



The Pop-Pickers Have Picked Decentralised Media: the Fall of Top of the Pops and the Rise of the Second Media Age

by David Beer
University of York

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Abstract

The BBC has recently announced that Top of the Pops, the long-running weekly popular music programme, will broadcast its final episode in the summer of 2006. This brief 'rapid response' article considers how the conclusion of Top of the Pops' 42 year history may be understood as representative or indicative of broader transformations in musical appropriation. As such it considers the fall of Top of the Pops in relation to the rise of what Mark Poster has described as a 'second media age' (Poster, 1996). This second media age is defined by the emergence of decentralised and multidimensional media structures that usurp the broadcast models of the first media age. This article argues that the decommissioning of Top of the Pops, and the ongoing expansion of 'social networking' sites such as MySpace and Bebo, illustrates the movement from a first to a second media age. In light of these transformations I suggest here that there is a pressing need to develop new research initiatives and strategies that critically examine these new digitalised forms of musical appropriation.

Keywords: Music, Digital, Digitalisation, Internet, Capitalism, Social Networking, Rhetoric, Second Media Age, Authenticity, Culture

Introduction

'We're very proud of a show which has survived 42 years in the UK and gone on to become a worldwide brand but the time has come to bring the show to its natural conclusion...Although we bid a fond farewell to Top of the Pops we remain as passionate as ever about reflecting the vitality of contemporary music across all our channels.' (Jana Bennett, BBC Director of Television, *BBC press release*, 2006)

1.1 *Top Of The Pops* (TOTP), the BBC's weekly popular music show, has become an established television brand over the past four decades^[1]. The first episode of TOTP, hosted by Jimmy Saville and transmitted live from a converted church in Manchester, was broadcast at 6.35pm on the 1st of January 1964 (*BBC press release*, 2006). The programme later, for 'logistical reasons', moved from Manchester to London's Lime Grove Studio's in 1967 (*TOTP2*, n.d.). Originally commissioned for six shows, the BBC recently announced that the 2,204th episode of TOTP would be its last (Byrne, 2006).

1.2 This final episode of the 'world's longest running weekly music show' (*BBC press release*, 2006) was broadcast on BBC 2 on the 30th of July 2006. The programme, which showed various performances from the TOTP archives and the final chart rundown, was presented by a selection of hosts from various eras of the programme's history - including Jimmy Saville, Dave Lee Travis, Mike Read, Tony Blackburn, Pat Sharpe, Reggie Yates, and Edith Bowman. Following the 'last ever' performance, the promotional video for 'Hips don't lie' by Shakira featuring Wyclef Jean, the programme concluded with Jimmy Saville ceremonially switching off the studio lights.

1.3 This 'rapid response' article considers the details surrounding this recent fall of TOTP and suggests that

this may be understood to be representative of the rise of what has been described as a 'second media age' (Poster, 1996). I argue here that in light of the transformations we are seeing in music appropriation, embodied by the demise of TOTP and the emergence of internet sites such as MySpace and Bebo, we now need to formulate new research initiatives and strategies that attempt to understand these complex decentralised media models through critical analyses of the ways in which these digital media intersect with music industry agendas and the everyday life aspects of music culture. I suggest here that it is necessary to interrogate the utopian rhetoric that surrounds these apparently democratised, decentralised, and disintermediated forms of technologically afforded musical appropriation in order to open up opportunities for sociological investigation.

The fall of Top Of The Pops

2.1 It is probable that we all have stories relating to our experiences of various moments from TOTP's 42 year history. Some will recall one of Cliff Richards record 160 appearances on the programme, one of Status Quo's 87 appearances, or performances by The Smiths, Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, Dave Clarke Five, or The Who, amongst other cultural luminaries. Or, perhaps, the choreographed dance routines of the Go-Go's, Pan's People, Ruby Flipper, Legs & Co, or Zoo (*TOTP2*, n.d.) remain as prominent memories of the TOTP experience. However, I don't wish to dwell on the cultural values of TOTP as a nostalgic intimation toward the sad demise of music as we knew it. Rather I wish here to use the decommissioning of TOTP as illustrative of a series of ongoing cultural transformations around the practices of musical appropriation.

