ways in

which media systems "strive to please discriminating audiences" by providing tools and

opportunities that those audiences actively pursue.[21] Henry Jenkins exemplifies this

narrative in *Convergence Culture*. Jenkins defines convergence culture as a site of

cultural transformation marked by two "seemingly contradictory trends."[22] First, media

companies are now bigger than they have ever been. There is immense concentration in

mainstream media ownership, with only a few conglomerates operating the majority of

broadcasting, publishing, and production companies. Second, production technology is

becoming more affordable, thus democratizing cultural production. As a result, media

companies are utilizing their resources in order to increase the value of their products,

while simultaneously presenting audiences with opportunities to interact with the media

content they consume.

The companies stimulate this interactive dynamic by engaging their consumers

and channeling that engagement through specific outlets. For example, companies direct

the fans of a television series to related content online, in stores, in video games, and in

films. The series' related website allows audiences to blog about their reactions to a

television series. Jenkins refers to the ways in which audiences have built communities

online to do just this, and he points to instances in which audiences influenced the

production of the content they logged on to discuss.[23] This marks a shift in the traditional,

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[21] Meyrowitz, "Power, Pleasure, Patterns," 649.

[22] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 17.

[23] Henry Jenkins, "The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (2004): 37.

unidirectional flow of information that characterizes older media. Before the internet,

television audiences had limited means of communicating with the producers of shows

and the producers of shows had little immediate feedback from their audiences. Now

consumers are no longer limited to passivity. This strengthening of audience expression

may not only allow the consumers to affect media content, but perhaps affect forms of

social and political change by means of influencing media content in specific ways. In

turn, the idealistic notion of multidirectional communication and production opens doors

that would otherwise be impossible without new media facilitating the interaction.

Meyrowitz's third root narrative, the *structures and patterns narrative,* provides a

master frame through which to observe a specific media environment. Also known as

"medium theory," and closely related to the field of "media ecology," this narrative

illuminates the ways in which communication systems are part of a "material and

symbolic environment that creates certain possibilities and encourages certain forms of

interaction while discouraging others."[24] Marshall McLuhan illustrates this narrative with

the phrase, "the medium is the message." The "message" of a specific medium is "the

change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs."[25] Andrejevic and

Jenkins each draw on this concept as they observe the contemporary media environment,

and they each offer a unique interpretation of the ways in which specific media shape the

behavior and interaction within that environment. Andrejevic observes a closed system in

which technology leads to the exploitation of technology users and consumers, but

Jenkins observes the potential for these users and consumers to utilize this technology for

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[24] Meyrowitz, "Power, Pleasure, Patterns," 652.

[25] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (California: Ginko Press 2003), 20.

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social and political expression. In Jenkins's perspective, individuals are empowered by new media; they can work inside of the system in order to break free from it. Andrejevic (and Adorno) might see Jenkins's perspective as problematic, and argue that beneath the interactive opportunity is a realm of structural control, but this control should not discount the significance of Jenkins's analysis. Both perspectives observe real changes and implications as to the ways in which digital media affect change in human affairs.

Enhancing Adorno's Model

Meyrowitz's recommendation is not for researchers to combine the traditions of each research camp or perspective; rather, the goal is for researchers to recognize both the value and the limitations of each tradition. By doing so, each camp might begin to learn something from the other. In turn, I apply this recommendation to Adorno's critical model of analysis in an attempt to envision the model in a new light. In the following two chapters, I will present both a critical and an idealistic interpretation of the ways in which digital media affect contemporary music culture. In doing so, I draw on specific themes from Adorno's theoretical framework in order to illustrate this enhanced model of analysis. In Chapter Two, I explore the critical discourse by applying the concept of hegemony to the relationship between Owl City and Universal Republic Records. I then trace this major label's campaign to maintain its hegemonic position by capitalizing on MySpace's structural facilitation of the commercial ideology. In Chapter Three, I describe an idealistic process of artistic expression through music production, and I illustrate the concept of music production as a form of progressively escaping from the culture industry's oppression. I ultimately argue that both the idealistic and critical

perspectives are crucial to understanding Adorno's relationship to the digital media

environment and contemporary music culture.

CHAPTER II

THE CULTURE INDUSTRY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2008, Adam Young was an average twenty-two year old boy who spent his days loading and unloading trucks at a Coca-Cola warehouse.[26] However, his true passion emerged after nightfall in his parents' basement. "After work I would race back home, not even eat or take a shower," he told *The New York Times*, "and just go back to the computer for fear of losing whatever inspiration I had."[27] Young's passion was composing music, and during sleepless nights, he would retreat into his parents' basement and spend countless hours creating his melodic and electronic pop songs. The songs became immensely popular when he uploaded them to MySpace. Young adopted the band name *Owl City*, and thousands of fans logged on to his page to immerse themselves in his music. He self-released two albums to great success and his songs averaged over two thousand digital sales each week.[28] Young became so popular on MySpace that he received interest from Universal Republic Records; he met with world-renowned manager, Steve Bursky, and soon signed a long-term contract with Universal Republic.[29] Young's first single on Owl City's major-label album reached number one on

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[26] Nicole Frehsee, "Owl City's Basement Tapes," *Rolling Stone* no. 1098, February 18, 2010, 48-49.

[27] Ben Sisario, "Adam Young, aka Owl City, Finds Pop Success," *New York Times*, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/21/arts/music/21owl.html?_r=1, (accessed February 16th, 2011).

[28] Cortney Harding, "6 Questions with Steve Bursky," *Billboard* 121, no. 48, December 5, 2009, 8.

[29] Sisario.

the Billboard charts.[30] Since then, Young has toured the world, performing across the United States, Europe, China, and beyond.

I mention this brief synopsis in order to demonstrate how well Owl City's story fits the image of a rags-to-riches tale. Owl City could inspire other musicians to work hard at their craft, build a strong foundation, and go for their goals because the possibility of great "success" is real. Owl City is evidence for musicians that the music industry is alive and well. More specifically, Owl City is the realization of the American dream in the digital era, and Theodor Adorno may have argued that this image of "success" is precisely what the culture industry needs in order to maintain its dominant hegemonic position. Adorno's concept of the culture industry stems from a long list of critical theorists. As a critical theorist, Adorno sought to offer a critique of the fundamental characteristics of capitalist society. His critique exemplifies the ways in which the culture industry legitimates a universe of commercialization and consumption. Within this universe, the industry transforms culture into commodities for entertainment, and then symbolically manufactures society's acceptance of this entertainment by facilitating the ideology that movies and music are "just business."[31] The dominant social groups within this universe strive to maintain their social position by ideologically naturalizing the status quo, and hegemony is the process by which this negotiation of social status occurs.

Recently, the social network site "MySpace" has appeared to afford musicians an opportunity to resist the culture industry's hegemonic force by providing outlets for independent subcultures. On MySpace, musicians and bands can upload their original

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[30] Silvio Pietroluongo, "Owl City Banks First No. 1," *Billboard* 121, no. 44, November 7, 2009, 70.

[31] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 1.

music, and potentially develop and maintain relationships with audiences who enjoy their music. However, despite MySpace's ostensible affordance, Owl City chose to collaborate with the culture industry's hegemony, rather than utilizing the affordances of MySpace in order to manage an independent music career. I argue that this collaboration represents something more significant than a recording contract. In this exploration of Owl City and Universal Republic, I argue that MySpace has become a "hegemonic apparatus" that structurally facilitates and naturalizes the "music is business" ideology on the micro-level of independent music production. In turn, independent artists on MySpace participate in forms of commercialization prior to signing contractual agreements with major labels, thus making the hegemonic process by which Adorno's culture industry operates more efficacious.

