



## Making Friends with Jarvis Cocker: Music Culture in the Context of Web 2.0

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### **ABSTRACT**

The movement toward what has been described as Web 2.0 has brought with it some significant transformations in the practices, organization and relations of music culture. The user-generated and web-top applications of Web 2.0 are already popular and widely used, the social networking site MySpace already having more than 130 million members worldwide. By focusing specifically upon the presence of the popular music performer Jarvis Cocker across various Web 2.0 applications, this article seeks to open up a series of questions and create opportunities for research into what is happening in contemporary music culture. This exploratory article lays out an agenda for research into music culture and Web 2.0 that is not only concerned with the implications of Web 2.0 for music, but which also attempts to understand the part played by music in making the connections that form the collaborative and participatory cultures of Web 2.0 and the *flickering friendships* of social networking sites.

### **KEY WORDS**

friendship / music / music culture / MySpace / social networking sites / Web 2.0 / Wikipedia / Youtube

‘And don’t believe me if I claim to be your friend.’

(Jarvis Cocker, ‘I Will Kill Again’ from the album *The Jarvis Cocker Record*, Rough Trade, 2006)

## Introduction

Recent years have seen some significant changes in music culture. The general shift toward virtual cultural artefacts, where individuals download digitally compressed music files from internet sources or 'rip' them from CDs (or even audio tapes and vinyl records), has been particularly prominent in these ongoing changes. It has become common to hear various commentaries across a range of media concerning the consequences of this shift: the death of the CD, home taping practices or DJ culture (Farugia and Swiss: 2005; McLeod, 2005); the undermining of analogue institutions such as the long running British television show *Top of the Pops* (Beer, 2006); the rise of unrepentant music theft repackaged as (file)sharing; the reorganization of the music industry (Leysnon et al., 2005); the diverting of funds away from music's grass roots (BPI, 2005); the rhetorical reconfiguration of the music collection (Beer, 2008); and accounts of the democratization of music distribution toward decentralized models where anyone can be heard (Breen and Forde, 2004; Jones, 2000). Of course, in truth the shift between physical and virtual artefacts is far from simple, descriptions of the movement between discrete media eras or ages overlook the complexity of the issues at hand. What is clear, however, despite resurgences in vinyl sales and the relative stability of CD album sales, is that there has been a shift in music consumption toward the virtual, or at least toward complex imbrications of virtual and physical artefacts in everyday musical practices.

This change is illustrated by the recent changes in chart regulations, which now account for combined physical and virtual format sales. This has resulted in a number of songs charting on downloads only. Gnarl's Barkley's single 'Crazy', for example, made number one in the UK solely through downloads and before the CD format version was available in the shops. More recently the charts have been reworked further so that it is no longer necessary to have a physical format in the shops in order for downloads to qualify for a chart position. This meant that *any* 'legal' download would count toward chart position. This change in chart rules has already seen the band Koopa enter into the UK top 40 without a record contract, and predictions that when the Beatles back catalogue is released in download format we may see the top 10 entirely populated by Beatles' songs (this may have already happened by the time you read this article). In fact it was because of these changes that the band Arctic Monkeys had 15 songs simultaneously in the top 40 during April 2007. These illustrate what are quite significant times in the relatively short history of the pop music charts.

We could quite easily get caught up here in the seductive stories of the democratization of music (where anyone talented enough can chart) and the notion that the consumer is now setting the musical agenda. However, this would be to overlook the continued and undoubted power of contemporary culture industries, or 'global culture industries' (Lash and Lury, 2007), as they operate in new and unseen ways to restructure buying habits and as they flex the marketing skills required to get artists heard in the digital arena. Also at odds with dominant media accounts of us *all* changing our music buying practices

are the ongoing sales of physical formats and the continued popularity of a discernable mainstream as set out by the music industry.

In this context of apparently radical transition the objectives of this article are relatively modest. Rather than providing an overview of all of these complex and far reaching changes, this article attempts to track a particular transformation in music culture that relates directly to the rise of what has been referred to in web business rhetoric as Web 2.0 (Beer and Burrows, 2007; O'Reilly, 2005). In order to highlight this change in a little more detail, and to understand how it may be transforming music culture, this article focuses upon a well known popular music performer who operates as an active wikizen (the name given to those who contribute content in Web 2.0). For this task I have chosen Jarvis Cocker, who was formerly a singer in the British band Pulp and is now a solo performer with an active MySpace profile.

Using Jarvis as a focal point, this article aims to place two analytic issues on the agenda for cultural sociology and cultural studies – in addition to bringing to the attention of cultural sociology the significance of Web 2.0. The first issue concerns the implications of Web 2.0 for music culture. The question here is how Web 2.0 applications are enabling a reconfiguration of the relations and organization of music culture. The second issue concerns how it is that we may understand the part that music and music culture play in the development of Web 2.0, and in particular how music brings together its community of collaborative wikizens. The aim then is to develop a vision of what is going on at the points where music culture intersects with Web 2.0; this vision is intended to illustrate the significance of these two issues for cultural sociology. The focus here in particular is upon how popular music performers bring people together to make connections around a shared interest in the music. I suggest here that not only do people 'make friends' with the popstar Jarvis, with the potential to alter the relations and organization of music culture, but also that Jarvis acts to introduce people as they orbit around his online profile and meet to discuss shared interests, tastes, and so on. To be clear from the outset, it is my position here that the profiles of popular music performers are crucial in making the 'flickering connections' (Hayles, 2005) central to the collaborative functioning of Web 2.0 by introducing 'like-minded' people who have never actually met.

