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**MAKING THE BRAND:
EXPLORING THE ROLE OF BRANDING IN POPULAR MUSIC**

by

Jeremy Morris (BSc. Hons.)

A thesis presented to Ryerson University and York University

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Program of

Communication and Culture

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2005

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Abstract

MAKING THE BRAND: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF BRANDING IN POPULAR MUSIC

by Jeremy Morris

Communication and Culture

Master of Arts

Ryerson University

2005

Music artists and their products share attributes with other branded commodities but are rarely discussed as such. Using Hirschman's "Culture Production System" model in conjunction with literature from popular music, communication and cultural studies, this thesis considers whether music artists and their products can be considered as brands? If so, how are music brands created? To explore these questions, I present case studies of marketing materials from albums by Keane, Radiohead, U2 and Wilco. Branding reveals itself as a process that creates expectations among consumers, critics and others. Expectations can hinder artist creativity and result in increased standardization of the music product. However, brands may offer artists a level of control. This investigation has implications for all parties involved in the business of music and provides cultural industry researchers a unique way of analyzing the impact of marketing and branding on commodities while accounting for the complexities presented by the consumption of cultural goods.

Key words:

Popular Music, Culture Industries, Branding, Advertising, New Music Technologies
Radiohead, Keane Wilco, U2

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*A rancher was asked the name of his ranch.
He replied, "It's the ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ Ranch."
He was then asked how many head of cattle he had and he said, "Not many."
"Why not," the rancher was asked.
"Because most of them don't survive the branding."*

Introduction

“Music is not a loaf of bread”. So begins an interview in *Wired* magazine with Jeff Tweedy, front man for a Chicago-based band named Wilco (Jardin 2004). The article meanders through a discussion of music, intellectual property, technology, and the current state of the music industry. At one point, the *Wired* reporter asks Tweedy about the music industry’s recent attempts to prevent file sharing by suing downloaders. If the efforts are successful, Tweedy is asked, how will that change culture?

If they succeed, it will damage the culture and industry they say they’re trying to save. [...] Stop trying to treat music like it’s a tennis shoe, something to be branded. [...] A piece of art is not a loaf of bread. When someone steals a loaf of bread from the store, that’s it. The loaf of bread is gone. When someone downloads a piece of music, it’s just data until the listener puts that music back together with their own ears, their mind, their subjective experience. How they perceive your work changes your work. [...] People who look at music as commerce don’t understand that. They are talking about pieces of plastic they want to sell [...] I’m not interested in selling pieces of plastic (qtd. in Jardin: 2).

Tweedy’s comments keenly illustrate the tension that exists when the words “music” and “industry” are combined. Although he depends on a music industry to earn a living, Tweedy clearly sees the two as separate worlds. Music and art are about feelings, about subjective experiences. Industry is about selling pieces of plastic.

The line between culture and commodity is a blurry one. As an ever-increasing amount of cultural goods (e.g. music, books, films, food, etc.) are mass marketed and distributed, it is hard to tell whether culture has been commodified or whether commodities are simply another expression of our culture. Arguably, the tension Tweedy grapples with was first raised in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno (1972). Their highly critical examination of the “Culture Industry” is a rich discussion of the impact of mass production and consumption on cultural goods. Though heavily criticized for its elitist stance and for

assuming a lack of agency on the part of individuals within mass society, the importance of Adorno and Horkheimer's work in the fields of communication and culture is evident in the volume of research that it has spawned. Expansions and refutations of their arguments from Sociology, Cultural Studies, Psychology, Consumer Research and other fields provide a vibrant body of literature regarding the culture industry; perhaps now more accurately called the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh 2002).

Like "culture" itself, the term "cultural industries" is widely used yet difficult to define. For the purpose of this thesis, Hesmondhalgh's definition of cultural industries as "institutions [...] which are most directly involved in the production of social meaning", is perhaps the most useful (11). Film, publishing, advertising, sound recording and other similar industries all fall under this broad ranging term since they are all involved in the "industrial production and circulation of texts" (Hesmondhalgh: 12).

In addition to exploring the impact of the mass production and consumption of culture fuelled by the cultural industries, another crucial feature of Horkheimer and Adorno's work is the notion of viewing culture as a commodified form. As Gunster (2004) points out, debate over whether or not Adorno was an elitist who denied the agency of the mass individual has obscured analysis of one of Adorno's central points: "cultural entities typical of the culture industry are no longer *also* commodities, they are commodities through and through" (Adorno 1967: 100). As a result, marginal attention has been given to "how Adorno actually theorizes the effect of the commodity form on culture – the cornerstone of his analysis of the culture industry" (Gunster: 24).

Adorno's work on commodities is informed by Marx (1978). Commodities are, in reality, nothing more than products of human labour. For Marx though, the exchange of one commodity for another, or of money (the universal commodity) for other commodities, gave

the commodity form “transcendent” and “mysterious” properties (320). In it, the “social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour” (320). Products of our own creation suddenly become mysterious to us as we endow them with extraneous meaning. A shoe is no longer a shoe to protect our feet, but a Nike shoe to make us better athletes. The power of the commodity form is what Marx called “the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (321).

With Gunster, Adorno and Marx in mind then, this thesis explores how a particular aspect of our culture has been commodified and what repercussions the commodity form of cultural products has on the way these products are produced and consumed. It is no secret that mass produced books, art, music and films are just as much expressions of our culture as they are products sold for the purpose of profit. Despite Tweedy’s pleas, there is a certain product logic applied to cultural products like books, movies, sound recordings, etc. that is not much different from that of a tennis shoe or loaf of bread. As much personal value and meaning as individuals derive from films or compact discs, cultural products are subject to similar types of business plans, marketing strategies and tactical advertising campaigns as many other consumer commodities.

This is not to say that music, art and film provide the same meaning, joy or sadness in our lives as cereal, shoes or coats (though for some, this may be a possibility). It is important, however, to recognize that music, art and film have now become such crucial components of our economy (e.g. the so-called Entertainment Economy: Wolf 1999) that they are subjected to similar processes of production, distribution and consumption as other consumer products. This type of thinking led Beck (2003) to collect a series of essays entitled

Cultural Work: Understanding the Cultural Industries. In it, Beck and other authors call for a return to focus on the work that actually occurs in the cultural industries. They argue that the bulk of cultural industry research typically centers on the products of the industry, the individual films or songs and how they are received, as opposed to the work that goes into those products. The production of culture, or to use Murdock's term, the "marketization" of culture warrants exploration, along with – as opposed to a sole focus on – the study of individual cultural products (2003: 18).

The goal of this thesis, then, is to begin to trace the effects of this product logic on the music product, specifically with respect to how popular music artists and products are marketed to consumers. Can music artists and products be considered as brands? Branding has become a dominant paradigm in the marketing of consumer commodities and a host of products and services are currently analyzed and scrutinized as brands. Music artists and music products, while they may share attributes of other branded commodities, are rarely discussed in this light. If music products and artists are subjected to similar marketing tactics as other products, then what are the specific components that make up the musical brand? How are music brands created? To explore these questions, this thesis compiles case studies of popular music artists and explores the possible impact of branding on artists, music and consumers. In other words, if artists are treated as brands, what are the impacts for artists and listeners? Against the backdrop of an ever-changing technological landscape that is threatening the music industry with new ways of producing, distributing and consuming music, this thesis also considers how new technologies affect the process of branding.

The first chapter reviews the current marketing literature on the practice of branding. The term "brand" is quite fashionable now; it has been overused and used improperly. This chapter defines brands and considers some critical opinions and negative aspects of

branding. The second chapter discusses branding in relation to the music industry. Considering that new technologies are threatening old business models, this chapter begins with an overview of the situation currently facing the music industry. It then considers whether or not the concept of branding can be applied to the music industry and reviews relevant literature. The third chapter outlines the theory and method behind the current study. Using a model from consumer research known as the “culture production system”, this chapter foregrounds the case studies and the sources chosen for analysis. The fourth chapter provides a detailed observation of four musical acts and the marketing materials associated with the launch of four of their respective albums. The fifth chapter synthesizes the data from the cases and discusses the impact of branding. Most importantly, it considers how new avenues for music production and consumption affect the branding and marketing of music artists.

Chapter 1 – Defining the Brand

Defining the Brand

There is no concept as vital, as discussed, as mentioned, as of the moment in the world of marketing and advertising today as Branding (Levine 2003: 1)

To Levine's list of attributes, I would also add "contested". This recent interest in brands has led to a host of books and articles on the subject. From scathing critiques like Klein's *No Logo* (2000) to countless marketing guides like Levine's which profess the benefits of branding (see also Aaker 1996; Ries 1998; Wheeler 2003), there is no shortage of opinions on brands. Consensus on what brands are, where they originate, or how they are created, on the other hand, is nearly impossible to uncover. Almost every book on branding has its own definition of the term so, before applying the term to the music product, the following section will consider some current and historical definitions of brands.

Jackson (2003) traces the history of branding as far back as a Syrian sandal maker in 200 B.C. who marked sandals he produced with his own name (51). Jackson's anecdote is clearly hyperbolic in nature but serves to underscore the fact that, while it may not have been recognized as such, branding has been in practice since the first commodities were made. From livestock to wine and ale, the brand – literally a mark burned into the surface of the object in question – signified ownership (Safire 2005: 20). Jackson later argues more earnestly that the modern notion of branding arose in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century as packaged goods makers like Kellogg's and Coca-Cola began to develop branded products with identifiable symbols that clearly distinguished them from unbranded commodities (51). In 1920, the concept of "brand management" evolved and by 1960 the American Marketing Association (AMA) began employing the term (54). Others attribute the origin of the modern brand to advertising guru David Ogilvy (Aaker 1991). In a speech

made to the AMA in 1951, Ogilvy identified the power of advertising as a means for creating a brand, but he recognized that this was not the sole source of imagery for a brand. He concluded his talk by calling for an increased focus on the study and development of brands (Aaker 1991: 7).

Part of the issue in defining a “brand” is that it is generally an abstract concept that is equal parts tangible and intangible. Brands can be a name, a design, a look, an attitude; in fact, most brands are all these things and more. However, it is important to keep in mind that brands originally served some very functional purposes. First and foremost, brands were employed to distinguish products from others. In 1960, the AMA put forth one of the first working definition of brands, classifying them as: “A name, term, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (qtd. in Jackson: 54). In addition to serving as a means of product differentiation for producers, consistent product designs, labels and names became symbols of guarantee for consumers. As branding expert Aaker (1991) notes, the brand “signals to the customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical” (7).

For marketers, brands distinguished their products; for consumers, brands distinguished their product experience. On a shelf full of non-descript goods, brands stood out because they assured customers of a certain level of quality (or at the very least familiarity). Although the meaning of “brand” has evolved significantly since the AMA’s early definition and brands now represent much more on a symbolic level, it is important to keep in mind that functional aspects such as product differentiation and product consistency are still important attributes of any brand.

The symbolic aspects of the “brand” can only be fully understood in relation to the “product”. The latter is the tangible commodity which is purchased and used while the former is a combination of tangible and intangible aspects. Levy’s (1959) early work on the subject alerts us to the idea that products are “purchased not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean” (118). King (1973) furthers this idea: “A product is something that is made in a factory: a brand is something that is bought by customers. A product can be copied by a competitor: a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated: a successful brand is timeless” (qtd. in Moore 2003: 339). This line of reasoning, one supported by many marketers and advertisers, argues that products are simply goods on shelves. They are meaningless until they become a brand. A watch is watch, but a Rolex is something special because of the image it forms in the minds of consumers. As Levy (1955) notes, the brand acts as “a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes [...] The net result is a public image, a character or personality that may be more important for the overall status (and sales) of the brand than many technical facts about the product” (34). Marx’s commodity fetish echoes in the background as everyday commodities are infused with personas, images and status.

The idea of a brand as a symbol means that brands are often broadly and ill-defined. Wheeler (2003), for example, argues that “the brand is the promise, the big idea, and expectations that reside in each consumer’s mind about a product, service or company” (2). Even pioneers in the field provide vague definitions: “A brand name is nothing more than a word in the mind, albeit a special kind of word. [...] Any and every proper noun is a brand whether or not it is owned by an individual, a corporation or a community. [...] Any proper noun is a brand. You are a brand” (Ries 1998: 2-3). Jackson’s summary of branding literature

concludes that “the most influential understanding of brands today is that they are, in essence, beliefs that form the basis for ideas” (96).

Although brands are made up of intangibles like essence, meaning and identity, these intangibles are created through very tangible processes. Moore’s (2003) definition concretely labels brands as “a name and a logo, joined to a set of regimented associations, with source-identifying indexicals” (339). In this light, a successful brand employs functional elements like the logo, name or design of a product to foster a set of symbolic associations or ideas that are powerful enough to generate belief in the mind of its users. Brands may only truly exist in the minds of consumers, but they exist as a result of a series of cues, images and associations created by marketers, advertisers and of course, the consumer’s own experience with the product. For all their symbolic attributes, brands are still rooted in materiality; connected to many real structures, practices and processes.

Defining Branding

*Like human beings, all brands are born equal.
The trick is the same, to prove one isn’t (Mootee 2003: 6)*

“Branding” is an equally slippery term. Often times branding is substituted for advertising or marketing as if all three meant the same thing. For the purposes of this thesis, it is necessary to distinguish between the terms. Marketing refers broadly to all practices related to bringing a product into the market. Advertising is just one of many factors to consider as marketers market a product. Decisions regarding the price of a product, its design, its availability, and the press releases or public relations that accompany it are all part of the marketing process. Advertising, on the other hand, is a specific part of the marketing process geared towards creating awareness for, and delivering messages about, a product.

Advertising and marketing are related to branding since both processes contribute to the overall image of a product in the minds of consumers. If we return to Jackson's suggestion that brands are ideas that generate beliefs, then branding is best described as a process of generating belief in the minds of consumers (73). It is the practice of creating "regimented associations" for a particular product (Moore: 339). This can be accomplished in many ways; branding occurs at almost every point of contact the consumer has with a brand. Packaging, price, product experience, product reputation, sponsorship, partnership and other factors all contribute to the construction of the brand in a consumer's mind.

Consider Holt's (2004) explanation of the branding process:

Consider a new product that a company has just introduced. Although the product has a name, a trademark, a logo, unique packaging and perhaps other unique design features – all aspects that we intuitively think of as the brand – the brand does not yet truly exist. Names, logos and designs are the material markers of the brand. Because the product does not yet have a history, however, these markers are empty. They are devoid of meaning (3).

Branding is the process that occurs as a product's material markers get filled up with consumer experiences. Advertisements, product placement on television shows or films, individual experiences using the product, reviews about the product etc. all serve to brand the product: "Over time, ideas about the product accumulate and fill the brand markers with meaning. A brand is formed" (Holt: 3).

Although brands can evolve over time as new points of contact with the consumer occur, the more tightly linked the above elements are to a consistent brand idea, the stronger a brand will be. Consistency of presentation is thus a key aspect of branding. Consumers measure brand interactions against past experiences with that brand so inconsistent branding may result in an image which is "off-brand". It is for this reason Jackson notes that branding is "primarily concerned with consistency between the ideas of a brand and the way it expresses itself in terms of its identity and the experience it offers" (87).

Before finishing this chapter with a brief critique of brands, it is perhaps helpful to summarize the last two sections through a visual representation of branding (see Fig. 1). The physical product lies in the center of several concentric circles. Arguably, the process of branding must always start from this point. What is the product, how much does it weigh, what is its shape? How is it used? The next realm reflects the experiences that revolve around the purchase and use of this product. Does the product fulfill its purpose? Is it enjoyable to use? Other attributes such as customer service and purchase experience in store also play a role in this area. The third and final layer in this diagram concerns the image that is created for consumers regarding the product. Advertising and product reviews and the corporate image of the company that makes the product all play a role at this level and serve to complete the image customers have towards the product in question. These three arenas, collectively, serve to create the brand.