Hegemony in the Music Business

Antonio Gramsci suggests that hegemony is "characterized by the combination of force and consent," and a balancing act between the two ensures that "force will appear based on the consent of the majority."[32] Legal systems and military are examples of force, whereas ideology subconsciously nurtures and stabilizes consent. Elite social groups strive to maintain hegemony by containing subordinate groups within "ideological spaces" that do "not seem at all ideological."[33] These ideological spaces normalize the dynamic of the status quo, but the dynamic is never secure; with one social group's dominance comes another group's resistance. In Adorno's framework, "serious art" has

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[32] Antonio Gramsci, "Hegemony, Intellectuals and the State," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Story (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 210.

[33] Dick Hebdige, *Subcutlture: The Meaning of Style* (London and New York: Methuen & Co., 2002), 16.

the ability to resist this realm of commercialization and mass entertainment by exhibiting

an artist or individual's sense of sociopolitical awareness. Elliott Carter is one

contemporary composer who resembles Adorno's serious artist. "I regard my scores as

scenarios, auditory scenarios, for the performers to act out with their instruments," states

Carter.[34] Carter designs his music to represent the complexities of modern life, and to do

so, he conceives each instrument in his pieces as a unique person. In turn, these unique

people interact freely within the construct of the music. Perhaps the most famous

example of Adorno's serious artist is Beethoven. According to Adorno, the meaning of

Beethoven's music derives from the reciprocal significance of details and overall form,

and when contextually removed, the music becomes "disrobed to insignificance."[35]

This insignificance is what separates Adorno's concept of serious music from

popular music. To Adorno, the individual details in popular music are interchangeable

and have no bearing on the overall form; moreover, popular music is a commercial

product, and if artists must sell their work to support their livelihoods, then logically, the

artists will contrive their artwork to appeal to large audiences. This is the nature of

capitalism, and because the majority of individuals within a capitalist society would not

understand a serious artist's artwork, artists commercialize their work for mass

recognition. As more artists commercialize their work into forms of entertainment,

entertainment pushes serious music to the social periphery. "Movies and radio need no

longer to pretend to be art," Adorno contends, and "the truth that they are just business is

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[34] Elliott Carter, as quoted in David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), 26.

[35] Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," 439.

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made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce."[36] In

contemporary times, trade books, textbooks, and magazines distribute this "just business"

ideology across the globe. Colleges offer degrees and training in all of music's industrial

facets, from marketing and management to audio production. Artists are finding new

ways to monetize their music, by means of signing contracts with labels or selling their

music on the internet through services such as iTunes and BandCamp. Music is

entertainment, entertainment is a booming business, and pro business is the dominant

ideology.

Dick Hebdige reinforces the notion that ideology shapes society and its

surrounding culture. In his research, Hebdige illuminates the ways in which subcultures

challenge this ideological dominance by "repossessing style"[37] Dress, fashion, and taste

are tools used by oppressed social groups to take back culture and transform its meaning.

For example, British DIY (do-it-yourself) punk exemplifies this alternative to the

mainstream, top-down power structure of the corporate industry.[38] These punks idealize

creative integrity and seize their own means of production without financial backing of

major record labels. They do this because the financial aspects of recording contracts can

result in forms of control.[39] A contemporary example of this control is the way in which

Radiohead's contract with EMI (Electric and Musical Industries Ltd.) failed to adapt its

financial agreement to the digitization of the commercial environment. Specifically, the

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[36] Adorno and Horkheimer, 1.

[37] Hebdige, 17.

[38] Pete Dale, "It Was Easy, It Was Cheap, So What?: Reconsidering the DIY Principle of Punk and Indie Music," *Popular Music History* 3, no. 2 (August, 2008): 178.

[39] David Hesmondhalgh, "Indie: The Institutional Politics and Aesthetics of a Popular Music Genre," *Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (1999): 54.

contract did not require royalty payments for Radiohead's digital sales in the iTunes store.[40] In addition, EMI deducted packaging costs from the band on digital sales that required no packaging.[41] This exploitation illuminates why some artists, like Radiohead, eventually sought "independent" alternatives to major labels for their promotional and distributional services.

However, these independent routes are not entirely free from exploitation and control. In ways consistent with the hegemonic negotiation, the dominant social groups strive to transform these resistive and "independent" meanings into preferred meanings. Independent musicians resist by attempting to manage and maintain careers outside of the mainstream structure, and the mainstream strives to incorporate this resistance by situating it within its own "dominant framework of meanings."[42] Hebdige notes two distinct ways in which this process occurs: by converting "subcultural signs into mass-produced objects," and by dominant groups "redefining deviant behavior."[43] The way in which major labels strive to control independent music culture is an example of this redefinition. The independent label route was, at one time, an effective way to circumvent major label exploitation, but now independent labels are increasingly merging with the mainstream.[44] Called pseudo-independents, these labels work in close affiliation with

[40] Guy Morrow, "Radiohead's Managerial Creativity," *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 15, no. 2 (May 2009): 163.

[41] Morrow, 163.

[42] Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media, and the "Ideological Effect," as quoted in Hebdige, 16.

[43] Hebdige, 94.

[44] Dale, 179.

major record labels, and in some cases, the major labels directly own them.[45]

Consequentially, the potential for control reemerges as the major labels constrain the

ways in which the pseudo-independents operate and redefine the relationship between

independent artists and major labels.

In the contemporary music culture, forms of independent resistance continue to

reemerge. Many artists now utilize social media and digital production technology to

produce and distribute their music. Internet services, such as BandCamp and

ReverbNation, facilitate interactions between artists and their audiences in manners that

are consistent with a contemporary "direct-to-fan" (DTF) marketing trend. DTF is a

strategy in which artists communicate and sell music and merchandise directly to their

target audiences. DTF ostensibly cuts out the intermediaries that have traditionally

connected artists to audiences. Today there is less of a need for specific teams dedicated

to helping an artist manage audience relations; yet, with their elimination potentially

comes an insertion of new, digital intermediaries with little relation to the artist, their

music, or their audiences. Many of these digital intermediaries, such as iTunes and CD

Baby, take a percentage of the artist's earnings. For instance, CD Baby (the service

utilized by Owl City prior to signing with Universal Republic) charges a fee of $39 to get

the artist's album in the iTunes store,[46] and then iTunes takes about $0.19 from each

$0.99 download.[47] Other services, such as ReverbNation, charge subscription fees for

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[45] Hesmondhalgh, 51.

[46] "Sell Your Music on iTunes in as Little as 48 Hours," *CD Baby,* under "What does it cost to sell on iTunes," http://members.cdbaby.com/sell-on-itunes.aspx (accessed September 3, 2011).

[47] Yuki Noguchi, "Justice Probes Music Firms' Pricing of Downloads," *Washington Post,* March 4, 2006, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/03/AR2006030301852.html (accessed September 6, 2011).

their premium services.[48] The benefits of using these services over using a record label relate to an artists' ability to interact directly with their audience, remain in exclusive control over that interaction and their content, and avoid contracts and debt associated with the cost of producing and marketing an album. Traditionally, an artist pays off this debt by exceeding a threshold of sales before earning a profit. The artists' small cut of revenue repays this debt and the label drops those artists who never surpass the threshold of sales. In effect, these services may have increased the attractiveness of the independent career in the digital era.

