IN CONCERT:
THE COORDINATION OF POPULAR MUSIC,
YOUTH PRACTICES, AND LIFESTYLE MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how the cultivation of stardom and genre communities has fostered and expanded the cross-promotional function of popular music. While emphasis is placed on the role visual media have played in the commodification of celebrity "personalities," calculated brand images are not positioned as unique to the mainstream. The central argument is that the promotional power of music within global multimedia apparatuses has not only allowed for unprecedented commercial clout for mainstream pop stars, but has also created advertising niches for "independent" musicians. The relationship between cultural meanings derived by subcultures and their interpretation within lifestyle marketing is evaluated. Key themes include debates around musical authenticity and commercialization, music as an art industry, and problematic cultural hierarchies embedded within competitive youth practices. This discussion analyses how the cachet afforded by rebellious and individualistic youth tastes is harnessed within a marketplace that caters to "personalization" and niche markets.

To my mother, for listening to my endless ideas,

and my father, for providing steady support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A&R   Artist & Repertoire

AC   Adult Contemporary

AOL   America Online

AOR   Album Oriented Rock

ASCAP   American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers

BMG   Bertelsmann Music Group

BMI   Broadcast Music Incorporated

CCCS   Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham University

CHR   Contemporary Hit Radio

CRIA   Canadian Recording Industry Association

EMI   Electrical & Musical Industries

IFPI   International Federation of Phonogram and Videogram Producers

KGOY   Kids Grow Old Younger

MGM   Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

MIDI   Musical Instrument Digital Interface

MP3   Mpeg 1 Audio Layer 3; a compression form used for audio files

MTV   Music Television

NAC   New Age Contemporary

R&B   Rhythm & Blues

RCA   Radio Corporation of America

RIAA   Recording Industry Association of America

UPN   Originally United Paramount Network, now officially UPN

VALS   Values and Lifestyles

Vcast   Video Podcast

VH-1   Video Hits-One

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Defining the Topic: Popular Music and the Media Environment

The sounds and images of popular music imbue contemporary multimedia environments in ever-more inventive and commercial ways. Clearly branded popular music not only infuses film, television, and advertising, but it has also expanded into online entertainment, video games, and mobile telephone ringtones. The proliferation of new and varied vehicles for consuming popular music has produced a hotbed of cross-promotional tie-in opportunities—a development that has been capitalized on by record labels and individual performers. Popular music has long been a multi-discursive cultural form that relies on various supplementary and complementary media working in concert to increase market viability (Goodwin, 1992; Negus, 1992; Banks, 1998). However, in a context where clothing designers, packagers, record producers, and magazine designers have assumed *creative* roles in engineering marketplace success (Frith, 1988a), the impact of multinational entertainment corporations over the global production, dissemination, and consumption of popular music warrants thorough examination.

This thesis documents and analyzes the acceleration of the popular music industry's elaboration and expansion into complementary multimedia forms and new marketplaces, taking the influence of global entertainment empires into consideration. By examining the culture and business of popular music production, dissemination, and marketing, I seek to understand how popular music and its performers function as

promotional engines. Because image is foundational to today's popular music product, I examine the role visual media play in positioning pop idols and "cool" genre communities. Like Graeme Turner (2004), I argue that celebrity image is the linchpin in global entertainment, serving as a branding vehicle that allows for efficient cross-promotion across a broad range of media platforms and products. I take this notion further, and explore how many mainstream popular music performers have taken advantage of their celebrity value and ubiquity within today's hyper-commercial media environment, leveraging their brand power to sell a range of lifestyle-specific products (e.g. clothing, video games, beverages). The term "pop star conglomerate" is used to describe entrepreneurial entertainers such as Jennifer Lopez, Jay Z, and Hilary Duff, whose celebrity brand is a flagship for diverse companies and business ventures.

However, I contend that the drive to capitalize on commercial opportunities is not unique to multimedia pop celebrities. A youth desire to express individuality or seem different has allowed non-mainstream and/or "rebellious" genres to gain popularity as soundtracks for "cool" advertising and prime time television programs. Much like pop star conglomerates, not-so-struggling "independents" and non-mainstream performers such as The White Stripes, The Killers, and Moby have taken advantage of their cool value or ability to confer status, and have agreed to lucrative licensing agreements and merchandising deals. Importantly, this trend underscores the complementary relationship between art and commerce, and reveals the mythology that surrounds much of audience perceptions of musical authenticity. While the idea of "good music" as reflecting pure artistic creation or a folk culture separate from commerce is a key aspect of the discourse of authenticity, these performers and the corporations through which they *choose* to

produce and distribute their music share in common the profit motive. Any group or performer that signs to a record label in order to sell music commodities (e.g. CDs, DVDs, vinyl) in the marketplace is necessarily a commercial enterprise from its inception.

Central to this thesis is an evaluation of the relationship between popular music (and associated products) and a market economy. This discussion is concerned specifically with *commercial* popular music, defined as that which is produced, promoted, and distributed with the involvement of record companies, be they major or independent. This broad definition parts with many academic and popular assumptions. The terms commercialism and commodification are typically reserved for pop music, which is accompanied with an assumption that popular music genres such as rock originated outside the market (Shuker, 2005)—a highly problematic notion. Keir Keightley (2001) captures how rock mythology characterizes the tension between art and commercialism, which are positioned as diametric opposites:

> Rock mythology asserts a creation story whose primal scene is beyond the mainstream: the illicit coupling of marginalized blues and country tradition spawns a bastard wild child, who, after a fleeting, authentic childhood, is captured, co-opted, and corrupted by the music industry. Rock, originating organically outside of mass culture, is thus tamed in the process of its mass distribution (called 'commercialism'). (p. 126)

While the notion of multinational corporations plundering true art is an enduring concept, it must be stressed that these debates are actually related to the place of artistic autonomy *within* the commercial music industry. Independent record labels may afford more creative control with respect to the production process, but these labels rely on licensing deals with the majors for distribution of their music. This is not to downplay

the importance of more flexible and experimental independent labels. Due to their willingness to embrace innovative music, independent labels were largely responsible for the establishment, expansion, and reinforcement of blues, rhythm and blues (R&B), rock and roll, and other styles and markets throughout the 1950s.[1] However, this important history has arguably fuelled persistent but romanticized dichotomies between majors, which are seen as producing mainstream music for the "masses," and independents, which are seen as producing art for those with refined musical taste. As I will explore, such perceptions of and distinctions made between commercial and non-commercial popular music reveal significant and contentious hierarchies of cultural value.

In assessing the relationship between art and commerce, I adopt the position of neither a cultural pessimist nor a cultural optimist. While the idea that market exchange has corrupted culture is an inaccurate simplification, the contemporary configuration of the music business undoubtedly produces restraints by demarcating possibilities for creative practice. The music industry is hesitant when it comes to investing in unproven sounds or difficult-to-market looks; record labels prefer to promote already-established stars or launch acts that are comparable to those that have proven commercial success. However, as Keith Negus (1999) points out, analyses of the marketing of music often exaggerate the manipulative power of media and promotional practices. The music industry cannot determine meanings, but must, to a certain degree, engage with broader youth cultural practices. There is no sure-win formula for commercial success, and the idea that the music industry has an interest in containing disobedient sounds is inaccurate; like any industry, the issue is whether there is evidence that a given product will sell.

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[1] For a thorough history of the relationship between independent labels and the emergence of rock and roll, see Charlie Gillett's *The Sound of the City: The Rise of Rock and Roll* (1983).

1.2 Statement of Approach: The Interdisciplinary Study of Popular Music

Popular music studies is an interdisciplinary field that traverses communication studies, musicology, ethnomusicology, cultural studies, sociology, gender studies, and ethnic studies. Although scholars approach the study of popular music from a range of perspectives and adopt differing methods, the subject is arguably explored through three main approaches. Structuralist approaches draw from semiotics and/or musicology to examine the generation of meaning in musical texts and among audiences; culturalist approaches construct popular music as a site of active consumption and oppositional politics, considering how individuals, fans, and subcultures determine cultural meanings; and political economic approaches examine the power structure within the capitalistic music industry and its relationship to audience tastes (O'Reilly, 2004; Shuker, 2005). However, it should be noted that a significant body of research that is largely overlooked within popular music studies lies within strategic marketing and consumer behaviour literature. Daragh O'Reilly (2004) suggests that although marketing and popular music studies may have dissimilar objectives, they could benefit from cross-disciplinary empirical research. Both fields share an interest in the meanings associated with the pleasures of music and consumer/audience constructions of identity.

This thesis draws from arguments derived from a number of these approaches and disciplines. I examine the history of the music industry in order to identify both the continuities and changes that influence the contemporary context. Of critical importance is an historical perspective on the symbiotic relationship between popular music, technological innovation, and stardom, as well as the creation of what I consider popular cultural infrastructure (i.e. Hollywood, radio, television).

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To pursue questions regarding the relationship between the concentration of media ownership and musical diversity and innovation, I draw from political economic perspectives on the media industries that comprise this popular cultural infrastructure. The influence of the synergistic promotional machinery achieved within today's vertically and horizontally integrated multimedia conglomerates is evaluated. However, as Keith Negus and Michael Pickering (2004) point out, the complexity and range of attachments that audiences have to music extends beyond its commodity form, posing a challenge for conventional political economy. Furthermore, pursuing issues related to corporate intervention into creative endeavours (within a commercial model) leads to a host of issues regarding how quality and authenticity are measured—and who does the measuring.

Because the prevailing discourses throughout popular music tend to privilege genres dominated by heterosexual white males, it is necessary to analyze how sexuality, race, and gender are inflected within hierarchies of value. Gendered and racialized performative codes within popular music are accompanied by assumptions regarding cultural validity, which are reiterated and reinforced by visual media. Therefore, I engage with social constructivist arguments developed within sociology, cultural studies, gender studies, and ethnic studies. I also draw from Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital in order to explore how musical taste serves as a site of distinction that privileges certain preferences. Because this thesis is primarily concerned with exploring debates regarding creativity, commerce, marketing, and meaning, I do not conduct textual analysis. However, I do consider how the reception of texts (e.g. songs, music videos,

performances, advertisements) reflects hierarchies of taste, which, in turn, figure into meanings derived by audiences.

Throughout this analysis, I use the term "popular music performer," rather than value-laden terms such as rock star, pop star, rapper, artist, or entertainer, in an attempt to avoid further reproducing hierarchies embedded within audience understandings of these terms. While I recognize that significant stylistic and cultural characteristics distinguish different genres and sub-genres, this discussion focuses on the common logic at work in the positioning and promotion of most acts' brand images—not the distinctive musical conventions that differentiate each. For this reason, when I do refer to specific genres, I use broader categories, such as rock, pop, country, and hip-hop, rather than various subgenres.

1.3   Mapping the Terrain: An Outline of Chapters

The historical context for the themes examined throughout this thesis is mapped out in chapter two. Tracing the visual presentations of popular song dating back to the music halls of the late nineteenth century, this discussion investigates the effects of technological change on the popular music industry. This overview identifies a number of significant precedents for the contemporary multimedia popular music product: audience interest in theatrical performances and sing-alongs; the manufacture of the star "personality"; the impact of new technologies (microphone, gramophone, radio, television) on audience/performer intimacy; cross-media promotion through the radio/film star; teen idols and mass merchandising; and the emergence of globally mediated superstars via music television. Central to this discussion is the relationship between visual media and stardom within the developing popular cultural infrastructure.

Shifting to the industrial organization of the music industry, chapter three considers the involvement of multinational entertainment corporations within the production, distribution, and promotion of popular music. After situating the global dominance of Anglo-American corporations in historical context, this discussion engages with questions regarding the relationship between commerce and creativity. Industry responses to market uncertainty are explored, including the use of cross-promotion, global celebrity, and genre labels. The influence of market concentration on musical innovation and diversity is evaluated, and comparisons between the manufacture of pop hits and assembly line production techniques are contested. Responses to risk are characterized as reflecting a reliance on precedents—not an opposition to art.

Chapter four turns to the relationship between popular musical meaning and marketing practices. In order to analyze the relationship between youth audiences and commodity-based expressions of identity, this discussion bridges arguments developed by subcultural theorists with observations made within consumer behaviour research. After elaborating on the complementary relationship between rock rebellion and capitalism, the subversive potential of style is questioned. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is used to conceptualize how taste in popular music is used to confer status, and shifts toward personalization and lifestyle marketing are positioned in relation to youth desire for difference. It is suggested that due to its power to harness emotions and convey a sense of individuality, "rebellious" and/or non-mainstream music has served as an effective advertising engine.

Building on these themes, chapter five considers how popular music performers have capitalized on the multimedia promotional environment. Taking into account the

impact of digital technologies on musical production and consumption, this discussion elaborates on debates regarding the problematic dichotomy between art and commerce and shifting conceptions of authenticity. The impact of the Internet—in terms of peer-to-peer file sharing, new for-profit music formats (MP3), and online retailing—on the business practices of performers is considered.

It is suggested that within this new commercial reality, a paradigm of legitimacy that recognizes economic (rather than symbolic) value has emerged. The notion of creative control has expanded to include commercial control, allowing for an "equal opportunity opportunism" that ranges from pop star conglomerates to savvy independents. However, the persistence of rock ideology is seen in audience perceptions of a hierarchy of "selling out" (or justifiable commercialism).

While each chapter examines different facets of and perspectives on the music industry, they each coalesce around popular music's relationship to North American consumer culture. These discussions support the argument that specific historical and industrial factors bred conditions amenable to the cultivation of celebrity as a promotional tool. In the music industry—which is fraught by risk—audio-*visual* media have played an enabling role in familiarizing audiences with popular music's celebrity "personalities."

While major record companies have been concerned with the manufacture of stardom, advertisers have tapped into the promotional power of more "unfamiliar" performers. These developments raise a number of questions regarding the relationship between brand image and authenticity, marketing and meaning. In order to explore key debates regarding youth music and leisure practices, I draw on both critical and

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marketing perspectives. By bridging academic research developed within popular music studies with the insights of consumer research, I come to a more comprehensive understanding of how commercial music is embedded in adolescents' lives, and address a significant research gap within the field.

CHAPTER 2:
MANUFACTURING THE "TOTAL ENTERTAINMENT PACKAGE": TRACING THE ROOTS OF POPULAR MUSIC, VISUALS, AND STARDOM, 1890-1990

2.1 Introduction

The successful branding of the name and image of numerous contemporary popular music performers has not only translated into pop chart dominance, but also spin-off careers in acting and entrepreneurial endeavours in a range of style-based industries. The following chapter maps out the historical context and relevant precedents for today's multimedia popular music stars. By tracing continuities and changes throughout the history of the commercial music industry, this discussion situates and investigates music's audio-*visual* character. The birth of Music Television (MTV)—the first 24-hour all-music television network—in 1981 is often cited as a seminal moment in the intersection of popular music, technology, and image. As Roger Wallis and Krister Malm (1988) observe, the primacy of the image in the MTV era has resulted in a trend toward "packaging," "whereby the music or the artist are but subcomponents of a *total entertainment package*" (p. 268; emphasis added). However, it is important to establish from the outset that throughout the twentieth century—if not before—there has been a complementary relationship between popular music and visuals, and an understanding of the relationship between a performer's image and sales.

The following historical review examines the intersection of Western popular music trends, technological innovation, and the manufacture of pop stardom, and

considers how the music hall, recordings, radio, cinema, television, and MTV have each influenced the contemporary popular music product. This discussion establishes that there as been a longstanding recognition that the performer's image is inextricably connected to consumer interest, and that pop stardom can be used to cross-promote or advertise a whole host of products in addition to music. The industry's understanding of the power of stardom has been reflected by the common strategy of launching new medium platforms—such as cinema or television—with "proven talent" and familiar content. I argue that the use of visual media throughout the twentieth century has paved the way for the contemporary "total entertainment package."

2.2 Watching Since the Beginning: From Music Hall to Mediated Visuality

Before exploring the history of the role of visuals in popular song, I must address the issue of identifying a starting point for "popular music." Scholars have acknowledged that popular music has *always* been a highly visual cultural form, relying on various supplementary and complementary media for promotion (Goodwin, 1992; Negus, 1992; Banks, 1998). However, some qualification is necessary. Discussions of popular music tend to focus on the birth of rock and roll in the 1950s as the defining moment in popular music. The cultural impact of performers such as Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, and Bill Haley is typically cited, while the importance of past popular songwriters, such as Cole Porter and Irving Berlin, is overlooked (Hamm, 1981). Simon Frith (1987) stresses the need for a wider time perspective, arguing that "rock and roll was not a revolutionary form or moment, but an evolutionary one, the climax of ... a story that begins with Edison's phonograph" (p. 54). With this in mind, I begin my

history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a timeframe characterized by live performance of popular song, sheet-music sales, and the rise of Tin Pan Alley.

Although the phonograph was invented in the late nineteenth century, popular song was primarily consumed through in-home performance and attendance at music halls. Music was a live and, hence, visual experience. In fact, Dave Laing (1991) argues that mass adoption of the phonograph after World War I brought about a break from the traditional way of consuming popular song, which historically had been an *audio-visual* event experienced through vaudeville performances or family recitals. This period provides a number of key precedents for today's popular music product. First, the theatricality of music and its performers was placed at the forefront at live venues. For instance, Britain's music halls typically offered a mixed bill of entertainment to keep audiences' interest, with performances including a host of amusements—such as comedy, magic, juggling, and acrobatics—in addition to popular song[2] (Baxendale, 1995).

Second, the music hall era saw the emergence of "stars," as managers and entrepreneurs realized the monetary benefits of selling *personalities*. As early as the 1870s, agents and the press underscored the "added value" derived from the individuality and glamour of star performers (Baxendale, 1995). Moreover, entrepreneurs saw how this added value could translate into branding power. For instance, the fame of nineteenth-century Swedish "nightingale," Jenny Lind, was so great that her name was used to launch a range of merchandise, including dolls, dresses, hairstyles, cigars, and even *sausages* (Wallis and Malm, 1988). The importance of image was also reflected in

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[2] The elaborate stage shows of contemporary performers such as Madonna and Britney Spears—which pair songs with dance routines and mini-plotlines—no doubt appeal to the same audience desire for the spectacular.

the product marketed by the publishers of Tin Pan Alley—the style of music that dominated American song in the first decades of the twentieth century. Publishers' primary source of income, sheet music, provided an important point of contact with the consumer. Since the mid-1890s, publishers have used visuals as a means of promoting music and cultivating renown for the performers. Prominent images on covers encouraged performers to retain individual songs and provided an incentive for fans of these performers to buy sheet music as a souvenir (Marshall, 1997).

Third, audience interest in participating in, or singing along with, popular song can be traced to this period. Unlike opera, "sing-alongs" were a key aspect of the music hall experience. As such, the songs had to offer simple and familiar sounding melodies that amateur pianists and singers could perform (Baxendale, 1995). Engaging audiences was as important as displaying virtuosity. An emphasis on simplicity also shaped the formula of what would later be termed the "hit" song. Because Tin Pan Alley's tunesmiths were interested in selling individual pieces of sheet music, rather than shows or songbooks, they focused on producing songs with memorable refrains (Laing, 1991), thus offering a prototype for the contemporary pop single. The early nickelodeon programs provided a venue for this communal enjoyment of song, and tapped into the symbiotic relationship between visuals and music.

Although the introduction of cinema came to revolutionize the culture of entertainment, offering audiences mass-mediated images rather than live experiences, the early years of silent film also reflected amusements from the past. The new was infused with the old, as early movie theatres also met the demand for popular song. Rick Altman (2001) points out that although most writing on film music discusses the importance of

light classical music, popular song has played a key role in film since the nickelodeon programs and illustrated songs of the 1890s. Illustrated songs can be seen, in part, as an adaptation or appropriation of the music hall experience. They were a type of live entertainment that involved a pianist and singer leading the audience through a popular song with the aid of colourful lanternslides and chorus-lyrics slides (Altman, 2001; Smith, 2003). Altman (2001) uses photographic evidence to suggest that "the highlight of many nickelodeon programs *was* the illustrated song" (p. 19; emphasis added). The popularity of song slides encouraged the sale of songs featured, triggering a promotional craze for sheet music publishers (Frith, 1987; Smith 2003).

The silent film and music industries developed a mutually beneficial relationship, realizing the potential for cross-promotion. However, the novelty of silent films' musical accompaniment was, in part, due to the fact that the phonograph and radio had not yet become common household items (Miller, 1982). How, then, would the mass adoption of these technologies impact film music and the visuality of popular song?