### **Using Jarvis for a Descriptive Sociology of the Object**

The approach used here, and my focus on Jarvis, can be understood as a response to Mike Savage and Roger Burrows' (2007) recent call for a 'descriptive sociology' that is able to cope with what they describe as a 'coming crisis' in 'empirical sociology'. They contend that the study of the social is no longer merely the jurisdiction of sociologists; instead the rise of what Nigel Thrift (2005) has described as 'knowing capitalism' has led to a situation in which business routinely draws upon and analyses significant and vast transactional data sets. These data sets are formed as information about us is produced and

harvested as we go about our everyday lives. In response to this issue, and to deal with the problem of the transitory nature of the things we are trying to understand sociologically, Savage and Burrows propose that we move toward a descriptive model based upon the critical reportage of the new digitalizations. For Savage and Burrows, it is through description and sociological engagement with these vast transactional data sets that sociology can find ways of saying things that may come to endure.

Savage and Burrows are not alone in this regard. A descriptive sociology has recently found its way onto the agenda in a number of forms. So for instance, Bruno Latour's (2005) widely cited most recent book on Actor Network Theory (ANT) suggests to its readers that they concentrate their efforts on describing or tracing 'associations'. We also find that prominent new media theorists such as Friedrich Kittler are promoting their own version of a sociology of description. In Kittler's case it takes the form of a kind of 'information materialism' (Kittler, 1999) or 'cultural mathematics' (Armitage, 2006) that is concerned with producing detailed understandings of the functionality and workings of new media technologies. More relevant in terms of the direction of this particular article is the form of descriptive sociology forwarded in Scott Lash and Celia Lury's (2007) *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*. Through a series of detailed case studies Lash and Lury update and renew Adorno and Horkheimer's well-known vision of the culture industry for a digital and global age.

Lash and Lury's book is 'about seven products of the global culture industry' (Lash and Lury, 2007: 8). These products include the animation characters Wallace and Gromit the films, *Toy Story*, and *Trainspotting*, the Nike brand and the Euro '96 football tournament. They describe their approach in the following terms:

The method we adopted from the start of this project was to 'follow the objects'. We were self-consciously developing a sociology of the object. The seven objects we chose to follow are a subset of those produced by the global culture industry. They were chosen both for their relatively high visibility in the contemporary landscape and for their potentially long and varied trajectories. (Lash and Lury, 2007: 16)

The purpose of such an approach, and resonating with my own interest in focusing upon Jarvis, is to 'investigate ... how it is that the objects of the global culture industry may come to act as life-forms, give faces to and animate the markets of the global culture industry' (Lash and Lury, 2007: 19). These objects have a life, a vitality that we can track and that can be used to understand the relations between culture and capitalism in the contemporary era. With the mediated nature of contemporary life at the forefront it is perhaps not surprising then that 'in this sociology of objects' Lash and Lury 'track the object as it moves and transforms through a media environment' (Lash and Lury, 2007: 31).

We see then developed in Lash and Lury's work a sociology of the object taking the form of case studies about particular cultural *things* in the context of a digital or information age. Taking inspiration from this approach I use Jarvis

here as a kind of object, a product of global culture industries that animates global markets, that can be followed through a series of web applications as described below. In terms of approach there are a few key differences here between the way I approach Jarvis and the way that Lash and Lury approach their various objects, although the sentiment largely remains the same. So for instance this study of Jarvis is not longitudinal in the way that Lash and Lury's are. Instead of following the object through time I move backwards and forwards through Jarvis's career using the information stored in these online archives. In a Web 2.0 context, following the object does not necessarily need to be a linear process. Indeed, it would seem that the types of applications described here offer consumers (and sociologists) opportunities for following desired objects in multiple directions.

So, in response to Savage and Burrows' suggestions, and informed by the approach outlined by Lash and Lury, this article treats a series of Web 2.0 applications and the user-generated content that they archive, as massive data sets from which we may draw information for sociological analysis. Jarvis acts as an focal object that may be followed in these data sets. I describe, to the level of detail permitted by the length and scope of this article, the key things that emerge from this exploration. The intention here is not to create a complete or defining work that illuminates all of the aspects of some quite radical changes in Web and music culture, rather it is intended to open these up as areas for investigation by sketching out how cultural sociology might approach such changes. To set the scene I will begin with a brief description of Web 2.0.