Nevertheless, if social media are allowing DIY culture to reemerge, then this raises questions as to why Owl City did not follow in the DIY tradition. The answer to this question rests partially in Universal Republic's attraction to Owl City's independent and handicraft image. Adorno contends that a "handicraft" image masks the industrial force behind popular music's production.[49] This image is "essential from the viewpoint of cultural big business" because it helps ensure that audiences will accept the music as a product of the people and not of the industry itself.[50] In the contemporary music industry, this independent image now fulfills the function of the handicraft image. The independent image marks an artist's explicit separation from the culture industry and its culturally regressive qualities, and artists with this image are especially attractive to the dominant social groups who can no longer hide their industrialization.

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[48] "ReverbNation Expands Distribution Services," *Hypebot,* March 19, 2010, http://www.hypebot.com/hypebot/2010/03/reverbnation-expands-music-distribution-service-.html, (accessed March 2, 2011).

[49] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 445.

[50] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 445.

Owl City embodies this independent image because its music is the product of a personal computer, software, and affordable digital recording technology. The small town boy who made it big in his parents' basement now represents an independent and grassroots musical phenomenon. Young's management team recognized that exploiting this independent image is an effective technique for marketing Owl City. In an article from *The New York Times*, Young's manager, Steve Burksy, references an explicit attempt to formulate a marketing campaign that retained this independent image.[51] The label withheld a publicity announcement that would have alerted Young's immediate fan-base, as well as potential listeners and supporters, to the contract signing. Bursky stated that his "idea was to make sure every gatekeeper in the music business--every journalist, every music supervisor, every radio programmer--discovered Owl City the same way his fan base discovered him, as opposed to him being just another major-label priority shoved down people's throats."[52] Bursky likely did this because many listeners and artists sense a form of "redundancy" in the content of mainstream music.[53] This redundancy reflects Adorno's notion that a song's industrial presence homogenizes the sound and structure of music. Because of this homogeneity, Universal Republic took strides to maintain Owl City's independent image by promotionally emphasizing Owl City's rise in social media popularity. Universal Republic highlighted Owl City's independent image in order to mask the major label's own public visibility.

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[51] Sisario, "Adam Young, aka Owl City, Finds Pop Success."

[52] Harding, "6 Questions with Steve Bursky."

[53] Young and Collins, 340.

MySpace as a Hegemonic Apparatus

Young's utilization of MySpace was a springboard into launching a musical career that ultimately reached mass audiences prior to signing with a major label, but MySpace is more than a means to an end. MySpace structurally encourages the "music is business" ideology on the local level of music production. Gramsci indentifies structures that facilitate and organize ideological consent as "hegemonic apparatuses." Traditionally, hegemony and ideology are "united like bricks and mortar." Institutional structures, such as universities, churches, and media channels, "build consent by establishing accepted practices."[54] For example, the physical structure of a university lecture hall, with its stadium seating surrounding a podium in front of whiteboards, normalizes the specific role of the professor and the specific role of the students. Ideology manifests itself within the physical structure of the institution, just as ideology manifests itself within the digital structure of MySpace. The artists who utilize MySpace must do so within the site's structural characteristics. At least three structural characteristics foster a competitive environment and encourage a commercial mindset: the ability to create and manage identities, the ability to view play numbers, "friends," and comments, and the interactive dynamic between artists and audiences.

In its basic form, MySpace is an online community in which artists and individuals create and design profile pages and socially interact with other artists and MySpace users. Members individualize their pages by decorating them with information such as photos, biographies, and interests. In effect, they create online, digital representations of their identities. danah boyd contends that teenagers who use MySpace

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[54] Lee Artz and Bren Ortega Murphy, *Cultural Hegemony in the United States* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000), 40.

negotiate their digital identities in ways similar to the techniques they use in real life. To clarify, boyd references Erving Goffman's theory of "impression management."[55] In this theory, Goffman suggests that individuals construct their identity by observing their surroundings, and altering their presentations of self according to the ways in which they believe their audiences perceive them. This process of identity construction illuminates the ways in which MySpace artists and bands negotiate their identity with photos, written texts, and online behavioral patterns, such as the frequency of their news updates, and the ways in which they promote themselves.

In addition, Goffman suggests that an individual's behavior in a given social situation can be broken into two categories, "back region" and "front region."[56] In this "dramaturgical model," individuals performing in the front region do so before an audience, and often strive to represent an "ideal conception" of their social role. In contrast, individuals in the back region perform a more intimate and personal role.[57] For example, when a band is in the middle of a performance, the lead singer usually performs in accordance with his front region identity. The singer might move about the stage with extreme energy and confidence. He or she might make exaggerated gestures to the audience and his or her band mates, and dance along with the music. Yet, when the singer is offstage, his or her role shifts to the back region. In this region, the singer may no longer be energetic, but exhausted, and the band mates will see a side of the singer that the audience will never get to see.

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[55] danah michelle boyd, "Taken Out of Context: American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008), 119.

[56] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 29.

[57] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*, 29.

Joshua Meyrowitz contends that electronic media alter this dramaturgical model by changing "patterns of access to information."[58] The application of this logic to MySpace's website structure emphasizes the artists' ability to control patterns of information, and ultimately manipulate their front region and back region performances. In turn, artists have the ability to mislead their audiences. For example, MySpace's structure allows musicians to upload original music, select appropriate background imagery, upload video footage, and write enticing biographies in order to construct a desirable image for their band. An artist could upload a home video of him or her playing a song, ostensibly giving the audience an intimate glimpse of the performer backstage, but edit the video's audio in order to sound more "produced." Artists could add more instruments to the mix, or add harmonies in order to strengthen the lead vocals subtly. The result of this process is an edited front region presentation designed to appear as if it were an intimate back region presentation.

In a manner similar to modern public relations, the significance of this studio magic rests in the maintenance of the independent image while simultaneously benefiting from the affordances of newer production technologies. In some genres of music, audiences might interpret overproduction as a symptom of the culture industry's industrial process. In turn, MySpace's ostensible fusion of front stage and backstage perspectives affords the possibility to manage this reception. Some MySpace users consciously manipulate and control their image and presentation of self, but MySpace, as a hegemonic apparatus, naturalizes this manipulation ideologically. Goffman's analysis of commercial photography provides further insight as to ways in which ideology shapes

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[58] Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*, 37.

a MySpace user's presentation. Goffman argues that commercial photos are specific and purposeful. "Ads are intentionally choreographed to be unambiguous," he states, and emphasizes that "uncontrived scenes" do not have the same advantages that "commercial realism" has.[59] Photographers and producers utilize specific resources, such as body language and camera angles, in order achieve a desired effect in the final shot. Moreover, the social role of photographers and their models grants them access to intimate glimpses from angles that would be voyeuristic and taboo in real-life because "one's presence in a place requires social warrant." Focusing specifically on gender, Goffman illuminates the ways in which photographers portray men and women in manners that are consistent with dominant ideologies and social structures.