2.3 Commodifying the Image: The Emergence of the Radio/Film Star

The expansion of mass communications industries, the adoption of new musical technologies, and the introduction of the sound film or "talkie" in the 1920s contributed to the establishment of the popular cultural "infrastructure" that continues to influence the contemporary popular music performer. Mechanical reproduction enabled not only the mass marketing and dissemination of music, but also of the "star" image. According to Stuart Ewen (1988), movies and then radio provided the "machinery of glory" that enabled audience identification with emerging "stars," and promoted consumer fascination with celebrities (p. 92). The 1920s saw a boom for companies making

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phonographs and phonograph records, and then for radio manufacturers, bringing about the decline of music halls and theatres as the primary sites of music consumption (Baxendale, 1995). Moreover, consumer demand for recordings of "star performances" eroded the appeal of sheet music (Burns, 1998).

The gramophone and radio made popular song an individual experience that was framed in a domestic setting, a substantial and enduring shift. As Frith (2002) explains, radio "changed the experience of live music, putting performers into the home and transporting listeners into the audience, whether for a Proms or Carnegie Hall concert, for a hotel dance band, for a field recorded folk singer or club recorded crooner" (p. 279). Perhaps more influential than the transmission of live music, however, was the use of radio to broadcast—and therefore promote—pre-recorded music. The popularity of records not only changed the context of music consumption, but also what it meant to consume music. As popular song came to be a "fixed performance," it became a commodity to purchase and possess. These recordings had to have "the right qualities of intimacy or *personality*, emotional intensity or ease. 'Broad' styles of singing taken from vaudeville or music hall began to sound crude and quaint" (Frith, 1987, pp. 61-62; emphasis added). The personality and individuality of the performer became a way for audiences to differentiate between performers.

Radio played a key role in introducing audiences to new genres, such as jazz (Frith, 2002). However, the importance of the radio star's image, and the prevalence of racism with the music industry and American society at large, was illustrated by the record industry's response to the popularity of big band. This music needed to be groomed for white radio audiences in order to reap mainstream success; the

mainstreaming of big band equated to the "whitefacing" of jazz music. More saleable white bandleaders, such as Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller, were substituted for influential African American musicians, such as Duke Ellington and Count Basie (Dinerstein, 2003). The end product was "sweet jazz," a more sentimental brand of swing.

The new emphasis on performer individuality and the creation of aural intimacy, which was made possible through the development of the microphone, translated into success for a new singing style called "crooning." Though rooted in Tin Pan Alley's "homogenized" music and vaudeville singers, "[crooning] was most directly a product of the microphone age and jazz, specifically white 'sweet' or 'syncopated' jazz" (McCracken, 2001, p. 110). This relaxed style of singing brought the nuances of each singer's "personality" to the forefront, marking a significant departure from the operatic tradition (Buxton, 1990). The sentimentality of these singers, who sang of love and loss, was intended to appeal in particular to female listeners—resulting in the increasing clout of women as popular music consumers. The era of crooners is particularly notable, however, because it was a joint product of the radio, record, and film industries (McCracken, 2001). Singers such as Rudy Vallee and Bing Crosby were *multimedia* stars whose "personalities" were sold on the silver screen as well as radio and records. However, unlike Vallee, whose film roles were used to showcase his career as a singer, Bing Crosby's celebrity was a product of both the radio and film industries (McCracken, 2001). According to Keith Negus (1992), "In many respects Crosby became the archetypal pop star, and had a direct impact on the development of the mass-entertainment industry in these formative years" (p. 24).

The difference between the images of Crosby and Vallee is suggestive of the entertainment industry's recognition of the importance of constructing an appealing public persona. As Crosby's predecessor, Valle had provided a model to be tweaked. Vallee, who was particularly concerned with "pleasing the ladies," was harangued by critics for being effeminate and excessively romantic, prompting Crosby's handlers to seek to "legitimate crooning by connecting it to traditional tropes of masculinity: a good work ethic, patriarchy, religious belief, whiteness, and contained emotions" (McCracken, 2001, p. 127). The key point to take away from this insight is not the degree to which Crosby came to embody the image of traditional masculinity (as latter male performers established much tougher personas), but rather the industry's recognition of the market value of the celebrity image and the commodification of that image. This is a significant moment, as the realization of the importance of image management has influenced and informed the positioning of successive generations of popular music performers. The commodification and manufacture of audience-appropriate images has become fundamental to the machinery of popular music marketing and distribution.

2.4 Return on Image: "Star Loyalty" and Consumer Role Models

The rise of the radio/film star was not a product of individual talent so much as the reorganization of the cultural industries. The Great Depression saw a decline in record sales, due to a combination of decreased disposable income and an increase in audience interest in radio and "talkies" (Frith, 1987; McCracken 2001). The mass adoption of the radio and the popularity of sound films prompted companies to become part of a "wider entertainment industry" (Negus, 1992, p. 23). As Frith (1987) explains, "the primary source of music profit shifted form record sales to performing rights and

royalties, and the basic technological achievement of this period the development of electrical recording by Western Electric, marked a fusion of interests among the radio, cinema, and record industries" (p. 60). These industries had a vested interest in manufacturing big-name personalities, and Hollywood provided the infrastructure necessary for the mass-mediation of the celebrity image.

Hollywood offered fertile ground for the mingling of popular song and film, opening up new avenues for cross-promotion. The American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP)—an organization formed in 1914 to protect the interests of songwriters—had prevented the regular use of Tin Pan Alley songs as promotion for silent films (Smith, 2003). However, the introduction of the sound film brought about an end to this ban, and as pre-recorded musical soundtracks became the norm, Hollywood invested heavily in the industry's top popular songwriters, composers, and music publishing houses (Smith, 2003). Warner, for example, took over the Tin Pan Alley publishers Witmark in 1928 (Frith, 1987). Throughout the 1930s, ASCAP took measures to ensure the dominance of the songs of the music publishers it represented over both radio *and* film, and studios such as Warner Bros., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), and Paramount began to use film music as an effective means of promoting songs they owned (Millard, 1995).[3]

The acclaim of established Broadway songwriters such as Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, and Ira Gershwin was harnessed by Hollywood, ushering in an era of movie musicals. Indeed, the first feature-length motion picture with talking sequences—*The*

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[3] The high royalties charged by ASCAP motivated radio broadcasters to create their own competing music publisher, Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI), during the early 1940s (Millard, 1995). As Charlie Gillett (1983) points out, "BMI represented many previously ignored writers and publishers (hillbilly, race, ethnic, foreign) whose business boomed during an ASCAP boycott on radio broadcasts in 1941" (p. 5).

Jazz Singer (1927), starring Al Jolson—was a movie musical (Allan, 1990). The popularity of the movie musical illustrated the compatibility of old content with new media, and arguably reflected audience—and investor—demand for familiarity. The film song saw its greatest period of success between 1930 and 1943, with Berlin's "White Christmas" from *Holiday Inn* (1942) serving as a notable example (Smith, 2003). Multimedia stars such as Bing Crosby were used to launch hit songs and films. As such "star loyalty" among fans—a tool used to help rationalize consumer taste and provide stability within an unpredictable market (Goodwin, 1992; Frith, 1987)—can be traced to this period.

The power of this "star loyalty" was used not only to sell films and music, but also the ideal of luxury. Matthew Stahl (2002) argues that "extra-musical audience identification" is a "necessary ingredient" in star loyalty (p. 313). By inspiring interest in these celebrities as people separate from their music, their "personalities" could be used to brand a range of products unrelated to music. According to Ewen (1988):

> The systematic link between *celebrity* and *consumption* was established, in the United States, during the 1920s and 1930s. The fan magazines and newspaper columns that covered Hollywood dovetailed with the movies to offer a seamless tableau of fashions, hairstyles, favorite foods, personal habits, reading interests, decorating ideas, and recreational interests, not to mention sexual proclivities. (p. 98; emphasis added)

This systematic link promoted audience identification with "stars" and positioned celebrities as consumer role models. As advertisers tapped into this potential, popular music performers became associated with a wide range of "lifestyle" products. David Buxton (1990) argues that participation in advertising "furthered the development of the star's life-model. [Star vocalist] Kate Smith advertised cigars, while several bandleaders

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promoted cheese, beer, and household items. The star's personality was embodied in the product sold" (pp. 431-432). Taste or style was shaped by the correspondence between the consumer's individuality and the star's "personality." The commodification of the celebrity image was complete—and it translated into a definite exchange value.

It was noted in the discussion of crooners that women emerged as a substantial market within the music industry. Because women were the "household managers" in charge of family consumption (Ewen, 2001), advertising and therefore celebrity appeals typically addressed the female consumer. The continued influence of female consumers over the popular music product warrants mention. Whether discussing Frank Sinatra in the 1940s, Elvis Presley in the 1950s, the Monkees in the 1960s, David Cassidy in the 1970s, Duran Duran in the 1980s, or *NSync in the 1990s, what stands out is the music industry's willingness to tailor pop groups to the demands of the female market. Marketing an appealing image has played an important role in each case.

During the era of radio, recording, and film, the popular music industry underwent a process of considerable change. As John Baxendale (1995) notes, these new technologies did not "cause" change, but "rather, it was the complex interplay of the new culture and communication industries, their audiences, and changing cultural forms which determined that the technologies should be used in this way" (p. 142). This combination of industrial, technological, and cultural factors contributed to the creation of a model for the current culture of entertainment, complete with cross-media promotion, celebrity "branding," and arguably the rise of the first pop star: Bing Crosby.

2.5 Televising Pop: The "Previously Branded" versus the Brand New

Much as radio brought popular song into the home, television allowed for private consumption of the pop image, further embedding the experience of popular music as an audio-visual event. The televisual framing of music—an extension of the symbiotic relationship between music and cinema—provided an avenue for the promotion of rock and roll stars such as Elvis Presley, shaping the visual conventions, imagery, and performance aesthetics associated with the genre (Frith, 2002; Negus, 1992). In order to understand how the introduction of this new technology affected the culture of popular music promotion, the relationship between television and music *before* Elvis should be detailed.

Musicians and their managers and agents had begun to recognize the promotional potential afforded by displaying music via television in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a period of transition in terms of leisure activities and musical tastes, as genres such as big band were in decline (Forman, 2002). During these formative years, television executives realized the compatibility between these media, and offered a broad range of music-related programming. Television was initially positioned as a "medium particularly appropriate for musical theatre, for forms integrating sound and spectacle like opera and ballet" (Frith, 2002, p. 281). Although popular music proved to be more profitable, the notion of spectacle was influential. As Murray Forman (2002) notes, "Maximizing performance quality in the new medium was an important objective among musicians and producers" (p. 268). As television embraced popular song, this "performance quality" was, at first, heavily influenced by past performance styles and musical conventions.

In many respects, the content and look of early television programming reflected continuity with past eras of music. In order to attract not only viewing audiences, and perhaps more importantly, sponsors, television networks often relied on the name recognition afforded by "proven artists" or "previously branded personalities," including comedians and radio and vaudeville actors, in addition to musicians (Forman, 2002). As such, television's "golden age" of live broadcasting was characterized by comedy-variety shows that were descended from the vaudeville tradition (Stahl, 2002). In fact, early television's reliance on entertainment veterans and older song material (especially "actable ballads") prompted *Variety* (1947) to speculate that television could help revive Tin Pan Alley and the vaudeville song styles of the past (Forman, 2002).

Your Hit Parade serves as an interesting case study regarding the transitional character of early music-related television. *Your Hit Parade*—a radio show (1935-1953) later adapted for television (1950-1959)—provided familiarity to audiences with familiarity in terms of its longevity, variety show aesthetic, cast of "stars-as-characters," and use of old songs (Burns, 1998). However, it was pioneering in that it featured performances of cover versions of the week's most popular songs, contributing to the development of the "record-chart fetish" that characterizes the popular music climate today (Burns, 1998). It was an audiovisual extension of publications such as the *Melody Maker* "Honours List" and *The Gramophone*, which had tracked the "charts" as early as the late 1920s and early 1930s (Parker, 1991).

Early television not only offered programs that documented music trivia, it also offered shows that rewarded this specialized knowledge and offered amateur contestants an opportunity to perform themselves. Musical quiz shows, such as *Name that Tune*, and

amateur programs, such as *Chance of a Lifetime* were popular among television networks because they were cheap to produce (Forman, 2002). These programs serve as models for the cost-effective music "reality" programming, such as the *Pop Idol* franchise, and popular music trivia shows, such as *Rock and Roll Jeopardy*.

While the early uses of music on television offer models of formats that were later expanded on and elaborated, television programming from the mid- to late-1950s was arguably more influential. It shaped the star-making machinery that continues to dominate popular music. While the vinyl record put an emphasis on vocal emotionality and intimacy, the television performance highlighted physical energy and style, adding a visual dimension to the "intimacy" between audience and star; audiences could *look at* the performer.

Television programs that showcased performers, such as the *Ed Sullivan Show* and *American Bandstand*, proved effective for "breaking" telegenic young acts and new genres. As Frith (2002) notes, "[i]n the USA the biggest singing stars of the 1950s (Dean Martin, Elvis Presley) came to national fame as a result of their appearance on TV variety shows, and the popular music industry realized at once that television was potentially a fundamental component of the star-making machinery" (p. 279). Similarly, Forman (2002) notes that the stardom of performers such as Paul Anka and Frankie Avalon was made possible through the promotional power of television. In contrast, in an industry response similar to the "whitefacing" of jazz, organized racism limited African American rock and roll performers' access to television as a promotional medium. In order to tap into the "white market," white performers such Pat Boone and Elvis Presley were substituted for musical innovators such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard. However, it

is important to note that disc jockey Alan Freed played original African American versions of those songs later "covered" by white performers, with great success among white audiences (Gillett, 1983).

2.6 Targeting Teen Dollars: Rock and Roll Imagery and Mass Merchandizing

The emergence of rock and roll coincided with the discovery and promotion of teenagers as a sizeable market segment with substantial consumer power. This was partly a product of radio, not television. As television replaced the radio as the basic domestic means of entertainment in the 1950s, radio pursued more narrowly defined markets, resulting in the development of youth radio (Frith, 2002). Rock and roll was a type of music that divided the tastes of parent and child, and as such, became the soundtrack for rebellion, as films of this vintage suggest. Although the film *The Wild One* (1953), starring Marlon Brando, offers an early example of the evolving image associated with "the rebel"—indifference, aloofness, leather, and motorcycles—it is *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955) that took advantage of the budding relationship between rebellion and rock and roll. Conceived and produced in the style and philosophy of "social realism," the film presents a controversially frank discussion of juvenile delinquency and racism, and was the first to use rock and roll on a film soundtrack—Bill Haley and his Comets' "Rock Around the Clock" ran during in the credit sequence (Kermode, 1995). In the wake of *The Blackboard Jungle* came an onslaught of rock "exploitation" movies, such as *Shake, Rattle and Rock!*, *Rock Around the Clock*, and *Don't Knock the Rock*. While these films lacked critical acclaim, they featured "musical content ... quintessentially

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representative of a critical moment in youth history—the birth of the 'teenager'" (Kermode, 1995, p. 9).

During the 1950s and 1960s, teenagers were not only exposed to the pop star image through films and television performances, but also through album covers. Ian Inglis (2001) explains that the introduction of self-service record racks after World War II allowed for browsing, making album cover art a key point of contact with the consumer. The album cover functioned as an advertisement and therefore reflected the performer's target market. Generating audience identification with the stars remained an important factor in engineering marketplace success. According to Cynthia J. Cyrus (2003), album photographs of 1960s girl groups, such as the Marvelettes, the Shirelles, and the Shangri-Las, were presented in a visually uniform manner in order to promote genre (and the supposed interchangeability of groups), and encourage audience identification with members of the groups: "Such a message of belonging was an important part of a marketing strategy aimed at the increasingly multiracial and self-consciously female teen market of the period" (p.176). In contrast, much of the Beatles' album cover art provided visual images that represented the groups' current musical output (Inglis, 2001). The *Yellow Submarine* album is particularly notable for its ability to translate fan fascination into multiple revenue streams, as its imagery was used to launch a diverse range of merchandise unrelated to music, including "toys, games, jigsaw puzzles, souvenir books, watches, costumes, bedclothes, greeting cards, lampshades, lunch boxes and crockery" (Inglis, 2001, p. 93).

While the clout of the teenage consumer was understood by the 1960s, the question had become how to target this demographic. For this reason, the television

program *The Monkees* is noteworthy, as it was one of the first to successfully provide advertisers with a youth audience. This prefabricated pop group and television program package, formed by television producers Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson, "combined elements of the vaudeville-derived comedy-variety show of American 'golden age' TV (such as musical performance, slapstick, direct address and outrageous costumed skits)" (Stahl, 2002, p. 311). However, the *look* of the program was unorthodox. *The Monkees'* emphasis on stylistic play and image, which was indebted to Richard Lester's 1964 Beatles film, *A Hard Day's Night*, differentiated it from anything else on television (Stahl, 2002; Ramaeker, 2001). It premiered in 1966, and although it did not rank among the top twenty-five Nielsen rated shows, record sales suggested that it was popular among its intended audience of preteens and teenagers (Ramaeker, 2001).

The Monkees is also significant for its successful strategies of fostering loyalty and identification among fans. Stahl (2002) argues that this "dual product of television show and records, each advertising the other, and both deepened by clusters of fan merchandise, was a master-stroke of marketing that presaged the vertical integration and corporate convergence so characteristic of the entertainment industry in the last couple of decades" (p. 313). In fact, Monkees member Michael Nesmith's comment that "those records were designed as ancillaries to the television show" (in Ramaeker, 2001) holds true for more contemporary MTV programs such as *The Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica* and *The Ashlee Simpson Show*, each of which catapulted these performers up the pop charts.

Stahl (2002) suggests that *The Monkees* represented an approach to "managing uncertainty in the music/entertainment industries, to the management of the intersection

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of *newness* and *familiarity* that is the locus of all successful mass media products" (p. 326; emphasis added). Early television's use of proven faces and formats, too, reflects this delicate balancing act. The 1950s and 1960s marked the elaboration of star-making machinery and an expansion of popular music in television and film. This set the stage for MTV, where performing music would become tantamount to performing image.

2.7 Narrowing the Target: Music Television and Market Segmentation

Although the sounds and sights of pop have been offered on television since Bill Haley and Elvis Presley in the 1950s—if not before—the introduction of MTV marked a distinctly new phase in the visuality of pop. Music-based television networks emerged as a result of neoliberal policies of deregulation and marketization implemented during the early 1980s. Within the United States in particular, but also in some of the more restricted European markets, the expansion of cable television led to a need for additional programming hours to fill the schedule, as well as an interest in more cost-effective programming (Goodwin, 1992). While MTV can be seen as an extension of the star-making machinery and marketing strategies that had been in train throughout the twentieth century, as Goodwin (1992) observes, the rise of music video and new music-making technologies in the 1980s "demonstrated to musicians, critics, and audiences more forcefully than ever before that pop performance is a *visual* experience" (p. 33; emphasis in original).

Throughout the 1980s, the music video evolved into an indispensable aspect of popular music promotion. The number of *Billboard's* "Hot 100" hit singles that had accompanying videos rose from twenty-three in May 1981, to eighty-two in May 1986, to ninety-seven in December 1989 (Banks, 1998). It is important to acknowledge that

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music videos are advertisements, and as such, do not typically generate revenue directly. Given that as of 1998 the production budgets for music videos typically started at $80,000 for well-known artists and exceeded $500,00 for superstars (Blumental and Goodenough, 1998), the question of what exactly music video really promotes merits analytical attention. On a basic level, the purpose of music videos from the record label's perspective is to increase retail sales of the artist's music (Banks, 1998). However, it seems that there would need to be a greater return to justify this investment. Blaine Allan (1990) notes that "music video not only disseminates the music; almost universally it represents and circulates the *performer*" (p. 4; emphasis added). Music video's real power, then, lies in its ability to mould and disseminate the performer's image and cultivate star loyalty among a specific fan base. This "branded image," in turn, can be used to promote a range of consumer merchandise (Negus, 1992). Substantial profits lie with the repeat purchaser not only of albums, but also performances, T-shirts, and posters. Moreover, the pop star brand can be used to promote lifestyle products unrelated to music. MTV promotes music, which, in turn, "is increasingly mobilized to promote something else (jeans, movies, beers, cosmetics, and so on)" (Goodwin, 1992, p. 46).

MTV not only provided a vehicle for international promotion of pop singles, but also a means of delivering teenage audiences to advertisers on a massive scale (Goodwin, 1992). The image established through music videos positioned an artist as a certain *type* of artist. Because the malleability of image allowed for performer "packaging" to appeal to different subcultures within the heterogeneous demographic of youth, MTV could provide advertisers with a very specific audience. In other words, the cultivation of brands tailored for specific market niches allowed for more sophisticated market

segmentation. The desire to deliver a narrower target market to advertisers was reflected

in MTV's genre-specific program slots (*Yo! MTV Raps*, *Headbanger's Ball*, and *Club MTV*) and MTV Corporation's launch of the network VH-1 (aimed at 25-54 year olds) during the mid-1980s (Goodwin, 1992). However, because MTV was positioned as an authority on both youth culture and music, audiences were not only loyal to these specific programs, but to the MTV brand as a whole.