## Web 2.0

The term Web 2.0 suggests an upgraded and updated version of the web. Indeed, Tim O'Reilly, who originally came up with the term in 2004 with collaborator Dale Dougherty, has noted that there is still:

a huge amount of disagreement about just what Web 2.0 means, with some people decrying it as a meaningless marketing buzzword, and others accepting it as the new conventional wisdom. (O'Reilly, 2005: 1)

The problem is that there is a range of web applications that have emerged over the last two or three years that are complex and different yet which share some common features. So although the term Web 2.0 has limited applications, and although it is too broad a categorization to be analytically pliable in itself, it provides a useful and succinct way of capturing what is happening in web culture (Beer and Burrows, 2007).

In very general terms, Web 2.0 looks to harness 'collective intelligence' (O'Reilly, 2005) through the development of a 'participatory culture' (Jenkins et al., 2006). The point is that users become 'co-developers' (O'Reilly, 2005) by generating as well as browsing content. Web 2.0 is about open participation

and collaboration, where anyone can add or edit web content as users take shared responsibility. Figures taken from recent research by the PEW Internet and American Life project suggest that ‘more than half of all teens who go online create content for the internet’ (Lenhart and Madden, 2005: 8). They claim that:

These Content Creators report having done one or more of the following activities: create a blog; create or work on a personal webpage; create or work on a webpage for school, a friend, or an organization; share original content such as artwork, photos, stories or videos online; or remix content found online into a new creation. (Lenhart and Madden, 2005: 2)

This indicates that the Web 2.0 typical practices of generating, tagging, blogging and sharing have become mundane and routinized (particularly for young people).

A second key feature of Web 2.0 is the operation of software ‘above the level of a single device’ (O’Reilly, 2005). The point here is that applications become accessible from any networked interface or portal rather than the information being stored on a single device. Here information moves from the private device to the network allowing for it to be accessed from a range of mobile and desktop interfaces at any time and from anywhere. This is where the ‘technology itself – in terms of both applications and operating software – moves from the desktop to the webtop’ (Lash, 2006: 580). For Lash this has created an ‘age of the portal’ where ‘a logic of feed comes to displace a logic of search’ (Lash, 2006: 580). Search facilities are not dead, but as Lash puts it, ‘the data find you’ (Lash, 2006: 580) as we frequently are confronted with recommendations, news specific to our interests, suggested purchases, things of interest. These ‘knowing’ (Thrift, 2005) systems are able to anticipate through strategic data-mining and classification processes, and then search us out rather than us searching for them.

Overall, Web 2.0 is a broad categorization or term that stands for a general shift toward user-generated content, participatory cultures, and open sourcing as it moves toward interactive, decentralized, and multi-media models (Maness, 2006). There are roughly four interrelated types of Web 2.0 application that can be categorized: wikis, folksonomies, mashups, and social networking sites.

A *wiki*, which is taken from ‘wiki wiki’, the Hawaiian term for quick, is an application that draws together open input to form communal projects. The key example here is the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, where anyone can edit and add content. Anything can be added to this wiki provided it may be linked into an existing entry. The result is a vast online literary project that is constantly changing, being updated, edited, content added, and expanded as new entries are linked into the network.

*Folksonomies* are vast archives that people classify by tagging them with descriptive metadata. This enables these archived items to be searched or browsed and retrieved. Examples of folksonomies include Flickr, used for archiving photos, Del.icio.us, through which users bookmark and categorize

webpages, and the ubiquitous YouTube, which is a repository of video clips. These enable the uploading and sharing of these photos and videos, or the accumulation of themed bookmarks that others can access, use and contribute toward. In short, a 'folksonomy is a mode of classification' (Lash, 2006: 580). Rather than photos, videos, or bookmarks being stored and accessed through a single device, they are uploaded to the web and may be accessed from anywhere (thus illustrating the shift from the desktop to the webtop).

*Mashups*, a term appropriated from popular music, 'mash together' two available and usually free-to-access data sources. The most common applications tend to use Google maps with other information sources to create 'new cartographies' of particular phenomena (Hardey and Burrows, forthcoming). So, for example, crime statistics have been mapped onto cities to indicate crime areas, and the same has been done for air pollution and noise. In some instances dynamic maps have even been created showing the real-time locations of trains, or tagged cars, pets and people (see [www.mashups.com](http://www.mashups.com)).

Finally, *social networking sites* (SNS) are widely used sites through which users generate profiles about themselves, with photos, descriptions, personal histories, thought pieces, preferences, lists of friends, blogs, and so on. Examples of SNS include MySpace, Bebo, and Facebook. MySpace alone has over 130 million members worldwide (Hof, 2006). As well as generating content through the updating of these online profile pages, users of SNS create user groups, meet people and make friends, and even use the profiles to communicate with people they know in the 'real world' to discuss the events of the day, to keep in touch, and to organize events.

## Getting Acquainted with Jarvis (Through Wikipedia and Youtube)<sup>1</sup>

Jarvis Cocker is a well-known, controversial and highly recognizable popular music performer. He has become something of a cult figure in the UK over recent years through his appearances on various music, light entertainment and culture shows. He has also appeared as a frequent point of reference in magazine, newspaper and radio articles. However, for many people Jarvis is perhaps best known for being the man who invaded the stage in protest during Michael Jackson's performance of 'Earth Song' at the 1996 Brit Awards.