This concept still applies to contemporary commercial photography, but it also applies to the ways in which users, as their own identity producers, present themselves using MySpace. For example, if men want to look masculine, they will choose photos that emphasize a socially accepted characteristic of masculinity, such as their muscular features or automobile. If women want to appear attractive, they might upload photos in which they believe they represent the ideal image of femininity. This ideological influence extends to commercial music in terms of an artist's presentation of identity over mass and social media. For instance, Lady Gaga utilizes sexuality to sell her music, just as Madonna had done in the 1980s.

There may be no way for MySpace artists and users to guarantee that audiences will perceive their identity as they intend, but the number of an artist's plays, friends, and the quality of comments on their profile offer tools for assessing an audience's response

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[59] Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976), 23.

to a specific presentation. When combined with the interactive dynamic between artists and audiences, these tools provide a clear view into an artist's perceived popularity. In effect, these users are participating in forms of networked focus groups, and audiences are laboring by qualitatively assessing artists. The structure of the MySpace music page acts as a stage on which artists present themselves, and audiences function as "barometers of taste and preferences."[60] In her exploration of this phenomenon, Hiesun Suhr draws on research by Pierre Bourdieu in order to demonstrate the ways in which users consecrate the value of artwork on MySpace. In turn, audiences embrace and accept the artwork by leaving positive feedback, or reject the work by avoiding it.[61] Listeners, or the sample audience, qualitatively assess the value of artists by strengthening those elements that reflect an artist's perceived popularity.

Consequently, companies can analyze this process in order to minimize the level of risk that is traditionally associated with the financial investment of signing and working with artists. Artists who exceed a certain threshold of popularity on MySpace are likely to sell more music and merchandise in an alternative, offline context. In turn, record labels may be more likely to approach those artists and strive to direct them back into the industry's traditional structure. Owl City's discovery on MySpace (and other artists on YouTube, such as Justin Bieber) illuminates the ways in which audiences, including A&R representatives, are in tune with some artists' perception of popularity. However, other artists can also observe this feedback and imitate the popular and "successful" artists. In effect, one artist's popularity may influence the ways in which

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[60] Hiesun Cecilia Suhr, "The Role of Intermediaries in the Consecration of Arts on Myspace.com," *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 4, no. 2 (2008): 261.

[61] Suhr, 261.

other artists construct their identities and music. This process affords the possibility for artists to imitate each other's identities, styles, and sounds.

Adorno references this concept in order to explain the ways in which popular music has resulted in similar sounds and structures. Adorno contends, "the musical standards of popular music were originally developed by a competitive process." "As one particular song scored a great success," he contends, "hundreds of others sprang up imitating the successful one" and "the process culminated in the crystallization of standards."[62] Over time, these standards have become set in stone. The culture industry served as a barrier to entry, allowing only those who demonstrated popularity and generated revenue. While MySpace challenges this barrier to entry by bypassing "the editors, the gatekeepers, and the quality-control department of the culture industries,"[63] the potential for homogeneity still exists. When one artist demonstrates popularity in a specific style or sound, other artists can imitate it. Moreover, if there are enough artists imitating the same sound, then this hypothetically ensures one of those artists would consensually enter into the old, traditional structure of the music industry. If the most popular artists choose not to, then the industry would approach the artist next in line, and so on, until the culture industry found a representation of that specific sound.

The New Industrial Dynamic

In effect, this new dynamic of the A&R selection process could become an integral component to the major label's contemporary role within the music industry. In

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[62] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 443.

[63] Young and Collins, 344.

addition, this process could simultaneously provide a solution to the criticism of "redundancy" that is characteristic of mainstream music content. MySpace's structural environment theoretically allows major labels to distribute consistent streams of audience-assured music, thus painting the picture of an increasingly efficacious hegemonic apparatus in which the independent cultural producers who demonstrate economic viability are visible and more easily acquired by the pre-established structure of the culture industry. Acquiring those independent artists who demonstrate economic viability over the internet may become the culture industry's newest attempt at maintaining hegemonic control of the industrial process. This hegemonic control will likely lead to a form of exploitation that is characteristic of the old industrial structure.

Moreover, those independent artists who choose to take their business into their own hands often reinforce the culture industry's nearly inescapable force to commercialize the artistic process, potentially with artistic integrity at the chopping block. Observing nearly any independent artist's online presence will demonstrate traces of an increasing tendency for artists to promote themselves with commercial photography, music videos, and biographical write-ups. As Adorno contends, "the assembly-line character of the culture industry, the synthetic, planned method of turning out its products (factory-like not only in the studio but, more or less, in the compilation of cheap biographies, pseudo-documentary novels, and hit songs) is very suited to advertising."[64] Perhaps if Young had realized and understood the function and technique of advertising, then he could have exploited Owl City's commercial viability himself, rather than relying on corporate direction. Prior to signing with Universal Republic, an

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[64] Adorno and Horkheimer, 22.

early performance depicts Young playing for a mid-sized crowd, perhaps one hundred people, while using only his laptop and mixing gear.[65] Nothing about Young himself engrosses the audience; a projection screen behind him that plays a digitally animated video draws the audience's attention. However, in a video one year later, Young sings along on guitar with a drummer, a bass player, two members on strings, and a keyboardist.[66] The contrast between these two performances illuminates the ways in which dominant groups in the culture industry utilize their resources in order to intensify and glamorize the entertainment experience. Universal went to great lengths in masking Young's weak performance by constructing a spectacle around him. Young's digital music was strong and his independent image gave him a competitive advantage, but he lacked the economic resources to adapt his own live performance to meet the industrial standard.

In the digital landscape, the ways in which musicians are reaching their audiences may be changing. The promotional tools and tactics designed to attract audiences might vary according to the affordances and constraints of new media, but their commercial function remains consistent and even more intrusive. Artists who use new technology to create, promote, and distribute their music may appear to be resisting the dominant structure of the industry; yet, by resisting over MySpace, they may actually be simplifying the process by which they are contained. MySpace's interactive and competitive structure supports an ideology that influences the commercial practices of

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[65] "Owl City - Full Set! Live in HD w/ Exclusive Swimming With Dolphins," YouTube, Jun 13, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ud07NoWAG2E, (accessed March 2 2011).

[66] "Owl City - Fireflies (Live)," YouTube, April 30 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mn4e0qtx1g0, (accessed March 2 2011).

artists who utilize the site; in effect, major labels can seek out and co-opt artists more efficiently than ever before. Owl City is a strong example of such a process, but this analysis demonstrates much more. Not only are artists using new media to make a stand in a transformative industry, and not only are big players resilient in maintaining their hegemonic dominance, but the economic ideology continues to guide the music industry despite significant advancement in communication technology. With a recording contract, Universal granted Young access to immense resources, and put him in contact with management and marketing teams. Yet, in doing so, Universal became the primary owners of a pristine pop-cultural artifact. The environment fostered by MySpace allowed this artifact, band, or brand to demonstrate a tremendous capacity for independent success, and Universal's decision to acquire it was logical, low risk, and a critical representation of industrial exploitation in contemporary music culture.