Figure 1 - From Product to Brand

A Critique of the Brand

Consumers now understand that marketers promiscuously stitch stories and images to their brands that may have nothing to do with the brands' real history and consumption.
(Holt 2002: 84)

Branding is the dominant paradigm in marketing today. While the tactics of branding are debated endlessly in business journals and marketing trade magazines, the practice itself, and its potential problems, are rarely questioned within the marketing literature. For criticism it is useful to turn to recent work from communication and cultural studies. Klein's *No Logo* (2000) achieved notable success by critically dissecting brands and the companies who use them. Her book provides an important counter-balance to much of the business literature on the subject. Despite the intangible aspects of brands discussed above, Klein keenly examines the tangible impacts of brands. From specific examples, such as Phillip Morris' purchase of Kraft in 1988 for 12.6 billion dollars (six times what the company was worth on paper) (7-8), to broader social issues such as those indicated by the sub-sections of her book (No Space, No Choice, and No Jobs), Klein illustrates the very tangible impacts of living in a heavily branded world. Although she uses an overly broad definition of brands as the "core meaning of the modern corporation" (5), Klein insightfully links brands to the growth in power of the modern corporation in society. As corporate consolidation and globalization spread, brands are having a significant influence on consumers around the world. Brands rob us of public space, of jobs and of choice; the latter seems especially ironic considering that the multitude of unique and distinct brands on store shelves appear to provide unlimited consumer choice in product decisions.

Lasn's *Culture Jam* (2000) also attacks our branded society. Like Klein, Lasn's call-to-arms explores the harmful effects brands have on our culture. Lasn's attack blames branding, advertising, the media and corporations for a host of societal issues including an increase in

mood disorders, increased insecurity regarding body image, a decreased concern for the environment and a lack of diverse and relevant information. Rampant consumerism of the late twentieth century has only exacerbated these problems. It is only by “jamming” these brands, by disrupting their symbolic attributes and “uncool-ing” fashions, signs and symbols, that consumers can resist brands and build a new consumer culture, “one with a noncommercial heart and soul” (Lasn: xvi).

Lasn and Klein are at the center of an emerging counter-cultural movement dedicated to attacking the power and position of brands in our culture (Holt 2002). While Holt credits the current anti-branding movement to newer works such as *No Logo* and *Culture Jam*, he is quick to point out the historical trend of anti-advertising thought in communication and cultural studies. Newer critiques follow the footsteps of earlier takedowns of advertising and consumer culture such as Vance Packard’s *Hidden Persuaders* (1957) and Stuart Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness* (1976). Packard’s extensive study of motivational research and persuasion explores how advertising has mined the depths of the human psyche in order to control consumer purchasing behaviour. Ewen adds that advertising is the process of creating consumer desire where none existed before in order to encourage spending on products that consumers do not ultimately need. Ewen and Packard’s respective works fuelled a series of critical studies of advertising and marketing practices, most extensively summarized in Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1986). Leiss et. al.’s historical review displays the range of attacks advertising as an industry has endured over the years. However, the specific practice of branding is not engaged as fully as it is in newer works like *No Logo* and *Culture Jam*.

While both new and old critiques raise important issues regarding the impacts of advertising, they are primarily concerned with a larger-scale assessment of capitalism and

corporations. They rarely engage specific industries or products. Klein's ideas, for example, are as much directed towards the politics of globalization and corporations as they are towards brands; it is difficult to apply her ideas directly to the issue of a branded musical product. She raises, however, two important issues in light of the current discussion. The first is that of limited choice (No Choice). Despite what seems like a plethora of brands offering us unlimited product choice, corporate consolidation and globalization result in "constant cloning" (Klein: 131). Global brands like Gap or Nike help consumers feel like individuals despite the fact they share the same brands as everyone else. Whereas brands used to stand for quality, an overabundance of products (produced under questionable labour practices) results in brands that now only really differ in image. Branding deceives consumers into believing the product they are purchasing is unique; the intangible attributes of the brand mask the lack of tangible difference in the products. Klein questions the illusory qualities brands confer on products. Brands are no more than constructed images designed to appeal to basic emotions. She reminds us that brands are created by:

a group of people sitting around a table trying to conjure up an ideal image; they toss around words like "free," "independent," "rugged," "comfortable," "intelligent," "hip." Then they set out to find real-world ways to embody those ideas and attributes... (157)

Klein's argument gives concrete evidence of Marx's fetishism. The mystery behind commodified products is in many cases a boardroom construction. With Klein's reminder and other brand critiques in mind, I turn now to explore the case of the music industry. I am interested primarily in whether or not the notion of the brand can be applied to popular music artists and products. If so, what are the impacts of branding on the production and consumption of music industry products? Are artists and consumers affected if the music industry treats its products as brands? Before answering these questions, however, it is necessary to review the current situation in which the music industry finds itself.

Chapter 2 – Brands, Branding and the Music Industry

The Music Industry and Technological Change

Talking machines and phonograph records seem to have suffered the same historical fate as that which once befell photographs: the transition from artisanal to industrial production transforms not only the technology of distribution but also that which is distributed (Adorno 1928: 48)

Since the invention of recorded sound, music and the technology with which it is recorded and played back have been entwined. From the phonograph to the mp3, the history of popular music production and consumption in the twentieth century is one marked by various technological innovations (see among others Coleman 2003; Garofalo 1999). Currently, new digital-based technologies are facilitating changes to music production (e.g. sampling and looping programs that facilitate the use of copyrighted material), distribution (e.g. mp3 compression and peer to peer distribution) and consumption (e.g. portable mp3 players that store thousands of songs). As historical overviews show, new technologies have consistently affected the development of the music industry; the industry's history can almost be seen as a constant negotiation between business management and technological innovation (see Chanan 1995; Coleman 2003; Garofalo 1999). The recording industry has consistently opposed new innovations (e.g. radio, cassettes or file-sharing) for fear of lost profits on the sale of recorded material.

Judging by recent sales figures from the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), the current gloomy outlook in the popular press about the fate of the industry may be warranted (RIAA 2004). After a long and steady rise in dollar and unit sales from 1990-1999, the RIAA recorded its first drop in sales figures in 2000. The RIAA showed CD sales losses of 6.7% at the end of 2002 on top of a 2.3% decline from the prior year. A similar decline of 6.7% was noted for 2003, and the percentage loss for units shipped is worse for all

three years. The RIAA reported a slight increase in 2004 of 1.9% for CDs. Last year's gain must have reassured some panicked industry members, but it would be surprising if anyone involved in popular music thought the commotion was finished.

Napster's launch in the summer of 1999 coincides all too nicely with the drop in figures noted by the RIAA. As a result, Napster and the file-sharing practices that resulted from mass consumer use of the program and its derivatives receive the brunt of the industry's blame. Although Napster creator Shawn Fanning and others argue that the decline in figures is likely the result of a combination of factors such as decrease in the quality and the diversity of musical offerings (see Coleman 2003; Mann 2003) or increased availability of other forms of entertainment such as movies and video games (Liebowitz 2002), these cries have not stopped the recording industry from aggressively retaliating with a slew of efforts including anti-piracy advertising, copy-protection software and high-profile legal cases against "digital pirates" of all ages (see for example Holland 2004; Knopper 2003).

As new technologies and new business models jockey with traditional ways of doing business in popular music, the music product itself is changing. The benefits of digitized music have been more fully realized in recent years with the development of new computer-based music technologies. Peer-to-peer software (e.g. Kazaa or LimeWire), virtual players (e.g. Windows Media Player or iTunes) and portable mp3 players (e.g. iPod or Rio) give consumers novel ways to find and use music. As a result, new means of marketing the music product must be employed. As with the advent of the phonograph, radio or music television, digital technologies are affecting the processes of bringing the music product to the market. Any research on branding within the popular music industry must consider this rapidly changing technological landscape.

Brands, Branding and the Music Industry

The music industry is a strange combination of having real and intangible assets: pop bands are brand names in themselves, and at a given stage in their careers their name alone can practically guarantee hit records. (Richard Branson qtd. on W'oopidoo.com)

Cree's (2000) investigation of branding in the U.K. music industry is one of the few studies that explicitly focuses on the idea of popular music products as brands. Cree concludes that while the industry has some of the world's most powerful brands, very few record label executives consider branding an important part of their job (32). Cree argues that a greater understanding of branding and of the commercial benefits associated with the practice is needed before branding becomes more widespread in the industry (32). Other useful research in the area can be found from sources addressing the political economy or the "production perspective" of the popular music industry. Although the terms "brand" or "branding" do not surface as explicitly as in Cree's study, related concepts such as "image" and "genre" combine with discussions of music marketing to provide an excellent starting point from which to consider brands in popular music.

Lury's (1993) *Cultural Rights: Technology, Legality and Personality* discusses the music product as a brand, though her interest in the subject is primarily from a legal perspective. As Lury explores changing notions of copyright, authorship and trademark in light of mechanical reproduction, she notes that "branding, the forging of links of image and perception between a range of products, has become an increasingly significant production strategy within and across the culture industry" (87). Although Lury does not discuss specific brands, the increased prevalence of branding is symptomatic of the "increasing importance of exhibition value in cycles of cultural reproduction" (62). Lury sees this as a threat to innovation in the cultural industries. Like Klein, Lury criticizes the illusory qualities of the

brand suggesting that instead of true innovation of cultural products, there exists only a “simulation of innovation” (62).

Longhurst (1995) also addresses the idea of exhibition value in the music industry as he claims “the music industry should not be examined primarily in terms of manufacturing but in the context of images and signs” (49). Music, he contends, is more akin to a service than a commodity; an experience rather than a purchase (49). The music experience is heavily dependent on the images and signs that are created for consumers. In other words, the way artists (and their products) appear, on and off stage, affects the way their music is consumed. Longhurst’s comments further Lury’s work by explicitly linking the idea of the brand to musical meaning. An increased focus on image and the need to create “musical stars,” leads Longhurst to conclude that “stars as brands have become [...] a very important focus of musical meaning” (190).

Of the current popular music scholars, Negus (1992; 1999) has been the most concerned with dissecting the marketing of music. Recognizing that “an industry produces culture” simultaneously as “culture produces an industry” (1999: 14), Negus looks at the cultural make-up of the organizations that manufacture and distribute music. His first book, *Producing Pop*, collects a series of interviews with artists and industry executives; one chapter deals exclusively with the practice of artist management. Although artist management and branding are not synonymous, there are obvious correlations with Negus’ work that deserve further discussion here.

Negus (1992) defines the brand as “the unique quality of an act [that] would become instantly recognizable and condensed into a specific image which could become a trademark” (71). Put more concretely, as one of Negus’ interviewees points out:

You try and brand the artists in the way that U2 are branded. The most brilliant corporate branding I have ever seen, without anyone 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. Bono was out there [clenches fist]. He was an OK kind of guy because he was saying the right things. [...] Brilliant piece of marketing (71-72).

While it is not entirely clear just what the U2 brand means for this industry executive, it is evident that he recognizes the importance of presenting artists in such a way that their essence can be easily distilled through consistent imagery and logos.

Defining and creating this essence, Negus argues, is largely a function of the marketing department within major music companies. That is why “in order to conduct the commercial activity of selling records, [the] marketing staff occupy a central position within the contemporary recording industry” (62). The increasing importance of the marketing department is not unique to the music industry. As it is elsewhere, Negus argues that the primary role of the marketing department is to “actively construct the consumer as identifiable markets” (62). Artists and recordings, in Negus' view, are not spontaneous texts that arise organically, but rather they are carefully constructed: “From the perspective of marketing, a creative artist is not expressing him or herself in some natural way, but is involved in a self-conscious and calculated activity” (62). It is not simply songs that sell; image, logo, name, video and press are all important elements of music consumption. As one interviewee explains:

A real artist is going to have a lot more than a good record. Being a pop star is not just about making records. Popular culture is about media manipulation. It's about how you present yourself. It's about utilizing the avenues at your disposal to create an image, a lifestyle, a point of identification for people. And a genuine artist may well have a real understanding of that (63).

The marketing department obviously plays a central role in shaping the image, lifestyle and identities – in other words, the brand – of the artist(s).

Negus' *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* (1999) continues to explore the role of the marketing department, specifically with respect to the creation and management of music genres. Genre and brand are two distinct concepts, and I do not wish to conflate the two. However, brands – as images and feelings in the minds of consumers – exist in relation to other brands and these relationships depend on the larger field of genre. Just as Frosted Flakes and Froot Loops are different brands within the cereal aisle (i.e. the same genre), they are also compared to other morning food choices, such as Eggo Waffles or Pillsbury Turnovers (i.e. different but competing genres). Negus argues that music genres serve to integrate “a conception of music (what does it sound like?) with a notion of the market (who will buy it?)” (1999: 27-28).

Negus' argument draws on Frith's (1996) idea of genre. Both agree that, from the record label's standpoint, music itself is only important in so far as an audience for that music can be created. It is important to realize that “music genres are constructed-and must be understood- *within* a commercial cultural process; they are not the result of detached academic analyses or formal musicological histories” (Frith: 88-89). Genres bring efficiency and clarity to the complexity of musical styles; they represent a record company's assumption about what listeners like and why they like it (86). In this light, genre labels are crucial in organizing the processes of music making, music listening and music selling (88).

The concept of genres-as-construction cannot be discussed without mentioning *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*, Peterson's (1997) detailed look at the country music industry in the twentieth century. Starting from its inception in the early 1920s, Peterson traces the evolution of the industry to reveal how a key attribute of country music, authenticity, is a negotiation (more likely, a fabrication) between numerous players including industry executives, artists and managers among others. “Authenticity,” Peterson argues:

“is not inherent in the object or event that is designated authentic but is a socially agreed-upon construct in which the past is to a degree misremembered [...] it is continuously negotiated in an ongoing interplay between performers, diverse commercial interests, fans and the evolving image” (5-6).

Peterson’s analysis of different kinds of country (e.g. Old-Timer, Hillbilly, Cowboy etc.) exposes the distinct codes, images, style of dress and even musicianship of those sub-genres. Some of the sub-genres were more marketable than others which is why country music today is radically different (in image, music and style) from the Old-Timer country of the early 1920s. Country music, and the values it represents, reveals itself to be a product of fabrication. For Peterson, this helps explain how “authenticity and originality became institutionalized as its [country music’s] core aesthetic, and why the field finally came to be widely called ‘country music’ in 1953 just when the largest number of the genre’s fans no longer lived in rural areas” (185).

Peterson’s research is closely related to Negus’ ideas about artist management and genres. The two share the belief that the development of artists and genres is a process of construction that relies on a series of codes, signs and symbols in order to create and define music markets. Jones’ (2003a) synopsis of academic research in the music industry reviews the work of Negus and Peterson and provides a useful concluding thought on the subject:

When pop acts set out to become popular, what each possesses is their own unique combination of the sounds they make and the way they look, together with the potential for stories to be told about how and why they make the sounds they do. What record companies attempt to create through the process of record manufacture is not simply a ‘faithful’ or even ‘enhanced’ recording of an original performance; they seek to create a commodity that is marketable as sound, print and vision in order to maximize the chances that the commodity sells as well as everyone involved in its manufacture hopes that it will (150).

A successful music act, then, must have both a potential sound and a potential story that will appeal to audiences. Creating that story depends on the proper marketing and branding of the act and the genre to ensure success.

Music as Product

Let's define a product as something that is made or created by a person or a machine, especially something that is offered for sale. Is that what music is all about? Is music a product? Is it only something that you can 'make a substantial profit on?' (Kusek and Leonhard 2005: 37).

The above review of music industry marketing helps underscore the idea that music is indeed a product like many other consumer commodities; but is it a product that can be branded like other consumer commodities? Brand perception is generally influenced by almost every point of contact the consumer has with a brand. Packaging, public relations, press, advertising, consumer experience and word of mouth are some of the most common points of interaction. Many of these traditional consumer touch-points apply when discussing the music product. Music artists often have logos, images or websites, and their music comes with distinctive packaging, advertising, and public relation releases. It seems, however, unfair to reduce music to just another product on the market. Even by analyzing music as purely a consumer product (i.e. ignoring all the intangible meaning consumers generate from music), there are still notable differences in the music product that need to be considered.