Within its first decade, MTV evolved from a pop music promotional tool into "an all-encompassing mediator of rock culture—a televisual *Rolling Stone* (or *Q* magazine)" (Goodwin, 1992, p. 138). Like a magazine, advertising and content began to merge into one, as this "rock culture" was defined primarily in terms of consumption. As a purveyor of a celebrity lifestyle and multimedia culture, MTV serves as a multi-faceted extension of the "machinery of glory" described by Ewen. It sells a branded vision of glamour and wealth. Furthermore, the branding of the celebrity image has opened up opportunities within film, television, and other entertainment industries for popular music performers. As Negus (1992) notes:

> Although pop has always depended on visual images for promotion and audience identification these changes have contributed to the displacement of sound as a central focus, and accelerated the re-organization of record companies as components of entertainment corporations. The personnel who are engaged in acquiring, developing and presenting recording artists are increasingly contributing to an *entire entertainment package*. (p. 5; emphasis added)

2.8 Conclusion

Discussing the continuities in pop history, Frith (1987) reminds us that "'new things' are rarely as novel as suggested" (p. 55). The preceding historical overview illustrates the longstanding complementary and, at times, inter-determinate relationship

between popular song and visuals, whether on the stage, screen, sheet music, or album cover art. The rise of theatrical, multimedia entertainers today can be seen as an extension of earlier vaudeville performers and radio/film stars, and mass merchandizing can be seen as a strategy inherited from past performers such as Elvis Presley, the Monkees, and the Beatles.

However, despite these continuities, it must be emphasized that the introduction of each new technology and visual medium has expanded the capacity and reach of what Ewen (1988) refers to as "star-making machinery," allowing for the cultivation of *global* multimedia stardom. The popular music industry, as Negus (1992) explains, is now concerned with "developing global personalities which can be communicated across multiple media; through recordings, videos, films, television, magazines, books and via advertising, product endorsement and sponsorship over a range of consumer merchandise" (p. 1). It is important to stress that the fame and prosperity of today's performers throughout the global marketplace is unprecedented. In particular, consumer demand for "pop star conglomerates"—entrepreneurial entertainers who have leveraged their celebrity status in order to launch broad and diverse product lines—marks an enormously lucrative new phase of celebrities' well-established role as "consumer role models." Unpacking the historical, cultural, and promotional dimensions of such "total entertainment packages" is imperative for understanding the place of popular music and celebrity within the contemporary context.

CHAPTER 3:
THE GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT APPARATUS: CONSIDERING THE INDUSTRIAL CONTEXT OF POPULAR MUSIC PRODUCTION AND PROMOTION

3.1 Introduction

While Chapter 2 explored historical precedents for the contemporary multimedia popular music performer, the following chapter turns to the industrial context in which these performers and accompanying visuals are produced and promoted. By positioning current business practices in relation to the organization of the music industry over the past century, I consider how the contemporary music industry is an extension of, and reflects continuity with, earlier configurations. I examine the growth of global media empires throughout the twentieth century, and consider how this global entertainment apparatus allows for the execution of aggressive marketing strategies. Today, within multinational conglomerates' vast product portfolios, music is but one component. As Robert W. McChesney (2004) suggests:

> [T]o break commercialism down by media category, like music or film, is somewhat misleading in the era of the media conglomerate. Marketers commonly link with larger conglomerates and work massive product placement/advertising/promotional deals across the media firm's entire arsenal of media assets. (p. 157)

Within this efficient marketing system, the sounds and images of top-selling popular music performers have become ubiquitous, and the entertainment value of these performers has taken on an increasingly promotional character.

Taking this industrial context into account, I engage with those debates focussed on homogeneity, diversity, and innovation within popular music, and explore how traditional and new promotional formats have worked to both segregate and disrupt genre/marketing categories. I contend that within the contemporary global entertainment apparatus, popular music has become an increasingly hybrid and multimedia product. The pop star image is extremely mobile, moving with ease across media and technologies and allowing for considerable cross-media branding. This system not only favours mainstream pop stars, but has allowed for a kind of "equal-opportunity opportunism," wherein diverse music genres are able to "address the needs" of their specific target markets by tapping into the desire to be different. Mainstream and non-mainstream performers alike have capitalized on popular music's brand power.

3.2 Anglo-American Production, Global Distribution: Multinational Entertainment Conglomerates in Historical Context

The worldwide exportation of the sights and sounds of Anglo-American popular music performers via international record label subsidiaries, MTV branches, and multi-faceted distribution networks has contributed to the cultivation of global superstardom. Today, a handful of multinational entertainment conglomerates dominate Western and non-Western popular music markets, which causes concern among critics and analysts with regard to cultural homogenization and corporate control of creativity. However, I would like to establish from the outset that oligopolistic market conditions (the dominance of very few competitors) and global trade strategies have coloured the American and British music industries since their inception. As John Baxendale (1995) explains, the relationship between American and British companies during the early

decades of the twentieth century was one of cross-ownership, licensing agreements, worldwide marketing deals, and the establishment of overseas subsidiaries, noting that the "record industry became multinational before the music did" (p. 142).

Throughout the twentieth century, the potential for cultivating mutually beneficial relationships between phonograph manufacturers, record labels, musical instrument companies, and publishing houses prompted corporate mergers that expanded the influence of those corporations. It is important to note that these companies were typically involved in selling hardware (technologies for playing music) first, and software (musical content) only later. Between 1910 and 1920, two companies—America's Victor Talking Machine Company (later RCA, then BMG) and Britain's Gramophone Company (later EMI)—controlled the world market (Negus, 1992). By the end of the 1930s, RCA and Decca manufactured seventy-five percent of the records made in America, and the Electrical & Musical Industries (EMI) and Decca manufactured nearly all records made in Britain (Frith, 1987). While RCA Victor, Columbia, EMI-Capitol, and Decca dominated the Anglo-American industry by the mid-1950s, eight companies garnered approximately 84 percent of sales between 1954 and 1973 (Negus, 1992).

The contemporary popular music industry constitutes an extension of this history of corporate mergers. Currently, four record labels control the industry globally: (1) Universal Music Group, which includes Decca, Interscope, Island Def Jam, Geffen, Mercury, Motown, PolyGram, and numerous other labels (http://new.umusic.com); (2) Sony BMG Music Entertainment, which as of the August 2004 merger between Sony Music Entertainment and BMG Entertainment, consists of Arista, Columbia, Epic, Jive, LaFace, RCA, and Verity, among others (http://www.sonybmg.com); (3) EMI Group,

which includes Angel, Astralwerks, Blue Note, Capitol, EMI, Parlophone, Virgin, and others (http://www.emigroup.com); and (4) Warner Music Group, which includes Asylum, Atlantic, Bad Boy, Elektra, Maverick, Rhino, Warner Brothers, among others (http://www.wmg.com). Despite apparent similarities, however, it would be misleading to suggest parity between these early to mid twentieth-century companies and current multinational media corporations.

First, it is important to acknowledge the mammoth size of the popular music industry today. The global market for this small slice of the entertainment industry was estimated at a staggering US $32 billion in 2004 (IFPI, 2004), 75 percent of which was controlled by the "Big Four": EMI and Warner shared approximately 23.9 percent of this massive market, while Sony BMG's 25.2 percent market share vied with market leader Vivendi Universal's 25.9 percent (Bishop, 2005). Second, such far-reaching influence of a small number of corporations over the entire spectrum of entertainment and communications products is a relatively recent development. Prior to the 1980s, a few companies dominated single industries, such as television, telephone, or book publishing, but they did not span the entire media business (Taras, 1999). During the late 1980s and continuing throughout the 1990s, many communications and entertainment companies pursued increasingly aggressive corporate mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures, allowing for the cultivation of "media synergy"—a process by which corporations can "gain maximum revenues from the inter-connections which various leisure industries provide for presenting artists across multiple media" (Negus, 1992, p. 5). These inter-connections have allowed for unprecedented cost-effectiveness with respect to distribution and promotion.

Today, a handful of horizontally and vertically integrated corporations dominate not just the popular music industry, but the *entertainment* industries. In other words, these multimedia conglomerates control an incredible share of the industry's global output (horizontal integration), and own both content and channels of distribution (vertical integration). The clout of these economic powerhouses has further entrenched existing oligopolistic markets, steepening already prohibitive barriers to entry for start-up record companies. As McChesney (2004) explains, "one major development in media markets over the past century has been the manner in which they work to the advantage of the largest players, making the possibility of becoming a commercially viable media producer difficult" (p. 177).

An exemplary case of the contemporary media corporation is AOL Time Warner, which is a major player in cable, music, film and television production, book and magazine publishing, and online industries. This degree of media conglomeration affords myriad cross-media marketing opportunities *within* the parent organization, resulting in an ability to manufacture stardom from scratch. *Popstars*—the precursor to the *Pop Idol* music reality television franchise—provides an extreme example of how this situation can be exploited. Based on the success of the series based out of New Zealand, an American edition aired on the AOL Time Warner-owned WB network in 2001, spawning the group Eden's Crush. The group's album was produced by a Warner record label, their single was released exclusively on AOL, and the group was touted as a success story in Time Warner publications such as *Teen People, Entertainment Weekly,* and *Time* (McLeod, 2001).

3.3 Industry Standards: Perspectives on Corporate "Creativity"

This industrial context has raised questions regarding the position of creativity[4] within the cultural industries, and the threat of musical standardization. Discussing the relationship between music and the market, Dave Laing (2003) suggests that the degree of influence wielded by a handful of suppliers, coupled with the "irrational" behaviour of consumers (i.e., they can be influenced by pricing and publicity strategies), has created a state of "disequilibrium" between the supply and demand of music products (p. 311). Interpretations of this sort of economic assessment have had a substantial impact within popular music studies, feeding the notion of "co-optation." This idea is informed by a problematic yet persistent dichotomy between culture and commerce. Within this schema, popular music creation is pitted against commerce, as mass consumption is typically equated with a hopelessly commercial "mass culture." The notion of mass culture is typically associated with two broad sociological traditions—the high culture (elite culture) tradition and the Frankfurt School—that both critique the commodification of popular music (Shuker, 2005).

However, the notion of homogenizing cultural industries is also apparent in the work of cultural theorists who examine the emancipatory potential for music and style. For instance, Dick Hebdiges's (1979) seminal analysis of punk in *Subculture: The*

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[4] Given the broad and vague usage of the term "creative," it is useful to comment on debates regarding its definition. Among critical audiences of popular music, the term creative is typically reserved for music deemed original or innovative. There is a tendency to over-emphasize individual performers, genres, and texts, and to overlook the social, economic, and historical factors that enable and/or frame creative practice and its reception. However, Keith Negus and Michael Pickering (2004) develop a definition of creativity as "the communication of experience"—an explanation that "counter[s] text-based and artist-centred approaches to creativity at the same time as challenging any assumption that creativity is solely about an act of appreciation or interpretation" (p. ix). For a more detailed discussion, see *Creativity, Communication and Cultural Value* (2004) by Negus and Pickering.

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Meaning of Style and Robert Burnett's (1996) synopsis found below reflect suspicion

regarding mainstream popular culture:

> Music often becomes mainstream only after an earlier incarnation as a
> counterculture genre. Successive cohorts of adolescents approach their
> entry into adult society by adopting novel forms of music that set them
> apart from that very mainstream. ... [A] repetitive cycle of subcultural
> rebellion and innovation [is] followed by gradual absorption. (p. 83)

According to Motti Regev (2002), this perspective problematically characterizes genres

such as rock as "expression[s] of rebellion, subversion, resistance and critique" that are

inevitably diluted by the music industry and absorbed into hegemonic capitalist culture

(p. 258). Integration into the musical mainstream is positioned as evidence of this

process. However, it is important to note that rock or punk performers who sell albums

or concert tickets within the regulated marketplace are a part of capitalist culture even

when they exist as niche markets—a theme that I will develop further in Chapter 4.

Concern regarding corporate domination and the standardization of music

predates the emergence of rock genres, however, as the cultural industries have been

subject to considerable critique since the rise of early radio and Hollywood. Perhaps

most notably, Frankfurt School critical theorist Theodor Adorno admonished the mass

popularity of "light" music during the 1930s—the era of "sweet" jazz.[5] In their seminal

book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1948), Max Horkheimer and Adorno analyze the

"assembly-line character of the culture industry, the synthetic, planned method of turning

out its products" (2001, p. 98). While a thorough evaluation of their analysis lies outside

the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that this influential yet contentious

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[5] See Adorno's "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" and "On Popular Music" for thorough critiques regarding cultural homogeneity and predictability within the "culture industry."

assessment has been echoed by successive generations of cultural theorists and political economists. For instance, McChesney (2004) argues that "competitive pressures demand that [the music giants] attempt to engineer the creative process as much as possible to ensure commercial success. The resulting stale, derivative music has little of the originals' spark. So, the better the music conglomerates do their job, the lousier the music" (pp. 196-197).

Major record companies may pursue what they consider to be safer formulas for success, perhaps resulting in what is perceived as banal or repetitious music. However, as Keith Negus (1999) points out, a strictly political economic approach to the music industry often overlooks the dynamic human mediations between the activities of musicians, audiences, and the staff working within these corporations. Furthermore, this perspective neglects to account for the fundamental roles that repetition and patterns play as formal elements of composition in both popular and art music. According to Richard Middleton (1983), it is "difficult to reduce the function of repetition simply to an analysis of the 'political economy' of popular music production and its ideological effects" (p. 235), because the repetition of themes, chord progressions, rhythms, and melodies is common to most (if not all) musical forms. Nevertheless, the music industry's interest in manufacturing *sameness* warrants further examination.

While numerous scholars have studied the relationship between market concentration and musical innovation and diversity (e.g., Peterson and Berger, 1975; Burnett, 1990; Lopes, 1992; Christianen, 1995), their conclusions have varied. Peterson and Berger (1975) use *Billboard* hits to suggest an inverse relationship between the degree of diversity in musical forms and the degree of market concentration, whereas

Paul D. Lopes' analysis of the *Billboard* charts proposes that the symbiotic relationship developed between independent and major labels within this oligopolistic system has, in fact, allowed for a considerable increase in innovation and diversity since the 1940s and 1950s. Michael Christianen (1995) notes the impreciseness of their methodologies, stressing that hit parades only reflect a small proportion of all music available to the consumer. While his study focuses instead on album sales, it should be noted that this methodology is also flawed. Attempts to develop indices for diversity and innovation are complicated by the fact that, as Will Straw (2001) points out, audiences consume music in a number of ways that do not involve the direct exchange of money.

First, I would like to make a distinction between diversity and innovation. The former suggests the availability of a variety of musical genres, whereas the latter specifies stylistic inventiveness or avant-gardism. Second, while Christianen (1995) is correct in pointing out the inadequacy of using *Billboard*'s "Hot 100" as a means of measuring music popularity and consumption, I contend that it does provide a useful index for gauging celebrity, and therefore cultural relevance. As Martin Parker (1991) points out, in the popular music industry, "the charts are not merely quantifications of commodities but rather a major reference point around which their music displays itself in distinction and relation to other musical forms" (p. 205). For decades, the practice of following the charts—whose ubiquity renders them difficult to avoid—has figured into the daily lives of fans and non-fans of the musical mainstream. Imagined to reflect "a democracy of taste," hit parades catalogue "latest trends"; these pop singles are "usually used obsessively for a short while and then allowed to fade into the realm of memory and

nostalgia" (Parker, 1991, p. 213). The charts chronicle the peak years of pop stars and therefore contribute to the apparatus of stardom.

The question, then, becomes the degree to which the top hits of music superstars reflect uniformity. Despite his characterization of the culture industry as homogenising, Adorno (2002) concedes that the standardization achieved in other industries had not been achieved within the production of hit songs:

> Though all industrial mass production necessarily eventuates in standardization, the production of popular music can be called 'industrial' only in its promotion and distribution, whereas the act of producing a song hit still remains in a handicraft stage. The production of popular music is highly centralized in its economic organization, but still 'individualistic' in its social mode of production. (p. 443)

Note that when this article was originally published in 1941, it was the norm for record companies' artist and repertoire (A&R) staff to select the music that the label's singers would perform (hence the term "repertoire"). Major record companies may, in some cases, discourage experimentation, but it is important to point out that the act of composing music remains the terrain of human expression, even if the writing process involves a team of songwriters hired by a record label.

With the emergence of rock came the emphasis on performer authors as a prerequisite for "authenticity." While I will further engage with debates regarding musical authenticity in Chapters 4 and 5, I would like to point out that the cultural privileging of authorship as a marker of legitimacy has resulted in the construction of rock as more authentic than pop or rhythm and blues (R&B) (Regev, 2002; Keightley, 2001). Negus (1992) uses the terms "organic" and "synthetic" to describe the ideologies of creativity that are typically linked to rock and pop (and R&B), respectively, thereby

trivializing those genres traditionally associated with female and African American performers.

The establishment of this hierarchy was largely a product of the institutional make-up of the music industry. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the key decision-makers and senior executives involved within the British music industry, for instance, were university-educated white males (many of whom were rock musicians), resulting in an emphasis on recruiting white male guitar bands (Negus, 2004, p. 54). Therefore, while this period is generally associated with musical experimentation and creativity— and is often constructed as the benchmark against which today's "bad" music is compared—it is important to point out that this institutional bias, in fact, translated into a failure to reflect real diversity (outside rock genres).[6] As Negus (2004) argues, this myopic approach had acute aesthetic and social consequences:

> [T]he British music industry was re-organised around a series of dichotomies in which rock artists were favoured over pop or soul performers; albums were favoured over singles; and self-contained bands or solo artists who were judged, from a position derived from Romanticism, to express themselves through writing their own songs, were favoured over the more collaborative ways in which singers or groups of performers have, for many years, worked with arrangers, session musicians and songwriters in putting together a package. (p. 54)

Arguments regarding the degradation of popular music, especially after the introduction of MTV and the influx of new pop acts, may therefore be seen to reflect concern regarding the dismantling of (white) rock hegemony.[7]

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[6] The minimalist musical style of punk was partly a reaction to the excessiveness and elitism associated with the progressive rock bands of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

[7] It is interesting to note that even during the 1960s—the pinnacle of the so-called "rock era"—the best selling album was the film soundtrack for *The Sound of Music* (Regev, 2002).

It is important to note that during the 1960s and 1970s, a number of African American R&B performers had songs that "crossed over" into American mainstream markets. However, during this period, corporate restructuring resulted in the creation of separate "black divisions." While this system allowed for increased involvement of managers with a greater understanding of R&B, the marginal position of these labels meant they were often subject to cut-backs or further restructuring (Negus, 1999). Furthermore, while numerous African Americans produced and performed music, the area of popular music criticism was—and continues to be—dominated by a rock ethos. Therefore, while the culture of the music industry may have encouraged innovation within rock genres, it has arguably been blind to innovation within a number of non-rock genres, thereby stifling the growth of more diverse catalogues. In order to assess musical uniformity, then, it is important to take into account the persistence of racial and gender politics.

Consider the hit-makers of the 1990s—the offspring of the era of the media conglomerate. Robert Burnett (1996) argues that during the 1990s, multinational entertainment corporations concentrated on a "mass homogenous market image" (p. 82). On the contrary, I suggest that during the 1990s there was a proliferation of different "image categories," as an increased number of female and African American performers achieved "crossover" hits. In 1993, for instance, *Billboard's* top hits included: "A Whole New World (Aladdin's Theme)" by Peabo Bryson and Regina Belle; "Informer" by Snow; "Freak Me" by Silk; "That's the Way Love Goes" by Janet Jackson; and "Weak" by SWV (Bronson, 2003, p. 814). These hits stem from different non-rock genres, such as the movie musical ballad, reggae/hip hop, and R&B, and aside from Snow (a rapper),

these performers are African American. In 2003, *Billboard's* top five ranked hits were all held by hip hop and R&B performers: B2K and P. Diddy, Jennifer Lopez featuring LL Cool J, Sean Paul, and 50 Cent featuring Nate Dogg (Bronson, 2003, p. x). The late 1990s also saw the rise of numerous female singer/songwriters, such as those headlined in the much-publicized Lilith Fair tour (i.e., Sarah McLachlan, Jewel, Paula Cole).

Jim Sernoe (2005) suggests that there is a link between the increased popularity of country, rap, R&B, and Latin throughout the 1990s and *Billboard's* adoption of the SoundScan sales tracking system in 1991. Because this sales tracking system monitored exact unit counts, rather than relying on reports from retailers, rack-jobbers, and wholesalers, the *Billboard* charts better reflected actual audience preferences (Sernoe, 2005). Significantly, Garth Brooks' *Ropin' the Wind* debuted at Number 1 on the "Billboard 200" album chart—a mainstream pop chart, not a country music chart—only four months after SoundScan's implementation (Sernoe, 2005). Brooks' popularity was now quantified outside niche markets. Recognizing sales potential, the music industry later backed would-be superstars such as Shania Twain and Ricky Martin—lending credence to Tom McCourt's and Eric Rothenbuhler's (1997) observation that SoundScan primarily benefited those performers with "crossover" potential (p. 207). Nevertheless, the 1990s did not reflect a "homogeneous" market so much as a widening of the mainstream and an inclusion of previously marginalized performers.