CHAPTER III

MUSIC PRODUCTION AS AN ESCAPE

Music production can be a long and tiresome process, but as the individual elements come together and as the orchestration develops a unifying sound, the artist reproduces his or her vision on the page, canvas, or computer. "The 11th hour. For me, it's the part of making records that takes longest," says Adam Young. "The 11th hour requires extreme micro-attention to detail and though it's often the most stressful and fatiguing piece of the process, it's during the final finishing brush stokes that dreams finally bloom and come alive."[67] In this quotation, taken from Owl City's official blog, Young conceptualizes the artistic process as a means by which dreams "come alive." Artists approach the task of creation with a vision, and they attempt to recreate and bring their vision to life during the production process. Yet, artists cannot ensure that listeners will hear or realize their vision in the exact manner that they intend. This is because listeners perceive music in unique and different ways, and music provides different functions for different listeners. For some listeners, music fills the background to daily routines, such as driving, cleaning, and exercising. For other listeners, music immerses them in an entire world of sound. Music can stimulate emotion, release inner tension, and comfort anxiety. Music, an integral aspect of meditation, allows listeners to relax and escape psychologically from their discomfort.

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[67] Adam Young, "The Eleventh Hour," Owl City: The Official Blog, entry posted January 17, 2011 http://owlcityblog.com/2011/01/17/the-11th-hour/ (accessed March 16th 2011).

In the previous chapter, I demonstrate the ways in which social media reinvigorate Adorno's culture industry. In this chapter, I explore the nature of digital production technology in order to reveal a potential escape route from that culture industry. To accomplish this, I provide a framework for evaluating the ways in which digital media intensify the meaning of a musical text, and in turn, provide artists with a progressive ability to exhibit forms of sociopolitical awareness and expression through music. Two premises form the basis of this argument. First, Adorno claims that "standardized content aims at standardized reactions."[68] I examine this claim by exploring new forms of standardization in digital music production. Second, digital media and synthetic sounds convey information to audiences in higher definition than the analog media characteristic of Adorno's time. I apply the logic of high-definition sound to Owl City's digital and synthetic music, and ultimately argue that digital production intensifies the meaning of a musical text by allowing for a virtually infinite arrangement of standardized form and structure. Moreover, because many musicians produce their own musical texts while maintaining their working class lifestyle, I introduce the concept of production as a progressive means of escaping from the culture industry's oppressive force.

The Escape Function of Media

Adorno elaborates on music as a form of escape in his critique of popular music. Escape is "bound to the present mode of production," he states, and to the "mechanized

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[68] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 442.

process of labor to which, directly or indirectly, masses are subject."[69] This mechanized

process of labor is an industrial system that increases production and profits, but, as

Adorno contends, simultaneously strips satisfaction from the individual's functional

position within that system. "Fordism" is a classic example of this process. In an attempt

to manufacture automobiles more efficiently, management teams streamlined production

systems by standardizing parts and labor. This eliminated any need for a worker's sense

of innovation or creative expression, and in turn, this diminished the level of satisfaction

that workers found within their position. In contemporary society, this classic image of

factory life and the assembly line may be disappearing, but the current economic system

of skilled and specialized labor also generates this lack of satisfaction. For example,

cubicles confine individuals as they sit at their computers performing repetitive office

work. Some teachers have the daunting task of educating apathetic students, and many

livelihoods are dependent on sales and commission. While some individuals do

experience forms of satisfaction in their work, the mundane side of work, known as "the

grind," accompanies those aspects of work that may be rewarding.

In response, individuals seek this satisfaction outside of the work process. Many

find this satisfaction in entertainment, such as reading novels, watching films, and

listening to music. However, Adorno contends that the satisfaction that consumers find in

popular music is illusory; the music's standardized structure insidiously mirrors the

meaninglessness of the listener's function within the industrial system. To Adorno,

popular music does not provide an intellectual stimulation, but provides a regressive

distraction from their anxiety and from larger, sociopolitical issues. Forms of Adorno's

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[69] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 458.

distraction are as evident today as they were during his time of writing. For example, the lack of contemporary public discourse on social and political issues is evidence of a society that is increasingly distracted. The growing gap between rich and poor, environmental exploitation and degradation, and the severity of global poverty are all contemporary processes from which entertainment distracts.

Contemporary research problematizes Adorno's notion that popular music affects a universally regressive sense of escape within listeners. More specifically, researchers suggest that audiences construct their own unique form of satisfaction and meaning during their engagement with the media text. For example, Janice Radway acknowledges that romance novels provide an escape for readers, but she emphasizes the ways in which readers create their own meanings from the text based on their own unique cultural and social environments. "The analytic process must shift from the text itself," Radway states, "to the complex social event of reading where a woman actively attributes sense to lexical signs in a silent process carried on in the context of her ordinary life."[70] Similarly, other scholars argue that media texts are "completed only when taken up by people and inserted into their everyday culture."[71] This research challenges Adorno's contention that popular music's escape function is universally regressive, and distracts audiences without the possibility of satisfying individuals in meaningful ways. By engaging with music, listeners have the ability to construct their own sense of meanings that could potentially resolve the deficiencies that they develop from the industrial system in which they are bound.

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[70] Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 8.

[71] John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 6.

However, this co-construction of meaning between artist, audience, and text also highlights the ways in which artists cannot ensure that their artwork will influence audiences in any specific manner. Audiences have unique relationships with the media content that they consume, and their interpretations will vary according to their cultural environment. Yet, Adorno's notion that producers utilize standardized music structures and sounds in order to achieve specific effects in reception is worthy of reinvestigation in the cultural environment of digital media. Digital media afford producers with new ways to utilize standardized content, and these practices could strengthen an artist's ability to convey their intended meaning through music.

21st-Century Standardization

Adorno claims that "structural standardization aims at standard reactions," and the primary effect of such standardization is for the listener to "evince stronger reactions to the part than the whole."[72] To understand Adorno's concept of standardization, one must again recall Adorno's polarization of serious and popular music. In serious music, "every detail derives its musical sense from the concrete totality of the piece which, in turn, consists of the life relationship of the details and never a mere enforcement of a musical scheme."[73] In this schema, the struggle and development of the piece's individual voices constructs the serious work's meaning.[74] Adorno compares a piece of music's totality to society, and suggests that historicity, in the form of development and struggle, is

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[72] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 439.

[73] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 439.

[74] Witkin, 47.

necessary for the individual elements to retain their autonomy. For instruments in a piece "to perform in complete accordance with conventions is to submit the individual voice entirely to social stricture."[75] Serious music is a dynamic negotiation between individual expression and social domination; for Adorno, only serious music, and more specifically "good" serious music, is capable of breaking through the social stricture and conveying this expression.

Contrary to this, Adorno argues that popular music is composed of standardized structures and patterns. Each element of the song can be stripped, interchanged, or rearranged, and the overall meaning remains constant. This is because the meaning of popular music comes to its audiences "pre-digested" by the culture industry. In Adorno's schema, intellectually drained listeners have no interest in serious music, so the culture industry listens to the music for them, repackages it, and sells it back to them as popular music. The product of this process is an artifact strategically organized for mass consumption, and its primary effect is to homogenize and massify the individuals who listen. These effects are byproducts of the regressive force that Adorno observes and condemns in mass culture and its related industrial process.