Lacher's (1989; 1994) research on the consumption of music provides assistance in this area. She argues that listeners can find music, willingly or unwillingly, in any number of places; it is part of the make-up of our daily lives (1989: 367). Whereas consumers need to actively seek out many products, music is all around us in stores, cars and television shows. Lacher's claims have only been strengthened as recent innovations in digital audio

technology have allowed even greater access to the music product. Mp3 files on desktops or portable players, burned discs, webcasts and other means of digital audio streaming all combine with more traditional distribution methods to make music available in a wider variety of formats at a greater variety of locations than ever before. With so much music around, music does not necessarily need to be purchased in order to be consumed. In fact, music is most often consumed (i.e. heard) before it is purchased as consumers sample products via a myriad of methods (Lacher: 367).

While Lacher (1994) acknowledges that consumers may buy an album without having heard previews, they still usually have expectations based on previous experiences or reviews (367). After consumers buy a music product, repeat purchase of that product, unlike other commodities, is rare. Repeat consumption, on the other hand, is incredibly frequent (367). In the end, purchase of music is only required if the listener wants to control the temporal aspects of consumption (367).

Although this last claim seems slightly outdated now that file sharing allows permanent control of consumption, often without purchase, Lacher documents key differences between music products and other commodities. If we broadly define a product as a good that is purchased and consumed, treating music as a typical consumer product reveals itself to be somewhat limiting. The music *purchase* is only one component of the overall music experience. In analyzing music as branded product, it is important to consider not only the factors involved in selling and purchasing music (i.e. the traditional elements of brands that have been discussed above), but elements that extend beyond music as simply another product on the shelf of consumer commodities.

Music as Experience

Music is similar to language in that it is a temporal succession of articulated sounds that are more than just sound. They say something, often something humane (Adorno 1956: 401).

As much as this thesis routinely refers to music as a product, the term “product” is an injustice when music plays such a pivotal role in many people’s lives. Music is a distraction, an escape, an event and for some, a way of life. Music helps us define ourselves and our friends. It is able to arouse in us deep and significant emotions (Sloboda 1985). Music is memories; it is a soundtrack to events in our lives. It is perhaps for this reason that Longhurst likens music to a service rather than a commodity. Music is not simply a purchase; it is an experience (Longhurst: 49).

The sounds of any given song or album arguably form the core of this experience. Emotions evoked during the listening experience shape the way listeners perceive artists. These emotions, I argue, are an integral part of the music experience and need to be considered as potential contributors to an overall brand image. If we consider the idea of a musical artist as a brand, consumer impressions are apt to be shaped by each new experience with that artist. Sound, or the overall nature of the listener’s experience with the music, reveals itself as an important site for analysis. An artist’s sound defines their brand just as much as their CD packaging or their music video.

Treating music as an experience helps explain the intense connections consumers have with music and their favourite artists. It is not simply something consumers buy and use up. It is something listeners turn to again and again; something they rely upon. Although music affects each listener differently, the power of music lies in its ability to evoke emotions upon each new listen. Music as an experience thus provides listeners numerous venues for brand interaction. Albums, concerts, videos, music magazines, wearing a t-shirt with a band

logo, learning to play a cover of a favourite song; all these moments potentially affect the overall experience a consumer has with a particular band. These in turn shape the overall brand image of an artist.

Music Brands

Don't tell me I'm a brand. I'm famous and people recognize me, but I can't look in the mirror and see my brand identity (Courtney Love qtd. in Love 2000).

Packaged goods, consumer commodities and even service-oriented products are routinely referred to, and examined, as brands, yet studies of music's place in popular culture rarely employ the term. On the one hand, this absence of analysis is understandable given the extreme aversion to the term from artists like Courtney Love and Jeff Tweedy. Most musicians create music as experience rather than as product; it is not surprising they would rather be seen as artists than brands. However, the lack of acknowledgement that, in some instances, artists and music products can be branded is strange, especially at a time when artists are increasingly branching out beyond music and showing just how branded they are (e.g. J. Lo's underwear line or Britney Spears' perfume). As with traditional packaged goods (e.g. Kellogg's Frosted Flakes) or more service-oriented products (e.g. Rogers Cable), music products and artists are subjected to similar branding tactics (e.g. logos, advertising, public relations, websites, promotions, etc.) for brand expression. Music as an experience also relies on less "traditional" elements of branding such as sound and other listener experiences. The popular music industry aids in constructing products and experiences through the tailoring of images and sounds that eventually reach consumers. This makes music artists fairly unique in the world of branded products and so, with Love's and Tweedy's objections to the term in mind, we proceed cautiously to consider the notion of music brands.

Research Objectives and Questions

In order to better illustrate the concepts discussed above, I will now turn to an in-depth analysis of music brands. Research Question 1: Can music be considered a branded product? If so, what are the components of music brands and how are they created? Treating music as both a product and an experience, I will analyze key components of several music brands using case studies. My descriptive analysis will be followed by a synthesis and discussion of the broader impacts of branding music products. Research Question 2: How does branding affect artists, their music, and eventually consumers? Finally, this paper will consider how new music technologies affect the process of branding. Research Question 3: What do new technologies (new ways of producing, distributing and consuming music) do to the process of marketing and branding? The popular music industry's traditional ways of doing business may be under fire from digital technologies, but the products (and brands) it has to offer will always have a market.

Chapter 3 - Methods and Sources

Culture Production Systems and the Attributes of Product Meaning

Since the term “culture industry” first came to prominence (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972), academics have questioned, refuted and expanded the concept of culture as an industry. Viewing culture as an industry or, more accurately, a collection of industries, allows researchers to address the systematic and industrialized production of cultural goods. As products of massive companies such as Time Warner or Sony/BMG, films, music and art undergo the same product logic as many other commodities; whether or not they deserve such treatment. Cultural industry theories provide a means for assessing the impact of this product logic on goods that we consider as valuable pieces of our culture.

Arguably, the work of the Frankfurt school and the reactions to that work laid the foundation for the many cultural industry theories that followed in the fields of communication and culture. There are now numerous frameworks with which to approach the products and practices of the cultural industries. Hirschman’s (1986) work in the field of consumer research provides particularly appropriate insights into the systems of production that exist within the cultural industries. Hirschman describes the cultural industries as industries which consist of several internal “culture production systems” (327). While she is concerned with how industries such as music or film produce and attribute meaning to cultural goods, the strength of her work lies in her account of consumer behaviour within this system of production. Her model, discussed in detail below, serves as an important framework for my analysis of the music product as a brand.

Hirschman defines a culture production system as “a system of specialists whose task it is to create, manage and disseminate cultural symbols” (327). The term “specialist” refers

not to the fact that it requires a special or unique “artistic” mindset to accomplish a task. Rather, it serves to distinguish between the various functions in the production process. This idea is not unique to Hirschman; other scholars have discussed similar divisions within the creative industries. Jones (2003a), for example, uses the term “expert”; his ideas are also incorporated below.

In most cultural industries, the cultural production system is comprised of three subsystems: the creative, managerial and communication subsystems (see Fig. 2). The creative subsystem is comprised of individuals or organizations involved in the direct development and design of the cultural product in question. In the case of music, this would include the songwriters, bands, musicians and, in some cases, producers responsible for the creation of songs. These are specialists who are, in Jones’ words, “experts” in music-making (152). They specialize in the act of making music, in particular, their own style of music. The managerial level is where products get manufactured and distributed. Sony/BMG or EMI are examples of the managerial subsystem as they influence which products from the creative subsystem get mass produced and marketed to a wider audience. They are experts in commodity-making since they understand, better than others in the process, how to produce and distribute a commodity (Jones: 152). The final area of interest is the communication subsystem, whose primary function is to provide the consumer with information about the products being disseminated from the managerial level. Advertising agencies, music magazines and newspapers all play a role at this level. Although Jones does not address this level of production, I would extend his ideas by arguing that this level features experts in message-making.

CENTRAL COMPONENTS OF THE CULTURE PRODUCTION SYSTEM

CREATIVE SUBSYSTEM

Functions to originate product concepts. Examples include song writers, playwrights, food chemists, automotive designers

MANAGERIAL SUBSYSTEM

Functions to mass produce and distribute selected products. Examples include automotive companies, record companies, motion picture companies.

COMMUNICATION SUBSYSTEM

Functions to provide information about products to consumers. Examples include advertising agencies, product rating services

Figure 2 – Central Components of the Culture Production System (from Hirschman 1986: 330)

Hirschman uses the culture production system model to describe how, where and when meaning is ascribed to cultural products. For her, “culture production systems are responsible for providing products with meaning prior to their dissemination to consumers” (327). At the first level, specialists in the creative subsystem turn an intangible idea (i.e. a song in the composer’s head) into a tangible product that can be conferred to specialists at the managerial level (i.e. a song performance, a demo tape etc.). As experts in music-making, however, creative specialists create ideas which may or may not be congruent with what the managerial level sees as a marketable commodity considering the needs/wants of consumers (Hirschman: 327). Some creative specialists may be more willing than others to comply with the demands of the managerial subsystem as they ready the product for mass consumption. The balance between achieving one’s own creative goals and attaining large-scale success comes into play at this level (Hirschman: 327). Although decisions made at this point heavily affect the meaning of the work, very seldom do consumers get a glimpse of the negotiations that occur at this level.

The next step in the process is the commodification of the product. Decisions made at the managerial level affect which products from the creative subsystem will eventually be mass produced and widely marketed. As experts in commodity-making, these organizations will invest only in what they deem to be successful market ventures. It is important to note, as Hirschman does, that while products like packaged goods can be tested with consumers during the development phase, rarely does the same situation exist for artistic products (327-328). While a manufacturer like Kellogg's can afford to create and test several versions of a new flavour of Rice Krispies, it is less likely musicians would develop multiple versions of a song or album to be pre-tested for consumer reaction. As such, decisions made at the creative and managerial level are extremely important filters of cultural products (Hirschman: 327).

The third point at which meaning gets ascribed to cultural products occurs when the final product is mass marketed at the communication level. Publicity tours, advertisements, sales promotions and press reviews all play a role in this step. The communication subsystem, in some senses, has the most overt influence on the meaning consumers generate from cultural products as it is here that consumers are generally made aware of those products. However, it is worth noting that the managerial subsystem may also be considered a "consumer" at points in the process. After all, the managerial subsystem receives and selects its products from the creative subsystem. The way artists (i.e. products) appear to the managerial subsystem, be it through a demo disc or a live show for music industry reps, has an impact on which artists they will sign and distribute (i.e. consume).

Although Hirschman uses these three steps to describe how meaning is ascribed to a product at the various levels of production, one of the key benefits of her model is that it also accounts for meaning generated by consumers. Negus, Peterson and Jones' research is

useful for understanding the specifics of what occurs at the various production subsystems, but they too often neglect the role of the consumer in the process. In addition to the three production subsystems above, Hirschman credits consumers as important contributors to a product's meaning. While the culture production system may work to tailor a consumer's impression of a product, the actual reception of that product may be significantly different. Hirschman recognizes the consumer as an important actor in the creation of meaning without sounding as resistant as Hall's (1980) notion of encoding and decoding or as counter-cultural as Hebdige's (1979) idea of sub-cultural style. Instead of looking at oppositional or counter-hegemonic meanings, Hirschman describes how meaning is negotiated through a series of tensions which she labels formal/informal, controlled/uncontrolled and tangible/intangible attributes.

Formal/informal distinguishes between the attributes ascribed to products by institutional specialists versus those added by consumers. A *Rolling Stone* review of Radiohead's latest album is formal compared to informal consumer reviews of the album posted on various fan sites or newsgroups. Similarly, some product attributes are controlled whereas others are uncontrolled. Controlled attributes are those which fall under the jurisdiction of the managerial subsystem. Record labels can shape the advertising and press releases that accompany Radiohead's new album but they cannot control *Rolling Stone's* review of the release. Finally, there is also a distinction between the tangible and intangible elements of cultural products. A sound recording is, in the case of a CD, a series of zeroes and ones encoded onto a polycarbonate plastic disc which is 1.2 mm thick and 120 mm in diameter. It is also a series of chords, rhythms and meanings that evoke diverse emotions. The managerial level controls some of the tangible aspects of the product but must work harder to control the intangible elements (through marketing, advertising and branding).

The implications of this model for the study of branding are evident; if branding is a means to influence the way consumers make meaning out of a product, then it is important to examine the level(s) at which branding occurs. Using Hirschman's model, it is possible to see how branding occurs at each of the levels. Depending on how artists look and sound during the initial stages, they are to some extent branded at the creative level before they turn their product over to the record company for mass distribution. The instruments they use, their sound, style, and attitude – and their willingness to change or defend these attributes – define stories that can be told about them (Jones 2003a: 150). The possibilities of their brand are rooted in the raw materials.

The managerial level is also concerned with developing the brand image of the artist and its product(s), though this is often done in conjunction with the artist and/or the manager. The development of artists likely differs from case to case, from contract to contract, yet the managerial system controls many of the aspects of the final product. The packaging for the album is designed at this stage, videos and websites are created and concert tours are planned. All of these decisions are made based on the images and ideas the record companies want to convey about their artists.

Significant branding also occurs at the communication level since this is where communication pieces actually meet the consumer. Advertising may not play as overt a role for music – rarely do we see a television ad for new albums like we do for new cars– but new songs are featured in ads, television shows, films and at retail. The music press diligently reviews new releases and radio promotions support album launches. A mix of mediated and non-mediated messages combines to provide an overall brand image for consumers.

Hirschman's model also helps explain how some elements of music brands are outside the control of both the artists and the record labels. While a band may work

diligently to create a certain type of sound, the record label may need to package and market them differently in order to shoehorn them into a trendy genre or to distinguish them from other artists in the company's roster. Similarly, a record label may decide to brand an artist in a certain way only to find that those brand attributes are not reinforced when the album is reviewed in the music press.

In this light, branding reveals itself as a fluid process with several players. Hirschman's three-stage model helps understand the complexities of this process. It also overlaps nicely with the earlier diagram of a typical brand. Instead of treating the model as linear, as Hirschman does, I have instead used a circular diagram similar to the model used to describe brands in chapter one (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3 - Culture Production System (non-linear)

If we are to consider the artist as a brand, then Hirschman's model and the original brand model combine to give an idea of how an artist becomes branded (see Fig. 4). At the center is the artist, with various physical features and attributes such as sound and musical style. At

this point, the artist is not really a brand; they are simply composers of musical material. However, these elements are important components of the brand's core. It is only after going through all the subsequent levels of the marketing process that they become a brand; it is only after their material markers get filled up that they become branded (Holt: 3). At the managerial level, all the product experiences again come into play. In this case, an artist may have several products to offer, most of which are mediated through larger industry influences (i.e. record labels, concert promoters, etc.). The final level of branding occurs at the communication subsystem, whereby additional attributes are ascribed to the artist as they are played on certain radio stations, interviewed or reviewed by the music press and as ads and other promotional material about their products diffuse.

Figure 4 – The Artist as Brand: A Conceptual Framework

Another useful aspect of Hirschman's model is that it provides a means for analyzing the points where technology has an effect on the branding process. At the level of the

creative subsystem, new technologies offer musicians novel ways to create music. This gives rise to new musical practices and new musical sounds and impacts the core attributes of a band's brand. At the managerial level, new digital technologies provide different ways for consumers to experience the music product. Concerts can now be webcast and music can be consumed as single digital files instead of as part of an album with bulky packaging. Whereas packaging typically provided visual cues to help build brand image, new product experiences will offer different cues and need to be examined. Technologies at the communication level also provide consumers new ways of discovering products. Websites, newsgroups and other forms of product discussion begin to carry as much weight as a traditional album review or as a press release. Technology affects all three levels of the culture production system and thus plays a role in how music artists and products are branded.