The preceding discussion is not intended to suggest that entertainment corporations' stronghold over the production of popular music has brought about a popular musical renaissance. Rather, I want to stress the complexity involved in assessing standardization, and point out factors that may skew arguments. (In particular,

I will to return to the problematic notion of rock music as an anti-commercial art form in Chapter 4.) Nevertheless, concern regarding the music industry's lack of creativity cannot be exclusively attributed to racial and gender bias.

3.4 Hit or Miss: Music Industry Responses to Market Risk

While the creative process may not have undergone rationalization and corporate engineering, I contend that major record companies' recruitment strategies reflect an interest in replicating the success of previous performers, resulting in a reliance on *precedents* and a reluctance with respect to experimentation. This cautious strategy stems from the fact that for the music industry, as Frith (2001) points out, "failure is the norm" (p. 33). Projecting the sales of cultural products compared to more standardized commodities poses a considerable challenge. There is no guarantee that a given song or album will resonate with audiences, or, more importantly, that consumer interest will convert into a purchase. According to Frith (2001):

> One way of describing the music industry is as a business in which both the supply side (the musicians) *and* the demand side (the consumers) are irrational; record companies, which make their money from bringing supply and demand into line, are thus organised around the bureaucratic organisation of *chaos*. Two consequences of this are striking. First, ... the vast majority of the music industry's products ... fail to cover their costs. ... Second, there are running tensions between record companies and their artists on the one hand, and their consumers, on the other. (p. 33; emphasis added)

Unpredictability with respect to sales, coupled with substantial overhead expenses (pressing plants, A&R departments, sales teams, and studios), makes a band or pop act an uncertain investment (Frith, 1987). Straw (2001) observes that even while pop performers such as Britney Spears and *NSync were breaking first-week sales records,

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MTV executives remained puzzled by the unpredictability of teenage taste (and somewhat paralysed by the popularity of peer-to-peer file sharing). He points out that "even the rosiest of cyclical booms will often coincide with predictions of that industry's imminent obsolescence" (p. 53).

Throughout the twentieth century, the music industry's vulnerability to unpredictable tastes has been exacerbated by volatile market conditions. While economic booms have proven incredibly profitable for the music industry—thanks to the post-war consumer boom, for instance, the market for popular music in North American between 1954 and 1973 grew by approximately ten times (Negus, 1992)—recessions have been crippling. The Depression of the 1930s and the economic recession of the 1970s in particular put record companies in jeopardy (Frith, 1987). The industry's responses to these economic downturns have had a lasting influence: during the 1930s, the music industry leveraged the star system, creating a tie-up between film and radio as a corrective to declining revenues, and the distinction between "hit" and "miss" groups was further demarcated during the 1970s, as the industry invested heavily into the cultivation of not simply stars, but *superstars* (Frith, 1987). This focus on achieving massive returns from a few artists, rather than modest returns from a diverse mix, reflects an understanding that profit accrues very quickly once the break-even point has been past. David Buxton (1983) observes that "in most cases, a record must break internationally to become profitable" (p. 438). Once international sales are achieved, however, profits are substantial—hence the music industry's interest in cultivating *global* celebrity.

Entertainment companies have responded to this history of market uncertainty through a number of risk-minimizing strategies. Dave Laing (2003) identifies three

tactics used to address the challenge of profitability: (1) the "portfolio" approach, "whereby a large record company will promote a wide range of recordings in the expectation that at least some of them will prove to be successful" (p. 313); (2) market research/consumer behaviour studies (including observation of the charts); and (3) influencing industry gatekeepers and consumer opinion leaders ("payola" schemes). I would like to consider labelling the strategy currently pursued by multinational media conglomerates as a portfolio approach in a broader sense. The involvement of media giants *across* the entertainment industries has emerged as a more thorough way of safeguarding investments than simply offering a diverse catalogue of music. Acquisitions, horizontal and vertical integration, and joint ventures across the media industries have been used to share investments and reduce risk, allowing for the creation of economies of scale and the development of new products and markets (Negus, 1992; Taras, 1999; McChesney, 2004). The clout of the media conglomerate is used to buttress the system of *super*stardom. These corporations can communicate the same content (popular music entertainers) across a wide range of media products, creating tie-ins between books, films, records, television, and so on, guaranteeing maximum exposure and audience familiarity (Negus, 1992; Burnett, 1996; Turner, 2004).

The portfolio approach that I am suggesting is not limited to an interest in pop superstars, however. As Jason Toynbee (2002) points out, the music industry understands the viability of niche markets as well as the mainstream:

> The marketing logic of the music industry mitigates in favour of the particular and the nameable, [and] the logic of production prefers the general—the largest possible category. The industry has responded to this situation with two strategies, for segmented and mainstream markets. (p. 155)

Entertainment companies seek to "bring order to the music market" through the use of genre labels (Frith, 2001, p. 35) that "integrat[e] an inquiry about the music (what does it sound like) with an inquiry about the market (who will buy it)" (Frith, 1996, p. 76). Subsidiaries and independent record labels play an important role in this process. Minor companies that specialize in specific genres are often linked with major companies through a web of investment arrangements and licensing deals (Negus, 1992).

While the music industry may be risk averse, and therefore tend toward safe choices, it is not unwilling to embrace difference, as long as that difference will cater to profitable market segments. Contrary to arguments that suggest that the music industry has an interest in diluting "rebellious" genres, such as punk or hip-hop, it is important to recognize that record companies attempt to accommodate the different ways that different audiences engage with different styles of music (Negus, 1999). Strategic branding plays a key role in this process, helping to stabilize the unpredictability of music sales in both mainstream and niche markets.

3.5 Popular Music Brands: Categorizing Genres, Segmenting Audiences

While image has been a fundamental aspect of the pop product throughout the twentieth century (as established in Chapter 2), the increasingly intimate relationship between the music industry and large entertainment conglomerates has allowed for considerable innovation and creativity with respect to the marketing and promotion of music. Prior to the 1980s, record companies tended to employ a "mud-against-the-wall" strategy, which essentially involved "throw[ing] out as much product as possible in the hope that some of it [would] stick" (Negus, 1992, p. 40). In the following section, I will

discuss the fundamental role that popular music genres have played as marketing categories, contributing to the industry's shift from this "pull" strategy for creating consumer demand toward the targeting of highly segmented markets. The proliferation of new genre titles, such as trip hop, Emo, Screamo, and grime is testament to the variety of sounds and images currently available to different audiences.[8]

While A&R departments have historically been responsible for scouting new talent while working *independently* from marketing teams, these practices have arguably begun to bleed together. Negus (1992) suggests that the decreased autonomy of A&R staff—and the increased involvement of other divisions within these entertainment companies—was a consequence of the rising costs of production and marketing. The result has been a preference for entertainment-oriented performers. Similarly, Burnett (1996) notes how the music industry's emphasis on a "product-image" has placed greater influence into the hands of the marketing and promotion departments, "focus[ing] the attention of the creative people on the commercial rather than the artistic values of the work" (p. 74). Much of this creative effort has been invested in constructing "product-images" that correspond with different genre categories.

David Brackett (2002) suggests that genres are not only used to categorize different musical styles, but also "performance rituals, visual appearance, the types of social and ideological connotations associated with them, and their relationships to the material conditions of production" (p. 67). While rock music has typically been constructed as less image-based than pop, it is important to acknowledge how rock's emphasis on the stage show helped shape audiences' visual expectations of that genre

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[8] However, in many cases these new genres titles arguably reflect a false variety. Due to the function of genres as marketing categories, a process of re-labelling may be used to construct niche audiences.

(attitude, charisma, and rebellious antics), contributing to what could be termed an "image template." It can be argued that the writhing stage presence of pre-MTV rock stars such as Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant is not entirely dissimilar to the video posing of Duran Duran's Simon Le Bon (both of whom were fetishized sex symbols). They provide different performances of masculinity and reflect different interpretations of what it means to entertain an audience, but both project "product-images" nevertheless. While Andrew Goodwin (1992) suggests that video pop "existed in cultural territory where notions of 'selling out' no longer made sense" (p. 34), it is important to recognize that the promotional tool of music video simply mass mediated already existing genre codes and conventions, what Regev (2003) terms the "rock aesthetic."

The purpose of this discussion is not to devalue or underestimate the (sub)cultural significance of genres' musical differences (which will be examined in Chapter 4). Rather, I wish to stress how record companies use performance-based (and thus visual) genre rituals to cultivate audience identification and tailor marketing strategies. As Daragh O'Reilly (2004) explains, the task of marketing is to "define, control and project … a brand identity" and "link consumer constructions of their own identities with product or serve attributes in a way which makes the purchase seem congruent with the individual" (p. 11). Genre labels use performers' images as well as sounds to position them as "unique" brands within a well-established scheme of genre conventions. As Negus (1992) points out, "visual marketing involves an attempt to articulate the authenticity and uniqueness of an artist and to communicate this through a concise image which operates as a metonym for an act's entire identity and music" (p. 72). This image is intended to manufacture a sense of authenticity in order to link a specific brand to a

specific audience. Negus (1992) cites an artist publicity executive's discussion of U2 (at the time considered an authentic rock act): "The most brilliant corporate branding I have ever seen, without anyone ever thinking that they were being corporately got. Brilliant. You never saw a picture of U2 if it wasn't in front of the Joshua tree" (p. 72). It is important to note that because the logic of market segmentation matches different types of music to different taste cultures, it does not necessarily exist in opposition to "quality art," itself a subjective and contested idea.

From the music industry's perspective, fan allegiance to specific genres or subcultural musics can be likened to loyalty to a marketing category, which, of course, simplifies a record company's task of forecasting sales. Subcultural groups not only provide a certain degree of predictability with respect to musical tastes, but also open up opportunities for tailoring marketing strategies according to *lifestyle*. Lifestyle marketing "recognizes that people sort themselves into groups on the basis of the things they like to do," and therefore targets consumers according to the activities they pursue during their leisure time and how they choose to spend their disposable income (Solomon, Zaichkowsky, & Polegato, 2002, p. 194). Playing/plugging punk music in skateshops, for instance, allows for the targeting of a specialized audience. Lifestyle marketing is often the basis for "co-branding strategies," which link together products that are considered complementary (often for symbolic reasons). Co-branding has not only played a key role in targeting differentiated market segments; it has become a standard mode of addressing mainstream audiences. Lifestyle marketing and its implications for popular music will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.6 Changing the Promotional Channel: From Segregation to Collaboration

Record companies reach potential purchasers through a range of sites of consumption, such as music stores, supermarkets, other retailers, e-tailers, press, television, radio, film, venue promoters, and websites (O'Reilly, 2004). The expansiveness of the multinational media conglomerate's holdings has not only provided access to numerous channels of distribution, however, but has also opened up new opportunities for the cross-promotion of popular music performers. In the following, I will review the role of well-established promotional channels, such as radio and music television, in defining marketing categories, and will consider how innovative new promotional strategies have contributed to the ubiquity of previously marginalized/non-mainstream genres.

Despite the proliferation of new technologies for music consumption, radio remains a key means of music promotion, and has evolved into online and digital satellite formats. Youth radio was originally a product of the advent of rock 'n' roll, as the music industry began to realize how teenage audiences' musical interests varied from those of adult audiences (Frith, 2002). Since that time, radio formats have greatly contributed to the demarcation of genre categories and the construction of a musical mainstream, as audiences have been further defined and re-defined. Straw (1990) describes radio formats as "the institutional spaces within which particular musical coalitions are produced, and wherein a specific relationship between the diversity of musical forms and the consistency of certain criteria of selection is maintained" (p. 92). As of 1992, radio stations were organized into the following categories: Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR), Adult Contemporary (AC), Urban (a euphemism for "black" radio), Album Oriented

Rock (AOR), New Age Contemporary (NAC), and Alternative (Negus, 1992). Because stylistic compatibility has been necessary for radio play, the categories established by radio formats have influenced record label recruitment strategies. However, the growth of new genres and fragmentation within the vague genres of "rock" and "pop" in recent years has made this classification process increasingly difficult. Roger Beebe, Denise Fulbrook, and Ben Saunders (2002) illustrate the problem this has posed for the promotion of rock, as "alternative," "adult alternative," "oldies," "70s/classic rock," "active rock," and "hot adult contemporary," and a generic "rock" categories are all used as radio tags (p. 6).

Despite the growth of radio stations tailored to specific audiences, however, Top 40 or CHR continues to define the mainstream. According to Negus (1992), the "ultimate aim of radio promotion in the USA is to achieve a 'cross over' hit—to move out from urban, new age or adult contemporary and gain nationwide exposure on Top 40 radio" (p. 108). While most radio formats are designed with the objective of achieving familiarity with their playlists, Top 40 is unique with respect to its high velocity of playlist changes and its rotation's high frequency (Straw, 1990, p. 87). In other words, a handful of songs are played regularly for a short period of time. It is important to note that because rock has traditionally dominated the mainstream, with "race" being categorized as a separate radio format, the segregation of styles has in some cases resulted in cultural bias.

An emphasis on Top 40 music has also been adopted by another key promotional medium: MTV. While MTV has greatly benefited the music industry, allowing for promotion of superstars, it is important to point out that the creation of this network was

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pursued by the television industry—not the record business—in order to deliver a teenage audience to advertisers and provide more cost-effective television programming (Goodwin, 1992, p. 37). According to Brackett (2002), "the advent of MTV in 1981 only exacerbated the rift between 'white rock' and black popular forms, owing to that channel's initial refusal to screen videos by African-American artists" (p. 70). The network's narrow playlist initially favoured British New Wave acts, and then embraced Heavy Metal during the mid-1980s. Racial and gender exclusion remained strong until the late 1980s (when black music video channels emerged) (Lopes, 1992, p. 68). However, the cultivation of superstardom provided by the medium of music video eventually contributed greatly to the crossover success of non-rock genres and non-white performers. Michael Jackson, for instance, dominated the mainstream charts during the 1980s.

The popular music industry's objective of developing "global personalities" or "entertainment icons" whose sounds and images can be communicated across multiple media (Negus, 1992) is now met through a host of new promotional channels in addition to radio and music television. The convergence between entertainment corporations throughout the 1980s and 1990s has allowed for considerable convergence between systems of delivery, and the merging of content between television, telephone, satellite, cable, and computer. Hilary Lapedis (1999) argues that the vertical integration of the entertainment industries has fed the already symbiotic relationship between Hollywood and record labels, allowing for further cross-promotion and the cultivation of new markets (e.g. soundtrack sales), while also creating a "hybrid text of escapism" (p. 370). Popular music has become the primary stock music used on television (Donnelly, 2002,

p. 331), and similar "hybrid texts" are now found outside the well-established media of television and film. As Graeme Turner (2004) points out, "[Y]ou can listen to FM radio via the internet on your home computer, for instance, or watch a music video on your mobile phone. You can play your choice of music on your computer, your Playstation console, or your CD player" (p. 33). This "content streaming" has contributed to the ubiquity of clearly branded mainstream music. In fact, Anahid Kassabian (2002) suggests that the popular music used in films, television programs, telephones, stores, video games, and so on should be considered as a new kind of genre: "ubiquitous music" (p. 138).

Within this commercial climate, numerous popular music performers have taken advantage of co-marketing strategies. In particular, the use of television advertisements as a mutually beneficial promotional medium for pop stars is a well-established practice, as performers such as Michael Jackson, Madonna, and Robert Palmer struck deals with Pepsi during the 1980s. McDonald's continues to use pop superstars as promotional centrepieces, with Destiny's Child replacing Justin Timberlake in 2005. However, opportunism of this sort is no longer the sole domain of pop performers. During the 1990s, Sting collaborated with Jaguar and Moby's music was used to promote a host of products. More recently, U2 promoted Apple's iPod and Sheryl Crowe endorsed Dell, while in Canada, licensing deals were arranged between indie performer Feist and Lacoste, and The Be Good Tanyas as well as Joel Plaskett and Zellers.

3.7 Conclusion

The preceding chapter establishes that throughout the twentieth century the music industry has been dominated by a handful of Anglo-American companies with a global

reach. While this context has understandably aroused concern regarding musical standardization and homogeneity, it is important to stress that from the music industry's perspective, audience tastes have been notoriously difficult to forecast. In order to minimize this risk and increase control over outside forces, record companies have pursued strategies of horizontal and vertical integration, geographic expansion, and conglomeration. Within this corporate structure, global superstardom has been utilized as a mechanism through which "record companies seek out career longevity for their investments" (Goodwin, 1992, p. 105). The sounds and images of popular music performers have been inserted across media conglomerates' portfolios, allowing for innovative new cross-promotional strategies that target both mainstream and niche markets. The ubiquity of these images has, in turn, contributed to the visuality and hybridity of the multimedia popular music product.

However, despite the enormous cultural and financial resources at the contemporary multinational entertainment conglomerate's disposal—and despite marketing departments' best efforts—audience preferences remain rather difficult to predict. As Negus (1999) explains, the "media or music industry cannot simply 'construct' a market, 'produce' a type of consumer, nor determine an artist's meaning ... and try as they might they continually fail in any attempts to do this" (p. 29). Negus (1999) argues that it is therefore important not to "overemphasise the role of media and promotional practices," but rather "to place an emphasis upon the wider sociological and cultural context within which sounds, images and words are given meaning" (p. 29). The task of the following chapter is to examine how market researchers, too, have begun to realize the importance of these broader contexts over the meaning of popular music.

CHAPTER 4:
POPULAR MUSIC AND LIFESTYLE:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE COMPLEMENTARY
DYNAMICS BETWEEN MARKETING AND MEANING

4.1 Introduction

> Today's marketing watchwords, *emotional branding* and *emotion marketing*, are beginning to scratch the surface of the "why people buy" strategy. ... [M]arketing executives informed with "why people buy" insights will be able to ... move just ahead of their customers, knowing where they are going to be next, and what the customers will demand when they get there.
>
> – Pamela N. Danziger, *Why People Buy Things They Don't Need*

In March 2006, Absolut Vodka unveiled "Absolut Kravitz," a collaborative marketing campaign for which Lenny Kravitz composed a song entitled "Breathe." Speaking of how the brand's "core values" of clarity, simplicity, and perfection *inspired* him, Kravitz stated that "[t]here's nothing more simple, clear or perfect than the essence of true love. ... Once I'd felt that, the track just came" (PR Newswire, 2006). While popular entertainers and songwriters continually juggle competing commercial and creative imperatives, the "Absolut Kravitz" model suggests a new twist: brand as muse. Reflecting on the evolution of Marx's fetishism of commodities to a fetishism of *brands*, Tom Vanderbilt (1997) suggests that "[n]ot only is it difficult to imagine the labor that goes into products, it is now difficult to see the products aside from the brand or the lifestyle they represent: The 'product idea' is more important than the product" (p. 133).

The launch of "Absolut Kravitz" suggests a shift wherein "product ideas" have become the source and conduit for retrieving authentic social relations. Absolut Vodka is love. The brand is the emotion. And as consumer psychology expert Pamela N. Danziger (2004) suggests, understanding and tapping into those emotions is the key to the "why people buy" approach. Popular music has emerged as a particularly valuable resource for manoeuvring consumer emotions and aligning brand personalities with distinct lifestyle categories.

Thus far, I have depicted the music industry as contradictory, dominated by strict corporate control, yet constantly struggling to understand audience demand. In the following, I consider how market researchers have become increasingly interested in more intuitive research methods in order to link meanings derived from purchases to broader patterns of discretionary spending. In order to explore the interface and interplay between popular music and identity, and trends in marketing practices, I consider both academic and industry accounts of commodity expressions of individuality and lifestyle. The methodological decision to bring together the theories and observations of cultural theorists and market researchers provides for a more thorough evaluation of the relationship between cultural practices and the marketplace, and addresses a significant gap within the research.

First, I review the study of subcultures, taking account of the relationship between discretionary spending and the idea of political voice. Second, I link the history of rock and youth rebellion to contemporary advertising. Third, I consider how Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital can be used to relate popular musical taste to the pursuit of status. Last, I explore how approaches to marketing, while global in scale,

cater to personalization, particularly with respect to lifestyle preferences. I argue that the intimate relationship between music and identity complements emotion-based marketing messages. In particular, the sounds and images of rebellion and subversion have emerged as a potent means of harnessing emotions and linking them to other lifestyle-specific products.