Adorno draws on the production line to symbolize the role of industrialization in music production. The production line is a systematic and mechanical process that produces identical artifacts in mass quantities. The elements that constitute the system, like the workers and materials, are interchangeable. The system deskills the workers for the purpose of simple replacement, and if a part or person malfunctions, then the system in its totality remains unaffected. Adorno does admit that the "act of producing a song hit

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[75] Susan McClary, "A Musical Dialectic from the Enlightenment: Mozart's Piano Concerto in G Major, K. 453, Movement 2," in *Cultural Critique* (New York: Telos Press 1986), 133.

still remains at the handicraft stage," but he finds popular music's industrial correlation in its promotional and distributional facets.[76] Rhianna's estimated million-dollar budget for the promotion of her single, "Man Down," is a contemporary example of popular music's industrial component. The industrial push of $1 million gets Rhianna's single on radio stations across the country, a banner on iTunes, and ultimately access to a mass audience.[77]

However, this metaphor of the assembly line is not without criticism. Bernard Gendron claims that Adorno's correlation of music production with the assembly line is flawed.[78] To explain, Gendron differentiates between functional artifacts, like the automobiles, and textual artifacts, like songs. "In functional artifacts, part interchangeability is largely a consequence of the technology of the assembly line," he states, and "technology does not put the same constraints on the production of recorded musical sounds."[79] Gendron argues that the technology in a recording studio actually allows for greater variation in the production process rather than increased standardization.[80] This is true, to an extent, but Gendron leaves room for critique in his claim that the modern recording studio is "at least as sophisticated as the assembly line."[81] This claim is worthy of scrutiny because it does not take into account the ways in

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[76] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 443.

[77] Chace.

[78] Gendron, 27.

[79] Gendron, 26.

[80] Gendron, 27

[81] Gendron, 27.

which digital media have simplified the recording studio and the recording process. With minimal hardware and software, artists can now produce music with relative ease.

A closer examination of the modern recording studio further illustrates this claim. The term "recording studio" is very broad. It could mean a high-tech studio in Manhattan, where only the world's finest musicians pay premiums for access, or it could mean an old Dell PC with one microphone in a Minnesota basement. Adam Young contends that he has self-taught studio skills and recorded his hit album, Ocean Eyes, entirely on an old Dell with a Behringer microphone.[82] He has also admitted that he is not technically versed in "how the signal path works or the ways sound can be altered." Yet, the simplicity of these digital tools and software have allowed him to experiment with his sounds and create a commercially viable album without the technical knowledge that is necessary to create specific sounds with analog production.[83]

This following passage from Owl City's blog illuminates several aspects of the basic production process that took place in Young's home studio:

> Really excited about this record and it's a hefty one! Most Pro Tools
> sessions weigh in at seventy tracks or more and some mixes have eight separate
> hi-hat tracks alone. There are often three or more different kick drum samples,
> each compressed and EQ'ed to glue together nicely like puzzle pieces. Four
> different lead synth lines play the same melody, all mixed and matched to form
> "one solitary" line. To me, mixing is the art of fine detail and compromise, though
> in my case, broad stokes is often the secret because it's the micro-details that can
> kill you.[84]

Pro Tools, the Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) he is referring to, is an audio production program. Musicians install DAWs on their computer and then use the

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[82] Kates, 18.

[83] Kates, 18.

[84] Young, "The 11th Hour."

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program to record, edit, mix, and master sounds and songs. There are many different DAWs on the market. Pro Tools, which Young specifically mentions, has been deemed the industry standard and is widely used by amateurs (often in "Lite" forms) and professional artists and recording engineers. Other DAWs include StudioOne, Logic, Reason, and Garageband. Garageband comes pre-installed on Apple computers and laptops; because of this, musicians with Apple computers have immediate access to a DAW (though Garageband has relatively limited features in comparison to its competitors).

The prevalence of DAWs, in combination with a laptop and a microphone (though some laptops have basic microphones installed in the hardware), is a strong example of the general simplicity of the modern recording studio. In Nick Prior's analysis of the laptop's prevalence in music production, he contends that "software is no longer the domain of the sonic experimentalist but has become the staple of the industry."[85] Most DAWs come stocked with software capable of performing the basic functions of production and editing, such as equalization and dynamics processing. In addition, engineering companies are now making digital emulations of renowned hardware tools that mimic the analog sound associated with that specific hardware. While software plug-ins are still relatively expensive for musicians to purchase, they are significantly cheaper than their hardware counterparts, and often, the software version has increased functionality, such as the ability to send more signals through the plug-in at once.

However, a paradox exists within this process. The studio's simplification provides artists with incentives to insert and manipulate standardized content in their

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[85] Nick Prior, "OK Computer: Mobility, Software, and the Laptop Musician," *Information, Communication and Society* 11, no. 7, (October 2008): 922.

production process, while the ease and simplicity allows for the extreme variation of that standardized content. In turn, artists have a tremendous capability to edit and alter the standardized patterns in which Adorno argues that audiences identify. The technique of sampling is a strong example of this. In Young's previous quotation, he states that each one of his songs can have "three or more different kick drum samples." In a general definition, sampling is the act of taking a sound from one source and applying it to another. In Young's case, he has likely taken his drum samples from a software database and applied them to his songs in order to construct the beats. Artists acquire these individual samples through commercial software that comes in large databases filled with various samples of instruments. However, artists can also capture samples themselves by recording the sound's source (such as a person clapping, stomping their foot, etc), storing it on a hard drive or memory card, and then applying that sound in alternative contexts. Artists string samples together in "loops," and sequence these loops to enter and exit the song at any programmed moment.

Digital production with loops and samples is a process in which science and math combine with artistic expression. Loops and samples are fragments that can be connected together, split apart, and intertwined. They are programmable, and they can be built using software. Some popular hip-hop artists even make their material available online for other artists to remix or overdub lyrics. To create a song's beat with samples, an artist might first conceptualize the whole piece and then mathematically orchestrate the beat or loop in order to form the song's foundation. The artist then interchanges programmed samples into the piece and aurally decides which sounds fit his or her vision. The artist then lines the sounds up on a grid and layers the project's additional elements on top. In

turn, this process exemplifies one way in which digital production is becoming increasingly more rational. Just as the assembly line is a mechanism designed to simplify and standardize production, this digital software, characteristic of both amateur and professional studios, simplifies the production process into a cut-and-paste, quantifiable process.

Orchestrating a piece of digital music is akin to constructing a building, as the boundaries between artists and engineers, between aesthetics and practice, continue to blur. In civil construction, workers purchase their materials from an outside source. The materials pre-exist the structure and this has implications on the structure's conception and design. While each structure may undoubtedly be a different building, the underlying framework often remains constant. This is evident in many suburbs, where rows of identical or nearly identical houses line the residential streets. A different family lives in each house and a different dweller is paying the mortgage. Yet, the home's basic function is constant. The home provides what its residents already expect it to provide. A similar expectancy occurs in music production. Specific styles of music call for specific structures, swings, and tempos, whereas specific sounds call for standard production techniques. For instance, audio engineers reuse specific production techniques learned from others in order to emulate pre-existing sounds. Many producers emulate the dynamics processing technique of "side-chain pumping," first popularized by Eric Prydze's song, "Call on Me."[86] This technique ensures the punchy dynamic of a kick drum and synth that is now a standard in dance and techno music. In addition to technique, the quality of material also affects the final structure. Owl City's utilization of

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[86] Jay Hodgson, "A Field Guide to Equalization and Dynamics Processing on Rock and Electronica Records," *Popular Music* 29, no. 2, (2010): 290.

synthetic material especially warrants analysis. Young states that he has "four different lead synth lines play the same melody" in one of his songs. Owl City relies heavily on synthetic instruments; very rarely does he record with acoustic instruments. Auto-tune, a form of pitch correction software, even digitally enhances his singing.[87] Synthetic sounds and instruments can also come pre-stocked within DAWs and are available in commercial packages.