2.2 TOTP – which in its abbreviated form represents one of the many attempts by the BBC to re-brand the programme – underwent some transformations of its own in what became its final years. As well as moving from its traditional Thursday night slot to Friday night during the 1990s, we also saw a range of TOTP offshoots. These included TOTP2, a Steve Wright hosted repository of archive performances organised around unifying themes^[2], TOTP Plus, a Sunday morning magazine programme, and TOTP Saturday, a rival to the success of the ITV Saturday morning popular music show *CD:UK*. In more recent months TOTP moved from its traditional place on BBC1 to BBC2, and was shifted from the Friday to Sunday evening schedules. This revamped and relaunched version of the programme began incorporating archive performances (usually two per programme) alongside performances by contemporary popular music performers^[3].

2.3 Achieving its highest viewing figures during the 1970s when 'audience figures regularly reached 16 million' (The Museum of Broadcast Communications, n.d.) it has been reported that, leading up to its decommissioning, TOTP audience figures fell from 'nearly 7 million to around 1 million' (Byrne, 2006: 3). The BBC have directly connected this fall in TOTP's viewing figures with the rise of digital technologies and transformations in music consumption. A BBC statement on the issue claimed that:

'Over recent years the show has faced ever increasing competition from multimedia and niche musical outlets which enable viewers to consume music of their choice any time night or day in a way that Top of the Pops simply can't deliver in its current weekly format' (BBC spokesman', Telegraph.co.uk, 2006)

2.4 In light of these transformations a further BBC statement claimed that:

'The decision to bring the show to an end after 42 years has not been taken lightly and over the past few years every effort has been made to maintain the quality and distinctiveness of the show...However, the BBC's Creative Review Music Strategy has concluded that in a rapidly changing musical landscape *Top Of The Pops* no longer occupies the central role it once did.' (Byrne, 2006:3)

2.5 The BBC's rhetoric clearly indicates, or suggests, that blame lies for the fall of TOTP with the emergence of interactive digital multimedia opportunities. The BBC's claim is that TOTP, as an out-dated format, simply could not 'deliver in the face of increasing competition from multimedia outlets.' (Byrne, 2006: 3). Of course, it is impossible to know if these new media are *directly* and *solely* responsible for the downfall of TOTP, or if other interconnected factors, such as changes in youth culture, the video game movement, scheduling, etc, have contributed to the increased irrelevance of the popular music programme.

2.6 Either way, the fall of TOTP leaves us with a series of pertinent questions about the implications of the digitalisation of music appropriation: what are these alternative media outlets? How are these media restructuring the appropriations and understandings of popular music? How have these media afforded reconfigurations in everyday musical practices? Whether we agree with the BBC's appraisal that these alternative media streams have directly *caused* the fall of TOTP or not, it is worth considering what appears to be a large scale and significant uptake of decentralised media opportunities, particularly as these become embedded into everyday cultural routines. Indeed, it is possible here to use the fall of TOTP as illustrative of broader transformations in how people are appropriating music in their everyday lives, or, indeed, how popular culture is reorganising itself around the affordances of a range of new information and communication technologies (ICTs)^[4].

2.7 Having accepted the BBC's rhetorical connection between the fall of TOTP and the emergence of the new digital media it is worth noting that there are, of course, other possibilities. Indeed, there are a range of political and/or financial agendas that may have been responsible for the BBC's strategic decisions to move TOTP around the schedules and to finally conclude its broadcast. The BBC's rhetoric, as with any rhetorical formulation, is imbued with the interests, ingrained perspectives, and embedded understandings that colour, reflexively or non-reflexively, the position it implies. Indeed, a range of motivations may be

read into the BBC's statements. Without wishing to side step these issues – which would make for lively debates in media studies – the concern here is with the social and cultural changes of which the end of TOTP is a part.

The rise of the second media age

3.1 One of the more significant recent transformations in music culture has been the increasing dominance of the practice of music downloading. Indeed, there have now been well over 1 billion *legal* music downloads worldwide, purchased from Legal music download sites such as <http://www.itunes.com>, <http://www.tesco.com>, and the legally morphed <http://www.Napster.com> music subscription site. There have also been an unknown number of *illegal* music downloads, obtained through peer-to-peer networks such as <http://www.limewire.com>, <http://www.gnutella.com>, and <http://www.kazaa.com>. The rise of digitalised forms of music piracy and bootlegging, embodied by the free sharing of music on file-sharing networks, have received particularly significant attention with regard to their 'impact' upon the music industry. The commentaries on music file-sharing in the popular press focus centrally upon the damage caused to music by file-sharing activities diverting revenue away from artists (and the grass roots of the British music scene). This culminated in a series of high profile legal cases between the music industry and individual music file-sharers on one hand, both in the USA and Europe, and file-sharing networks such as Napster (prior to its re-launch as a legitimate download site) on the other (see Mewton, 2001; BPI, 2005).