4.2 Subcultural Theory, An Overview: Conflict, Style, and Identity

Scholarship on youth subcultures provides a fruitful means of introducing the meanings that youth communities have derived from commodity-based expressions of identity. In stark contrast to Frankfurt School Marxism's assessments of mass culture as homogenising, manipulative, and promoting passivity, subcultural theorists offer readings of popular culture as a site of negotiations between dominant and subordinate groups. By considering the rationale behind—and at times meticulous execution of—style, the study of subcultures affords a degree of legitimacy to youth consumer practices. Subcultural theory emerged from the qualitative empirical studies of Chicago School sociologists as a conceptual framework for studying crime and "deviant behaviour." From this tradition, Howard Becker's analysis of the social world of 1940s jazz musicians is particularly notable, as it provides insightful observations regarding the symbolic interactions that distinguished the "hip" from the "square"—a type of distinction that continues to be re-inscribed among contemporary popular music audiences (Becker, 1997). However, research conducted at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University (CCCS) during the mid-1970s more comprehensively explored the relationship between youth subcultures, style, leisure, and music. It is not my intention to provide an in-depth discussion of the contributions of Birmingham School theorists, but

rather to draw attention to the legacy of subcultural analysis to later approaches to studying the relationship between music audiences and leisure spending.

CCCS researchers documented the activities of working-class youth during post-Second World War Britain, a critical historical moment that saw the growth in money wages for the working-class. The resulting increase in leisure spending translated into demand for "expressive" goods, or commodities that could demarcate discrete (and sometimes competing) identities. In particular, theorists such as Stuart Hall, Phil Cohen, Paul E. Willis, and Dick Hebdige were concerned with the relationship between youth subcultures and class-based power relations. As such, this body of work draws from British Marxists critics, such as Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart, and E. P. Thompson, in addition to Continental theorists, such as Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, and Roland Barthes. In particular, Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which refers to the processes of resistance and incorporation through which the ruling class maintains cultural leadership over "consenting" subordinate groups, was applied to analyze the cultural and social logics behind youth resistance.

The CCCS's seminal analysis of working-class subcultures in Britain, *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson, 1976), is considered "the first attempt to provide a systematic social theory of music and style-driven youth culture" (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004, p. 1). In the theoretical introduction to that study, John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts stress the importance of distinctive "styles" in articulating collectivity, as "concerns, activities, relationships, materials become embodied in rituals of relationship and occasion and movement" (Clarke et al., 1997, p. 104). Clarke et al. observed that the market could not dictate the meanings attributed to

commodities, and subcultures were therefore able to manipulate material objects designed for the youth market to "construct meaningful styles and appearances for themselves" (p. 110). Through such resistance, it is argued, these working-class subcultures were able to "win space," though the authors concede that concrete material problems are solved only in an imaginary way. Similarly, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) examines how British subcultures, and punk in particular, used dress and style as means of re-presenting "the experience of contradiction" (p. 121). For Hebdige, processes of subversion and incorporation, rupture and recuperation characterize the relationship between subcultures and the hegemonic mainstream.

While the theories developed by the CCCS have sparked many debates regarding youth cultural practices,[9] the key idea that I would like to glean from these discussions is the centrality of visible/commodity markers of identity. The CCCS developed innovative perspectives regarding the relationship between youth and consumption, and how material goods are imbued with meaning and confer status. A similar focus on how collective identities are related to audience attitudes, consumer preferences, and leisure activities has since been adopted by consumer behaviour researchers in pursuit of ever more differentiated youth markets. Within marketing terminology, subcultures are described as smaller groupings or niches whose members "share beliefs and common experiences that set them apart from other members of a culture," and may include

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[9] The following limitations of the CCCS conception of subcultures have been observed: the exclusion of female subcultures (McRobbie and Garber, 1976); essentialist conceptions of the working class (Muggleton, 2000); unqualified equation of patterns of youth consumerism with uniform strategies of resistance (Bennett, 1999; Chambers, 1985); emphasis on universality rather than geographical specificity (Waters, 1981); inattention to issues of race (Rose, 1994); underestimation of the role of media in the creation of subcultures (Thornton, 1995); and the problem with "youth" as age category (Ross, 1994; Calcutt, 1998; Bennett, 2001). In the wake of these criticisms, a myriad of alternate approaches to studying music audiences have emerged. "Post-subcultural" theorists have introduced a range of concepts to describe youth cultures, including "neo-tribes," "lifestyles," and "scenes" (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004, p. 11-14).

ethnic, regional, and age groupings (Solomon, Zaichkowsky, and Polegato, 2002, p. 477). The youth market has been further divided into lifestyle-based market segmentation typologies, as a means of predicting consumer behaviour and understanding "why people buy." Although the link between subcultures and class has been largely omitted within marketing research, the notion of youth marginality has emerged as a key marketing pitch. The belief in a "politics of resistance" expressed through commodity manipulation and expression has contributed to the problematic notion of the rebel consumer. This emphasis on stylish subversion has shaped how marketers position popular music performers to target youth audiences.

4.3 Perpetual Youth: Selling Subversion, Resisting Marketing?

The image of youth rebellion, which comprises so much of the history of rock and roll, continues to operate at the heart of the popular music marketing. In the following, I will review this history and consider the impact of the detachment of youth from age specificity. I argue that commodity-based expressions of rebellion are typically motivated more by generational cultural conflict than a broader societal critique; the intimate relationship between youth music and rebellion reflects the tendency of rejecting parental values during the in-between period of adolescence. As such, music and styles intended to subvert "the establishment" reflect the conflation of two institutions: the family and the state. Youth rebellion has emerged as a potent emotional appeal and branding mechanism precisely because it is contained within the logic of capitalism. As Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter (2004) suggest, "genuine creativity is completely rebellious and subversive, since it disrupts existing patterns of thought and life. It subverts everything *except capitalism*" (p. 205; emphasis in original). As a result, music

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intended for audiences ranging from childhood to middle age adopts the tropes of youthful rebellion, creating a perpetual, commodified non-conformity.

Although "youth" comprise the target audience of much of the music industry's output, this market's notoriously heterogeneous character renders it a problematic category (see my discussion of market risk in Chapter 3). Complicating matters is the distancing of the idea of youth from demographic groupings; youth can no longer be equated with the teenage years. Simon Frith (1981) suggests that the concept of "teenager" emerged in the 1950s as a description of a style of leisure consumption associated with working-class youth. The term was linked to both age and class. Although "youth cultures" also constituted "leisure cultures" with strong associations with class (i.e. the *middle* class), Frith (1981) explains that the notion of "youth" developed into an ideological concept:

> [M]iddle-class children were deliberately adopting lower-class *values*—
> "toughness, excitement, chance-taking, indulgence, 'conning,' autonomy
> and hardness"—and were thus making a conscious decision to oppose the
> values of their parents (unlike working-class teenagers who were, it seems,
> simply indulging themselves on their way to a life of conformity). (Frith,
> 1981, p. 190; emphasis in original)

Sarah Thornton (1995) echoes this refrain in her study of British club cultures, which she suggests reflect "rebellion against, or rather escape from, the trappings of the parental class" (p. 204) more than actual class delineations.

As youthfulness emerged as a potent symbol for nonconformity and freedom from parental constraints, popular music developed into a central vehicle for the expression of generational rebellion. In fact, Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004) argue that it was the power of the "symbolic value of style and popular cultural resources" that greatly

contributed to this transformation of "youth into an ideological category, a state of mind rather than a particular stage in life" (p. 10). Furthermore, this youthful state of mind was best expressed through broader specific patterns of discretionary spending. As early as the 1920s, "the youthful approach to consumption—concern for fashion and change and up-to-dateness, the use of style to establish in-group membership—became the model for *all* consumption" (Frith, 1981, p. 192; emphasis in original). That a youthful approach to consumption involves keeping up with the trends and using style to signal a relation to group membership is key from a marketing perspective. Because a youthful approach to consumption encompassed a "whole way of life," rather than a series of discrete choices, it added a degree of predictability to consumption patterns.

Rock music has had a central role within the rebellious "whole way of life," as its irreverent sounds and styles have provided a fertile site for generational conflict. Despite this genre's dominance from 1950s through the 1970s, Jason Toynbee (2002) suggests that "the association of rock and rebellion is so strong that it might seem perverse to consider rock a mainstream at all" (p. 152). Rock and roll articulated the youth experience of post-war alienation, and incited dialogue regarding adolescent difference. According to Lawrence Grossberg (1984), "[r]ock and roll's relation to desire and pleasure serves to mark a difference, to inscribe on the surface of social reality a boundary between 'them' and 'us'" (p. 39). The lyrics for The Who's "My Generation" incisively capture one of the main sources of contempt: the adult generation. As Toynbee (2002) points out, in this song a collective youth is positioned in opposition to "the whole older generation": "[T]he second person 'you' (of 'Why don't you all fade away?') became a despised other" (p. 153).

Despite this emphasis on expressing generational frustration, however, it is important to acknowledge that during the late 1960s in particular, rock provided a strong vehicle for voicing dissent regarding more acute social and cultural issues. In the United States, rock's power to generate a strong sense of community lent clout to protests against the Vietnam War and rallies in support of the Civil Rights Movement (Bennett, 2001). However, it must be stressed that although music and style can be valuable tools for stimulating dialogue regarding social injustices or for articulating feelings of alienation, they *do not* threaten a capitalist system of production. According to Frith (1988b), "far from being 'counter-cultural', rock articulated the *reconciliation* of rebelliousness and capital" (p. 2; emphasis in original).

Perhaps due to rock performers' social influence, however, a critique of consumer capitalism has been somewhat problematically folded into the identity of rock. Keir Keightley (2001) comments on the contrary character of rock as "a mass phenomenon that retained its distinctly anti-mass sensibilities. ... [Baby boomers'] purchasing power gave legitimacy and significance to teen music, even as that musical culture was defined by its antipathy to commerce" (p. 139). The marketplace was flooded with rock music precisely because of the unprecedented economic clout of teenagers. As such, the social visibility of youth—and corresponding anti-mass sentiments—was indebted to the realities of the mass market. Nevertheless, an antipathy to commerce is apparent in one of rock's great narratives: the notion of "selling out." Naomi Klein's (2000) assessment of early 1990s grunge reflects this paradigm: "What was 'sold out' in Seattle ... was some pure idea about doing it yourself, about independent labels versus the big corporations, about not buying into the capitalist machine" (p. 83). This idea is a key

facet of indie rock identity, in particular. However, it should be acknowledged that indie rock's celebration of non-major record labels is actually related to a concern with the *scale* of consumer capitalism, not an outright rejection (Keightley, 2001). It is important to acknowledge that the logic of a market economy embraces smaller niche markets, and furthermore, as previously discussed, that independent labels often rely on major record companies for mass distribution and marketing. However, for "indie" audiences, small-scale production and consumption is a site of authenticity and status.[10]

The cultural emphasis on the pleasures of youth rebellion, coupled with the emergence of youth as an ideology rather than an age category, has led to a peculiar situation: as youth has become an advertising pitch for a widening demographic, the question is not who is youthful, but who is *not*. Today, more "mature" consumers clamour for a taste of youth, while young children wield unprecedented financial clout. Andy Bennett (2001) suggests that the various post-Second World War generations engage in an ideological "struggle for youth," as each "claim the right to 'define' youth" (p. 152). Bennett (2001) also acknowledges the role of corporate interests in shaping conceptions of the "youth market" as the more affluent 25-45 years age bracket. According to Andrew Ross (1994):

> [A]n entire parental generation [is] caught up in the fantasy that they are themselves still youthful, or at least more culturally radical, in ways once equated with youth, than the youth of today ... It is not just Mick Jagger and Tina Turner who imagine themselves to be eighteen years old and

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[10] Despite the problematic assumption that independent record companies produce more "authentic" music than major record companies, it is important to recognize the historical importance of independent labels in producing and promoting new talent and genres. During the 1950s in particular, the independents embraced R&B, blues, gospel, and rock and roll. In contrast to massive music corporations, for these labels "the owner, record producer, sound technician, and promoter often were the same person (as with Sam Philips at Sun)" (Shuker, 2005, p. 144). Today, many independent labels work more closely with the major record companies. However, to a certain degree, they continue to function as talent developers for the majors and have been associated with new genres, such as Sub Pop and grunge during the 1990s.

steppin' out; a significant mass of baby boomers partially act out this belief in their daily lives. (p. 8)

The saleability of the experience of being young is underscored by the marketing strategy of targeting "mature" consumers according to "perceived age," or "how old a person feels" (Solomon et al., 2002, p. 534).

Within this context, the image of the counter-cultural maverick and non-conformist has blossomed into a powerful branding mechanism designed to target baby boomers. Due to its association with a period of cultural change, the emotional power of the popular music of the late 1960s (political or otherwise) has been harnessed in order to sell everything from hamburgers to insurance. In a content analysis of the use of nostalgia in television commercials, ten percent of 1,031 advertisements viewed were considered nostalgic, twenty-eight percent of which used "period-oriented music" as a nostalgic device (Unger, McConocha, and Faier, 1991). The aging Generation Xers have been targeted in a similar way, as Diet Pepsi has adopted a 1980s pop soundtrack to target this demographic. Through the use of stylized "flashbacks," these television commercials highlight this generation's outrageous types of youthful spending (unconventional hairstyles and fashion), and position Diet Pepsi as a more sensible means of remaining "young at heart." Within this "in joke," leisure spending is positioned as a means retaining youth.

Concomitant with the "aging" of youth has been the emergence of a young cohort of children eager to participate in a "way of life" defined by consumerism. While adult generations are notable for their refusal to grow old, "tweens" (pre-adolescent children to fourteen year-olds) have been described as the KGOY (Kids Grow Old Younger)

generation (Lindstrom, 2004). Both the baby boom and tween markets are highly sought after due to their purchasing power. Unlike adults in their twenties and thirties, who might have financial demands related to student debt, mortgages, or young families, the baby boomers and the "tweens" often have considerably more disposable income free for leisure spending. And like the baby boomers before them, tweens use taste in music to signal lifestyle as a source of affiliation. As such, Martin Lindstrom (2004) argues that the market segmentation of tweens can be based primarily on musical taste, a theme that will be developed later in this chapter.

Although music and style-based rebellion may have, in certain cases, helped highlight social injustices, the primary conflict typically articulated is *generational*, pitting teenager against parent. It is these ties between popular music and generational experience that intensify music's power as a nostalgia-evoking device in advertising. Moreover, it is the notion of leisure spending as expressing a youthful way of life that has shaped the discretionary spending of children and adults alike. Thus far, I have discussed popular music and youth in a somewhat general way, neglecting to account for the heterogeneity of music genres and youth lifestyles. Now, I will turn to the fundamental role of difference to popular music audiences, and will consider how this resonates in corresponding approaches to marketing. As Keightley (2001) points out, "[w]hat is truly at stake in rock culture is the differentiation of taste, not an affiliation with forms of cultural action" (p. 129).

4.4 "Us and Them": Genre Communities and Designed Distinction

Popular musical meaning is etched into audiences' understanding of difference. While Bennett (2001) characterizes the "struggle for youth" as largely intergenerational,

popular music and lifestyle-based consumption also involves strict *intra*-generational contests related to hierarchies of taste. As such, marketing researchers target different genre communities or subcultures within the heterogeneous youth market. In the following, I will consider how the relationship between audiences and different genres of music reflects a competition for status and distinction. Partly due to the importance of rebellion to both subcultural and rock history, the idea of "subversive" consumption has been posited as a powerful alternative to the mainstream. However, the idea that certain uses of commodities constitute an effective "politics of resistance" reflects a misunderstanding regarding market economies. Due to capitalism's indifference to *intention* (i.e. symbolic resistance), what are sometimes heralded as "subversive economies" are often no more than "cool" youth markets. This pursuit of coolness cannot be separated from status hierarchies. Further, it is this desire to differentiate oneself from the mainstream that fuels the turnover in youth trends.

The link between musical taste and hierarchies of aesthetic value signals group or class affiliation, and perhaps more importantly, exclusion. Due to the ability of musical knowledge to confer status or distinction, numerous popular music scholars have drawn from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and taste (see Thornton, 1995; Frith, 1996; Bennett et al., 1999; Toynbee, 2000; Regev, 2002; Hibbett, 2005). For Bourdieu (1984), status is not only a product of economic capital, but also of social and cultural capital. This cultural capital, which is acquired through upbringing and formal education, consists of distinctive tastes and knowledge of "legitimate" arts and "high" culture; class governs cultural taste. With respect to music, Bourdieu (1984) argues that because concert-going and playing a "noble" instrument are exclusionary activities, "nothing

more clearly affirms one's class, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music" (p. 18). *Popular* tastes were linked to the less educated working classes.

Removing Bourdieu's ideas form a French context and applying them to North America takes some reconfiguration. However, as Douglas B. Holt (2002) illustrates, although the American context is marked by a lesser emphasis on art, there are numerous other consumption fields through which cultural elites articulate status, ranging from fashion to food. Popular culture in particular has emerged as a key site of negotiation and debate. According to Scott Lash (1990), the emergence of newer, post-industrial middle classes has resulted in what Bourdieu terms "classificatory struggles" over what constitutes legitimate cultural capital (p. 21). The legitimation of certain popular music genres and performers can be seen as the product of such struggles. Motti Regev (2002) argues that the position of "pop/rock" as the dominant musical form of the second half of the twentieth century has been accompanied by the production of a canon of great works: "The artistic ideology that has been producing the 'pop/rock' canon is essentially a permutation of the traditional ideology of autonomous art" (p. 255).

Notions of connoisseurship and expertise have been re-inscribed *within* and *across* popular music genres. Frith (1996) elaborates on this theme: "Low cultural forms ... generat[e] [their] own capital—most obviously, perhaps, in those forms (such as dance club cultures) which are organized around *exclusiveness*" (p. 9; emphasis added). For instance, Sarah Thornton's (1995) work on British "club culture" considers how "hipness" constitutes what she terms "subcultural capital":

> Subcultural capital is the linchpin of an alternative hierarchy in which the axes of gender, sexuality and race are all employed in order to keep the determinations of class, income and occupations at bay. Interestingly, the

social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it
dislikes and by what it emphatically *isn't*. (p. 208; emphasis added)

This emphasis on exclusion echoes Bourdieu's (1984) argument that "tastes are perhaps

first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by ... the tastes of others" (p. 56). Within

British club cultures, the despised "other" is typically the *mainstream*.

In order to accurately conceptualize the relationship between popular music

audiences and status, it is necessary to examine the attitudes toward the musical

mainstream. Within both scholarly and popular discussions of mainstream and non-

mainstream genres, the language employed often implies a re-inscription of a divide

between high and low culture. Much like the status of popular culture when contrasted

against high culture, mainstream music functions as a residual category: the mainstream

is what authentic music is *not*. As P. David Marshall (1997) points out, "The irony of the

entire discourse of authenticity that envelops rock and popular music is that it is

dependent on the existence of such examples [as New Kids on the Block] for the

maintenance of ... what rock means for other audiences" (p. 173). As previously

discussed, rock has historically balanced a tenuous position as both a mainstream yet

heterogeneous genre, whereas pop has been labelled as homogenising. The discourse of

authenticity also has an oppositional relationship to notions of popularity and

accessibility. Bourdieu's (1984) observation that "the dialectic of distinction and

pretension designates as devalued 'middle-brow' art those legitimate works which

become 'popularized'" (p. 14) could be updated to describe the devaluation of songs and

performers that move from the "underground" to the mainstream.

Within a meaning system that is reliant on inscribing *difference*, distinctions between popular genres, however subtle, are embedded in the attitudes of audiences. Genre codes are more than aesthetic categories, as the values and attitudes associated with particular genres and performers constitute a key facet of audience identification. As David Brackett (2002) points out:

> Genres bring with them connotations about music and identity which may encode specific affective qualities such as 'conformity,' 'rebelliousness,' 'commercialism,' 'selling out,' 'art for art's sake'; and they may encode a whole variety of social characteristics including race, class, gender, place, age and sexuality. (p. 66)

The intimate relationship between genres and specific affective qualities serves as an organizing principle within the marketing of popular music. Tensions between art and commerce are "built into the system" (Frith, 2001, p. 34). According to Simon Frith (2001):

> What the commercial music industry has done is make the way music can offer a sense of belonging (and exclusion) a part of its sales pitch. Whether through the star system (fans identifying with idols) or, more significantly, through genre marketing (types of music—country, heavy metal—standing for ideological communities), record selling has meant persuading people that their music market choices aren't just a matter of self-indulgence but also link them to communities. Musical tastes matter so much to people because, however vainly, they take them to be a statement of what sort of people they are. (pp. 38-39)

Despite genre categories' function as marketing categories, the notion of "ideological communities" is a fruitful way of conceptualising how the affiliation and division amongst and between fans are understood. Specific values, principles, and conventions exist within these communities. However, while Frith makes a distinction between the star system and genre marketing, it is important to acknowledge the overlap and intersection of these two strategies. Popular music celebrities with close links to

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specific genres often emerge as metonyms for the ideals heralded by their genre. For example, Bruce Springsteen is an icon for working-class concerns, the late Kurt Cobain symbolizes adolescent alienation, and the late Tupac Shakur is synonymous with racial politics. Moreover, popular music audiences, ranging from mainstream to underground, look to performers for cues with respect to musical preference, style, and attitude. Marshall (1997) suggests that "[t]he presentation of the star, his or her musical roots, style of dress, manner of speech, and public display of sexuality are all significant markers for the structuring and differentiating of youth culture" (p. 161). Nevertheless, the distinction made between pop stars and genre heroes is significant, as are the fashions and styles associated with them.