Jarvis was originally from Sheffield where his band Pulp formed in 1979. It was not until the mid-1990s, and what has become known as the Brit Pop movement, that Pulp reached the peak of their popularity. The single 'Common People' from the album *Different Class* (1995) one of the better known tracks from the Pulp repertoire. Indeed, it was during 1995, and the height of Brit Pop, that I encountered Jarvis in person at the Glastonbury festival. He was walking in the other direction to me across a mud path while looking at a map alongside Candida Doyle, Pulp's keyboard player. They appeared to be going toward the

acoustic tent. More recently Jarvis has been working as a solo artist (with some of the previous members of Pulp making various contributions). In 2006 he released an album of solo material entitled *The Jarvis Cocker Record*.

Using Wikipedia and Youtube it is possible to become a bit more familiar with Jarvis. The entry in Wikipedia gives Jarvis Branson Cocker's birthday as 19 September 1963 and informs us that he is not related to his namesake Joe Cocker (although, it claims, Joe Cocker was a family friend and babysat Jarvis). The entry suggests that Jarvis formed 'Arabacus Pulp', later to be Pulp, at the age of 15 while still at the City School. Clicking on the link available for the City School provides an entry about this school that tells us it is located on Stradbroke Road in Sheffield. Apparently Jarvis has now moved to Paris where he lives with his wife and child.<sup>2</sup>

The Wikipedia entry goes on to describe Cocker's years in Pulp, the details of the Michael Jackson incident and its aftermath, his brief time in the electro band Relaxed Muscle, his numerous collaborations with various artists as a solo performer, a link to an appearance on BBC Radio 4's *Desert Island Discs*, and a link to his MySpace profile (discussed below).

Entering Jarvis Cocker into the search facility on YouTube generated 160 results. These included a selection of Jarvis's recent solo videos, live performances of various solo tracks, interviews with Jarvis, and an appearance on the *Ali G Show*. Selecting the first video from the list opened a video clip of Jarvis interviewed on a German television programme discussing his latest album (including descriptions of buying food for the musicians during the recording sessions), his mid-life crisis during the *This is Hardcore* (1998) era of Pulp, and his views on capitalism in relation to the single 'Running the World' (2006) which was written in response to Live 8. Other interviews include footage of appearances on the British television shows *TFI Friday* and *The Jonathon Ross Show* discussing various aspects of his work and his views more generally.

The video clips of live performances allow us to watch Jarvis playing 'Fat Children' on BBC2's *Newsnight* or live in Milan or Hamburg, 'Running the World' live in Koko, 'Tonight' live in Brussels, 'Black Magic' live in Hamburg, 'Disney Time' and 'Heavy Weather' on the BBC's *Culture Show*, 'I Will Kill Again' at the 2007 South Bank Show awards, and various guest appearances on stage with other groups and artists across different venues. A number of these live gigs appear to have been recorded on the digital camera facility on mobile telephones by people in the crowds – the work of art in the age of flexible mobile interfaces and decentralized distribution. In addition to this solo material, the YouTube search also generated clips of a range of Pulp videos, interviews and live performances. The clip of the famous Brit awards incident seems to be contested, with it sometimes being available on YouTube and at other times not.

What is interesting here is that it is possible to find out a vast range of information about a performer to read about their personal history, to watch live performances from gigs we never attended (and that were often not captured by official film crews), to access interviews and even encounters in the street videoed on mobile phones, and so on. In short we can engage in research into any popular performer



with great ease and free access. Getting to know these performers is apparently straightforward, particularly for the experienced wikizen, and makes the process of making friends a far smoother process (for example imagine sharing memories of a gig in Hamburg that you did not actually attend). Consider here also how we get to know academic colleagues by Googling them before meeting up, before seeing them speak at conferences, or when we receive email invitations or requests from strangers – no doubt in the near future we will also be looking up academic colleagues on Facebook or seeing if they have an entry on Wikipedia in the near future.

### **Making Friends with Jarvis (through MySpace)**

Jarvis runs a relatively active MySpace profile, which he refers to as Jarvspace, through which he communicates with his ‘fans’, posts gig information, blogs what he is up to, and makes available music, spoken word podcasts, and video downloads. This profile page can be accessed either by selecting music on the MySpace homepage ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)) and using the ‘search artists’ function, or directly by entering [www.myspace.com/jarvspace](http://www.myspace.com/jarvspace).

Jarvis’s page, as with all of the profiles on MySpace, shows the number of ‘profile views’. Jarvis’s page had been viewed 677,605 by 9 February 2007, Jarvis’s page had been viewed 617,605 times, and Jarvis himself had last logged in four days previously. When I logged on again five months later, the number of profile views had risen to 1,409,259 on 3 July 2007, and Jarvis himself was online at the time. These profiles also indicate the number of occasions on which the available music files had been played by those visiting Jarvspace. These figures indicated that the single ‘Running the World’, which was released as a free download single through MySpace, had received 435,237 plays. Also here the visitor can see that the various Jarvis spoken word ‘podcasts’ had received between 15,000 and 30,000 plays. These various statistics illustrate the significant usage that such sites receive. Others have received even more attention: at the time of writing the music posted by the Arctic Monkeys had received over four million plays in total, The View nearly two million, and Muse over 10 million.