Case Study Methodology

Academically speaking, the "case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied" (Stake 1994: 236). Yin (1989) sees the case study as a strategy and technique for inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (23). The desire to study cases comes from the desire to show what the specific can teach us about the whole (Stake 1994). Case studies are sometimes designed with the intent to generalize from the results as can be seen with empirical, "statistical generalization" (Yin: 38), but are very often studied solely for understanding the particularities of the specific cases in question. These can then be related to broader theory using the case as an example of that theory in practice. Data collection for case studies primarily comes from six sources of evidence: documentation, archival records,

interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Yin: 85). Case studies have been conducted using only one of these sources, but one of the key advantages of case studies is the “opportunity to use many different sources of evidence” which gives researchers the ability to “address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and observational issues” (Yin: 96-97).

Case studies are often used in marketing classes and textbooks to describe brands and brand activity (see for example Mootee 2003; Williams 2000). Treating brands as images, beliefs, or ideas formed in the mind means recognizing that brand perception can be influenced by almost every point of contact a consumer has with a brand, whether this is through formal marketing or other experiences with the product. Qualitative case studies provide researchers the ability to “to describe the unit of analysis in depth and detail, in context and holistically” (Arneson 1993: 164). Since multiple elements combine to establish an artist’s brand image, case studies seem ideally suited for offering a holistic analysis of how brands are created and maintained.

The case studies examined in this thesis are cases from the popular music industry. Popular music studies, as a discipline, tends to dissect music into its component parts. Lyrics, music, and videos are discussed with respect to specific texts to show how these various musical components help create meaning in music. However, since my intention is to consider music artists and products as brands, lyrical or musical analyses alone will not suffice. Brands are made up of innumerable components; it is a disservice to focus solely on a single element of the musical product or experience.

Fast’s (2000) analysis of rock band U2 is instructive in this regard. Fast’s research explores both the music *and* the contexts in which that music is presented to fans. Analyzing two different sounding (and looking) U2 albums, *War* and *Achtung Baby*, Fast attempts to

“explore the system of significations in U2 holistically, bringing music, images and lyrics together in an analysis that examines the band’s discursive strategies” (34). Although her research is primarily musicological, Fast importantly recognizes that “our reception of ‘the music’ consists of a complex set of relationships among sounds, CD covers, videos, media coverage, and live concerts, not to mention individual life circumstances at the time we consume it” (33).

The forthcoming case studies mirror Fast’s dedication to a holistic understanding of the music product/experience. The cases describe four bands and the marketing materials associated with the launch of four albums. They are presented as examples of how branding operates across the popular music industry, though it should not be assumed that all artists/bands experience the same process. Rather, these four examples illustrate the impact of branding on the way consumers and listeners make meaning from the music they consume, especially given the important technological changes facing the music industry.

Sources

From concerts to compact discs to discussions with friends about what clothes a band is wearing, there is truly an infinite amount of source material from which to draw. By way of example, the following list offers an extensive though incomplete description of many of the elements that should be considered in a discussion of the branding of an artist:

Creative Subsystem:

Sound/Style: An artist’s sound is an incredibly important part of the branding process. Though branding is normally a visual affair, it is important to consider sound as a key site for branding. The way artists play their instruments and the sounds they create contribute to the overall brand image. Since the creative and managerial subsystems “control” the sounds to be distributed, they are seen as a formal component of the marketing mix.

Managerial Subsystem:

Packaging: The packaging of the music product, in most cases a compact disc, is a key site for artist branding. Packaging typically accompanies the purchase of the music product,

though this is changing as an increasing amount of music is sold (or obtained) through e-music services. Packaging is a formal and controlled aspect of the music product.

Video: Music videos are generally considered as three or four minute ads for bands and artists. In fact, new CD products are rarely accompanied by traditional television advertisements, since video typically fulfills that role. Videos are another formal and controlled part of the marketing mix. Like websites, they straddle the line between the managerial subsystem and the communication subsystem as they are often produced by a third party under the direction of the record label and/or band.

Website: Many bands now also have a presence on the Internet. Their websites are sometimes important sites of interaction with their fans. Websites can be formal and controlled or informal and uncontrolled (i.e. official artist sites vs. unofficial fan sites).

Electronic Downloads: As an ever increasing amount of music is spread or sold over digital networks, it is important to understand how the music product is marketed to us over these spaces. Electronic files are now another element of an artist's brand.

Concerts: Concerts are an important experience for fans to connect with their favourite artists. The power of live music has an important impact on branding since it combines sound and visuals in a live and unmediated experience (as opposed to listening to a recording or watching a video).

Communication Subsystem:

Press/Interviews: The music press certainly plays an important role in defining music brands. Reviews of sound recordings in music and popular magazines vocalize consumers' experiences with albums and thus affect the way an artist or band becomes branded. Reviews of the band can be formal and uncontrolled (e.g. established music magazines) or informal and uncontrolled (e.g. customer reviews of albums at amazon.com).

Merchandise: Fans are able to purchase merchandise like T-Shirts, hats, stickers or other gear associated with their favourite bands. These are outward expressions of a consumer's affinity for a certain artist or band and are arguably an important statement on the part of the individual. Merchandise is generally formal and controlled though often informal and uncontrolled merchandise can be found (bootlegs, unauthorized band T-Shirts, etc.)

Movies/Books: Since musicians are of such interest to their fans, there are usually several other ways to find out more about a favourite artist. Movies and books (biographical or autobiographical) serve to present artists in a certain light and thus affect the way they are perceived by consumers. These can be controlled or uncontrolled, formal or informal.

Radio Stations: Radio stations are branded identities themselves. In an effort to attract particular advertisers, radio stations go to great lengths to distinguish themselves in the market place through branding. In Toronto for example, The Edge 102.1 is geared towards an 18-29 demographic of listeners who like alternative rock, while Q 107, another rock station has a target audience that is slightly older and more interested in classic rock songs from the early 60's and 70's. All this is to say that the station on which an artist is played serves to brand that artist as a certain type of music, a certain type of brand.

Newsgroups/Discussion Boards: Many listeners interact with their favourite artists by subscribing to newsgroups. The web-based groups typically post news and information about the band and allow fans an opportunity to discuss their views about lyrics, music and the quality of the artist in general. While they may be created by formal means, the content is generally informal and uncontrolled.

These are a few of the many possible sites where branding occurs. All of these elements contribute to an artist's overall image; they are an important part of brand identity. It is not feasible to study all of the above components in a work of this scope. However, by analyzing a number of them in conjunction, a brand story begins to emerge for the artist in question.

The cases that follow explore the marketing materials and other brand attributes associated with the launch of four albums by four different bands: Keane's *Hopes and Fears*, Radiohead's *Kid A*, U2's *How To Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* and Wilco's *Yankee Foxtrot Hotel*. I believe these albums represent key points in the bands' careers with respect to their brand development. Since many listeners may not be involved with a band to the extent that they would regularly purchase merchandise or participate in newsgroups, each case focuses on attributes such as sound, CD packaging, videos, websites and album reviews. I believe these reflect the most common and pervasive points of contact with the band. However, since each case is unique, I will also draw on other factors that contribute to brand identity (e.g. DVD documentaries, promotions etc.) if they add depth to the qualitative descriptions.

These four bands were selected for a number of reasons. First, they represent an interesting range of samples. Keane is a new band on the popular music charts; their first album is less than a year old. U2, on the other hand has been around for decades. Radiohead and U2 have achieved global success whereas Wilco's record sales are significantly more modest. All the bands fall loosely within the rock genre but U2 and Keane lean more towards pop rock whereas Wilco and Radiohead are considered more alternative or avant-garde. Methodologically, this facilitates an ease of comparison between the brands. As Negus

(1999) and Frith (1996) argue, genres have their own unique codes and tactics. The elements used to brand a rock act are likely different than the codes employed for branding pop divas. Comparing branding across genres, while perhaps a worthy study, is a separate exercise.

I have also chosen artists that are known primarily for their careers as musicians. Pop acts and hip hop artists such as Britney Spears, Jennifer Lopez (brand name, J-Lo) or Method Man are often multi-media performers; music is but one of their interests. Branding in these cases is almost too obvious as artists are able to launch entire lines of merchandise on their names alone (e.g. Beyoncé Knowles' new fragrance or Kylie Minogue's lingerie line). While this overt superstar branding is interesting, I am more interested in how branding applies to acts that seem, upon first glance, further removed from the marketing process.

Analysis of the various brand elements follows Hirschman's model of the "culture production system". For the creative subsystem, I have analyzed the sound and the style of the band. One song from each band was analyzed through a rudimentary musical analysis. Musical analysis is a technique in which key sonic characteristics of a composition such as instrumentation, tone, mood and lyrics are described and dissected. Musical analyses range from in-depth to surface but are often ignored in most discussions of the music product within communications and cultural studies (ironic considering sound is presumably an important consideration when consuming music). For each case, I have chosen a song representative of the album's sound (where possible) and dissected its components. Due to the scope of this project, the musical analyses presented are brief.

At the managerial level, attributes such as CD packaging, videos, official websites and presence on electronic download sites (e.g. iTunes) were analyzed. The design and content of album packaging is discussed, with special attention given to the size of the booklet, the text and photos within the booklet and the presentation of the band's logo. A

music video for each band (where possible) is analyzed. Music videos are usually either narrative (i.e. they tell a story) or performance-based (i.e. they show the band performing), though many videos contain elements of both. The videos here are evaluated with respect to their structure, the content of the video and the associated imagery. Websites, as with packaging, are discussed based on their content. Images, text, band photographs and overall site structure are considered in conjunction with the number and type of links available to users. While most all of these artists have numerous fan sites, this thesis considers only official websites (i.e. the one designed at the managerial subsystem). These bands' products and promotional materials are also available in other online formats, apart from their websites. Their presence on electronic download sites, be they official (e.g. iTunes, Napster 2.0, Puretracks) or unofficial (e.g. Kazaa, LimeWire) is briefly discussed.

The communication subsystem is comprised of press and consumer reviews of the albums. Press reviews were collected from music magazines and newspapers from North America and the U.K (for a complete list of sources, see Appendix 1). Reviews are primarily analyzed based on the discourse that forms around the band and the album in question. I have also examined customer reviews of each album from Amazon.ca. While some may see this as a poor substitute for surveying music fans, my primary interest is the discourse that surrounds the bands and the albums in question. As such, the postings at Amazon.ca help show what consumers think about the artists and how consumers are receiving the albums.

After examining each case individually, the four cases will be compared to further expand on the impact of the practice of branding on artists; listeners and the music itself. Since several of the cases involve interesting uses of new technologies in the marketing process, a discussion of how new technologies impact branding and the branding process will follow the analysis of the individual cases.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis

Keane and Hopes and Fears— Honest, Innocent, Expansive

Keane has only recently come to the attention of the popular music scene. They have quickly shot to prominence, achieving the rank of #2 band of the year in the U.K. last year (Official UK Charts Company qtd. on BBC.com 2005) and *Q Magazine's* Album of The Year award (Qawards.co.uk 2004). Originally formed in 1997, Tom Chaplin (vocals), Richard Hughes (drums), and Tim Rice-Oxley (piano, songwriter) were also joined by a guitarist who left the band before they achieved any notable success. The band's rise to fame was slow at first because their piano-driven pop sounded derivative of Coldplay, another UK band that had gained global popularity a few years earlier (Wilson 2004). In 2002, Keane finally got their big break as they signed to independent label Fierce Panda and released their first hit single, "Everybody's Changing" (Keane.com 2005). After this success, the band was quickly signed to Island Records and released their debut album, *Hopes and Fears*. Their initial effort has received critical and popular acclaim; Keane's melodic sounds and earnest lyrics have marked them as a band to listen for in the upcoming years.

The reason for including Keane in this case study is twofold. First, the recentness of their success means they represent a relatively new brand compared to the others in this analysis. U2 and Radiohead have been around for years; Keane is only beginning to write its brand story. Second, they represent a band that consciously and explicitly employed branding tactics to ensure their image was presented in a consistent manner. While packaging and branding often occur at the managerial subsystem level, Keane appears to have sought out branding advice even before their first product was released. Prior to signing with Fierce Panda, Keane enlisted the help of a branding firm in England called Moving Brands (Burrell 2005: 16). Keane was "penniless" at the time so the founder of

Moving Brands, Ben Wolstenholme, offered his time for free based on his enjoyment of a Keane demo CD (Burrell: 16). The agency was responsible for “giving Keane a ‘coherent identity’, from its CD covers and videos to its websites, posters and T-shirts” (Burrell: 16). In the end, “beautiful, fascinating, honest, youthful, innocent, passionate, expansive” were the “seven buzz words - or ‘characteristics’ - that were carefully selected to shape the identity of Keane” (Burrell: 16). By examining the marketing elements of Keane’s debut album in conjunction with Moving Brands’ intentions, this analysis shows how the Keane brand was launched into the marketplace.

The Creative Subsystem – “Somewhere Only We Know”

“Somewhere Only We Know” opens *Hopes and Fears*. It is fairly representative of the sound that has earned Keane its early praise (listen to Appendix 2). The song is 3min57sec in duration and is one of the radio singles from the album. It alternates between the full sweeping sound of the intro or the chorus and the quieter verses. Guitars are not featured at all in this song or any other song on the album. Instead, piano, kick, snare and tambourine are favoured in the mix while the bass is further back. Chaplin’s English-accented vocals, out front in the mix, begin after a dynamic instrumental intro establishes the melody. Backed by a softer version of the piano melody, Chaplin’s vocals are soft and light in tone. As the first bridge arrives, tambourine and bass join in. The instrumentation and the added intensity of the vocals create a musical build, but ultimately, the first bridge is followed by another verse.

The second verse, compared to the first, features a full drum set and bass. Chaplin’s vocals, still light in tone, have increased in intensity since the first verse. This dynamic continues to build through the bridge, largely due to Chaplin’s vocals and an added synthesizer part. This time the musical climax at the end of the bridge culminates in the chorus. Chaplin’s vocals and all the backing instruments are in full force here as the chorus

explodes with an overall dynamic not heard since the beginning bars of the song. The chorus fades to a close with a cymbal crash leaving only a piano melody and Chaplin's vocals for a brief post-chorus. However, as Chaplin finishes the line "somewhere only we know" the drums re-enter and lead us back into another bridge.

Another chorus repeats but instead of a quiet post-chorus, the chorus is extended for an extra four bars. A new backing synthesizer part adds a sweeping tone as Chaplin howls over top of the music before proceeding with the final chorus. Rather than sing a full chorus, Chaplin's last chorus is a half chorus, beginning at the line "This could be the end of everything". Again, a cymbal crash signals the end of the chorus and all sounds, save the piano melody and Chaplin's voice, fade. After Chaplin's last line, the piano plays a resolving major chord which is sustained for six seconds before fading to silence.

The song's lyrics speak to lost love and simpler times (see Appendix 3). The imagery of the first and second verse has an earthly and natural feel to it as Chaplin describes the land, trees and river. As the lead subject wanders the path (s)he knew so well, (s)he pleads: "Oh simple thing where have you gone?" The desire to return to the innocence of the way things were, or to escape and be alone with the object of affection, is also evident in the chorus ("If you have a minute why don't we go/Talk about it somewhere only we know"). The longing for private conversation becomes all the more urgent as the request is followed by the foreboding couplet: "This could be the end of everything/so why don't we go/somewhere only we know". It is almost as if the world around the protagonist is falling apart; the only safe place is somewhere only they know. Read another way, talking about "it" could help bring about the end of "everything". Perhaps some misunderstanding or miscommunication between the two may only be resolved if they escape to talk about it.

If branding begins at the most basic level of the product (i.e. the product's physical looks and function should inform all its other aspects), then an artist's sound should be considered the starting point for developing the brand. The buzz words used to describe Keane are certainly evident in their sound. The lyrics of "Somewhere Only We Know" are confessional and honest and characteristic of other songs on the album. Chaplin's vocal tone adds sensitivity and tenderness to the melody and lyrics of Rice-Oxley's songwriting. Youthful, innocent and earthly images are conjured through Chaplin's boyish vocals and earnest delivery. Expansive sound is provided by the sweeping piano-driven chorus.