Equalization and High-Definition Sound

The production technique of equalization emphasizes the theoretical significance of synthetic sound. While equalization is standard in analog production, synthetic and digital sounds extend equalization's features. In his response to the software version of the renowned "Neve 1081" equalization unit, Young said: "The tastiest EQ I've ever laid ears on. Pure ear candy. Makes the rustiest chunk of audio shine like a deep-buffed chrome hot rod hood ornament."[88] Equalization is a means of achieving clarity between the various sounds and instruments in a mix. The human ear, in peak physical condition, can hear frequencies ranging from 20Hz to 20 kHz.[89] In equalization theory, each sound rests in a band of frequencies. Lower notes and sounds peak in lower frequencies and the higher the note, the higher the note's frequency response. One goal in the mixing process is to equalize the different sounds to allow each individual instrument and voice to be heard clearly when they are all played simultaneously. Because computers capture the

[87] Joe Bosso, "Adam Young on Protools, Fireflies, and MySpace," MusicRadar.com, March 4, 2010, http://www.musicradar.com/news/guitars/qa-owl-city-reveals-live-and-studio-setup-i-use-auto-tune-238845/3, (accessed March 18, 2011).

[88] Young, "The 11th Hour."

[89] Hodgson, 284.

sound directly and eliminate the microphone as an intermediary, synthetic instruments have more clearly defined bands of frequencies than acoustic instruments. In turn, fewer undesirable frequencies come through when recording the instrument. This minimizes (or eliminates) potential external noise which may be recorded along with the instrument or voice, such as the sound of the furnace which would come on and interrupt Young's recording sessions in his parents' basement.[90] In effect, synthetic sounds are more pure in sonic form and hold information that is more readable. The elimination of noise and intensification of readable information leads to a more clearly encoded and higher definition sound.

This concept of high-definition sound illustrates the immersive capabilities of Owl City's music. Because Owl City's production process utilizes digital production tools and synthetic sounds, the resulting media text is of a higher definition than analog music or music without these forms of digital processing. The logic is simple: the higher the definition of a medium, the more information the medium transmits to the receiving audience and the less information the receiver has to fill in for him or herself. The extension of this logic to Owl City's digital music illuminates the ways in which high-definition sound informs the aural senses of its listeners with greater definition, presenting a clearer message and leaving a smaller possibility of audience misinterpretation. This notion of a clearer message, combined with new forms of digital standardization, demonstrates the way in which Owl City's high-definition sound might intensify the capacity for a musical work to evince standardized reactions and immerse its audiences in the listening experience. Many people experience this sense of immersion

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[90] Kates, 18.

while reading a novel or watching a suspenseful film, and high-definition movies and the IMAX Theater intensify this experience. This sense of immersion is a significant reason as to why many people enjoy reading, watching movies, and listening to music. If an audio system can reproduce this high definition aural entertainment accurately, then one could draw similar conclusions for music.

Moreover, Owl City exemplifies the ways in which high-definition sounds might fulfill Adorno's notion of "pseudo-individualization." In Adorno's framework, pseudo-individualization "is the necessary correlate of musical standardization."[91] To Adorno, standardization provides the basic template for a song's production, and pseudo-individualization gives listeners the impression that they are hearing something novel and unique, rather than an industrial product. Owl City's high-definition, aurally appealing and attractive sounds accomplish this task by drawing listeners in and maintaining their interest. More specifically, Owl City attracts its listeners with aurally appealing, high definition sounds that enhance the song's basic framework. Owl City's song, "Vanilla Twilight," demonstrates this point. Specifically, from 0:23 to 0:46, one can clearly hear the synthetic drum beat created with its kick drum, snare, and closed hi-hat cymbals, as a synth padding fills the lower to mid frequencies.[92] Slightly above, a synth lead line (perhaps with four different layered tracks, as noted in Young's quotation above) carries the melody in perfect clarity to the mid to upper range of the frequency spectrum. Finally, synthetic bells and chimes ornament the very top of the mix, in great clarity, as they fade softly into the background beyond the emergence of a synthetic organ and vocals.

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[91] Adorno, "On Popular Music," 445.

[92] Adam Young, "Owl City - Vanilla Twilight," YouTube, 3:53, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIz2K3ArrWk (accessed July 6, 2011).

The presentation of attractive people in mainstream media is worth mentioning to clarify the immersive potential of Owl City's attractive music. If one interchanges ear candy with eye candy, one realizes that these two concepts, though appealing to different senses, have similar effects on the audience. For example, many audiences find attractive women appealing. The advertising industry's utilization of sex appeal in the marketing process illustrates this point. The logic is that beautiful and attractive men and women draw people in, and if a product is in an attractive environment, individuals will be more likely to perceive the specific product as attractive. If a composer or songwriter surrounds the framework of a song with attractive aural stimuli, the listener may be more likely to perceive the music as attractive. These attractive aural stimuli may be a superficial, outer-covering of bells, whistles, and glamour, but their purpose is to draw listeners into the rest of the material. Like Adorno's concept of pseudo-individualization, the high-tech graphics in a Hollywood film, and the digital enhancements of model photography, aural stimuli have a practical function in production and musical processes.

The Progressive Escape

The process of creating and listening, and of speaking and understanding, reflects a musical literacy that challenges Adorno's regressive interpretation of music as an escape. When artists create through production, their unique representation of inner vision immerses listeners, and enables a musical escape that high-definition sound intensifies. This form of escape is progressive because it allows for the comprehension of the artists' ideas, beliefs, and arguments. Moreover, this progressive escape immerses not only the listeners, but also the artists themselves. When artists produce music in the

digital studio, they engage in a process of distraction through intense, intellectual stimulation and creation. In turn, this process not only affords artists and audiences the ability to escape within musical content, but also the ability for artists to escape from the culture industry's homogenizing and commercializing force by a means of individual expression. The high-definition sounds afforded by digital media, in conjunction with the new forms of standardization and variation in modern production, are essential resources that enable artists to create these forms of meaningful content in the 21st-century. When artists appropriately utilize these resources, their content effectively immerses both the audience and themselves, conveying meaning, and affording the ability to escape within each participant's immersive experience.

I am not arguing that Owl City exhibits a form of expression that Adorno would have praised. The meaning within music varies according to the ways in which artists write their music, and to the ways in which audiences participate in the meaning's construction. Adam Young believes that music's artistic value is relative to its effect upon the listener. His goal is to stimulate an effect in the minds of others in order to captivate them in an alternative world, and he achieves this in some of his listeners. Yet, more importantly, his goal encourages rationalized forms of musical production in attempts to achieve this stimulation in his engaged listeners. In turn, these digital techniques and resources could heighten Young's ability to convey sociopolitical content if he chose to do so.

Artists who utilize these digital resources for the purposes of sociopolitical expression have an ability that did not exist in Adorno's time. However, Adorno would likely argue that digital production's new forms of standardization push music further

from his ideal conception of artistic expression, and more toward the system of oppression characterized by the culture industry. In the context of the contemporary media environment, Adorno's critical model parallels Andrejevic's digital enclosure. The social system in which individuals live is highly controlled, and the ability for those individuals to demonstrate agency is limited. In contrast, approaching today's media environment from an interactive perspective similar to Jenkins allows for a potential form of expression. Contemporary artists have the ability to convey this expression through the digital production and related consumption of music. Recognizing both of these perspectives, the critical and the idealistic, is necessary in order to grasp the complete picture of the ways in which media influence contemporary music culture. By fusing these two media discourses, and by illuminating the ways in which these discourses interact with Adorno's key themes, my enhanced model demonstrates one way to accomplish this task.