Also available on Jarvspace is a video for ‘Running the World’ with an introduction from Jarvis and a written description of the history of the song, which, as mentioned, was written as a protest song on the night of the global mega-event Live 8. There are a range of links for purchasing and downloading the solo album and the latest single.

One of the differences between MySpace and most other SNS is that it enables the constructor of the profile to design the layout and style of their own profiles – the pointer, background, colours, fonts, etc. – as well as content. However, SNS generally have common features that are shared by all of the profiles across the various networks. Common across SNS profiles are the cumulative statistics accounting for the number of ‘friends’ that the owner of the profile has accumulated. These are commonly followed by a list of these friends with links to their profiles. Usually around eight or nine friends are shown on the profile,

with the option to see a comprehensive list of all friends belonging to that profile, by clicking on the appropriate link. Jarvis, for instance, had accumulated 39,738 friends at the time of writing in February 2007, and this had increased to 61,002 when the article was being revised in July 2007.

The crucial point here is that in order to become friends, one party asks the other to be their friend and the other has to accept this proposal for the friendship connection to be made. The sheer quantity of 'friends', over 60,000 in this case but higher in others, suggests that SNS are seeing a quite radical reworking of understandings of 'friendship'. We can perhaps distinguish here, for analytic purposes, between what might be thought of as the *flickering friendships* of SNS and the more 'physical' friendships of the 'real', off-line world. However, the problem with this approach is that it is common to see flickering friendships occurring between people who know each other in physical space. So, for example, university students use Facebook to discuss their lectures, to organize social meetings, to reflect on their working practices with people they know from their courses, to communicate with friends from school at other universities, and with other friends they have made at university. These sorts of friends sit alongside people they have met solely through the SNS. Also, conversely, it would seem that it is not uncommon for individuals that form flickering friendships through SNS to use the messaging facilities to meet in physical space and become 'real' friends. We can imagine here fans of Jarvis meeting on MySpace and then getting together at a gig, for instance. In terms of the geography of Jarvis's friends, selecting a few from the list indicates that this is an international group located in Italy and Canada but generally dominated by people living in the UK and particularly the USA.

We can also see on Jarvspace the interactions that are occurring between Jarvis's friends. These friends post comments on Jarvis's blogs and write messages on the notice board. By July 2007, there had been over 15,000 messages posted on this 'friends comments' section. Here we see a network of users using Jarvspace to interact, with occasional interjections from Jarvis himself. We can see recorded the reaction of the friends of Jarvis to his comments, posted on 31 January, about how much he enjoyed his European tour, thanking the fans who attended, and revealing that there is scheduled a future UK tour. This comment then sparks up discussions between those commenting on the post, some of which stay on the subject, others starting new topics.

We can see here Jarvspace is not solely a portal through which the fanbase can communicate with the popstar, or a space where the popstar (or the music industry) can communicate information *to* the fans. We see instead the formation of networks around these well-known performers; these networked friends then use Jarvspace to communicate with one another and forge their own friendships. Jarvis's presence is not essential to the connections; the network operates through this space without him being in constant attendance. Yet his intermittent interjections remain essential in giving a sense of 'livingness' to the profile, while remaining only a part of a range of multi-dimensional and decentralized interactions and connections.

In the light of these descriptions, I will now return to the discussion of the two questions which this article aims to place on the agenda of cultural sociology. I look first at the implications of the types of Web 2.0 applications described here for music culture, and then at music's part in bringing together the friendship connections that drive Web 2.0.

### **Hanging with the Stars? Proximity and the Relations of Music Culture in the Web 2.0 Context**

The analysis offered here begins to illustrate that Web 2.0 is facilitating a shift in the relations of music culture as people 'hang with the stars' in the flattened environments of the social networking site, and particularly MySpace (with Facebook rapidly following). Popular music performers with profiles become part of the communicative flows of the SNS, checking and updating their profiles, making friends, posting music, and so on. The contact point here is not a fanzine, a circular, a gossip magazine or even a radio or TV show. Instead the audience are communicating 'directly' (or at least they are) led to believe they are, with the performer. We are dealing here then with *perceptions* as we already know it is relatively easy to pass yourself off as someone else in a virtual environment. It has even been reported that financially affluent users are paying people to operate their SNS profiles on their behalf so as to release the pressure of maintaining a profile (Cellan-Jones, 2007). Whether visitors to places such as Jarvspace are in fact communicating and making friends with the actual performer or with a record company employee does not seem all that important, for the outcome is the same. The visitor, as we can see from the posts directed at Jarvis, has the perception that Jarvis is intermittently present and that he is communicating with them (and it is particularly encouraging when the blinking message tells us that he is online now). It is possible that the user may even be participating here in a kind of Orwellian 'double think'; they know it is highly likely they are being misled but they continue to participate in the charade. Or it may simply be that they do not really care provided that they have the prestige of having celebrities on their list of friends on their profile. Indeed, we can presume that in many cases record companies are involved in some capacity, as this may be a part of how they are reorganizing themselves (Leyshon et al., 2005) and re-theorizing their commodities (Beer, 2008) to maintain profitability in the digital age. It seems unlikely that Mick Jagger and Keith Richards actually logged in four days ago. Yet there is a perception of (popstar) accessibility, or a *perception of proximity*, that is being cultivated here that fits with the broader rhetoric of democratization and participation that has ushered in Web 2.0.