Reflecting on how easily "subversive" and "rebellious" subcultures have been packaged and profited from, Naomi Klein (2000) acknowledges the problematic assumption that different scenes or styles necessarily pose a challenge to the mainstream. However, focussing the debate on the mainstream versus the margins results in an important blind spot not only regarding the centrality of difference as a marker of status, but also regarding the reality of market economies. Because commodity production in a post-industrial society favours niche cultures, the idea of individualizing oneself through cultural tastes is not necessarily progressive (Thornton, 1995). Although music and style-based rebellion may be deemed threatening by cultural and social authorities, it *is not* considered subversive from a business perspective. Rather, the desire to express one's individuality is, in fact, the cornerstone of successful enterprise.

The conflation of rebellious consumption and subversive politics reflects misunderstanding regarding capitalism's need for *difference* and its indifference to

intention. The use of style to express punk values, for example, is informative. Stacy Thompson (2004) describes punk as a cultural form that "refuses to abandon aesthetic negation and economic resistance ... where negation means the rejection of any and all commercially viable aesthetics coupled with an attempt to found an anticommodity market aesthetic" (pp. 307-308). The problem is that this take on "economic resistance" is dependent on a market economy. Assembling items such as safety pins and garbage bags to create an "anticommodity aesthetic" typically involves purchasing items through a regulated market economy, whether at a hardware store or an overpriced boutique. Hebdige's (1979) argument that the subversive power of subcultures is defused as style innovations are "fed back directly into high fashion and mainstream fashion" (p. 95) may have merit, but when resistance is expressed through commodities, incorporation into the mainstream is inevitably seamless. Genuine "economic resistance" requires the establishment of or engagement within an alternative economy that operates outside of regulated capitalist economies, and therefore does not participate in regulatory practices such as taxation. A "subversive economy" would describe the trade of illegal substances and resale of stolen goods, or the industrious use of previously purchased/disposed goods through recycling and adapting (junk yard shopping). Punk style is fed more by the idea of innovation than unlawfulness, and therefore cannot easily be characterized as resistance.

The limitations with style-based subversion is explored in Heath and Potter's *The Rebel Sell* (2004), a play on Billy Idol's anthem, "Rebel Yell." The authors observe that "[f]or generations now, countercultural rebels have been pumping out 'subversive' music, 'subversive' art, 'subversive' literature, 'subversive' clothing" (pp. 34-35), but argue that

"[t]he fundamental problem is that rebellion against aesthetic and sartorial norms is not actually subversive. Whether people have piercings and tattoos, what kind of clothes they wear, what music they listen to, simply does not matter from the standpoint of the capitalist system" (p. 150). Rather, capitalism has proven proficient at meeting market demand for anti-capitalist sentiments. The actual shift that occurs is in the price that these items can fetch, due to the demand for status or coolness. The effectiveness of a consumer-based politics of resistance is undermined by the reality of market economies, which thrive off stylistic innovation and differentiation. In fact, Frith (2004) suggests that the legacy of subcultural theory seems to be "the continuing assumption that a girl or boy with an ostentatiously pierced body is being more 'resistant' to dominant culture than if they were, say, to join a radical political organization" (p. 176).

Within youth markets, musical taste and rebellious or non-conformist styles are important tools for expressing identity and pursuing distinction. However, because this differentiation process involves a playful relationship with commodities, these statements are contained by a market economy from their inception. Furthermore, as marketers further develop their understanding of how objects are being used and *why people buy*, the ability for style to constitute truly political terrain is weakened. Marketing research is increasingly structured not around functional uses, but symbolic values, no matter how elusive.

4.5 Macro Markets, Micro Identities: Music and Customization in the Global Marketplace—The Sounds of Difference

Thus far, I have outlined how popular music is an integral facet of the individual and collective meanings derived from youth rebellion and status. When comparing the

contemporary context to the historic cases reviewed, it is important to acknowledge that during the years since Hebdige's *Subculture* was published, "there has been a proliferation of music genres associated with different youth groups, each with its own stylistic codes and conventions" (Negus, 1996, p. 20). Today's teenage and tween audiences participate in an intense competition for coolness, and taste in music and brand name products often reflects position within status hierarchies. Due to exposure through the Internet, magazines, and television, this generational cohort has access to both local and international trends, inspiring market researchers to herald them as "the most global generation the world has ever seen" (Lindstrom, 2004, p. 17). The major players within youth-related industries have placed considerable emphasis on developing "global" brand platforms, while also dividing youth audiences into narrower, lifestyle-specific market segments. In the following, I would like to explore how the development of "global markets"[11] for music has been accompanied by and has catered to an increased emphasis on personalization and the expression of individuality within Western markets.

Globalization has provided Western audiences with access to a diverse range of music, which has, in turn, allowed "a growing range of groups and individuals to use them in the construction of identity and location" (Harris, 2000, p. 26). While the proliferation of digital technologies has supported the consolidation of corporate control over the music industry, it has also fostered global piracy via peer-to-peer file sharing (Laba, 2006). Interestingly, despite unprecedented opportunities for eclecticism, a handful of Western performers continue to garner enormous audiences, reaping international sales. Martin Lindstrom (2004) characterizes the contemporary music

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[11] As Keith Negus (1999) explains, "the so-called 'global markets' tend to be those which have strictly enforced copyright legislation and highly priced CDs rather than cheaply priced cassettes (so Japan is an important global market, whereas India is not)" (p. 156).

industry as offering "a proliferation of 'the same,'" but also "more difference than ever before" (p. 21). Consideration of the social processes of listening to and purchasing music is instructive here. Gilbert B. Rodman and Cheyanne Vanderdonckt (2006) argue that peer-to-peer file sharing reflects "a set of *affectively* charged social relationships. For fans, the impulse to buy and the impulse to share are often too tightly intertwined to be separated" (p. 248; emphasis in original). Because music constitutes such a key part of youth relationships, what they choose to buy (or share) is not necessarily the product of individual-based, rational choices, but is a social practice. The notions of both sameness and difference in music can provide this sort of social affiliation, depending on the target audience. However, I argue that the sounds of difference have offered a more potent emotional tool for advertising. Unique or "subversive" music has been linked to numerous brands in order to sell the perception of individuality.

Much of this discussion has focussed on the historical importance of rock to youth rebellion. However, Jason Toynbee (2002) illustrates how cultural and economic shifts throughout the 1980s contributed to the dismantling of rock dominance:

> Popular music was increasingly organized around distinct generational cohorts and diverse tastes and identities. Emerging trends towards globalization then compounded this fragmentation. As a result, in the contemporary period singular mainstreams have been replaced by parallel multiple networks ... [including] world music, glocal scenes and regional blocs. (p.159)

Within this context, numerous popular music genres have emerged as means for expressing individuality. Significantly, the distinct generational cohorts to which Toynbee refers share in common attitudes not only toward diverse popular music genres, but also toward different brands. Musical taste has been used as an index for predicting

broader patterns of discretionary spending and affinity toward different brands; as branding guru Lindstrom (2004) suggests, "no sound, no brand" (p. 100). As such, popular music celebrities are routinely used to generate loyalty toward brands that seek to evoke similar cultural meanings as the performer (Marshall, 1997; Solomon et al., 2002). However, although mainstream performers such as Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez have been used for corporate branding in the past, the current trends suggests more attention toward "non-mainstream," cutting-edge sounds. Brands stamped with the promise of individuality permeate the contemporary global marketplace, and "cool music" has become a keystone of the advertisements' emotional appeals. In fact, the relationship between the mainstream pop singers and advertising is so well-trodden that they are increasingly harnessing their own brand power, positioning themselves as "pop star conglomerates"—a theme I will explore more fully in Chapter 5.

As established in Chapter 3, global sales of popular music performers allow for substantial profit margins. When discussing the global exchange of popular music, however, it is important to acknowledge that the relationship between the "global" and the "local" is complex and contested, and raises numerous questions regarding cultural imperialism and post-colonialism (Fairley, 2001). Keith Negus (1999) borrows from Nestor García Canclini's (1990) ideas of "deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" to explore how "international repertoire" and "world music" engage with notions of cultural identity: "If international repertoire is constructed in such a way that an artist can, in theory, be taken from anywhere and sold to anywhere else (the negation of places), then world music involves the affirmation of place" (Negus, 1999, p. 164). A thorough discussion of the politics of place within world musics lies outside the scope of this

thesis. Rather, I would like to explore how international repertoire—typically one of the major record labels' most profitable divisions—has seen a broadening in its conception of Western acts with global sales potential. No longer limiting themselves to safe balladeers, such as Celine Dion and Elton John, record companies and marketing departments alike are embracing the potential of rebellious performers with strong links to distinct genre communities and identities. In particular, hip-hop is now seen as a potent economic engine with global potential.

Although hip-hop has arguably emerged as one of the most prominent mainstream genres, the significance of genre-specific values suggests that the genre itself—aside from its celebrity performers—remains a significant source of meaning. When marketed globally, hip-hop is not stripped of cultural specificity, but rather is promoted as an exoticized version of the local—much like the approach associated with marketing world music to Western markets. According to David Samuels (2004), "rap's appeal to whites [has] rested in its evocation of an age-old image of blackness: a foreign, sexually charged, and criminal underworld against which the norms of white society are defined" (pp.147-148). The thrill of the idea of subverting societal norms has such currency that numerous companies have been clamouring for hip-hop endorsers to enhance their "brand personalities" in transnational advertising campaigns. For example, in an attempt to register with young consumers on an "emotional level," Reebok designed a global campaign that aligned their brand with hip-hop stars such as 50 Cent and Jay-Z (Sanders, 2005). As advertising agency manager Lyle Tick suggests, this campaign, titled "I am what I am," acknowledged that "[y]outh are struggling with individuation and belonging"—and positioned Reebok as the brand that would celebrate their uniqueness

(as cited in Sanders, 2005, p. 5). Reebok sells hip-hop rebellion as a type of collective identity wrapped in the rhetoric of individuality. Individuation is positioned as belonging.

Hip-hop is a favourite among advertisers not only because of the saleable image of rebellion, but also because of the genre's practice of embedding brand names into rhymes. This custom dates back to Run DMC's (1986) tribute to "My Adidas," but has exploded as of late. For instance, Nelly's "Air Force Ones" and Busta Rhymes's "Pass the Courvoisier Part Two" assume a calculated approach to product placement. Discussing this practice, trend-spotter Ryan Berger suggests that, "[t]hese brands are part of the artists' lives, and what they're selling is a *lifestyle*" (as cited in Stanley, 2004, p. 16; emphasis added). Because marketers want to insinuate their brands into these cool lifestyles, they are approaching record labels not only about weaving brands into songs, but also licensing arrangements and sponsorships (Stanley, 2004). Genre-specific tours or festivals, for instance, typically offer marketers audience members of similar socio-economical/ethnic/lifestyle communities; they offer narrowly defined niche markets (Orosa Paleo and Wijnberg, 2006). Such cross-promotional opportunities are limited to products deemed relevant to the hip-hop lifestyle, such as shoes, cars, clothing, jewellery, and alcohol. For hip-hop audiences, the acquisition of these sorts of material possessions makes an important statement about manhood and self-worth (Watts, 2004).

Another approach to generating affinity through selling individuality has been an eclectic or "indie" sell. For instance, the iPod advertising campaign has promoted new music by a diverse range of performers, including Gorillaz, The Killers, and jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, all, of course, reflecting the access to difference the

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technology promotes. Also, Lacoste Fragrances has teamed up with Feist and Jaguar has partnered with Spoon. Within this approach, new, innovative music is deemed the key to linking brands to "cool youth." Jin Wang (2005) explores how a strategic relationship between Motorola and Apple was designed to target Chinese youth based on a Western model of "an avant-garde mobile music society thriving on an edgy and cool youth culture" (p. 187). Within this strategy, remaining current with respect to new technologies is equated with keeping on top of fresh music trends. Wang's (2005) study underscores the weaknesses associated with applying Western marketing approaches globally, as she suggests that musical taste is more related to an entertainment culture than serious self-expression for Chinese youth. However, this link between technology savvy consumers and an interest in innovative music illustrates North American marketers' interest in tying certain personality types and interests to specific approaches to consumption.

Market researchers are exploring both quantitative and quantitative methods to uncover "why people buy"—the key to predicting consumer behaviour outlined by Danziger (2004). While the sales-tracking approach to research made available through SoundScan has proven valuable for tabulating consumer interest in specific music performers, it fails to capture the nuances involved in the decision-making processes of more knowledgeable, trend-setting music audiences (McCourt and Rothenbuhler, 1997). Two more qualitative approaches to addressing youth trends have been "cool hunting," an anthropological approach to observing youth, and viral marketing, through which marketers pay people to create a buzz about certain products in an attempt to insinuate them into youth cultures (Heath and Potter, 2004). In addition trend spotting and

monitoring, however, researchers are going to great lengths to understand the logic governing such choices.

Increasingly, statistical information regarding behavioural and attitudinal attributes is used to segment audiences into lifestyle and personality categories. The VALS (Values and Lifestyles) segmentation system, for instance, uses survey data to categorize consumers according to available resources and "self-orientation"; individuals may be classified as principle oriented, status oriented, or action oriented (Solomon *et. al*, 2002). This type of approach has also been applied to teen and tween audiences, as marketing researchers strive to understand how different brand images appeal to different personalities and lifestyles. Based on statistical analysis of questionnaires which are then validated by high school students, the Teen/Types segmentation system classifies teens and tweens into the following categories: Edges (11% of teens/tweens), Influencers/Persuaders (10%), Conformers/Followers (44%), and Passives/Reflexives (35%) (Zollo, 2004; Lindstrom, 2004).[12] Both the rebellious Edges and the more conventionally popular Influencers/Persuaders are considered cool and set the trends that are later adopted by Conformers and then Passives. While the Edges' aesthetic is anti-fashion and supposedly anti-brand (as expressed through specific brands), the Influencers/Persuaders adopt more accessible styles (Lindstrom, 2004).

Interestingly, the Edges are described as avid *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* readers who are at "the cutting edge of white music," whereas Influencers are invested in rap music and hip-hop culture (Zollo, 2004, p. 111). This statistical information provides an explanation for my observations regarding two main approaches to using popular music

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[12] Peter Zollo (2004) uses the labels Edge, Influencers, Conformers, and Passives, whereas Martin Lindstrom (2004) refers to Edges, Persuaders, Followers, and Reflexives.

in advertising. The cool edge afforded by either innovative, avant-garde music or by rebellious hip-hop is used to manufacture specific brand personalities. However, from a corporate perspective, the real pay-off occurs when the late adopting audiences (Conformers/Followers and Passives/Reflexives) buy into lifestyle-specific trends. Therefore, while the coolness factor may dissipate as the trend-setting elites continue to innovate, these same products remain relevant to the slower transitioning populations, offering substantial profit margins. When Klein (2000) suggests that "cool hunters reduce vibrant cultural ideas to the status of archaeological artefacts, and drain away whatever meaning they once held for the people who lived with them," (p. 84) perhaps what she is really observing is the late adopters becoming aware of the trends initiated by style rebels.

According to Heath and Potter (2004), advertising plays a minor role in the diffusion of cool trends from style innovators: "Advertising if it is effective at all, may help alert the late majority and laggards about what the rest of society has been up to" (p. 216). That trend seems to be changing, and companies are attempting to use cool music to signal their ability to stay within and predict the trends. Market researchers are not engineering meaning so much as observing what different brands and products mean to teen audiences, and selling them on those terms.

4.6 Conclusion

Speaking about working with hip-hop stars 50 Cent and Jay-Z, Reebok's Brian Povinelli explains: "It's about putting out a message that resonates and is relevant to today's youth. ... If your brand isn't connecting [with consumers] on an emotional level, it's hard [for them] to make the conversion standing at the shoe wall" (as cited in

Sanders, 2005, p. 5). This approach is consistent with Danziger's (2004) recommendation that the examination of target audiences' emotions provides vital insights into understanding why people buy, which is key to predicting patterns of discretionary spending. Through a discussion of subcultures, youth rebellion, taste hierarchies, and marketing typographies, I consider the links between the meanings that youth audiences derive from popular music and style, and marketing's interest in personalization and lifestyle. This approach is vitally important as a means of testing the validity of claims regarding music and style as viable sites of political resistance. While alternative youth styles may be valuable tools for contesting dominant representations of gender, race, and sexuality, they do not undermine capitalism. Rather, commodity-based expressions of identity *nourish* market economies. As Coyle and Dolan (1999) note:

> Punk rock, or alternative rock, defines itself in opposition to the mainstream and in so doing becomes the perfect expression of capitalist society. It survives, as does the mainstream, by constantly revolutionizing the instruments of its own production and thereby the relations of production to performance and with them the whole of its relations to its audience. (p. 31)

I contend that popular music's affinity to both emotion and difference makes it an effective tool in communicating the core values of "brand personalities" to specialized youth markets in a resonant and evocative way. In particular, due to adolescents' interest in expressing their individuality and independence, the image of rebellion and subversion has gained currency as a commodified symbol of autonomy, and as a *surrogate* for more genuine strategies of resistance. Despite the diversity across contemporary youth market segments, these audiences are connected by a desire to consume in a way that reflects difference.

CHAPTER 5:
"EQUAL OPPORTUNITY OPPORTUNISM":
AUTHENTICITY AND ECONOMIC VALUE

5.1 Introduction

> I believe that, over the next decade, corporations, the music industry and broadcasters are going to be working together in ways no one even dreamed of as little as 10 or 20 years ago, probably in ways none of us foresee right now. ... By the year 2000 I think we'll see the targeting of brand-specific music artists, matched precisely to products. Music will play a major role in this new commercial reality—the emergence of a global market.

> — Bill Lynn, former Coca-Cola vice-president

> (as cited in Frith, 1993, p. 72)

As established in Chapter 4, market researchers' keen interest in the symbolic value of both music and youth products has led to increasing reliance on popular music as a tool for legitimating brands. Building on this theme, I turn from the role of the market researcher and consider the involvement of the popular music performer in more detail. It is important to recognize that marketers do not simply plunder popular music. Performers agree to license their music or "personalities" for their own commercial gain. Considering the degree to which many popular music performers have begun to embrace a broad range of less traditional promotional practices, Bill Lynn's comments above seem prophetic. However, in the contemporary marketplace, it appears that the relationship between music celebrities and non-music products has been taken one step further: rather

than teaming up with Coca-Cola or Pepsi, today's superstars are launching their own competing brands.

In the following, I examine how popular music performers have capitalized on this changing commercial climate, harnessing the emotions that teenagers invest in music and style in order to sell a wide range of merchandise. I take into account how two related developments have contributed to the creation of a new creative/commercial paradigm of legitimacy: changing perceptions regarding the debate over authenticity; and changing musical practices sparked by technological innovation. According to P. David Marshall (1997):

> The popular music industry ... is an apparatus that tries to organize and focus the crowd's intensity into recognizable forms and products of consumption. The industry is an apparatus for the congealing of emotions and sentiments into recognizable sounds, images, and personalities that work to maintain the intensity of emotion. When the emotional intensity dissipates, the industry works to construct new forms of intense sentiments around new images, sounds, and personalities. (p. 167)

While cross-promotion throughout entertainment corporations ensures the ubiquity of *particular* popular music stars, as Marshall points out, it is the greater apparatus that houses the emotional power; the performers themselves are often trend-dependent and largely substitutable. Perhaps acknowledging their status as ephemeral and their celebrity as fleeting, today's popular music stars are cashing in on their time in the limelight. I argue that, within this commercial reality, the savvy entrepreneur who takes control of his or her own image and merchandise has emerged as a new model of authenticity.

5.2 Industrious Artists and Authenticated Commerce: Gender, Genre, and Financial Control

Because image-based marketing is a fundamental aspect of the selling of *all* popular music genres, dichotomies between art and commerce, authenticity and artifice are problematic. As Lisa Peñaloza (2004) points out, in the contemporary global economy "[a]uthenticity is a performance. ... Ironically, celebrities are increasingly simulated people—human yet more, even as products become more personalized through brand images and communities of consumer users" (p. 190). Within this intense media environment, notions of authenticity and tradition are routinely drawn from as yet another marketing strategy (Coyle & Dolan, 1999). In the following, I examine a shift in how authenticity is constructed within the popular music industry. In particular, I consider the relationship between the chart dominance of female pop acts and African American "urban" genres, and the emergence of a new type of legitimacy that is based not on *symbolic* value, but *economic* value.