The Managerial Subsystem – Packaging, Video and Web

Figure 5 - Front Cover of Keane's *Hopes and Fears*¹

Keane's *Hopes and Fears* includes an 8 page double-sided booklet. The front cover is primarily white and displays the band and album name in bold dark green lettering, centered on the page (see Fig. 5). The band's name appears in capitalized letters, in a simple font. This treatment has become a "simple, now distinctive Keane logo (or 'wordmark', as it is known)" (Burrell: 16). Knowing the importance of colours in the packaging process, Keane asked "Moving Brands to computer-generate for them their own shade of sludge green, after rejecting every pantone of the colour previously available to them" (Burrell: 16). As one of

¹ The images throughout this thesis come from a variety of sources. Album covers and packaging have generally been taken from images on the web, website images are typically screen grabs taken by the author and video stills are either pulled directly from QuickTime video (by the author) or from the web.

the founders for Moving Brand argues “The colours used are important, too. They have to be ‘flat’ and ‘rich’ and ‘have depth’ ” (qtd. in Burrell: 16). The front cover also displays a design that engulfs the wordmark; it is a “crest” that Moving Brands created “based on the hammer functions of Rice-Oxley's Yamaha CP70 electric piano” (Burrell: 16). The back cover features an image of an electric piano silhouette (sludge-green), the band’s web address and copyright information.

Inside the CD jacket, song lyrics and various band photos fill the pages. There are solitary and group shots of the band members. Some of the photos are full-page while others are smaller thumbnail photos showing the band performing, recording, or generally lazing around. All the photos are in black and white. In all shots, the band is dressed in casual clothes (as opposed to, say, matching outfits). Chaplin, the least attractive of the three in a conventional sense, is generally obscured by silhouettes or by his long hair. In other places, he looks pensively off-camera. The images also rarely stray outside a musical setting. All but a few photos contain instruments or recording equipment. Clearly absent are pictures of any guitars (bass, electric or acoustic). The lack of a guitar is an important part of Keane’s sound and image; the absence of guitars here is thus not surprising. The booklet’s final page features production credits, personal thanks and the band’s web address.

Moving Brands most likely chose and designed the layout of the images, but the actual photographs were taken by Alex Lake, a longtime friend of Keane and their official photographer: “Whenever photographs of the band appear on official products, they have been taken by Lake” (Burrell: 16). Having a consistent photographer allows Keane and Moving Brands to strictly control the presentation of the band’s visual image. As a result, “the photographs will almost always depict Tim Rice-Oxley and the other Keane boys at

work, either in the studio or on stage. Again, this is all part of the careful, deliberate branding of the band” (Burrell: 16).

In its totality, the album packaging is simple and stylized. The fonts are clean and crisp, as are the black and white photos. These attributes suggest simplicity, honesty, and innocence (compare this to the recent Libertines album cover for example). The decision to include lyrics in the booklet allows listeners to further connect with Rice-Oxley’s personal and confessional writing. The heavy use of photographs serves to introduce the band to potential fans. Keane is presented as a serious and contemplative band interested more in their music than the frills of costumes or luxurious photo shoots. Interestingly, “photographs of the band (who, it is fair to say, are not the most photogenic in the history of popular music) don't appear on the front of CDs. The pictures are tucked inside, in the sleeve notes, for the fans to pore over once a purchase has been secured” (Burrell: 16-17). The CD packaging is thus designed to communicate the most important elements of Keane’s brand in the most stylistic way possible.

Figure 6- Screen shot of Keane’s website

Keane's website is completely integrated with the CD packaging (see Fig. 6). The colours and design elements of the CD artwork are replicated online. This is not surprising considering Moving Brands pushed for control of all marketing elements:

It was important that Moving Brands had responsibility for the whole Keane presentational package, unlike other bands who risk muddling their message by allowing one agency to lay out their website and others to design the album covers and the merchandise (Burrell: 16).

Upon first visiting www.keaneband.com, a pop-up window is displayed with a brief video and audio clip which alternates between "Somewhere Only We Know" and another song from the album. The band and album name appear in the same green wordmark as on the album sleeve, as does the piano image from the back of the CD. There are links to upcoming concert dates, CD ordering information and additional video/audio. There is also a link, "Tell a Friend", allowing users to email or instant message the web address to a friend.

On the full site, the sludge green and white colours are prominent along with the band name. The album crest appears twice on the first page, once static, once animated. The web page contains links to typical band website information under the headings: News, Music, Gigs, Band, Journal, Gallery, Forum, Extras and Register. "News" discusses the latest reviews and awards to Keane's credit. "Music" gives fans access to select songs on the new album and a few live tracks recorded at Glastonbury. "Gigs" notifies fans of upcoming and past shows. "Band" provides an official biography, but "Journal" is a more intimate and informal introduction to the band. This link allows users to read journal entries from band members dating back to early 2004. The entries range in topics though they generally depict life on tour. The writing is sometimes poetic (e.g. "I was back out propped up at a bar, fighting the jet-lag with a Margarita and trying hard not to make eye contact with the dead cobras that floated in the Tequila bottles above the bar, positioned in a coil, head back, tongue out, waiting to strike"), sometimes prosaic (e.g. "Oh my god it's hot in Phoenix

Arizona. I woke up and stumbled to the front of the bus. It looked sunny so I stuck my head out the door”) (Keane.com). Regardless of style, the journal entries serve to connect fans with band members in a seemingly real-time and personal way.

“Gallery” offers fans another chance to discover more about the band, with close to 40 pictures of the band from video shoots, photo shoots and concerts of the past year. The majority of the pictures, like in the CD artwork, are in black and white. They are all high quality and cleanly styled and generally display band members within a musical setting. “Forum” links to a discussion board where fans can register and post comments. “Extras” offers desktop wallpaper downloads of album covers or shots of the band in concert. The final link, “Register”, signs users up for the mailing list and the discussion forum.

All of the links above display within a window on the right hand side of the homepage save the “Forum” link which opens to a new page. This means that for the majority of a visit to the site, the Keane graphics and branding are present and prominent. The font, lettering, band photos and colour choices mimic the CD. The simplicity of the site’s design makes it easy to navigate. The content builds Keane’s credibility as down-to-earth musicians (as opposed to pictures of them partying, or in front of screaming groupies).

This image is maintained in other electronic avenues. Napster and Puretracks both offer access to Keane tracks, but the iTunes store is perhaps the best example. There, users can find a biography of the band (taken from allmusic.com) as well as Keane’s album and singles. There is also an EP from the band entitled “Sessions@AOL”, recorded specifically for electronic distribution. Album art does appear as a thumbnail image, however, only the front cover is shown (i.e. no images or lyrics from inside the CD booklet are available). A colour picture of the band is shown and the band name appears in the Keane font.

Sticking to core brand values allows Keane to maintain consistency of their image across different media. For Moving Brands “there are increasingly different channels on which music is distributed, and it is really important that the Keane experience is undiluted by anyone else interpreting the brand” (qtd. in Burrell: 16). A distinct wordmark, consistent photographs and shared design elements create a uniform representation of Keane across different media reinforcing the key buzz words of their brand.

Figure 7 - Images from “Somewhere Only We Know” Video (UK Version)²

The video for “Somewhere Only We Know”, although mainly performance-based, has a minor narrative component (watch Appendix 4). It opens with the band exiting a set of doors labeled “Stage Door”. It is late evening and Keane has just finished a show. They descend a set of stairs out into a back alley; the walls are covered in graffiti. Hughes and Rice-Oxley are carrying a snare drum and a non-descript bag, presumably with equipment in it. They get into a taxi where there are no managers or other members of an entourage one would typically associate with a band after a show. The back alley exit suggests Keane has played a club rather than an auditorium. Their choice of ride is also far from the luxurious limos one tends to associate with rock’n roll fame.

² Two versions of the video for “Somewhere Only We Know” were created: the U.K. version and the international version. The videos were shot in the same location but they feature different computer animation elements. Since the Keane videos are not available for purchase, the version I obtained was from a file-sharing network. Only the U.K. version was available for analysis.

Once in the cab, a fourth character is introduced. In the backseat sits an alien figure. It is black but slightly translucent and appears to be approximately the size of a young child. Its eyes are bright white and its head is shaped like a flame (see Fig. 7). The creature has been in the cab since the band arrived but they do not react to its presence. The camera treats the alien as it does the other members of the band. Solo shots of the lead singer looking pensively out the window, for example, are followed by a similar shot of the alien staring off. The creature has a child-like quality to it; it does not appear menacing. The “taxi” sign atop the cab is extinguished and the camera cuts to a shot of a dark road.

At this point in the song, the lyrics begin. A shot of the road fades down as a shot of Chaplin singing fades up. He is alone on a stool at an outdoor location which appears to be a wooded forest area. Shots of Chaplin are inter-cut with shots of the other band members playing and more shots of the cab ride. Rice-Oxley plays an old rustic piano. By the time the camera shows the drummer playing, it is clear Keane is in a forest; Hughes’ drums are completely covered in vines and leaves and sit in a stream of water. The images of nature nicely complement lyrics about an “empty land”, “pathway” and “earth”.

As the second verse begins, evening becomes morning. The cab drives down an isolated road through a forest. The leaves have fallen from the trees; fall has taken hold. The band members exit the cab and walk into the woods, seemingly with a destination in mind. The creature remains in the cab. As the first chorus begins, the band descends into a stream. As they walk upstream, the creature comes into view on the right hand side of the screen. It appears to be watching the band without their knowledge.

Their stream stroll stops as the song reaches the first post-chorus and as Keane comes to a small waterfall surrounded by trees and vines. A pool of water resides beneath the waterfall. It is clear to the viewer that this is where we have seen the band playing

throughout the video's previous cuts. As the band gets their first glimpse of the water pool, the colour of the film turns from daytime to a deep blue-ish hue. It is evening again. The band's isolation is reinforced through the post-chorus lyrics ("somewhere only we know").

Several voyeuristic camera angles of the forest and the band give the viewer the distinct impression Keane is being watched. Leaves begin to fall and the camera cuts to a shot of a misty moon covered in fog. As the band plays on, the camera locks onto a falling leaf, which transforms itself into a creature resembling the one from the cab. The creature floats in front of Chaplin as the final lyrics commence. Slowly, more and more creatures emerge from the woods and stand in fascination. They watch the band with bright white eyes. As Chaplin utters the final lyrics, the camera offers a close-up of one of the creatures. Suddenly, the area of its chest where a human heart would be turns a glowing reddish-orange colour. Like a heart, it appears to beat as it glows and dims. The camera cuts back to the singer, then to a shot of two creatures, both with glowing hearts, then back to the band. The video closes on a wide shot of the woods where the entire group of creatures, about two or three dozen at this point, can be seen with bright white eyes and glowing orange hearts.

The video evokes images of isolation, nature and earthliness that fit nicely with buzz words like innocent and honest. The drab colours of fall (e.g. browns and muted greens) blend with the darker nighttime colours to further enhance the sense of isolation. Keane comes off as a (pardon the pun) down-to-earth band. They are dressed fashionably, but not extravagantly. All of them wear jeans, and dark shirts or jackets. From the un-glamourously dingy small venue of their show, to carrying their own equipment, to the frugal means of transportation, the members of Keane do not seem to be high-rolling celebrities. Introspective camera shots of band members and the performance focus of the video present Keane as musicians first, rock stars second.

Yet underneath this earthliness lies a mystical quality to the video. The unexplained presence of the alien creature(s) gives the video an obvious supernatural quality. Like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, strange things are afoot in the woods. Keane's forest performance seems to resonate with the forest spirits. It draws them in and lights up their "hearts". The lyrics and the sounds of the song may reflect a sense of longing, isolation and loneliness but the creatures' child-like innocence and fascination with the band provide a feel-good ending to the video that matches the song's resolving chord.

The Communication Subsystem – Reviews of Hopes and Fears

Formal reviews of Keane, as a whole, focus on several key attributes of the band. First, almost every Keane review analyzed for this thesis mentions their similarity (or lack thereof) to Coldplay, another recently successful British band: "Keane performs the kind of dreamy and emotional pop/rock that has people automatically calling the band 'the next Coldplay'" (Hay: 39). This is driven in part because British bands often have difficulty achieving success in North America (Kipnis: 6). As a result, any band that does achieve success shares at least that with its predecessors. The comparisons in Keane's case, however, are rooted in musical similarities other than just their British-ness or their success across the pond. Both Coldplay and Keane rely on heartfelt piano-driven songs and are fronted by lead singers with powerful yet delicate voices. Coldplay is used as a frame of reference as well as a direct musical comparison "Tim Rice-Oxley's piano playing, like Chris Martin's, is at once percussive and expansive" (Scoppa: 84).

Reviewers, though, are quick to point out a key difference between the two bands: Keane does not have guitar player. This feature becomes an integral part of reviews: "Keane - a guitar-less trio that relies on voice, keys and drums - plumbs the anthemic sentimentality of Coldplay" ("CD Reviews" 2004: 13). Keane is also described as a "nice" band that is not

likely to engage in regular rock'n roll antics: "Naming themselves after their public school's tea-lady and being 'nice' is hardly rock'n roll, but, then again, Keane just don't want to be" (Connolly: 4). Their upper-middle class background is highlighted; sometimes as a positive (i.e. it makes them polite), sometimes as a negative (i.e. they are not authentic).

Those who praise the band are quick to point out that they are not an overnight success. Rather, Keane spent over six years trying to get noticed in the U.K. music scene. Their hard work has paid off with an album that is, lyrically and musically, "expansive" (Scoppa: 84), "honest" and "emotional" (Connolly: 4). The earnestness of their sentimentality impresses some critics: "the album brims with unabashedly grand, sun-breaking-through-the-clouds gestures" (Scoppa: 84) or "sure, their music is free of serrated edges, but it's also inclusive, emotional and honest, and Rice-Oxley is blessed with a rare gift for melody and hooks" (Connolly: 4). The album's hooks and melodies are labeled "catchy" and it is clear that this accessibility is both good and bad for the band. As one reviewer notes: "I was initially cynical about the sheer accessibility of Hopes and Fears, as though they were some kind of manufactured pop band" (Connolly: 4). Finally, Chaplin's vocals receive a notable amount of attention in reviews. His voice is credited for its strength and its cherubic innocent nature: "the angelic voice of singer Tom Chaplin, [...] sounds less like a rock star than a choirboy" ("CD Reviews" 2004: 13).

Informal consumer reviews of the album from Amazon.ca reproduce a similar discourse as the formal reviews. The comparisons to other British bands are plentiful as consumers both agree "If you like Coldplay, I think you'll love this!" (Amazon.ca 2005a: Lj, July 18, 2004) and disagree "I find the comparisons to Coldplay pretty limited, the ones to Travis a little more so" with each other (Benjamin Harris, July 12, 2004). Similarly, the album's lack of guitar is both hailed and criticized.

Overall, reviews of the album are positive (out of 89 reviews, the average customer rating is 4.2 out of 5 stars) and it is praised for being warm, magic and catchy. *Hopes and Fears* is “an amazingly beautiful album. The vocals, the piano work, everything makes the album very warm and beautiful [sic] (Wil K, Apr. 9, 2005). Enjoyment ranges from intensely personal “I broke up with my girl of three and a half years on monday, and tuesday this CD was released and I got it. It can do wonders for anyone that appreciates it [sic]” (Phil, July 8, 2004) to primarily musical “Its comprised of melodies that sport both catchy, wide eyed hooks, as well as that infamous brand of British melancholy...the kind that’s so infectuous, you simply can’t resist yielding to the sweet angst of it all [sic]” (hints, July 28, 2004).

That is not to say all reviews are supportive. Some of the harsher reviews of the album actually bring forth two other adjectives for Keane that differ notably from Moving Brands’ buzz words: boring and bland. Several reviews attack Keane for being derivative and unoriginal. Keane has “no edge what-so-ever” and makes “bland music for bland Starbuck’s America” (Harold Vintner, June 5, 2004). What many supporters describe as honest or sentimental, some reviewers describe as cheesy: “I would label Keane as wimp rock” (Brian J Albanese, July 2, 2004).