3.2 The crucial point here is that musical artefacts and music reproduction and collecting practices have, to varying degrees, been reconfigured in the movement from physical discs to digitally compressed virtual music files. This transformation, when allied with the interactive potential of the internet has radical consequences. A striking example of this transformation in music appropriation practices in the face of digitalisation is illustrated by the recent number one single 'Crazy' by Gnarls Barkley, which, during the early summer of 2006, reached number one in its first week of release solely through internet downloads (and before the release of the physical CD format).

3.3 We have now seen further transformations to these digitalised musical appropriation practices with the emergence of an internet based phenomenon that has become known as 'social networking' (Garfield, 2006: 6). These free to access sites such as www.myspace.com, which has 80 million members and counting, and www.bebo.com, which has 25 million members, enable people to build their own sites, construct their own blogs (online journals), and build up online communities of 'friends'. In a recent report on this emerging phenomenon, *The Observer* described these 'social networking' sites in the following terms:

[the user] can do a lot of the usual internet things on their Bebo homepages like uploading music, videos and photos, and updating their blog, but for the first time they can do it all in one place...so imagine the possibilities if anyone of any age could create their own webpage for free, and include in it almost everything that turned them on; and imagine if they were instantly linked to everyone else.' (Garfield, 2006:6)

3.4 These networked sites are used to display personal photographs, to provide links to favourite music, performers, film, and television sites, to update journal entries, to communicate with other users, and to build up social networks of 'friends' around shared interests, and even, in some instances, to arrange actual meetings (Garfield, 2006). Here we see virtual and actual communities enmeshing in everyday life practices, thus further undermining any notion that we may keep these as distinct spheres in sociological research.

3.5 Sites such as MySpace now also have vast musical presences. Illustrating the growing significance of these social networking sites for music appropriation, there are now innumerable well-known popular music groups and artists with their own sites on the MySpace network. To return to the Rolling Stones, who, 42 years previously, provided the first ever performance to be broadcast on the first episode of TOTPs, we find that they now have their own MySpace webpage. They currently, at the time of writing, have four free tracks available for download on the site. Their well-known track 'I can't get no satisfaction' has attracted 189,463 plays. Of the more contemporary popular music groups, the Arctic Monkeys track 'I bet that you look good on the dancefloor', which is also available for free download, has attracted 346,545 plays^[5].

3.6 Through these MySpace sites performers are able to make their music and webcast footage of live performances available for download, place photos of themselves, add links to their official websites, and interact with their fans. MySpace sites enable the accumulation and interaction of a community of internetworked fans based upon these shared tastes and interests. These then become online fanbases that are instantly accessible to performers and to the music industry.

3.7 This type of practice has resulted in MySpace providing the opportunity for performers to 'get noticed' by popular music consumers. MySpace, and its creation of communities of online 'friends', has recently been credited with creating the opportunity for artists such as the Arctic Monkeys and Sandi Thom to reach number one positions in the weekly sales charts. The idea here appearing to be that people 'discovered' these artists through MySpace and then purchased downloadable or physical copies of their singles and albums.

3.8 As this brief overview indicates, MySpace is a network of hypertextually integrated sites that adapts to a range of practices and preferences. It is this flexibility of use – where users design their own site layout, style, avatars, etc. – that is the defining feature of the social networking phenomenon and its interfaces. If we take the implications for music culture for instance, these social networking sites are not *simply* 'music sites' *per se*, yet they have caused a rapid and radical reconfiguration of the relations between well-known

and little-known performers and their respective audiences. It is this reconfiguration that, considering the significant and rapidly escalating number of users, requires urgent and critical inquiry. The work of Mark Poster is particularly useful for creating a foundation for these inquiries, particularly as we consider the relations between the fall of TOTP and the rise of these new internet phenomena.