Due, in part, to the cultural dominance of rock throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the discourse of authenticity is strongly rooted in rock ideology. As such, cultural judgements regarding popular music often stem from an *art* discourse (whose ideal is transcendence) or a *folk* discourse (whose ideal is integration and community)—both of which are the legacy of Romanticism (Frith, 1998). As Negus and Pickering (2004) explain, the Romantic period in Western Europe saw the emergence of notions of creativity that placed emphasis "on individual imagination and feeling, for it was through such faculties that authentic self-expression was felt to flow" (p. 3). Today, notions of individualism and musical originality lie at the heart of the idea of rock authenticity, and virtuosos (on the guitar, that is, not the voice, as in pop or R&B) are celebrated as

"gifted" individuals or even "geniuses."[13] Within this schema, binaries between rock (constructed as authentic and masculine) and pop (constructed as artificial and feminine) have been produced and naturalized (Coates, 1997). As Michael Jarrett (1992) stresses, such dichotomies mythologize notions of purity and authenticity.

Throughout the 1980s, the growing dominance of not only pop, but also of rap/hip-hop and R&B/urban genres, arguably contributed to the dismantling of rock as the hegemonic mainstream (Toynbee, 2002). This decade saw increased emphasis on visual media, as the use of music videos for marketing became standard practice.[14] Furthermore, the introduction of synthesizers, and then new digital technologies— samplers, sequencers, and Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI)—brought about substantial shifts in music production (Hesmondhalgh, 2002). Within this context, rock-based notions of authenticity seemingly began to lose their authority, although they were (and continue to be) invoked by the popular press and rock fans. According to Martin Laba (1996), the introduction of new technologies exacerbated and further highlighted the problematic character of rock authenticity:

> Originality and authenticity in music have become increasingly problematic and unworkable notions in the realities of new musical technologies and techniques which routinely revise, version, and sample. Artistic creation, invention, and re-invention, and the everyday appropriations and uses of musical goods and symbols, are practices that are vitally connected to commodities and media technologies in the marketplace. (p. 80)

Although these changes were rebuked by rock enthusiasts, they also opened up new creative possibilities. Groups such as the Pet Shop Boys, for instance, vocally rejected

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[13] Punk was a key exception, as virtuosity in instrumental solos was deemed excessive (Shuker, 2005).
[14] Those rock fans incensed by Duran Duran's contrived image would perhaps be surprised to learn that the same New York designer and artist, Stephen Sprouse, later styled Nine Inch Nails (Lindstrom, 2004).

the Romantic version of authenticity, and drew attention to their dependence on technology (Stahl, 2002).

Although pop, hip-hop, and R&B may still remain the targets of popular (rock) criticism, the chart dominance of these genres has arguably contributed to a shift in what consumers perceive as authentic. Pop and urban genres are more consistent with what Frith (1998) considers a pop discourse: "the ideal of cultural experience is *fun*; pop provides routinized pleasures … and legitimised emotional gratification, a play of desire and discipline" (p. 575; emphasis in original). A key exception is gangsta rap, which has roots in realism and has at times assumed an acutely political agenda. For gangsta rap, notions of authenticity are built around a sense of place and notions of experience; ghetto life, gang membership, and criminal records are markers of legitimacy (De Genova, 1995). However, gangsta rap shares with these "lighter" genres an emphasis on money as a key site of pleasure. Whether the message is partying or protest, the relationship of pop and urban genres to commerce is not adversarial, but agreeable.

I would suggest that the unapologetically celebratory relationship between many of these performers and commercial gain largely reflects social experience. It is significant that women and African Americans are the dominant performers within pop and urban genres. Both have been subordinated not only within the music industry, but within Western patriarchal societies. In a discussion of hip-hop culture, George Lipsitz (1994) asserts that "in contemporary culture, artists from aggrieved communities often subvert or invert the very instruments of domination necessary for the creation of the new global economy—its consumer goods, technologies, and images" (p. 34). As a response to cultural and economic struggles, an emphasis on understanding the business of rap

developed alongside cultural and aesthetic considerations (Negus, 1999). Although much mainstream hip-hop music has lost its political edge—and was highly romanticized even at the stages of its inception—it is important to recognize the legacy of the idea of working *within* existing capitalist structures as a means of disseminating ideas and images. The idea that economic and cultural marginalization cannot be separated, and that commerce is necessary to create art, has served to justify the opportunistic business choices of performers from a range of genres, a theme that will be further developed later in this chapter.

When considering the relationship between contemporary male hip-hop performers and commercial success, it is apparent that money is not only a prerequisite for power and autonomy; it is a central signifier of masculinity. "Spectacular consumption," which involves excessively showing off luxury acquisitions, is a key part of the hip-hop lifestyle portrayed in music videos and popular publications. Eric K. Watts (2004) explains the link between material possessions, "juice" (or respect), and notions of manhood: "[T]he assembly of items for show enhances [a rapper's] juice. Jackets, sneakers, jewelry, cars, and women are treated as 'trophies' that demonstrate and create self-worth" (p. 596). A misogynistic and homophobic attitude is another aspect of hip-hop hyper-masculinity (Stephens, 2005). Interestingly, much like "spectacular consumption" has been established as a means for hip-hop performers to show off their masculinity, economic independence has emerged as an important facet of "girl power."

The term "girl power" entered the popular vernacular during the late 1990s courtesy of the massive commercial success of the Spice Girls. However, the first pop *superstar* with a feminist agenda was arguably Madonna (Gauntlett, 2004; Pisters, 2004).

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Madonna's approaches to and performances of gender politics have been contentious and have received mixed reviews among feminists and non-feminists alike. By catering to the male gaze, both Madonna and the Spice Girls have reinforced patriarchal values, yet they have done so as a feminist strategy of increasing their economic power within the prevailing patriarchal-economic conditions (Leach, 2001). Consequently, some feminists have critiqued such "popular feminism" for its unabashed endorsement of capitalism and its limited, individualistic approach to confronting patriarchy (Gauntlett, 2004). This insight is key, as Madonna is seen as a pioneer for her ability to fully exploit commercial opportunities, not for any attempt at broader structural change. This idea can be extended to the notion of celebrity in general. Celebrities are to be consumed, and the power that they exert is primarily related to consumerism, not political policies (Ewen, 1988).

Madonna's ambitions are clearly articulated and realized in terms of capitalism, and the "feminist" example she set was of the independent female entrepreneur. As Lisa Peñaloza (2004) points out:

> Madonna is viewed as a shrewd marketer and a business woman without equal. ... Madonna's early responses were to distance herself from her business savvy to claim her status as an artist. ... More recently, perhaps with the growing globalization of popular culture, such divisions of art and commerce may be less an issue. (pp. 183-184)

Interestingly, Madonna initially attempted to stake a claim at a rock-based notion of authenticity. However, over time, the idea of original artistic creation became less important to her than a greater message of female (economic) power. The impact of this brand of popular feminism is clearly seen in the work of Destiny's Child, an R&B group who are not only female, but African American. In their hit singles, female independence is equated with financial independence. For instance, "Bills, Bills, Bills" (1999),

"Independent Women Part 1" (2000), and "Independent Women Part 2" (2001) make explicit lyrical references to women having their own money and paying their own bills, often for luxury items (Gauntlett, 2004).

Similar to how women are considered "trophies" for hip-hop performers, "girl power" has involved the objectification and sale of male bodies. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the male pop performers who have been constructed as the objects of female desire (albeit at the level of fantasy): boy bands and male teen idols. Performers such as the Backstreet Boys and Justin Timberlake present a friendly, feminized image of masculinity to cater to teen and pre-teen girls. While pre-fabricated pop acts are typically seen as the embodiment of all things inauthentic and superficial, efforts have been made to create a feeling of legitimacy among their fans. Marshall (1997) suggests that for the New Kids on the Block, this authenticity was fashioned by drawing from black urban forms of music and dance; the music was positioned as contemporary and therefore relevant, and the group members' supposed working-class origins were emphasized.

It is important to acknowledge that for these pre-fabricated marketing inventions, the division of labour is particularly pronounced. Boy band members are seen as highly substitutable, and are subordinate to the producers and creators who reap the greatest financial rewards. Therefore, financial control and autonomy becomes a vital site of legitimacy. In a comparison of the representation and reception of the Monkees and contemporary boy bands, Matthew Stahl (2002) observes a shift away from notions of individuality and authenticity grounded in rock ideology. Noting how exploitative

contracts with boy band impresario Lou Pearlman prompted the Backstreet Boys and

*NSync to sue, Stahl (2002) contends that:

> [T]he struggle is over the locus not so much of *symbolic* value ... but of
> *economic* value and how the work that the boys do should be valued *vis-à-vis* other participants in the production chain. ... [C]ontemporary boy
> bands make claims of value as the legitimate, authentic proprietors of
> valuable physical skills cultivated through hard work and determination,
> who can engender audience identification by virtue of their identity with
> their targeted audience. (p. 324; emphasis in original)

Despite being the progeny of marketing departments, within this schema, boy bands

position the business moguls and record labels as adversaries.

Johan Fornäs (1995) points out that while rock criticism has typically positioned

the "sincerity, legitimacy and hegemony of rock in opposition to the vulgarity of pop,"

others have "derid[ed] the authenticity illusion of the rock establishment and elevat[ed]

the honest construction of the pop machinery" (p. 112). The preceding discussion

illustrates not only that each genre develops its own conventions of authenticity (Negus,

1992), but also that since the 1980s, there has been a substantial shift in the relationship

between commerce and authenticity. Due to the decline of rock ideology as the dominant

ethos, as well as the recognition of the symbiotic relationship between all genres and the

marketplace, the notion of "selling out" has been downplayed. By positioning the

multinational corporations that produce, market, and distribute records as the real

problem, rock and non-rock acts alike have created a space where they can justify and

legitimate their own pursuit of a range of commercial opportunities.

5.3 Digital Retailing: Mobilizing Music, "Mixing" Media

New technologies have not only played a critical role in changes in musical production, but have also contributed to shifts in musical distribution and consumption. Market research suggests that, globally,[15] approximately forty-six per cent of urban tweens have access to the Internet, nineteen per cent have their own mobile phone, and about eighty percent carry a music device such as an MP3 player or Walkman on their way to school (Lindstrom, 2004). Furthermore, it is estimated that teens spend 9.19 hours per week listening to music (MP3s, compact discs, tapes, and records) and 6.83 hours per week online, with forty-two percent reporting that they regularly download music (Zollo, 2004). This shift in where and how youth consume music has paved the way for the online retailing of not only music, but various other products linked to popular music performers. Even for those who do not use the Internet to make purchases, online catalogues function as valuable vehicles for promoting branded lifestyles.

The prevalence of peer-to-peer file sharing on the Internet has elicited heated debates regarding the ownership of sounds, as organizations such as the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), the Canadian Recording Industry Association (CRIA), and the International Federation of Phonogram and Videogram Producers (IFPI) have fought to defend the status quo with respect to copyright control. Contrary to the rhetoric of the music industry, numerous independent empirical studies have demonstrated that downloading has not caused a decline in CD sales (see Laba, 2006). Nevertheless, the popular music performers themselves remain somewhat divided

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[15] Martin Lindstrom's research for *BrandChild* drew participants from major urban areas within seven countries, representing a cross-section of economies and Western and non-Western cultures. The sample included an even number of male and female tweens who were aged nine to fourteen.

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regarding whether or not downloading poses a threat or provides an opportunity. Superstars such as Metallica and Nickelback's Chad Kroeger have been vocal opponents, labelling the practice dishonest and irresponsible. In stark contrast, with the support of his roster, Terry McBride, CEO of Nettwerk Music Group, is covering the legal costs of a Texan family sued by the RIAA for downloading music, including that by various Nettwerk artists (McBride, 2006).

In fact, many performers, such as Public Enemy's Chuck D, have endorsed the Internet as a valuable promotional and distribution tool for artists whose music is not a priority within major record labels' rosters. For instance, after being dropped by Warner, Wilco's album *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* debuted in the *Billboard* Top 20 and sold a half million copies, largely due to free distribution of their music online, in addition to the buzz surrounding the plight of the record (McLeod, 2005). In 2004, the Pew Internet and American Life Project conducted a large-scale study of artists' and musicians' uses of the Internet and views on copyright. Out of the musicians surveyed, two-thirds reported that the Internet is "very important" in helping them create and distribute their music; eighty-seven percent stated that they use it to promote, advertise, and post their music online; and notable numbers report higher CD and merchandise sales, larger concert attendance, and more radio play (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2004). Many performers have suggested that they would actually fare better financially if audiences were to download their music, and then attend a concert and buy a T-shirt. This observation reflects the prevalence of inequitable corporate practices and record contracts. For instance, royalty rates for album sales are typically around only twelve percent, and the costs of touring, music videos, packaging and recording sessions are usually clawed back

from artist royalties (Rodman and Vanderdonckt, 2006). As such, typically only superstars make substantial profits from album sales (hence the position of Metallica and Nickelback).

While thorough engagement with debates regarding peer-to-peer filesharing lies outside the scope of this thesis, I would like to explore some key by-products of this development. First, the music industry has responded (albeit slowly) by developing new formats for purchasing music. Apple's legal, for-profit iTunes Store charges $0.99 per downloaded song. Keir Keightley (2004) suggests that such sites may prompt a return to a singles-dominated model of retailing, albeit online. Related to the revived popularity of the single is perhaps a more lucrative product idea: the mobile phone ringtone. Contemporary pop, R&B, and hip-hop hooks are among the most popular ringtones, along with novelty theme songs. The constant repetition of hit melodies throughout broadcast media ensures that interest in these ringtones is short-lived, leading to the frequent purchase of more fashionable replacements (Uimonen, 2004). The diversity of *Billboard's* charts reflects the new ways that popular music is consumed today. In addition to the Hot/Pop Charts, Genre Charts, new artists, and independent albums, *Billboard* has also begun to chronicle Hot Digital Songs, Hot Digital Albums, and Hot Ringtones.

Second, due to the threat of piracy, major record labels are relying even more on cross-promotion. A synergistic, Britney Spears approach to selling—wherein both the star and the music are licensed—is seen as their means of survival, which has led to increased emphasis on merchandising (McLeod, 2005). In fact, Lindstrom (2004) stresses the importance of the "networked brand" to all entertainment products, and

suggests that content targeted at tweens *must* be made available on more than one channel in order to be successful. This strategy brings to mind costly co-promotional deals between pop superstars and soda pop companies or fast food chains. For instance, in 2000, Burger King arranged a US $50 million deal with *NSync, the priciest to that date (Lindstrom, 2004). However, it is apparent that the role of merchandising and cross-promotion has become central to smaller scale performers and markets as well. While fast food may remain the domain of pop stars, it is apparent that non-mainstream performers are eating up other options for licensing their music to merchandisers. In addition to straightforward arrangements with advertisers (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4), many performers have benefited from a third by-product of the availability of online digital music: the revitalization and commercial appropriation of the trope of the "mix tape."

Because downloading single songs is more common than downloading entire albums (particularly at legal, for-profit sites), people are crafting playlists and organizing mix CDs. Tom McCourt (2005) contends that "[t]o compensate for their lack of materiality, digital music providers tout greater selectivity, personalization, and community as 'value-added' features" (p. 252). However, it is apparent that not all consumers have time for or interest in hunting down their favourite music within the vastness of cyberspace. Rob Drew (2005) observes that the centrality of personalized mixing within the digital music business has, in fact, translated into more rather than fewer opportunities for marketing; many businesses are recognizing that, due to the diverse range of music choices available online, there is demand for active commercial compilers of interesting music (as many consumers are not necessarily sure what they

want). The Music Genome Project's Pandora is a website that provides song recommendations according to the musical attributes of the listener's favourite artists or songs. As founder Tim Westergren explains, this process has involved a group of musicians and music-loving technologists "assembling literally hundreds of music attributes or 'genes,'" such as melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, orchestration, arrangement, lyrics, and singing (http://www.pandora.com/mgp.shtml). Should the listener like the music recommended, there are direct links to iTunes and Amazon.com.

However, other consumers want to be exposed to new music, but prefer the CD format to the immateriality of digital files. Rock River Communications assembles mix CDs for merchandisers such as Pottery Barn and Volkwagen, selecting music to "tap into and complement the 'lifestyle' defined by the companies' products. Volkswagen's *Street Music* goes for the eclectic, modern vibe, with bands like Hooverphonic and Spiritualized" (Drew, 2005, p. 538). Similarly, Starbucks has been successful at compiling and selling CDs that capture the mood and image the brand seeks to evoke; consumers can take the Starbucks experience from the coffee shop into the living room. Given the attitude shifts regarding notions of authenticity within this new commercial reality, these opportunities are seen as important promotional vehicles for the lesser-known bands that typically make up their playlist. Rock River's executive president, Jeff Daniel, points to the influence of Moby's practice of licensing music to advertisers, and states that performers "realize there is no stigma to selling out. They really are becoming savvy businessmen" (as cited in Flaherty, 2001, p. C1).

In efforts to gain greater exposure, numerous non-mainstream performers show no qualms about licensing their music to network television's most popular programs.

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The hip television soundtrack is now the rule, not the exception. For instance, while *The OC*, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, and *Grey's Anatomy* target different demographics and deal with different subject matter, they all feature "cool," non-mainstream music. *The OC* website promotes the availability of the music the show features in stores and via the iTunes Store, and notes that fans can have "everything *The OC* now on your V cast phone"—including music, ringtones, videos, and wallpapers (http://www.fox.com/oc/). There have been five soundtracks (interestingly titled "mixes") released to date, featuring the music of The Futureheads, Ron Sexsmith, Eels, Death Cab for Cutie, and Sufjan Stevens, among others.

In fact, the similarity of the soundtracks released by many television programs leads me to make a distinction between this promotional medium and the television commercial. Unlike selling music to advertisers, through which companies generate customer affinity by associating themselves with the sounds and images of a particular performer, in the case of the television program soundtrack, the performer is arguably the greater beneficiary. Marshall (1997) argues that "the recording industry has organized itself around the momentary capturing of expansive affective power" and that the pop music celebrity "is the convertible personality who can capture youth's affective intensity" (p. 183). Because the same affective logic is at work with such genre or lifestyle identification, this insight can be extended to the television soundtrack. Those who compile the mixes have a certain mood or sound in mind, and then pursue the individual performers who will fit into that template, rendering the individual acts highly substitutable. Furthermore, it is arguably audience loyalty to these programs (particularly in the case of teen shows such as *The OC*) that generates interest in these soundtracks.

They are not simply exposing their music to new audiences, but are benefiting from the brand loyalty to such television programs and celebrities.

Nevertheless, in this hyper-commercial reality, it appears that a hierarchy with respect to the *degree* of "selling out" has been created. Unlike mainstream pop acts, it seems that audiences perceive the opportunism of "struggling independents" justifiable. Clearly, in addition to shifting perceptions regarding the authenticity debate, the backdrop of exploitative record contracts has helped performers legitimate capitalizing on new promotional opportunities. Moreover, the distinction between licensing music and licensing the star "personality" is paramount from the perspective of these performers: they maintain that it is *about the music*. Moby's position regarding accusations of selling-out is telling: "[T]hey might be right. Just because I've done something doesn't mean that I'm convinced that I've done the right thing. But my feeling when I license music is that if I make a record and I'm proud of it, I want people to hear it—so I have to avail myself to sort of untraditional means to get people to hear my music" (as cited in Slomowicz, 2005, p. 3). While it may still be profiteering, at least *my* music is good, or so the logic goes. Next, I consider those mainstream acts deemed to be the real "sell-outs."

5.4 Cashing in on Ubiquity: Shopping "Pop Star Conglomerate" Style

The amalgamation of shifts with respect to commercial pressures, technologies, marketing trends, and celebrity fascination has allowed for popular music superstars to take licensing agreements to a new level, coalescing into the "pop star conglomerate." The mainstream popular music performers that dominate the contemporary music (and perhaps entertainment) industries are capitalizing on their ubiquity within the multimedia

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environment. Leveraging their celebrity status, as well as the fact that they function as metonyms for entire lifestyles, performers such as Jennifer Lopez, 50 Cent, and Gwen Stefani have diversified, launching various lifestyle-oriented product lines. Such performers function as "one-stop-shops" who have their (brand) name stamped on music, movies, fashion, video games, and even beverages. Provided that there is a coherent relationship between the performer and the products they hawk, their authority as experts is not necessarily compromised.

Marshall (1997) suggests that the teen idol is a "transitional commodity that must in some instances appeal to parents' sensibilities as well as represent the youth culture and its spirit of difference" (p. 169). For instance, during the New Kids on the Block "phenomenon," the group became a sign that served to sell numerous products targeted at school-aged children, including lunch boxes, dolls, note folders, and games (Marshall, 1997). Considering the shifts regarding the notion of youth discussed in Chapter 4, it is apparent that the demand for products symbolically linked to music may span audiences ranging from childhood to adulthood. The unprecedented purchasing power available to children has meant that the parent can potentially be erased from the decision-making process, and the consumer interest of young adults has translated into markets for pricier goods, such as high-fashion labels.