In terms of these perceived relations what is most significant in the case described here is that Jarvspace reveals that performers, some more than others, are getting closer to their audiences through Web 2.0. By affording ordinary wikizens the feeling that they are hanging with the stars, SNS give a sense

that the long established, while historically variable, distance between popstar and interested enthusiast is eroded (although we can of course argue that this is illusory). I am reminded here of a trip to see the band the Stone Roses playing Whitley Bay Ice Rink, a venue in Northern England in 1995. Standing outside the venue queuing for over one and a half hours to get in on a December evening, for over one and a half hours, I could see through a second storey window two members of the band inside smoking and talking. Despite the discomfort of my environment this felt like the *right amount* of distance between them and me. I seem to remember having a conversation at the time about it not being a good idea to meet your heroes. It would seem that the opposite sentiment fuels what is happening to music culture during Web 2.0. This is not a criticism or a desire to get back to the musical enigmas of the past, rather it is to point out a change in the relations of music culture. When I walked past Jarvis at Glastonbury I would not have risked opening a conversation, never mind asking him directly if we could be friends. It is perhaps the security and distance (although not anonymity) of SNS, and a broader re-definition of friendship, that has enabled over 60,000 people to make this request of Jarvis (and for him to respond positively). How these fit in with the friendship connections that sociology has discussed in the past, such as in the work of Ray Pahl (2000, 2002), is yet to be assessed.

I would like to suggest here that this is a reconfiguration of the relations between performers and their audiences that should now find its way onto the agenda of cultural studies and cultural sociology. We might want to think here about how the 'rock god' or 'popstar' becomes an ordinary member of the network as that enigmatic distance is breached and they become a 'familiar friend' (and we know, or can find out, all about them). On the other hand, it may be that these SNS friendships have no substantive bearing upon the proximity to popstars and that the purposeful connections come at gigs, record signings or through the recordings themselves – although we see the impact of Web 2.0 impinging on these connections as well, as audiences watch and record the events through mobile interfaces, forming a sea of mobile phones, to later post on Youtube. Even being at a gig is being re-mediated by Web 2.0 and ubiquitous and convergent mobile media.

The next step may be to use key accounts of popular music history (Savage, 1992 for instance) and academic studies of these movements (e.g. Frith and Goodwin, 1990) as points of comparison to understand exactly how Web 2.0 applications have reconfigured (or not) the relations of music culture in general, and in particular those between popstars and their audiences in particular. What will be different in the case of Web 2.0 is that this shift in music culture is not related to a particular genre, style, scene or performer; instead it is a platform for such, movements to operate on. As such Web 2.0 has the potential to reconfigure the cultural relations along any of these axes. Any genre, any scene, any performer can use Web 2.0 applications to reconfigure relations with audiences. And, in fact, this is already happening. We only have to browse through the profiles of the many performers

already on MySpace to see that this is the case. What this reveals is that the presence of popstars in Web 2.0 complicates the issue of proximity, as users find new ways of getting close – or perceived ways of getting close – to their heroes. All I wish to point out at this stage is that we are now finding that the relations and organization of music culture – the distance of the popstar, the practices and artefacts of the industry, and the way that musical movements operate – is being challenged and disrupted in a way that may require cultural sociology to return to and refresh established visions and theories of youth and music culture. We might also need to think outside of the sphere of popular music as other celebrities, politicians, activists, product manufacturers, and even the Queen – through *The Royal Channel: the Official Channel of the British Monarchy* which was recently launched on Youtube – begin to use Web 2.0 applications to play with perceptions of proximity in an attempt to connect with and get closer to ‘the people’.

### **Musical introductions? Music Culture and the Connections of Web 2.0**

The second issue concerning the part music culture plays in the operations of Web 2.0 is perhaps more pressing for the general sociology audience as we see the social sciences working now to understand how Web 2.0 operates (judging by the content on email discussion lists such as that hosted by the Association of Internet Researchers). Clearly further empirical detail is needed to flesh out the part that music culture plays in bringing together and forging connections in Web 2.0. This would look to build upon work such as that by Caldwell and Henry (2005) which explored the part that ‘celebrity worship’ and ‘fan clubs’ played in creating an ‘extended social network’. We might do this by continuing to follow spaces like Jarvspace over longer periods, or alternatively it may be necessary to follow ordinary users to see how the profiles of popular music performers fit into their Web 2.0 practices. The options here are wide-ranging.