Formal and informal reviews of Keane, to a large extent, reproduce the brand narrative that Keane and Moving Brands worked upon so diligently. Descriptions of band members ground them as personable and regular guys who just happen to be on the verge of global rock success. Music, as opposed to the band’s behaviour, is generally the focus of the reviews. Although Keane can’t seem to shake comparisons, warranted or not, to other British acts, descriptions of the band echo buzz words like honest, expansive and innocent. However, undesirable attributes such as boring, bland and unoriginal surface as valid parts of the product experience in both formal and informal consumer reviews. If enough consumers

feel this way, and if subsequent releases from the band reflect similar features, it is possible to see how these could become a part of the band's brand, despite Keane's best intentions.

Summary

The case of Keane is an interesting one because it is such an explicit example of branding applied to a music artist and its products. Very rarely in the brand building business are the essences of brands revealed by those doing the building. In Keane's case, Moving Brands was hired to design an image for the band that could be carried across multiple mediums. Moving Brands and Keane decided on key buzz words such as fascinating, honest, youthful, innocent and expansive and infused these into album art, web designs and music videos. These buzz words coincide (though not coincidentally) with the band's very sound and personality. Keane is seen as a group of hard-working, down-to-earth musicians capable of melodically beautiful and catchy songs.

Radiohead and Kid A— The Avant-Garde Anti-Corporate Anti-Brand

Radiohead (Thom Yorke, Colin and Jonny Greenwood, Ed O'Brien and Phil Selway) first came to prominence in 1992 when they signed to EMI/Capitol and released their first single: "Creep". This single and its b-sides were subsequently released on Radiohead's first full-length album, *Pablo Honey* (1993). Though, initially, the album and the band went rather unnoticed in England, heavy touring and the surging popularity of "Creep" in the U.S. helped Radiohead achieve gold status with *Pablo Honey*. The release of *The Bends* (1995) and *Ok Computer* (1997) further positioned Radiohead as a band to keep an eye (and ear) on. The band's fourth album though, seemed to take fans and critics by surprise. *Kid A* (2000) adhered to few rock traditions; guitars were almost completely absent and machine-generated bits and beats took precedence over vocals and drums. Though many were unsure

how to react to Radiohead's "new" musical direction, the band's next two albums, *Amnesiac* (2001) and *Hail to the Thief* (2003), continued to explore and combine eclectic influences and instruments with counter-cultural lyrics. In addition to audio releases, the band has maintained a website for over seven years and has released three "films": a collection of videos from *The Bends* and *Ok Computer*, a documentary of the band on tour called *Meeting People is Easy* and a collection of short films entitled *The Biggest Lying Mouth of All*.

Radiohead's longer history makes their case different, and in some senses, more difficult than Keane's. On the one hand, the Radiohead brand is better defined since, in Holt's (2004) words, their "material markers" have had more time to fill. On the other hand, like many great brands, Radiohead has evolved over the years. It is difficult to understand their brand using only *Kid A* as an example. The album falls three years after *Ok Computer*, which was at the time and is still, heralded as one of the greatest rock albums of all time (Smith 2000a: 10). The intensive touring and press junkets in support of *Ok Computer*, wonderfully documented in *Meeting people is Easy*, caused a near breakdown in the band (Smith: 10). The hype and pressure surrounding the follow-up album was equally meltdown-inducing. Three long years later, Radiohead delivered *Kid A*, an album that is as much a reaction to the experience of wearing the "World's Greatest Band" moniker as it is anything else. With all that had happened with *Ok Computer*, Radiohead did not want to release *Ok Computer, Version 2.0*.

As a result, *Kid A* is a different album. More importantly for the purpose of this thesis, the marketing for this album was also significantly different than previous Radiohead albums and indeed most other popular music albums. Radiohead did not want to do the regular marketing blitz of videos, radio promotions, ads and interviews that traditionally accompany album launches; instead they decided to release very little information about *Kid*

A. Radiohead refused to make traditional music videos, refused to pre-release radio singles and did very little touring in support of the album. Instead they held private listening parties and used their website to keep dedicated fans posted on the development of the new album. Staying secretive about *Kid A* created an air of mystery and intrigue that surrounded the album and became an important statement about the band's attitude. Far from a lack of marketing, as some might have seen it, *Kid A*'s anti-marketing said an enormous amount about the Radiohead brand and served to create intense hype for the album.

The Creative Subsystem – "Idioteque"

At a time when the prevalence of "alternative" music in the mainstream had made the term "alternative" laughable, Radiohead appeared to be exploring real alternatives on *Kid A*. Heavily reliant on electronic sounds and non-traditional rock instruments (e.g. horns, Ondes-Martenot, etc.), *Kid A* leaves behind most of the attributes that made Radiohead famous. Guitars are practically absent and Yorke's voice is often barely recognizable as a voice, let alone his. Choosing a "representative" song is virtually impossible; after all, no singles were officially released to radio. "Idioteque" surfaces as one of the more popular tracks but, along with the rest of the album, it represents a different experience for fans. If Radiohead's audience was previously a core of college rock fans, then it is understandable that "Idioteque" would have represented a significant sonic challenge for listeners.

The first feature that strikes one listening to "Idioteque" is the driving, electronic, drumbeat (listen to Appendix 5). The heavy thud of the repetitive drum loop is more reminiscent of a dance club than a rock arena and lays bare influences from electronica and "art-music". Lasting 5min09sec, "Idioteque" is still not the longest song on the album. There are four longer songs which makes half of the album un-playable at most radio stations. "Idioteque" begins with a musical intro that lasts an entire minute before Yorke begins

singing. The intro establishes the two main elements of the song: the drum beat and the synthesizer sample (taken from Paul Lansky's "Mild und Liese"). The sample gives an atmospheric sound to the song while static, vocal samples and other garbled electronic noises round out the sonic landscape. Yorke's vocals, when present, are relatively far back in the mix though they are still a focal point of the song (unlike on the title track). The melody meanders in free-form manner overtop of the looped beat and synthesizer sample.

The electronic back beat stays virtually the same for the entire song. Extra percussive elements provide added variation to the second verse. The synthesizer sample is also present for the majority of the song, though it drops out for the second verse and for the bridge at 3min11sec. Yorke's vocals stop after the second chorus and the bridge begins. A reversed synthesizer sound rings and the kick drops out of the beat. A new element enters at this point. It is an indescribable high-pitched sound that vaguely resembles whale noises. This haunting new noise plays for a few bars as percussive elements and the synthesizer sample gradually get layered back into the beat. Yorke's vocals reappear at 4min18sec panned way to the right and still further back in the mix. Although there is comfort in the return of lyrics, the voice is sampled and fragmented. The song ends as the beat and vocals drop out at 4min55sec. The haunting sound introduced at the bridge then carries the listener out of "Idioteque" and seamlessly into the next song on the album.

"Idioteque's" lyrics are relatively abstract and non-linear (see Appendix 6). Rather than telling a story, as in the case of "Somewhere Only We Know", "Idioteque's" lyrics are most aptly compared to connected fragments of poetry. The images evoked are somewhat apocalyptic in nature; "bunkers", "ice age", "women and children first", all suggest some impending disaster. As Yorke screams "this is really happening" the listener gets the sense that the world has indeed imploded and the protagonist is perhaps the only one left. This

may explain why the “I” character exclaims in the chorus: “here I’m allowed (possibly alive)/everything all of the time”. Another interesting interpretation of the song could come from the title’s play on words. A mashing of the words “idiot” and “discothèque”, the title is well-suited for the driving, repetitive beat and the other electronic elements of the song. Yorke and company may be commenting upon the frivolousness of the club scene.

Regardless of which interpretation is stronger, a broader social commentary appears to be at work in “Idioteque”. Rather than focusing on the self, “Idioteque’s” lyrics, along with the rest of *Kid A*, seem to explore broad, global issues. Abstract in nature, fragmented and non-linear in form, the lyrics and their meaning are not instantly accessible. Compared to Radiohead’s first mainstream hit, “Creep”, “Idioteque’s” sonic and lyrical characteristics reveal an interest in new instruments and new means of making music for Radiohead that challenges the genre to which the band has been assigned.

The Managerial Subsystem – Packaging, Video and Web

Figure 8 - Front cover of Radiohead’s *Kid A*

Kid A’s cover features the band name in red and the album name in white (see Fig. 8). The Radiohead logo has been consistent since their second album. Interestingly, their first album featured a different wordmark; a lowercase band name with a black circle around the r of Radiohead. The font was “fuzzy” like television static, suggesting an almost un-

styled design. The “r” mnemonic was used on-stage and in other early promotional material. Comparatively, the new logo is cleaner, more stylized and less grungy in contrast.

Below the logo is an endless mountain chain of snow-capped peaks. There is a foreboding barren-ness to the cover; two of the mountains have fire exploding from their peaks. Inside, the images of mountains, snow and fire all recur in different forms. There are also several shots of barren and desolate landscapes. Hand drawn images of humans and of strangely menacing teddy bear figures are also visible. There is no band photo and no text, save for the second last page, which features production credits and copyright information. The booklet is approximately 12 double-sided pages, though obtaining the page count is made difficult by the complex layout. Folds within folds need to be opened in order to view the artwork that adorns both sides of each page. As a whole, the images are dark and dreary. Like the lyrics of “Idioteque” the packaging seems to be an artistic comment on the threat or reality of impending disaster.

A limited edition version of the CD, given to early buyers, also came with a second, hidden booklet. Located between the back case and the plastic tray that holds the disc, the hidden booklet contains 6 more double-sided pages of artwork. The artwork stands in slight contrast to the album packaging. Instead of barren landscapes, the hidden booklet is primarily text interspersed with violent hand drawn scribbles. The drawings resemble those of a demented comic strip. A teddy bear head with menacing teeth, for example, recurs several times. The text is cryptic fragments, some of which are lyrics, most of which are not. The fragments range from expressions of alienation and anxiety (e.g. “I didn’t really cut it/too much of a coward” or “CCTV in every room”) to anti-corporate and anti-consumerist thoughts (e.g. “I dine on only the premium brands” or “He will tell you how hard he is trying/but we’re all on the market now”). There is also a portrait on the second last page that

some say resembles a diabolic version of Tony Blair (Perry 2000: 5). The hidden booklet, with the reference to Blair and the anti-consumption/anti-corporate thoughts, completes the picture of Radiohead initiated with the regular CD packaging. These elements of the brand are further explored in the other marketing elements of this album.

Figure 9 - Images from *Kid A*'s video blips

Although by 2001 high quality music videos had arguably become an important part of the Radiohead brand, no videos accompanied the release of *Kid A*. Along with refusing to release any official radio singles for the album, Radiohead carried this marketing tactic into the video realm (Siegler 2000: 80). Instead of traditional 3-5 minute music videos, Radiohead released a series of animated “blips” (watch Appendix 7). The 15-20 second clips featured images from *Kid A*'s packaging and website cut to various sounds from the album. Dozens of video blips were created and ran as mini-commercials on video stations such as MTV and Much Music. The blips share the ominous tones of the CD artwork. They also share a similar end shot, that of a menacing teddy bear (see Fig. 9). It is the one linking device between the videos and it also ties back to the CD booklets and the website. Relative to how music videos are normally presented, the avant-garde and challenging nature of the video blips, both in form and in content, mirrors the difficulties presented by the artwork, lyrics and music of *Kid A*.

Figure 10 - Images from Radiohead's Website at the launch of *Kid A*

Whereas most band websites (certainly the ones analyzed here) feature links to band photos, biography, discography and audio/video download pages, Radiohead's site is a maze of confusion to the uninitiated. The design and theme of the site changes over time – typically in conjunction with album releases – and each new site has its own navigational challenges. By clicking on an archives link, www.radiohead.com/archive.html, fans can visit previous versions of the site. While many of the attributes I discuss below apply to many of the site's iterations, my analysis refers specifically to the site at the time *Kid A* was launched.

Fully taking advantage of the properties of hypertext and the infinite space the web provides, Radiohead's website defies cohesion and resembles more a labyrinth than an information site. If there is a "point" to the site, the band shares it on one of the splash pages for the *Kid A* site: "www.radiohead.com – as useful as a chocolate fireguard™" (Radiohead.com). The *Kid A* site begins with the following links: Help, News, W.A.S.T.E., Theme Park, More Info and No Data. The "Help" section is Radiohead's best attempt at guiding users through the site but the first advice it offers users is "I can't really help very much" (Radiohead.com). "News" simply links users to other sites that might have news on Radiohead and the "More Info" link is about as useful; it is actually a disclaimer for users

who are not enjoying their experience at Radiohead.com. The “W.A.S.T.E.” link is the official place to buy Radiohead gear as well a place to find links to other useful websites and organizations. Radiohead seem to be poking fun at themselves by labeling their merchandise waste, offering users a knowing wink that while they may be anti-corporate, they still need to sell CD’s, books, clothing and other art to make a living. The “W.A.S.T.E.” section also links users to the numerous Radiohead fan sites.

The “No Data” link presents users with a marketing survey which satirically collects data on “consumer lifestyles, personal habits, opinions, sexual preferences, hidden fears, looming terrors, crushing humiliations, tearful recriminations and unfulfilled ambitions” (Radiohead.com). Here Radiohead tastefully mock consumer surveys, marketing and corporations who rely on consumer research. “Theme Park”, the crux of the site, is where things get particularly complex. There are dozens upon dozens of links and pages here; instead of a page by page description, key attributes are highlighted below:

Hypertextuality – There are so many links that one can get lost easily and frequently during any one visit. Sometimes pages contain only one link other times there is an absolute defiance of linearity as links lead down many divergent pathways. In many cases, links are hidden or difficult to find.

Social Commentary – There is a significant amount of text on the site; sometimes album lyrics, but often text that is exclusive to the website. The writing is incredibly cryptic, but there is a distinct political thread of anti-globalization, anti-corporation and pro-environment running through their site. Further evidence of Radiohead’s beliefs can be seen in the various links to political causes and organizations such as www.corpwatch.org, www.freetibet.org and www.altenergy.org.

Artwork – Like their CD packaging and music videos, the website relies heavily on artwork and design. Generally abstract in nature, the artwork is far from posed photos or band pictures. It forces users to think about the interplay between the images and the text.

The decision not to release singles or videos for *Kid A* presented Radiohead as distinctly un-corporate and this image is clearly visible on the website. Even though there is a large Radiohead “store” available to users, the difficulty in finding the merchandise (waste)

and indeed any other concrete information on the site makes it seem as if Radiohead does not actually want to sell you anything. The site is virtually useless with respect to providing details about the band; questions such as how Radiohead began, when they are playing next and what they look/sound like are never answered. Instead the site offers fans a different kind of interaction. As one biographer points out:

For them the Internet is really the future of music. Thom wrote much of Kid A while hanging out on the Internet [so] it's really become about more than just promoting their music. [They] often promote their political ideas and causes they believe in on their Web site, telling fans what books and albums they think we should read and listen to (qtd. in Hooper 2000: 9).

Visiting Radiohead.com is best done without a goal in mind. Rather, it is a chance to experience the band in another medium. Oddly, the band is not available on iTunes or Napster; two of the most popular legitimate electronic download sites. Thus, their official site is an integral part of Radiohead's branding despite (or perhaps, as a result of) the fact that all its iterations defy the conventions of a typical band website.

The Communication Subsystem – Reviews of Radiohead

Critics have a tough time describing *Kid A*; instead they describe its complexity. It is “a mystifying experience” (Sweeting: 20) which is “unremittingly intoxicating” (Wagner 2000: 10), “daring and provocative” (Smith 2000b: 21), “challenging, utterly bewildering, adventurous and willfully uncommercial” (Gundersen 2000: 1). For Radiohead, the album “marks a defiant, even perverse departure” (Gundersen: 1) and sounds more like “a score composed for an experimental dance troupe” (Sweeting: 20) than it does a Radiohead album.

The complexity of the album is usually seen as a good thing: “Any album that gives up all of its secrets in the first go-round isn't built to last” (Fricke 2000: 86). Similarly, *The Village Voice* credits *Kid A*'s complexity: “It's...really different. And oblique oblique oblique: short, unsettled, deliberately shorn of easy hooks and clear lyrics and comfortable

arrangements. Also incredibly beautiful” (Wolk: 73). *The Washington Post* disagrees, arguing that the album is purposefully obtrusive: “There’s no telling what planet Thom Yorke is on [...] ‘Kid A’ is in no rush to impress, and it won’t mind if you don’t fall in love with it or care about its mumbly freakout on the other side of the Milky Way” (Segal: 1).