In the contemporary media environment, audio production can happen almost anywhere, and the songwriters themselves are often their own producers and their only audience. In turn, the recording studio and the practice of music production continues to be a necessary area of analysis for understanding the function of contemporary music. Media scholars must continue to observe the ways in which artists encode sound in the recording, mixing, and mastering processes. As David Sanjek notes, "the hands who turn the dials, run the tape, set the mics, and balance the mix are as much authors of sound as are songwriters and musicians."[93] The practice of recording and production is worthy of analysis because, with the prevalence of the standardization and variation characteristic

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[93] David Sanjek, "Funkentelechy vs. the Stockholm Syndrome: The Place of Industrial Analysis in Popular Music Studies," *Popular Music and Society* 21, no. 1 (1997): 87.

of software-based home recording and digital sounds, the recording process takes on new

meanings of escape for the producers and their listeners.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I argue that social media transform the relationships between musicians and their audiences into continuous streams of observation and interaction. As musicians adapt to their audience, the audiences react to the artists' presentation. This social dynamic suggests that structural characteristics remain integral to media analysis in the digital age. The structure of MySpace facilitates a key component of Adorno's traditional culture industry, the economic ideology, on the local level of music production. MySpace makes explicit the qualities that categorize "successful" artists, and in turn, artists willingly guide themselves into exploitation by participating in a competitive and hegemonic system that encourages commercialization. In the case of Owl City, this social dynamic led to a form of exploitation that is similar to the way in which the culture industry has traditionally operated in the past. However, by highlighting the differences between digital and analog production, I also demonstrate the capacity for audio technologies to allow forms of artistic expression that Adorno could not have foreseen. The nearly infinite level of variation within DAWs, and the ability to manipulate standardized musical material ensures a potential for artists to express meaningful forms of social and political commentary. This potential for expression counters Adorno's argument that popular music is only regressive and incapable of conveying such expression. In turn, Adorno's vision of the culture industry as a universal entity that produces and distributes aesthetically bankrupt content is increasingly problematic; it cannot account for the ways in which new technologies empower consumers with these new expressional tools. As digital production technologies continue

to progress, high-definition sounds and simplified functionalities will continue to empower more individuals with tools for cultural production and expression.

The simplicity of digital production not only allows more people to "hear" music, but also allows more people to understand it. The dynamic of producing and listening, of communicating and understanding, has a tremendous capacity to generate forms of political power that could ultimately affect social change. In *The Politics of Small Things*, Jeffrey C. Goldfarb suggests that "when people freely meet and talk to each other as equals, reveal their differences, display their distinctions, and develop a capacity to act together, they create power."[94] Musicians and audiences realize this power by communicating through music and sound. In ways similar to the roles that Facebook, Twitter, and older media, such as the newspaper *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, played in Egypt's recent revolution, new technologies facilitate this form of power on the micro-level.[95] People create music to convey intimate, emotional, or rational messages, and when more people have the ability to both create and understand the music's message, the political potential of music, and in turn digital production, intensifies.

Furthermore, the accessibility of digital production enables individuals to maintain their working-class livelihoods, while simultaneously facilitating an escape from the social structure in which they operate. Artists, audiences, hobbyists, and professionals with these production tools are each adequately equipped to reproduce their unique musical texts whenever their schedule permits. In essence, the capacity for middle-class individuals to communicate forms of sociopolitical awareness through

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[94] Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *The Politics of Small Things: The Power of the Powerless in Dark Times (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4.

[95] Romesh Ratnesar, "Not Just the Facebook Revolution," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, June 6, 2011, 64.

music has never been greater. Yet, the artists and the individuals themselves will ultimately determine their action or inaction, and time will shed light on the ways in which musicians utilize this technology. Nevertheless, the potential for power through expression exists.

In turn, I emphasize that recognizing both critical and idealistic interpretations of the ways in which digital media affect contemporary music culture is a valuable model for enhancing Adorno's theoretical framework. Yet, the idealistic notion that digital production tools afford individuals the ability to convey awareness and expression does not counteract the critical interpretation that social media afford the ability to oppress that expression. Rather, each interpretation develops and supports my main thesis that envisioning Adorno's theoretical framework through a lens of media analysis provides a more inclusive model for exploring Adorno's continuing relevance in the digital age.

The specific themes that I draw on in my analyses, the economic ideology and media as a form of escape, will continue to alter with and adapt to the continuously changing dynamic of the contemporary media environment, and researchers must continue to analyze the implications of this changing dynamic. An example of this alteration is the way in which MySpace has recently undergone a substantial structural transformation, and has seen a significant decline in its user base.[96] Facebook is currently the social network leader, but Google+ is only beginning to enter the market. The future of social networking may cease to operate through individual entities, such as MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter, but evolve into a universal frame, such as Google+, through which users navigate their entire social networking experience. While the social network's

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[96] Tim Arango, "Hot Social Networking Site Cools as Facebook Grows," *New York Times*, January 11th, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/12/technology/internet/12myspace.html?pagewanted=all (accessed August 10th, 2011).

inherent function of collapsing distance and fostering forms of networked social interaction will likely remain consistent throughout these alterations, more research will be necessary in order to understand both micro- and macro-level implications as the media landscape continues to change.

Given the broad spectrum of digital and social media, the variations between different genres of music, and the long-debated study of media reception, the analyses above have many limitations. First, I have focused my analyses solely on the relationships and production techniques of only one musician. Although Owl City is a compelling representation of the dynamic music culture in the digital era, Owl City does not reflect the culture in its entirety. Moreover, I cannot take into account every social, economic, or cultural factor that could influence the relationships between technology, artists, record labels, and audiences. In addition, I am not an expert on digital production technology. My knowledge comes from personal experience as a musician and from producing music in my own home recording studio.

Yet, these forms of personal experience have given me an understanding of music that is common in contemporary music culture, and this experience has afforded me the opportunity to observe the capabilities of digital production first hand. In my personal experience as a musician, the commercial force behind the production of music has become more apparent to me as I continue to involve myself with contemporary music culture. In certain cases, this force is an explicit broadcast of an artist's business mindset and commercial agenda. For instance, during a casual conversation, a fellow musician once expressed joy to me in realizing that his music was a commodity. He explained that his band strives to produce the most enticing package of songs, photos, and videos. This

conversation led us to exchange our original music in a listening session, followed with comments and critiques. To this musician, my music sounded like nothing else in the current music scene. Because of this, he could not envision where my band might fit into the broader market of the music industry. On the contrary, to me, his music sounded familiar. His music sounded as though other artists had already written, recorded, and performed it. The songs had commercially appealing properties; they were fast, upbeat, and catchy. Yet, they lacked a sense of novelty. This musician's band created their music by observing and emulating other popular artists in their surroundings. This led to the traditional standardized structures of verses and choruses, similar sounds, and repetitive hooks, but the music lacked Adorno's concept of pseudo-individualization, or the external cloak that appears unique, novel, and genuine. Their strategy was finding a current popular sound and capitalizing on it, whereas my strategy was conceptualizing where I believed the popular sound would go, and then creating a unique sound to fill that future void. However, the significance here rests not in the better business strategy, but in the ways in which the commercial ideology guided our artistic visions long before audiences would ever have a chance to hear our music.

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