But to begin to put a little more meat on the bones we can focus upon the content of some of the more recent postings I have come across on Jarvspace. As well as the obvious and most prominent posts you would expect to find here occurring between Jarvis and his ‘friends’, there are also those that use Jarvspace to promote their own music to this ready-made audience of Jarvis followers (with the intention of encouraging people to visit their own profile and make friends with them as well). These performers create an association between themselves and Jarvis, indicating the type of band that they are to the audience. So in the case of the band The Adventures of B. Violet, Jarvspace is used to communicate directly with the visitors of Jarvspace rather than with Jarvis himself:

Just to keep ya’ll updated ... Please check out our new song ‘Rodeo Hoe’ Lotsa lov -x-. (*The Adventures of B. Violet*, posted 3 July 2007)

Another example is the band Metropol who posted a similar message of encouragement to friends of Jarvis:

We are a band called Metropol ... if you like bands like Snow Patrol, U2, Radiohead, Embrace, The Killers, The Fray, Coldplay, Mew ... maybe you like our songs. Listen to our songs!!! (Metropol, 1 July 2007)

Here in these examples we see beginning to emerge the part that music culture plays in Web 2.0. Jarvspace, as a space of shared tastes and preferences – a codification of habitus perhaps (Burrows and Gane, 2006) – can be used to make new connections between people and even between other musicians and Jarvis's friends. The point of reference here is a shared taste or preference that allows for new associations to be made. So Jarvis's presence is bringing together people and other bands into one shared space from which new connections can be made. It looks increasingly likely here that as these Web 2.0 applications continue to move into the mainstream, and disseminating and consuming music becomes about operating within these web applications, so cultural sociology will need to draw upon sociological work into networks and relations such as that conducted by Knox et al. (2006). Perhaps then by moving toward understandings of culture in a Web 2.0 context, cultural sociology may make some significant contributions toward the 'interdisciplinary cross-fertilizations' (2006: 136) that Knox et al. suggest may help us to overcome the 'problems for network thinking' (2006: 114).

As we begin to understand how these spaces operate communicatively and even communally, so we are required to consider further pressing questions relating to the 'cultural circuits of capital' (Thrift, 2005) that underpin Web 2.0. Even though these networks are free-to-access and user-generated they remain enduringly commercial, despite all the rhetoric to the contrary. We can see here how Jarvspace has become a commodity in itself as it draws users into the network. In fact it is *the profile* that has become *the* commodity of Web 2.0, as users engage in simultaneous acts of production and consumption. It is not just the profiles of cultural luminaries that are commodities, but also those of the ordinary user. Even making connections in the network is an act of production in itself as it generates a path and history. This is illustrated most clearly by the social networking site Facebook, which provides news about what your friends have been up to every time you log on. This includes news bulletins about the new people they have made friends with, the groups they have joined, and the changes they have made to their profiles. We return here to Lash's (2006) points about the importance of 'the feed' and the image of the data actively 'finding' us. The movement toward the user-generated profile as commodity, and also even the collaborative repositories and archives of the wiki, folksonomy and mashup, may be understood then as 'changes in the form of the commodity [that] point to the increasingly active role that the consumer is often expected to take' (Thrift, 2005: 7).

In line with this it is important to avoid thinking of SNS, and other Web 2.0 applications, as free-floating, unrestricted and ungoverned products of a new age of global collaborations. These applications have infrastructures, gatekeepers,

rules, self-governing powers, restrictions and written into the code that inhibit the practices of users. These spaces are sorted by metadata that ‘organize data ... often in reconstituted hierarchical orderings’ (Lash, 2006: 580); they are spaces in which a range of agendas come to form a new tension of use.

## Conclusion

I would like to conclude by suggesting that popular music plays a complex and central role in the connections necessary to the participatory functioning of Web 2.0. This is perhaps a continuation of the part music has played historically in bringing together people through shared tastes – although it has long been considered that where we are from and the personal relations we have affect our tastes and preferences (Johnstone and Katz, 1957) leading to intimate connections between music, space and place (Whiteley et al., 2004). In the 1950s for instance, Johnstone and Katz found that ‘musical tastes and preferences for particular songs ... are found to be anchored in relatively small groups of friends, suggesting that personal relations play an important role in musical fads and fashions’ (Johnstone and Katz, 1957: 563). As social networking sites stretch out friendship networks – and in some cases disassociate them from particular localities – so we might need to reconsider how this has a knock-on effect for music culture and for its linkages between locality, friendship groups and musical tastes and preferences. Reflecting on these linkages in the context of the type of mainstream web applications described here would give us a much needed sociological way into studying Web 2.0.

Thinking of the possibilities here for a more quantitative angle on things, recent globalization literature has told us that music is particularly important in terms of senses of ‘belonging’ (see for instance the chapter on mediascapes and music in the study of Manchester in Savage et al., 2005). It has been suggested that musical taste is a particularly important variable connecting in complex ways with a series of sociological classifications such as age, ethnicity, gender, occupation, social class, place and so on (Savage, 2006). What might be of particular interest to cultural sociology is how these senses of ‘belonging’ and ‘taste communities’ (Savage, 2006) are altered as music cultures move out onto the web-top in the Web 2.0 context. As well as the involvement of popstars on SNS, it is also possible to think of the recent emergence of social ads on Facebook, where people become connected with products and brands, as representing an attempt to tap into new communities of taste. The questions here are complicated as they require some understanding not only of the complex ways in which software has sunk into the realm of the everyday and the mundane, but also how this comes to transform people’s connections with other persons, places and cultural formations. Here we are taken toward a form of cultural sociology that might engage with sociological literature on the geodemographic classification of space (Burrows and Gane, 2006) and the emergent literature on the sociological uses of transactional data and marketing informatization

(Savage and Burrows, 2007; Thrift, 2005; Turow, 2006). For these reasons, the next steps in understanding music culture in the Web 2.0 context will be far from straightforward.