Segal’s response, though perhaps a touch hyperbolic, is not uncommon. Even reviewers who love the album can’t help but wonder if Radiohead is intentionally trying to alienate their fans: “Kid A is liable to sorely test the sonic palate of Radiohead’s core fan base - to destruction, in some cases.” (Gill: 13). *Kid A* “has been widely interpreted as Radiohead’s conscious attempt to alienate their fans. Look, it seems to say, hardly any guitars, not much singing, and yellow, unbrushed teeth still fancy this?” (Romney: 13) More to the point: “[With *Kid A*,] they’re giving their core constituency the biggest, warmest recorded go-fuck-yourself in recent memory” (Wolk: 73).

There is significant focus in the reviews on the music and the sounds of the album. This feeds into discussions of the album’s avant-garde nature. The album’s “arresting off-kilter rhythms” (Everett-Green: 4), result in a “bizarre collection of electronic ‘tunes’, with a miserly scraping of guitars, a whispering of incomprehensible lyrics [...]” (Romney: 13) influenced more by the likes of “John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Kraftwerk and Can” (Smith 2000b: 21) than by anyone in the rock canon. The instruments, noises and song structure are all dissected more vigorously in the case of Radiohead reviews than any of the other bands examined here. “Other worldly keyboard textures [...] horn cacophony [and] carnivorous noises” (Paoletta: 22) mean that:

Rather than songs as we’ve come to understand them, with verses, choruses and middle eight proceeding in orderly manner from introduction to resolution, these 10 tracks are more like exercises in the emotional weight of sound in space, comparable to more avant-garde undertakings (Gill: 13).

In all, *Kid A* comes across as “a kind of virtual rock in which the roots have been cut away, and the formal language – hook, riff, bridge – has been warped, liquefied and, in some songs, thrown out altogether. If you’re looking for instant joy and easy definition, you are swimming in the wrong soup” (Fricke 2000: 85).

Almost all critics note the lack of guitars and the muted vocals of Thom Yorke (the two attributes that the band has arguably built its fame upon): “on Kid A they have abandoned their tried and tested brand of angsty, guitar rock for electronic swirlings and guitar-free sounds” (Perry: 5) or “for a guitar band, there are precious few bouts of guitar pyrotechnics. For one of rock’s more distinctive voices, Thom Yorke does little untreated singing” (Gill: 13). Reviews also focus on the anti-corporate sentiments that lie at the heart of the album and the band’s anti-marketing strategy. It is as if Radiohead, through their album content and their marketing tactics, is trying to “promote small -- but growing -- challenges to authority being made by a generation raised on a steady diet of advertising” (Hooper: 9). Although Radiohead is housed at one of the world’s largest recording labels, critics paint the band as stars who would rather not be. Yorke is described as “a rock star uncomfortable with the demands placed on him by the music industry” (Hooper: 9). Part of Radiohead’s appeal appears to be their critique of dominant ideologies, despite the fact they live the life of major label recording stars.

The number of informal customer reviews for *Kid A* at Amazon.ca is positively overwhelming. With a total of 1873 consumer reviews, they eclipse all the other bands studied here. Over 250 of those reviews appeared on the very first day of its release. The average rating for the album is 4.2 out of 5 stars but consensus is far from universal. Reviews were still being posted in March, 2005. The length of reviews is also surprising as fans submit page-long reviews of the album.

Customer reviews praise Radiohead for pushing boundaries. The album is described as “a master work if ever there was one, radiohead has created something to behold in wonderment” (Amazon.ca 2005b: Brain, Oct. 3, 2000). Radiohead is seen as “a band that refuses to bend in the direction of culturally-accepted norms” (Christen, Oct. 3, 2000). Another reviewer adds that “it is hard to find a rock band that is daring enough to step into this territory” (MaddKhameleon, Oct. 3, 2000). Not everyone agrees of course. Some find *Kid A* shallow and fake and suggest that “how much you’ll like it depends on how well you tolerate pretentious art” (Acustomer, May 26, 2004). Others see it as “pointless, redundant, possibly the worst form of per capita matter that has ever taken up space on this earth” (Mike Young July 19, 2004). Luckily, there are plenty of fans to defend the album’s greatness: “If you don’t like this album, have you considered that it might be you, not them that’s the problem?” (x_cjunkie, March 25, 2005)

Most reviewers point out that it is a departure for Radiohead: “Ok, first off this is nothing you’d expect from Radiohead. It’s a lot like an experimental electronica album with just a track or two that remind you that this is Radiohead” (Avnish Jasmat, Oct. 3, 2000). There are also plenty of comparisons to Radiohead’s earlier work, with most reviewers surprised the band could better their previous efforts: “Man, I didn’t know how Radiohead could top *Ok Computer* (much less my favorite album of all time, *The Bends*), but I never expected them to just go in a completely new direction!” (Michael, Oct. 3, 2000)

As with the formal press, fans also spend significant time discussing the music and sounds of *Kid A*. Several reviewers offer mini musical analyses of several of the songs:

Kid A [the song, not the album] comes in with a riff on a treated piano and again has vocals so distorted they are almost a texture. ‘The National Anthem’ slams in with an almost punkish bass riff and is the most tension-filled songs on the disc [...] ‘In Limbo’ is [...] a gorgeous, echoey arpeggiated guitar riff/loop with touches from a Fender Rhodes [sic] (Tom, Oct. 3, 2000).

This leads reviewers to commend Radiohead for their artistic vision and for staying un-corporate: “in an age where trivial pop runs rampant, consider it refreshing when bands like these take the artistic lead without the fear that no one will follow” (David Oct. 3, 2000). For fans looking for something to believe in beyond manufactured pop, “there ARE torchbearers such as Radiohead amongst the corporate puppets” (Nathan, Oct. 3, 2000). Some skeptics, however, see Radiohead as pure charade, dismissing the idea of anti-corporate:

The people who are giving this album five stars are people who call themselves ‘anti-corporate,’ hiding behind such facades as ‘if you like Kid A don’t listen to Britany Spears’ or ‘not for people who listen to corporate radio’ or ‘this is a very deep and emotional album.’ [...] You think it’s groundbreaking? The ground has been broken by bands like Rush and Sigur Ros [two other bands]. Why do overrated bands get to produce crap like this and sell millions of copies? Because the sheepish people who don’t consider themselves sheep because they listen to ‘abstract’ music buy it in order to get their ‘anti-normal points.’ (Mike Young, July 19, 2004)

Despite formal and informal reviews dismissing the album, the emotions it sparks in both fans and critics speak for themselves. The boundaries Radiohead is attempting to push, pretentiously or not, create controversy in the communication subsystem. Avant-garde, innovative and anti-corporate are attributes that surface in both the formal and informal reviews of the album. Radiohead is described as a progressive and challenging band; miles from their guitar-laden alt-rock beginnings. *Kid A*, in reviews, is difficult (in a good way) and loaded with unique and unlikely influences (e.g. jazz and electronica). With *Kid A*, the critics treat Radiohead as a band synonymous with groundbreaking and pioneering work.

Summary

After the pressure of releasing, *Ok Computer*, a fantastically received and widely popular rock album, Radiohead responded by creating the completely unexpected *Kid A* and

marketing it atypically. The music is difficult in the sense that it is not what Radiohead fans are used to hearing from Radiohead. From the hidden album booklet to the cryptic lyrics to the labyrinth-like website, Radiohead demands time from its listeners. Much like the CD packaging, it's as if the point of *Kid A*, and its associated marketing materials, is to get lost in the folds. By choosing not to market the album in conventional ways, Radiohead showed that they were pushing not only musical boundaries, but boundaries of traditional music product marketing. Radiohead comes across not as a brand, but as an anti-brand; an avant-garde group of musical pioneers who define genres rather than adhere to them.

U2 and How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb— Grandiose Global and Political Rock

A quarter of a century after the launch of their first album, U2 (Larry Mullen Jr., Adam Clayton, “Edge” a.k.a David Evans and “Bono” a.k.a Paul Hewson) have become one of the most globally recognized bands. U2 originally formed in 1976 as a cover band in Dublin, Ireland (Erlewine 2004). They have since released fourteen albums and will likely go down in history as one of the most influential pop rock bands of the 80s, 90s and 00s. Early in their career the band earned attention for their “sweeping, atmospheric but edgy sound” and for their “public embrace of Christianity” (Erlewine). Early songs from *Boy* (1980) and *War* (1983) laid the foundation for the political over and undertones that would subsequently become an important part of U2’s career: “their righteous political stance soon became replicated by many other bands, providing the impetus for the Band Aid and Live Aid projects in 1984 and 1985, respectively” (Erlewine). The mid to late 80s saw the release of some of U2’s most popular material including *The Joshua Tree* (1987) and *Rattle and Hum* (1988). The 90s saw U2 depart from its trademark sound and style and explore with electronic dance club sounds and self-reflexive larger-than-life imagery. After playing with

their image as global superstars in the late 90s, they seem to have returned to their roots with their first two albums of the new millennium.

As with Radiohead, U2 has been around for a long time by pop music standards. U2 is a well-known and well-established brand with numerous loyal customers. While *Kid A* was seen by some as a departure from the Radiohead brand, U2's latest album, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (*HTDAAB*), is seen as a return to what U2's brand is really about. There has been a huge marketing push for *HTDAAB* which includes a series of brand building initiatives (e.g. a website re-design, a special edition DVD, and a high-profile partnership with Apple's iPod), making it an interesting case for analysis.

The Creative Subsystem – “Vertigo”

The opening track and first single from *HTDAAB*, “Vertigo”, is unabashed rock (listen to Appendix 8). At 3min18sec, “Vertigo’s” crisp production and catchy guitar hooks are ripe for radio. The song features a traditional rock lineup: guitar, bass, drums and vocals. While there are slower ballads on *HTDAAB*, this first single is the epitome of U2's brand of rock; it simultaneously signifies selections from across U2's catalogue. As U2's bassist explains: “With ‘Vertigo’ we really wanted to have a vital, up, rock’n roll sort of track” (U2.com). The following musical analysis confirms this is exactly what they got.

“Vertigo” begins with a four count lead-in from the drummer's sticks. This gesture is a staple at live rock shows. On the album, since it is the first sound we hear, it has added significance; U2 is here and ready to rock. Bono's vocals quickly chime in with another four count, though he plays with the traditional “1, 2, 3, 4” by counting in Spanish: “uno, dos, tres, catorze” (one, two, three, fourteen). The electric guitar riff, the main musical hook of the song, is introduced immediately after Bono's count. The guitar is distorted but crisp and the riff is repeated several times during the intro. As the riff fades, the drums and bass take

over and Bono sings the first verse. Muted guitar strums provide an extra rhythmic element and precipitate the return of the electric guitar for the chorus. The first chorus kicks in with Edge's distorted guitar chords sustaining noisily throughout. Vocal fills also give the chorus an extra dynamic as (presumably) Edge interjects in Spanish ("Hola"). Bono's vocal line intensifies and culminates with a scream at the end of the chorus ("...I can feeeeeeel").

The second verse, noticeably less dynamic than the chorus, is similar to the first though slightly longer. The second chorus is followed by a bridge where Edge introduces another guitar line and Bono shouts barely discernable lyrics. A sweeping phase effect on the distorted guitar provides the build as the bridge climaxes with the solo. The solo features a clean tone and ringing delayed electric guitar; this is Edge's signature sound.

Edge's solo leads listeners into the second bridge, where the song takes a darker turn (relative to the rest of the song). Bono's lyrics are spoken here, not sung; this gives them a slightly menacing tone. After Bono's line, "and no one gets hurt", all sound stops briefly before the entire band kicks in with the last chorus. The song then returns to the lead riff and Bono howls: "yeah yeah yeah". This dynamic outro continues until Edge strums the final chord, which is sustained until he slides his hand off the guitar, leaving nothing but noise from his guitar amp to finish the song (another staple move at live rock shows).

The lyrics (see Appendix 9) serve to describe Vertigo both as a feeling and a place:

It's a dizzy feeling, vertigo, a sort of sick feeling, when you get up to the top of something and there's only one way to go – that's not a dictionary definition, that's mine. And in my head I create a club, called Vertigo, with all these people in it, and the music is just not the music you want to hear, the people are not the people you want to be with (U2.com).

In Vertigo the club, the only object of interest is the "you" figure from the chorus, who takes on a more tangible nature in the second verse: "The girl with crimson nails/ Has Jesus

round her neck”. A small piece of salvation in a superficial dance club, this girl appears to be the one thing that gives the protagonist “something I can feel”.

Perhaps the most interesting lyrical aspect of this song occurs during the second bridge. Up until this point, the song has been fairly straightforward rock with generalized lyrics and catchy aphorisms. But the second bridge causes listeners to wonder what Bono means when he speaks (not sings) “All of this/all of this can be yours/Just give me what I want/and no-one gets hurt...” It is unclear whether “you” is the same figure from before or someone new. It is also unclear what is wanted or what (s)he might do if (s)he doesn’t get it. A hint of fear in the song, however, is not unusual, considering Bono’s aim for the song:

Fear, paranoia, these are the type of things we wanted from ‘Vertigo’. [...] These are nervous times, they really are, you turn on the news, you think ‘Wow, who’s next? My brother, my sister, my uncle, my aunt’ ...nervous times (U2.com).

Luckily, the final chorus claims “*we’re* at a place called vertigo” as opposed to “I’m” from earlier choruses. This suggests a somewhat happy resolution for the protagonist and the “you” figure. They may be in a superficial club, feeling disoriented and dizzy, but at least they are there together.

“Vertigo” presents U2 as a flat out rock’n roll rock band. The repeated guitar riff, song length and song structure all contribute to a song built to be a lead single. Politics and religion are not as overt in this offering – certainly compared to their earliest work – yet traces surface here (e.g. “Jesus round her neck”). Although early mixes of the song contained stronger politics, Steve Lilywhite, the producer for Vertigo stripped the song of much of its politics in an effort to increase its radio-friendliness (Tyrangiel 2004). Other tracks from *HTDAAB*, however, maintain their political edge. As a result, “Vertigo” reminds one of a tamer version of an old U2 song but still manages to sound like something new. Each band member seems to be playing his instrument in his signature style.

Figure 11 - Front cover of U2's *HTDAAB*

HTDAAB has a 12 page double-sided booklet. Photos and lyrics appear over a black background with red stripes. The red stripes are slanted and give the impression of a hazard or warning sign. The front cover features a medium-close black and white/sepia photo of the four band members seated outdoors near some type of building (see Fig. 11). Three of the four members are wearing sunglasses. The band's name and the album title appear above the photo in white text and capital letters. The font is different from their last albums. Other than the capitalized U2, there is little consistency in how their name appears from album to album. The compact disc itself also has an image worth noting; it is a bull's-eye with alternating black and red circles (see Fig. 12).

Inside the album cover, there are more band photos. Seven of the twelve pages feature photos of the band members. All the shots are in black and white/sepia. Unlike the clear picture on the front cover, the inside photos appear grainy and digitized; it is almost as if they are photos taken by a satellite that has been tracking the band. The photos are of a non-descript location; most likely a barren industrial zone. The red hazard stripes also appear over many of the pictures.

The pictures are interspersed with lyrics and production credits for every song. Not only is information provided about who plays what instrument and who mixed what song, but there are thanks to the many people involved in the production of the album. There is also a dedication to Bono's father, who passed away while U2 was touring for its last album. This dedication is complemented by "Sometimes you can't make it on your own", the third single from *HTDAAB*, which deals with the subject of Bono's loss.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the booklet is the list of not-for-profit organizations with which U2 is associated. Campaigns from Amnesty International, Debt, Aids, Trade, Africa (DATA), and Greenpeace are all highlighted. Addresses to all organizations are provided and taglines such as "Action speaks louder than words – join Greenpeace" or "For Freedom! For Burma! Take Action!" call listeners to action.