3.9 It has now been some ten years since Poster wrote of the emergence of what he labelled *The Second Media Age* (1996). This second media age, for Poster, was to be defined by the emergence and escalating prominence of decentralised and multidimensional media structures. At the time Poster's contention was that:

'The Twentieth Century has witnessed the introduction of communications systems that allow a wide distribution of messages from one point to another, conquering space and time first through electrification of analogue information, then through digitalization.' (Poster, 1996: 3)

3.10 Poster's central argument was that with the onset of the digitalisation of media we had begun the transition from the uni-directional modernist broadcast model, operating from the few to the many, toward decentralised models of multidimensional participation and interactivity. Poster claimed that:

'With the incipient introduction of the information "superhighway" and the integration of satellite technology with television, computers and telephone, an alternative to the broadcast model, with its severe technical constraints, will very likely enable a system of multiple producers/distributors/consumers, an entirely new configuration of communication relations in which the boundaries between these terms collapse.' (Poster, 1996: 3)

3.11 Poster's prediction, back in the mid 1990s, was that a 'second age of mass media [was] on the horizon.' (Poster, 1996: 3). For Poster, this was a transition that would ultimately result in the collapse of the boundaries between the previously distinct categories of producer, distributor, and consumer. This suggested collapse of categories, as a consequence of the incorporation of digital technologies, has now emerged as a theme across a range of works into contemporary music and contemporary music culture (Théberge, 1997; Taylor, 2001; Beer, 2005). The fall of TOTP, and the emergence of the social networking phenomenon, may be understood as further evidence of the shift toward, or even the realisation of, a second media age.

3.12 Using Poster's definitions we may understand TOTP as representative of the first media age 'dominated by the broadcast model of few producers and many consumers' (Poster, 1996: 5), whereas the new internet based social networking phenomenon, of MySpace and BeBo, may be thought of in terms of the multidirectionality and multidimensionality of the second media age. In this sense we see embodied in the fall of TOTP and the rise of social networking the shift, to use Poster's terminology, from a first to a second media age.

3.13 However, this is not to argue that this shift between media ages has been complete or without complication. As Poster argued:

'the insertion of a period may suggest not a passage from one state of being to another but a complexification, a folding in of one structure upon another, a multiplying or multiplexing of different principles in the same social space. Periods or epochs do not succeed but implicate one another, do not replace but supplement one another, are not consecutive but simultaneous.' (Poster, 1996: 21)

3.14 We see for example the ongoing significance of music television channels such as MTV and VH1, amongst many others. These are, of course, based upon the first media age broadcast model. The difference here is that these are often interactive (and sometimes specialised or niche) forms of television with music video selections texted or emailed into the channel by the viewers. Indeed, the survival of terrestrial popular music shows until relatively recently, including TOTP and CDUK (which has now also ended), indicates that, as Poster argued, the movement between media ages should not be thought of as complete or discrete. Rather this shift toward decentralised media, exemplified by music file-sharing and the multidimensional communities of the social networking phenomena, is implicated by the technologies and cultural practices of the preceding era. Indeed, it would be a mistake to think of the new digitalised media as distinct from the analogue, to talk of media ages is not an attempt to reproduce 'a binary logic' (Poster, 1996: 21).

3.15 The importance of TOTP – apart from its recording of the recent history of youth culture, its archiving of mainstream cultural movements, the definition of generational boundaries, and its harbouring of cultural memories – is that, through its demise, it illustrates a part of what might be thought of as a broader cultural shift toward a second media age, whilst also indicating the complexity of these transformations both in terms of everyday musical appropriation and the relations between media ages. It is this reconfiguration in everyday cultural practices that the end of TOTP's implies that now requires urgent sociological attention, particularly as we attempt to come to terms or even understand the sociological implications of the increasingly significant emergence of social networking sites, such as the ubiquitous MySpace, as well as a range of other internet based cultural repositories.

The challenges of 'social networking'

4.1 This complex and ongoing movement between the first and second media age, exemplified by the fall of TOTP and the emergence of digitalised music culture, leaves us with a series of questions and challenges that require further consideration. I will now conclude by briefly considering some of the questions and challenges that face sociological research into the new musical appropriation through

decentralised media.

4.2 Perhaps the key issue requiring analysis concerns the relations between the 'democratic' images of the new media – as embodied in phrases such as 'how the people took over the internet' (Garfield, 2006) – and the wider flows of information capitalism. The challenge is to find the underlying structures, flows and 'circuits' (Thrift, 2005) of capitalism in these apparently democratised, decentralised and disintermediated systems of distribution/consumption/networking/sharing. Or, in short, to address cultural studies apparent 'amnesia' about capitalism when considering the processes of digitalisation (Burrows, 2005; Gane, 2003). The utopian vision of the 'people's' internet (Hand, 2005) as a site of liberation and empowerment now needs to be tested without recourse to the dystopian vision of a newly digitalised 'culture industry' (Adorno, 2001).