As I have shown here, getting hold of data about musical movements has become easier with the emergence of (these largely sociologically/untapped) open and accessible archives of information about them. These archives are eminently searchable and sortable. If we take the SNS for instance, the people with profiles on these sites can be sorted into groups dependent on favourite performers, films, television programmes, and so on, as well as by ethnicity, gender, height, location, and other such categories. Indeed, on Facebook it is now possible to retrieve statistics about selected networks that provide a series of 'top 10s' revealing the preferences of that network. So, for example, most universities have a network with varying numbers of members (these are formed by the last part of the email address when people sign up for a profile); for each network we can find top 10 books, top 10 films, top 10 bands, and so on, based upon the preferences entered by the individual members of the network. So if we take the network for the University of Aberdeen, we find that the favourite band is Snow Patrol. The *cultures of archiving* that underpin Web 2.0 mean that this type of information is already there for cultural sociologists to call upon and use. What is sure to be far more difficult, as ever, will be getting something out of these data sets. They are not that easy to follow or to interpret, particularly as we as sociologists are often outsiders vis-a-vis the worlds we are studying. These are cold environments for observation.

Considering the descriptions of Web 2.0 discussed here it is now necessary, pressing even, that cultural sociology embraces what are fast becoming mainstream changes across a range of cultural spheres – including art, literature, film and others, as well as music. The challenge will be to come up with innovative research strategies that allow the social researcher to get inside the network and to participate in its ongoing connections. This would need to sit alongside strategies that call upon and use Web 2.0 applications, and their user-generated content and metadata, as significant cultural archives from which we may draw sociological insights. These strategies can be understood, in line with the contentions of Savage and Burrows, 'not simply as particular techniques, but as themselves an intrinsic feature of contemporary capitalist organization' (Savage and Burrows, 2007: 895). Also the connections we would aim to get at cannot be appreciated, or even seen in full, unless we join up and become members. We simply cannot observe from the outside. On Facebook, for instance, it is not even possible to enter the site and see profiles unless you sign up, volunteer information, and generate a profile. An important prerequisite here will be to look sceptically at both the rhetoric of alleged democracy associated with Web 2.0 and the various powerful marketing strategies centred on claims of the 'empowerment' that Web 2.0 supposedly allows, instead promoting critical thinking about the often highly commercialised nature of Web 2.0 spaces.



In line with Scott Lash's claim that 'the critique of information will have to come from inside the information itself' (Lash, 2002: vii), we need to begin to create profiles and make some friends online. We can then conduct virtual interviews and ethnographies, analyse content, geographically map networks of friends, generate user profiles from the archived information contained in SNS profiles, account for the patterns and powers of viral marketing, and get a sense of the connections made and how they are located or interwoven into everyday routines.<sup>3</sup> Or, if we take Savage and Burrows' (2007) suggestions on board, by getting inside we can participate in a descriptive sociology and make analytical use of what are significant data sets about people and about their cultural practices, preferences and engagements. Making friends with Jarvis or any of his fellow wikizens affords us a way in and provides a focal point for seeing what is happening. As Web 2.0 applications move into the mainstream and restructure aspects of cultural production and consumption, it seems reasonable to conclude that cultural sociology, whatever type of culture it is concerned with, will need to begin to think in some detail both about the implications of Web 2.0 for each cultural sphere, and also about the possible ways in which each of these spheres might in turn come to affect the nature of the connections that make up Web 2.0 itself.

## Notes

- 1 The information about Jarvis Cocker gathered in this article was taken from Wikipedia, Youtube and MySpace on 9 February 2007 and updated on 3 July 2007. Many of the statistics had changed significantly during this relatively short period. This is illustrative of how rapidly these sites are moving into the mainstream and how hard it is for sociologists to keep up (see Beer and Burrows, 2007).
- 2 The full names of his wife and child are included in the Wikipedia entry but are not reproduced here.
- 3 Of course, 'technologizing' theory in this way comes with its own set of analytical problems. These are explained in detail in Nick Gane's (2006) recent discussion of the options of speed-up, slow-down, or variable speed with which social and cultural theory is now faced as it attempts to come to terms with the 'time sensitivity' of what is widely understood to be social and cultural speed-up. Indeed, the rapid rise to prominence of SNS and Web 2.0 illustrates this acceleration of events and happenings in the face of what are powerful technological shifts, cultural rethinkings, and defining marketing strategies of 'knowing capitalism' (Thrift, 2005).

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