Fans participate in parasocial relationships with their favourite performers through mimicry and emulation, perhaps most obviously in terms of style of dress. To a certain degree, the involvement of popular music in the selling of clothing can be seen as an extension of the concert T-shirt. However, the fashion labels created by pop star conglomerates serve less of a commemorative function. Instead, consumer demand

reflects an interest in looking like their favourite performers. Negus (1992) observes how record companies "position acts sartorially in relation to other artists and genres of music, and signify the adoption of an implicit life style and set of values denoted by these visual codes" (pp. 66-67). Substantial interest in hip-hop lifestyles has translated into rappers' involvement in men's and women's wear, including: Jay Z and Damon Dash's Rocawear, Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson's G-Unit Clothing Company, Cornell "Nelly" Haynes' Vokal, and Sean "Diddy" Combs' Sean John. Interestingly, the Sean John label also offers fragrances and a higher fashion line that cater more to yuppies than aspiring rappers.

The popular appeal of these lucrative markets has been spun into other "lifestyle-appropriate" products, including beverages and video games. As discussed in the documentary *The Merchants of Cool* (2001), Sprite manufactured a relationship with hip-hop by paying fans US $50 to go to a Sprite-sponsored Ja Rule and Nelly concert that would be aired on MTV. Today, Nelly sells his own non-carbonated energy drink called Pimp Juice, named after one of his hit songs. Also competing in the energy drink market is Russell Simmons' DefCon3 and Ice-T's Liquid Ice, while 50 Cent's Formula 50 vies for consumers within the flavoured mineral water market. In fact, Formula 50 is integrated into the content of the video game *50 Cent: Bulletproof*, serving as the fuel for the 50 Cent character (Johannes, 2006). The Def Jam record label has also produced video games: Def Jam Vendetta and its sequel Def Jam: Fight for NY. The sequel features around forty hip-hop artists, including Snoop Dogg, Ice-T, and Busta Rhymes, and also has a game option that allows the player to customize a street-ready fighter, which involves outfitting him with "gear" from fashion labels such as Def Jam

University, Sean John, and Reebok (Navarro, 2004). Numerous other rappers have recorded songs for video games.

Female pop and urban performers are also competing within markets that make a link between musical taste and style. Singer and actor Jennifer Lopez has launched clothing lines, fragrances, and various accessories, and is the executive producer of the UPN television show *South Beach*. Pop singer Gwen Stefani and rapper Eve have also ventured into fashion, designing labels that reflect the look associated with their "personalities" and music (Lamb and Fetish, respectively). Hilary Duff, an actor who crossed over into music, has successfully targeted a base of younger tween and teen girls through her straight-laced yet "cutesy" Stuff by Duff line. Having long capitalized on the purchasing power of this demographic, Britney Spears has launched fragrances that play upon her image as a sexy pop idol.

Although pop and urban performers have been among the most visible examples of this entrepreneurial template, it is apparent that rock performers are also leveraging their brand power. Market researcher Peter Zollo (2004) notes the return of punk and Goth as styles with mass teen and tween appeal: "[M]ore teens are now looking to punk- and goth-inspired fashions as a way to attract attention. Look for a steady rise in spikes, studs, and safety pins until the look is done in by its own popularity" (p. 118). Correspondingly, the members of the pop/punk band Good Charlotte have extended their safe take on Goth and punk styles (complete with eyeliner and multiple tattoos) into fashion lines. Brothers Joel and Benji Madden have created a clothing company, called MADE, and band-mate Billy Martin has launched his own, called LeVel 27. Even

Marilyn Manson has suggested that he may have fragrance and Goth makeup lines in the works, so that it will be easier for fans to adopt his image (Pitman, 2005).

While much of the clothing associated with rock bands is consistent with the commemorative concert T-shirt, the merchandising of rock in general supports the notion of the "transitional commodity." However, to re-emphasize, the notion of youth must be loosened from the tween age grouping. The product catalogue of KISS, the masters of mass merchandising, illustrates the shifting conceptions of youth and age. KISS jigsaw puzzles, action figures, night-lights, stickers, and lunch boxes are sold alongside ashtrays and condoms. Given the aging KISS audience, it is apparent that it is not only children, but also adults who are purchasing toys. However, toys within the context of rock fandom are perceived to carry more of a (nostalgic) commemorative function or are deemed to be collectors' items. And while KISS have a reputation for crass commercialism, their influence on rock merchandising is undeniable. Metallica, Guns 'n' Roses, Ozzy Osbourne, Green Day, Good Charlotte, My Chemical Romance, and numerous others have licensed their brand "personalities" to be cast in plastic and mass produced by toy manufacturers. [16]

Much as the hierarchy of "selling out" has retained a strong link to rock ideology, within this mixed bag of toys, cosmetics, and fashion, notions of rock authenticity also impact the reception of music merchandise. From the perspective of rock audiences, there is a significant difference between the figurines that commemorate rock heroes and those linked to pop groups such as the New Kids on the Block, the Spice Girls, or

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[16] Discussing My Chemical Romance's new action figures, band member Frank Iero comments "It just kind of makes sense for us, because we collect so many toys anyway, and the ultimate collection is to have your own figure" (as cited in Montgomery, 2005, para. 9).

*NSync. My Chemical Romance's Gerard Way punctuates this point: "We hate when people call us 'dolls.' ... We're definitely action figures" (as cited in Montgomery, 2005, para. 2). Within this distinction between rock action figures and pop dolls, the persistence of binaries between masculine and feminine, active and passive are apparent. Once again, what is critical is the perception of who is in charge. The commercialism of the Spice Girls was seen as a dishonest, because it was male managers and songwriters who were "pulling the strings" (Leach, 2001, p. 148). The same issue of entrepreneurial autonomy applies to boy bands that appeal to the tween and teen girl market. In fact, not long after *NSync's legal battles with producer Lou Pearlman, the group released an album titled *No Strings Attached*. In contrast, rock bands are seen as agents of their own enterprise.

5.5 Conclusion

Within the contemporary popular music industry, a wide assortment of commodities capitalizes on the emotions invested into popular music, many of which are produced and promoted by the performers themselves. In a context where music and/or "personalities" are routinely converted into commemorative merchandise, television soundtracks, and lifestyle-appropriate fashions, the unworkable character of dichotomies between art and commerce and romanticized notions of rock authenticity have been underscored. However, despite shifts in attitudes regarding authenticity within a hyper-commercial, digitalized marketplace, clear hierarchies linked to a masculine rock ethos persist. It is apparent that ideals regarding artistic integrity are relative, not fixed. In comparison to the excessive profiteering of pop star conglomerates, the opportunism of

the rock performer or indie musician is perceived as reasonable, or even necessary due to unfair practices within the music industry.

Within his shift toward "equal opportunity opportunism," the savvy entrepreneur who actively takes part in the business of the band is perceived not so much as a "sell out," but as smart and realistic. Moving beyond somewhat naïve ideas regarding the possibility of separating art from commerce within the commercial production of popular music, the means of reconciliation seems to be the expansion of the notion of creative control to include *commercial* control. The solution posited involves retaining autonomy over all products linked to the performer's name—musical and otherwise. Amidst contradictions and inconsistencies, it appears that the key to acceptable opportunism involves making clear that it is the performer, and not the industry, "pulling the strings."

CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSION: POPULAR MUSIC
AS AN ART INDUSTRY

6.1 Introduction

When I began research for this thesis, I intended to analyze how, in recent years, multinational corporations had worked to standardize and homogenize popular music. Coming from a marketing background, I saw a potential parallel between the emergence of what I deemed a generic formula for pop success and the pioneering use of strict formulas in another cultural industry historically plagued by market risk: book publishing. During the early 1970s, Harlequin romance novels were launched based on a radical idea—generate brand loyalty to the Harlequin name, not individual authors, in order to allow for more accurate sales projections. The creative role of authors was, more or less, written out of the equation. Similarly, I thought, the actual musician had been substituted for interchangeable pop celebrities, such as Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera, and, especially in hip-hop, brand loyalty was generated for specific *record labels* as much as individual performers. However, as I engaged with popular music studies literature, I came to see the reality as much more complex.

Far from written out of the equation, today's popular music performers generate so much interest that their celebrity value has been spun into a range of products unrelated to music. Due to a strong emphasis on cross-media promotional efforts, popular music performers have been woven into the greater fabric of contemporary celebrity culture. Not only their music, but also their *personalities* are consumed via the

Internet, magazines, television, and film. It is therefore imperative that popular music is conceptualized as an audio-*visual* product. Indeed, image and style are fundamental aspects of how popular music performers are marketed, and audience perceptions of whether the constructed image reflects the "true" performer or is appropriate for a specific genre becomes a key site for debates over authenticity. In the following, I first revisit the core debates regarding the contradictory position of popular music as both commercial and artistic—as an *art industry*. Taking these questions and contradictions into account, I then review the key arguments posed in this thesis. I argue that the integration of clearly branded popular music across popular media has provided cross-promotional machinery that has not only benefited pop stars; youth desire for status and distinction has generated demand for promotional niches that draw on less well-known performers as well. Indeed, it has translated into an "equal opportunity opportunism" that has been capitalized on by mainstream and non-mainstream performers alike.

6.2 Revisiting the Debates: Quality versus Commerce?

Many of the debates central to this thesis—the notion of authenticity, the relationship between art and commerce, and hierarchies of value—apply to assessments of popular culture in general. Therefore, I will briefly review how cultural theorists have conceptualized popular culture as a means of providing a framework to bring together and reiterate the core themes as they apply to popular music. John Storey (1998) outlines six key ways of defining popular culture: (i) simply put, that which is highly favoured; (ii) that which is not high culture (i.e. a residual category); (iii) a hopelessly commercial "mass culture"; (iv) a folk culture; (v) a site of exchange between an imposed culture and an oppositional culture of "the people" (neo-Gramscian hegemony theory); and (vi) a

post-modern culture wherein boundaries between high and popular culture have dissolved. Among critical and popular audiences, each of these definitions—however problematic—has garnered a certain degree of support. However, each neglects to fully capture the commercial dynamics at play.

Much of the rhetoric that surrounds "Top 40" music suggests a practical definition of simply that which is enjoyed or consumed by many. Perhaps more significantly, this definition also feeds into the function of the popular, or, more accurately, the "pop" mainstream, as a residual category. Contrary to the post-modern argument that boundaries between high and popular culture have been eroded, it is apparent that they have been redrawn *within* the popular, with the mainstream serving as the Other against which "quality art" defines itself. Furthermore, particularly in discussions of those performers who appeal to girls, the legacy of mass culture theorists is evident. Fans of pop are routinely portrayed as passive, non-discriminating consumers who will like whatever is promoted to them—a problematic assessment, given the debates regarding popular music and gender. This is not to downplay the role of the music industry in constructing markets. Due to the intervening and enabling functions of record companies, the notion of popular music as a folk culture that organically emerges from and reflects the desires of "the people," for instance, is romantic and problematic. Popular music creation is typically more individually than communally driven, and is exclusive rather than inclusive. Participation in such a culture is dependent upon whether the individual meets certain market criteria (i.e. produces music that will sell and has a marketable "personality").

Within neo-Gramscian subcultural theory, a recurrent and resilient theme is that despite the commercial character of popular culture, there is a space where audiences can assume a more active role. By citing "rebellious" genres such as punk, it is suggested that subcultures can resist the "homogenizing" tendencies of mainstream culture. However, I suggest that although style can function as an important site of struggle over representations of gender, race, or sexual orientation, its reliance on a market economy means that it cannot undermine the organizing principle of what is labelled mainstream culture: consumer capitalism. Furthermore, this perspective is not completely unlike mass culture theory, only it treats the fans of the mainstream—rather than the whole of popular culture—as those who are manipulated and excessively sentimental. Rather, I suggest that regardless of genre affiliation, most fans have emotional and affective bonds with "their music," which is why the logic of lifestyle marketing has proven so effective—a key point to which I will return. Interestingly, within both neo-Gramscian and mass culture perspectives, it is implied that purer forms of culture (apparently non- or *less* commercial) have been commodified and lost: a more oppositional culture for the former, and a pre-capitalist folk culture for the latter. It must be stressed, however, that the production of popular music as we know it is a *product* of capitalism, and therefore cannot be compared to pre-capitalist cultural production.

The post-modern perspective is correct, then, in pointing to the unworkable nature of dichotomies between art and commerce. A range of critically acclaimed performers have licensed their music to television programs and commercials, supporting the notion that boundaries between "authentic" and "commercial" culture have blurred. However, once again, I suggest that this has been the case throughout the twentieth century.

Dichotomies between art and commerce have never worked when applied to the music industry—*industry* being the operative word. Those who work with either major or independent record labels to produce popular music commodities (singles, albums) for profit are professional, and therefore *commercial*, performers, regardless of whether they capitalize on co-promotional opportunities. Furthermore, there are precedents for pop celebrity endorsements—and product line extensions—dating back to before the strict corporate organization of the music industry, with Jenny Lind in mid-nineteenth-century Sweden serving as a key example (as discussed in Chapter 2). The extent to which performers cash in on their celebrity/brand value today underscores the underlying reality that these performers are in the business of selling as well as creating music.

It is not my intention to dismiss the important contributions of the theories of popular culture reviewed above, but rather to highlight how perceptions of such distinctions continue to resonate among audiences, and emphasize the questions raised by these assessments. As Storey (1998) stresses, these definitions of culture and popular culture point to developments that emerged after industrialization and urbanization, and that are *dependent* on capitalist market economies. Therefore, capitalism has been both a limiting and an *enabling* factor. This is not to commend the role of corporations, but rather to avoid romanticizing the motivations of the performers, who also desire profits. The issue is not capitalism versus non-capitalism, then, but rather an interest in fairer business practices *within* capitalism.

Although the production of popular music is an undeniably commercial practice, it is important to stress that this system does not necessarily preclude the possibility for creativity, which leads to another core debate: what is the relationship between market

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concentration and musical diversity and innovation? For the purposes of my argument, the key is not defining quality art, but rather acknowledging the obstacles that render such evaluations problematic. Among music fans, there is a persistent idea that the "industry" (conjuring up a boardroom filled with "Suits" who can only appreciate the financial angle) has some interest in force-feeding audiences terrible music. However, a number of the issues emerge when one even attempts to sift the "bad" from the "good." For instance, being labelled "derivative" is a common charge used to suggest unoriginality. However, because the composition of both popular and art music is typically influenced by what has come before, it is not so much a matter of *if* sounds and ideas are derived from others, but *from whom* a songwriter draws such influences. Therefore, among more elite audiences, sounds that reflect a Lou Reed or Gang of Four influence may suggest artistry, whereas borrowing from Michael Jackson or Madonna is equated to creative bankruptcy.

This leads to another key question: why is it that music that appeals to teenage girls or is dominated by African American performers is routinely dismissed, in favour of white male rock? Certainly the music press plays a key role in influencing what is perceived as culturally valid. Once again, these publications tend to reflect certain racial and gender biases. Even within the culturally privileged genre of rock, the importance of particular notions of masculinity results in the marginalization of women. As Norma Coates (1997) points out, in publications such as *Rolling Stone* and *Village Voice*, so-called "women in rock" are often appreciated primarily as sexy pin-up girls (e.g. Liz Phair) or seen as valid only if they "play like guys" (e.g. the Breeders); the more raw,

"angry" feminism of riot grrrl, for instance, is deemed too threatening and political to really "rock."

Within the conventions of popular music criticism, more important than musical complexity is the idea that the musical creation reflects something "pure" about the performer (who typically must be the songwriter). Pre-fabricated pop acts designed to "meet a need" in the marketplace therefore are seen as lacking that type of authenticity. A question that is seldom asked, however, is *why* people like mainstream Top 40 music, and *why* certain sounds (often pop and R&B) and themes (sex, love, and loss) resonate with such large audiences. A common (and condescending) explanation for the popularity of Top 40 music—one that is reminiscent of the mass culture debate—is that the "masses" are not intelligent enough to recognize quality art and will purchase whatever is marketed to them. Of course, mass-marketing efforts that ensure high rotation within radio and music video playlists generate considerable audience familiarity. However, as Keith Negus (1999) argues, the influence of marketing is often exaggerated in discussions of popular music. Despite efforts to engineer markets, the music business remains risky, with many performers failing to cover the costs of production. If there were such a direct cause and effect relationship between what is marketed and what is bought, then any act would be successful if promoted heavily enough. Due to the issue of risk, market researchers have begun to pursue the important question of why people like what they like.

Providing a comprehensive explanation of audience preferences, however, lies outside the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, I suggest that insight can be found in musicological arguments that stress that there is something *in* the musical text that

encourages certain responses. I argue that the lessons of the music hall—namely the idea of crafting songs in a sing-able range and with easy-to-remember lyrics in order to encourage audiences to actively participate (rather than passively listen to virtuosos)— remains fundamental to audience appreciation of the mainstream in particular. Also, sociological explanations of the importance of group affiliation may inform audience interest in niche genres as well as the mainstream. According to Simon Frith (2001), music "works both to intensify the appropriate feelings ... and to collectivise them. We feel the music individually but also as a form of what the ethnomusicologist John Blacking called 'fellow feeling'" (p. 36). It is apparent that across genre communities, the feelings of certain "fellows" are perceived as more culturally valid than others. It is this exclusive and competitive tendency that has provided fodder for marketing strategists, leading to the construction of "cool" youth markets. Perhaps, then, pop offers a more democratic take on culture than more exclusive genres, such as indie rock. However, "democracy" in this case refers to an inclusive fan culture, rather than access to the means of cultural production.

6.3 Sorting Through the Contradictions: Key Arguments

In an effort to sort through these debates and examine the place of commercial popular music within a market economy, this thesis identifies both continuities and changes within popular music production, distribution, and consumption. Today, the popular music industry is embedded within a vast web of communications and entertainment industries, whose visual dimensions have buttressed an apparatus of stardom. Indeed, the "Big Four" (Sony BMG, Vivendi, Universal, EMI, and Warner) have a stronghold over global musical production and distribution, yet a handful of

corporations have been dominant since music was established as an *industry*. Likewise, visuals and brand images have long been fundamental aspects of the popular music product, allowing for cross-promotional opportunities. However, although these continuities can be traced from music halls to MP3, it must be stressed that the concentration of ownership and the development of new (especially visual) technologies has allowed for the *accelerated expansion* of popular music throughout the marketplace. Ubiquity within this popular cultural infrastructure has reinforced and expanded the performer's promotional value.

The expanded reach of visual media particularly since the 1980s has allowed for effective means of disseminating global popular music idols, as well as the images and styles associated with various musical genres. Shifts in the forms and means of music consumption have brought about an increased emphasis on personalization, and have fed identification between performer and audience member. This shift toward identifying with star performers and consuming mass-mediated images of specific styles/identity markers has been a potent pairing. Because taste in music and leisure spending is constructed as a space for youth expression of collective and individual identities, popular music performers—consumers *par excellence*—function as promotional powerhouses. In a marketplace that is increasingly configured around market niches, and where marketers are becoming ever-more intuitive with respect to the meanings that audiences derive from music and style, it is clear that the promotional value of popular music is not limited to the mainstream.

Because youth consumption of music and leisure goods privileges *difference* (or difference within sameness), the style-based *rebellion* of subcultures such as punk is not

only contained within capitalism, but *feeds* market economies. Furthermore, because such expressions of identity harness a particular emotional and affective power and a sense of empowerment, youth subcultures have been spun into lifestyle markets. The link between different genres and difference lifestyle commodities, coupled with a climate that is more permissive of profiteering, has translated into a flood of products backed by music performers and music licensed to advertisers. Within this context, it seems as though the pop star conglomerate and the savvy indie entrepreneur have much in common. Interestingly, it appears as though two seemingly diametrically opposed logics have begun to merge: Top 40 performers have borrowed from punk's DIY (do it yourself) mentality by taking greater control of their music (and lifestyle-appropriate) businesses, whereas indie performers have learned lessons from popular musical celebrities regarding cross-promotion and the brand power of image.

In a consumer climate that caters to fragmented markets through customization and personalization, popular music's sounds, images, and "personalities" serve as tailored commercial engines. The question is increasingly becoming not whether popular music performers capitalize on co-promotional opportunities, but *which products* they choose to promote. Like musical preferences, it is apparent that consumer choices in general say something about who we are—or, perhaps more accurately, who we would like to be. Therefore, as the notion of "selling out" becomes more contingent, the products that performers choose to endorse become a site for communicating authenticity (or coolness)—or lack thereof. Amidst these contractions and problematic consumer hierarchies, audience perceptions of such distinctions between art and commerce, authenticity and inauthenticity persist.

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