4.3 Rather than subscribing to the extremes of the imagining of these systems as either forms of social domination disguised as choice and freedom (Bauman, 2003), or the liberation of everyday social experience through the compression of time and space and the increased richness of instant globalised communications, we need a form of inquiry that appreciates the 'complexity', non-linearity, and unpredictability of these virtual, or information-material, spaces (Hayles, 1999; Urry, 2003, 2005; Thrift, 2005). In short, we need to escape the polarising discourses of utopianism and dystopianism (Hand & Sandywell, 2002; Thrift, 2005) to recognise the subtleties of these complex practices, processes, and interactions occurring across, or interweaving, virtual and physical spaces, artefacts and bodies. This is to attempt to understand how these virtual phenomena have concrete implications for people, places, identities, senses of belonging, communities, engagement, and social inequalities^[6]

4.4 We need now to consider how the new cultural intermediaries of the social networking phenomenon are formed in the tension between various capitalist interests and localised interfaces (of individual agents interacting across these networks of accumulated 'friends').

4.5 Of course, we are also faced here with the problems of conducting research into what are predominantly 'virtual' phenomena (Hine, 2000), an issue that itself introduces a range of analytical problematics around eroded human/non-human, virtual/physical, digital/non-digital, divides. One possibility may be to use the interactive potentials of these networked communities to conduct virtual interviews or even online focus groups. Further to this, and perhaps more pertinently, the information that these sites hold and accumulate about the individuals – their choices, thoughts, movements and interactions – may be used to unravel, through the hypertextual connections and linkages between pages, understandings about taste, preference, belonging (Savage et al., 2005), and the cosmopolitanization of everyday life (Beck, 2000 & 2002; Beck in Gane, 2004) as a form of 'globalization *from within*' (Beck, 2002: 17)^[7]. These social networking sites are in fact vast cultural archives of the 'everyday world' (Featherstone, 2000: 170) that capture, however briefly, the details of contemporary everyday experiences and interactions. As Featherstone (2000) has described, digitalisation has brought with it these vast and non-linear archives that enable rapid access to information and thus transform everyday life through the processes of miniaturization. These interactive social networking archives both transform and record everyday experiences, they are communally owned and shaped, and, therefore, provide an opportunity to access cultural memories.

4.6 The second challenge facing this research is to attempt to understand how these sites, or social networks, and the rhetoric that surrounds them, are used to project authenticity or legitimacy onto performers. The question here is how these sites are reflexively used to authenticate performers. How is being noticed or discovered on these sites a product of the marketing skills, knowledge, power and capital of the music industry? These questions may operate alongside other more obviously sociological questions concerning the ways in which access, engagement and exclusion impinge upon the formation of new *in-crowds* or *cultural elites* in these virtual communities^[8].

4.7 The recent take-over of MySpace by Rupert Murdoch (Garfield, 2006: 7) reveals that we cannot merely think of these networks as 'belonging to the people'. It is an oversimplification to think of networks like MySpace as disintermediated spaces in which music distribution and consumption are democratised or open to all. It is misleading to assume that because these sites are free-to-access that they somehow escape the flows, hierarchies, and structures of capitalism. It is necessary to consider the use of what has become known as 'viral marketing', a 'digital version of word-of-mouth' (Garfield, 2006), to understand how social networks, such as MySpace, are used to promote and circulate particular performers and cultural artefacts.

4.8 If, as Nigel Thrift argues, capitalism may be thought of as a 'series of relations of relation instituted over time through different organizations of time-space' (Thrift, 2005: 1), then, in the case of MySpace and other social networking internet spaces, we are presented with an opportunity to unfold some of the details of these complex relations. MySpace, in a sense, captures the 'everydayness' of the 'knowledge economy' (Thrift, 2005: 3) as people exchange information, cultural artefacts, personal details, links to products and commodities, contacts, friends, and organisational details about events and meetings (all of which would be considered valuable information by those interested in understanding consumers). Indeed, the activities and interactions of MySpace resonate with Thrift's observation that:

'commodities are becoming increasingly animated. This does not mean simply that consumer objects have become more interactive – though the auspices of Internet and wireless technologies, consumers and producers now increasingly interact jointly to produce commodities, and, increasingly, commodities become objects that are being continuously developed (as is the case of, for example, various forms of software). Rather, more and more consumer objects are becoming part of an animate surface that is capable of conducting

'thought'; thought is increasingly packaged in things.' (Thrift, 2005: 7)

4.9 In the case of internet based social networking, it is perhaps people's constantly updated and revised personal information, photographs, and *thought* journals that are the commodity which draws new members into the network and gives existing members the sense of belonging. Music, as it has always been, is one connector around which these (now virtual) social groups meet and relate. Music is one of many cultural aspects and commodities that is deeply interwoven into these complex, fluid, and non-linear online communities of *virtual friends*. It would seem that these 'changes in the form of the commodity...point to the increasingly active role that the consumer is often expected to take.' (Thrift, 2005: 7)^[9].

4.10 The challenge, then, is to attempt to unravel the relations between everyday musical appropriation and the flows of capitalism as *materially instantiated* (Hayles, 1999) in these complex online social networks. It is necessary here to not only consider the transformation of the ways in which individual agents are consuming music in their everyday lives, or how the digitalisation of music culture fits into the various aspects of globalisation, but also it is important to consider here how the music industry is adapting to these digital phenomena (Leyshon, et.al., 2005). It is through this later option that we may come to further understand the implications of digitalisation through the nature of the relations between music culture, everyday experience, and the flows of information capitalism.

4.11 This type of research project needs to fit into an ongoing programme that explores how digitalisation, as an ongoing social process, is not only transforming how people consume or relate to music, but also, on the other side of the coin, how the music industry is becoming fluid, morphing (Sandywell & Beer, 2005), and reconfiguring itself through these new media infrastructures and marketing rhetoric, in order to capture, protect and maintain its revenue streams (Jones, 2000; Breen & Forde, 2004; Leyshon, et.al., 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2006)^[10]. This requires analytical strategies that attempt to understand how the music industry is reflexively theorising and re-theorising its own practices, musical artefacts, and the everyday practices of music production, reproduction and appropriation (Thrift, 1997 & 2005).

4.12 Having said this, perhaps the biggest challenge facing sociologists who wish to investigate the digitalisation of music culture (or cultural informatics in general) will be to attempt to keep up with the subtleties of the transformations that are occurring, to detail the possibilities of the more prominent internet phenomena without overstating their significance, and to attempt to conceptualise and understand the implications of these new possibilities. Events such as the end of TOTP provide windows or points of comparison that create opportunities for the digitalisation of (music) culture to be understood in relation to that which went before.

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Notes

¹Top of the Pops has been broadcast in over 120 countries during this period (*BBC press release*, 2006)

²Although it is worth noting that the BBC has announced that TOTP2 will continue with occasional programmes and one off specials showing performances from the TOTP archives (*BBC press release*, 2006).

³With regards to the themes of this article I should draw attention here to TOTP's own web presence, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/totp>, which provides news about popular music performers, upcoming performances on the show, etc.

⁴This may be understood to be one of the questions that underpins what might be described as the study of 'cultural informatics'. For more on cultural informatics see the work of the recently launched *Social Informatics Research Unit* (SIRU) in the Department of Sociology at the University of York (<http://www.york.ac.uk/res/siru/>).

⁵It was this particular track, released as the Arctic Monkeys' 'debut single', that achieved a position of number one in the sales chart.

⁶Amongst many others, see for example the key works on the social implications of informatization by Haraway, 1991; Loader, 1998; Mitchell, 2003; Graham, 2004; Burrows & Ellison, 2004; Nettleton, et.al., 2004; Savage, et.al., 2005; Burrows, et.al, 2005.

⁷Of course, these new strategies for social research are bound up with questions concerning the ethical uses of this type of data.

⁸ It is possible that the number of recorded 'friends' on these social networking sites may prove to be as significant as the peer rating functions on sites such as eBay. On visiting MySpace, for example, it becomes clear that many of the community members have vast numbers of friends. This is particularly true of the sites of popular music performers who have vast numbers of friends. Not only does this indicated number of friends provide a sense of level of popularity and the length of time that the user is

likely to have been engaged with the site (accumulating friends takes time), it is also possible that we will see a redefinition of the term 'friend' as these sites become more deeply embedded into everyday practice. Understandings of friends and friendship groups may be altered as a part of this wider cultural shift.

⁹Tellingly Thrift explains: 'Consumers are expected to make more and more extravagant investments in the act of consumption itself, through collecting, subscribing, experiencing and, in general, participating in all manner of collective acts of sensemaking.' (Thrift, 2005: 7). Indeed, in the case of MySpace, we see that the act of consumption is also an act of production. *Consuming* the MySpace product requires the *production* of your own profile on the site.

¹⁰The range of outcomes described in this literature, particularly with regard to the successfulness of the industries reactions to digitalisation, reveals that there is still some debate over the exact implications of the movement toward music downloading and the consequences for the music industry. The polarisation of opinions is most clearly illustrated in the recent debate between Marcus Breen and Eamon Forde (2004).

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