The name of the album and its design elements lend political overtones to this release. With "weapons of mass destruction" now infused in our collective lexicon, U2 offers this CD as a potential solution for disarmament. The red stripes that signify caution or hazard and the satellite shots of the band on a wasteland all evoke images of war and potential destruction. The alternating red and black circles on the CD itself simultaneously signal a target (bull's-eye) and a feeling of dizziness or vertigo. The lyrics in the booklet confirm the album's content is politically and religiously charged (e.g. "Love, Peace or Else" or "Yahweh"). The overt link with not-for-profits furthers the image of U2 as a politically engaged group of rockers. The heavy use of band photos is slightly surprising considering U2's global recognition. However, if this album is taken as a return to earlier days, the pictures serve as a potential re-branding. They aid in shifting perceptions back to U2 as a serious rock band interested in exploring political and personal issues through their music.

Figure 12 - Limited Edition DVD and booklet for *HTDAAB*

HTDAAB was available as a regular CD or as a special edition DVD. At approximately four times the price of the CD, the DVD is designed for dedicated fans. The DVD set includes the CD, a video documentary entitled “U2 and 3 songs” and 5 exclusive performances of tracks from *HTDAAB*. It also includes a 48 page hardcover booklet featuring illustrations, paintings and photography by U2. The DVD booklet (with its red and black cover) focuses more on U2’s politics than on their music or themselves; there are no lyrics and only two pages of band photos. The booklet is comprised of two sections: the first politicizes the threat and damage of bombs and wars, the second is a blueprint for change. The “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” is reproduced in this section and each page of the act has the imprint of a band member’s hand in finger paint.

The DVD documentary features in-depth interviews with band members and producers discussing song development and the production process for “Vertigo”, “Crumbs on the Table” and “Sometimes You Can’t Make it On Your Own”. There are also five exclusive performances of the above three songs. The DVD is almost exclusively focused on discussions of music (i.e. there are no questions about Bono’s love life, or what Edge does in his time off). Rather, interviews with the band focus on the music process, how songwriting progresses from idea to finished song and what the process means to U2.

Figure 13 - Video stills from “Vertigo”

The video for “Vertigo” is completely performance-based (watch Appendix 10). Set in a desert, there are no visible structures of any sort, other than instruments and equipment, for miles. The ground appears hard, made of dried sand or dirt, and there is a circular bull’s-eye pattern visible when the camera shows an overhead view. The band plays in the center of the target. The video begins with a wide shot to establish the location, but quickly cuts to individual shots of the band. U2 is all dressed in different outfits, but each member wears only black. Bono dons his trademark sunglasses; Edge his trademark toque. Mullen’s drum sticks count us in but the video truly begins when Edge’s crunchy guitar riff rings. At this point, the desert explodes with action as a sudden windstorm fills the screen with sand and dirt. The band plays on. As the sand storm dies down, the colour from the band’s clothing drags behind them, like a dark jet stream (see Fig. 13). The sand storm and the jet streams create a dynamic visual complement that reinforces the song’s charged intro.

As Bono’s lyrics begin, the jet streams subside from the band members, but the ground around them starts to change. Black streams of dirt arise from the ground in a circular pattern around the band. U2 plays their instruments vigorously even though the wind/sand storm from the intro resumes as they hit the first chorus. The second verse is similar but features a slightly different visual effect. The circular patterns on the ground

around the band actually begin undulating; it is as if the ground has become a series of dirt waves. The band, in the middle of all this activity, remains on flat ground as waves of dirt rise and fall around them.

Suddenly, during the bridge, circular chunks of ground rise up around the band, forming an amphitheatre-shaped arena with the band in the centre. The walls rise so high as to place the band in complete shadow. The darkness of the camera work mirrors both the moodiness of the music and the seriousness of Bono's lyrical delivery. As the bridge ends, Bono falls to his knees. The desert walls crash down around him and flatten into the original desert shape. With a quick cut to Edge as he strums the first chord of the chorus, the sand storm returns for the duration of the final chorus. As Bono finishes with "yeah yeah yeah yeah" he is again on his knees and the camera pulls out to reveal another wider, calmer shot of the band in the desert. The black sand streams and the sand storm have finally passed.

This video is undeniably performance focused. The visual effects are interesting but their role is secondary to the band's performance. The recurring use of the bull's-eye pattern visually brings the concept of vertigo to life. The circular pattern, especially when viewed from the overhead camera, gives a sense of dizziness. This feeling is further enforced as the ground starts undulating in wave-like forms throughout the video. The sand storm provides an explosion that matches nicely with the song's loud-rock feel.

U2's performance is dynamic and active even though there is no audience for miles (except of course the camera). Compared to Keane's introspective performance, Bono's gestures are much-exaggerated grandiose rock poses. He struts with a boastful swagger, falls to his knees as if overcome by the music, and assumes a Christ-pose as he is pelted with sand and wind. The other musicians gesture equally, swaggering back and forth and jolting their guitars carelessly as they strum their notes. The drummer is the most reserved; his stone-

faced stare suggests he barely notices the commotion around him. It is as if his sole mission is to play the drums. Though U2 does not have matching outfits, they have clearly been styled for rock'n roll. The black of their outfits is further enhanced by the black sand and the digital jet streams. Three of the band members are sporting sunglasses, shielding their eyes from the desert sun and sand, but also from the camera. They give the impression they own this deserted patch of land. While Bono's lyrics address the materiality of being stuck in a crowded club, the video offers no hints of this. The barren nature of the location and the giant bull's-eye target speak instead to a post-bomb world where very little remains.

Figure 14 - Images from U2's current website

The size and scope of U2.com reflects the size and stature of the band as well as the marketing dollars behind them. The site covers virtually everything fans could ever hope to know about U2. The splash page is a half-page photo which changes upon each visit; it always features the red “hazard” stripes recognizable from the other marketing material (see Fig. 14). Upon entering the site, users are presented with a top graphic that resembles the cover of the CD packaging. The navigation bar gives users access to the following areas: Home, Tours, Tour Dates, Zootopia, Hearts +Minds, Digital Downloads, U2 Shop, Subscribe, News, *HTDAAB*, Gallery, Albums, Singles, Audio-Video, Lyrics, and Exclusives. The site has its own search engine as well as a members-only area that offers users “access to

our unique subscribers-only site which is packed with exclusive band content - from rare video, audio and downloads covering 20 years to exclusive band interviews and access to a huge searchable news archive" (U2.com).

"Tours" and "Tour Dates" give fans access to current shows as well as summaries and dates of all the past tours dating back to 1979. Included here are links to the band's tour diary, tour photos and fan reviews of previous concerts. Functional links such as "News", "Gallery", "Singles", "Audio-Video", and "Lyrics" offer what their titles suggest. Most notable is the extensiveness of the material available in each of these sections. The link to the most recent album, "HTDAAB", gives fans an in-depth look at the latest release while the "Albums" section contains the track listings and release dates for each of U2's fourteen albums. A synopsis of the band's sound and career at the launch of the respective albums is provided and audio/video previews are available for each album.

Other than these standard links, there are a few links of note on U2.com. "Zootopia" connects users to a discussion board where they can discuss band-related topics. The "Hearts + Minds" link begins with a Gandhi quote and displays the political and social causes with which U2 has become involved in over the years. As the site makes clear:

The music of U2 has always been about heart and mind, body and soul. Down the years the band have successfully thrown a spotlight on the work of key campaigning groups who are trying to make the world a better place. From Amnesty International and Greenpeace through to DATA and the Chernobyl Childrens Project, U2 have used benefit concerts, songwriting, public campaigning, special visits and fund-raising projects to promote a range of charities and activist communities worldwide (U2.com).

Here U2's political and social work is advanced as a key part of understanding the band's music. Links are provided on the left hand side of the page so that users can visit these various organizations and support them as well.

Despite their political commitment, the very commercial “U2 Shop” is only a click away. Limited edition lithographs of album covers and album art, over 5 pages of U2-related men’s, women and youth clothing, and other products like U2 mouse pads and calendars are available. Fans can also register with U2.com for \$40 per year. The “digital download” area also offers U2 merchandise, albeit in digital form. This link also advertises U2’s pioneering deal with Apple Computers, details of which are discussed below.

The Communication Subsystem – Apple Partnership and Reviews of HTDAAB

The launch of *HTDAAB* cannot be discussed without reference to U2’s partnership with Apple Computers. The timing of U2’s latest album coincided nicely with the launch of several new Apple products and as such the two created an integrated partnership seeking to boost sales for their respective products (Jobs 2004). To start the promotional train rolling, the album’s first single, “Vertigo”, was offered exclusively on iTunes one month before the album’s release. When it came time to launch the rest of *HTDAAB*, U2 decided not only to offer that album through iTunes, but virtually everything else the band had ever recorded. The effort marks the first-ever “digital box set” and contains a dizzying number of songs: “U2, U2.com and Apple have struck up a creative new partnership which means that U2 fans can now buy digital downloads of over 400 U2 tracks through iTunes” (U2.com). The digital box set was accompanied by the launch of a limited edition U2 iPod; a black and red iPod designed to match the album cover and website imagery. While some may find it hard to believe that 99 cent digital downloads will ever be profitable, U2’s entire digital catalogue costs \$150 (USD) and the U2 iPod retails for close to \$400 (USD).

Apple promoted their partnership with U2 through a series of print ads as well as a television spot. The television commercial, in line with previous iPod ads, features “silhouette” figures on vibrantly coloured backgrounds (see Fig. 15). For the U2 spot, the

featured silhouettes are not just everyday music consumers, they are the actual band playing their instruments. The guitar and microphone cords are iPod white. The camera work is much like a music video; close ups on individual band members and wide shots of the entire band playing against the backdrop. The spot is at once an ad for the iPod and a preview of “Vertigo”; it also serves to associate U2 with a technology brand that is currently extremely fashionable, especially among music consumers.

U2’s partnership with Apple is unprecedented on numerous fronts and speaks volumes about the U2 brand. The Apple brand itself has a long history as a brand for creative types, musicians, artists and intellectuals of the world who like to “think different”. Apple prides itself on simplicity and style and delivers this promise with every product it makes. By associating themselves with Apple, U2 undoubtedly gains some spillover image from Apple. Pioneers in their own right, U2 is able to partner with a massive global corporation yet still seem creative and unique. By associating themselves with this new style of music distribution, and by being open to alternative formats not available in the physical (as opposed to virtual) world (i.e. 400 song box sets), U2 comes across as a band that remains on the cutting edge of their industry, over twenty years after their first real success.

Figure 15 - The U2 iPod and a still from Apple’s ad campaign for Vertigo

Formal reviews of U2 unanimously focus on the fact that *HTDAAB* is a return to form for U2. The band appears to have emerged from their experimental phase and returned

to what they do best: creating epic rock'n roll. The new album "feels like nothing less -- or more -- than vintage U2, assembled from the best elements of *The Unforgettable Fire*, *The Joshua Tree* and *Achtung Baby*" (Stewart: 1). It is "quintessential U2, taken to the next level. The sound is bigger, the playing better, the lyrics sharper and the spirituality more compelling than anything the act has done in many years" (Robbins: 28).

The return to the U2 of yore is not embraced by all. *The Toronto Star* argues that *HTDAAB* sees "the band completely circling its wagons against the adventurous spirits that led *Achtung Baby* and *Zooropa* to such bold, unpredictable heights" (Rayner: 5). *The Independent* gives a similarly mixed review describing the album as a blend of the "pompous sincerity of their 80s incarnation" and their "ironic, self-aware 90s version" (Price: 24). The album "isn't downright atrocious - frustratingly U2 never quite are - but neither does it sparkle" (Price: 24).

Love it or hate it, critics agree that U2 is a grandiose rock band and that the massive sound of *HTDAAB* is a prime example of their anthemic nature. *The New York Times* calls it "an album that's ready to take on the world, with big tunes and benevolent thoughts that add up to unironic anthems" (Pareles 2004: 37) and *Rolling Stone* describes it as "grandiose music from grandiose men, sweatlessly confident in the execution of their duties" (Sheffield: 172). Some see this grandeur as delusion and argue that U2 has become nothing but ego: "rock's most self-assured advocates of grandeur affirmatively affirm their own affirmation [...] their sound keeps ballooning in proportion to their sense of importance" (Harris: 97).

Reviewers also address the band's political and spiritual take on universal themes: "During the course of *Atomic Bomb*, you will be urged to ponder death [...], birth [...], God [...], love [...], war [...] and peace" (Sheffield: 172). When the music is engaged, Edge's guitar work and Bono's vocals/lyrics are frequently referenced:

Bomb's majestic sweep owes much of its verve to the sparkle, thrum and roar of Edge's bold guitar. Larry Mullen Jr. excites and fattens the songs with a pugnacious thump, spiced by the steady, seductive bass of Adam Clayton. Bono, in peak form vocally and lyrically, sweats and bleeds passion... (Gundersen 2004: 1).

Informal reviews of the album are similarly mixed and emphasize the band's return to an earlier, more glorious state. The album receives an average rating of 3.8 out of 5 stars at Amazon.ca but surprisingly, there are only 24 reviews. In contrast to the other albums in this analysis, this number is strikingly low. Granted, their album is the newest of all the releases examined and more reviews are probably still to come. But they are also the biggest band in terms of mass popularity and appeal. This may speak to differences between the type of audience that posts on Amazon.ca and U2's core target or it may be an anomaly. Interestingly, newcomers Keane received four times the reviews on Amazon.ca. It should be noted that this ratio does not hold for the U.S. version of Amazon, where U2's album received three times as many reviews as Keane's.

Most favourable consumer reviews agree *HTDAAB* is some of U2's strongest work in a long time: "While Zooropa and Pop were about distancing themselves from everything they used to be about, *HTDAAB* is a resounding return to the U2 of old" (Amazon.ca 2005c: Marc Bertrand, Nov. 29, 2004). One reviewer believes the album is "a gem, and has elements included that are reminiscent of all the U2 eras" (gregbrucetaylor, Dec. 1, 2004). Others cannot seem to find the old U2 in the sounds: "They lost all of there feel that U2 is famous for. Garbage! [sic]" (John P. Molenaar, Dec. 17, 2004). This leads to disappointment and resentment:

Actually, to my ears, it has the feel of a set of recycled B-tracks - pieces that didn't make the grade for the album when they were written. Now they're collected in one place just in time for the Christmas season, 2004. Which leads to my one word description of this album: product [sic] (ACustomer, Dec. 31, 2004).

The music, where addressed, is generally discussed in terms of older albums and songs: “it has the rock feel of the newer stuff but the jangly guitar riff’s we grew to love on Pop” (ACustomer, Dec. 5, 2004). Those disappointed with the sound tend to be angry that they were duped by the lead single “Vertigo”. One reviewer laments that she “had high hopes for U2’s latest CD especially after hearing the blistering title track, Vertigo. Thinking it was just a preview of things to come, I was surprisingly disappointed” (Christine, Dec. 3, 2004). Another warns “If you are looking for upbeat tracks like ‘Vertigo’ to maintain throughout the entire album, think again” (ACustomer, Nov. 23, 2004).

Summary

HTDAAB is a politically charged accessible rock’n roll album from one of the world’s biggest bands. Compared to Radiohead’s anti-corporate politics and anti-marketing tactics, U2 seems quite happy to embrace corporate partners and affirm their role as global superstars. The grandiose gestures of the “Vertigo” video are equaled by the grandiose initiative of launching the first-ever digital box set and the first-ever artist branded iPod. Their politics are industry-friendly; their views and beliefs marketable enough to fill a 48 page booklet. U2 has worked throughout their career to maintain the discourse of authentic rockers with explicit political and religious leanings. They may have branched out in the late 90s but *HTDAAB*’s packaging, videos and website reveal a return to U2’s core brand ideas.

Wilco and Yankee Hotel Foxtrot— Artistic, Ambitious and Uncompromising

Wilco formed from the remnants of the Chicago roots rock band Uncle Tupelo. Originally comprised of Jeff Tweedy (guitar, lead vocals), Ken Coomer (drums), John Stirratt (bass), Max Johnston (mandolin, banjo, fiddle, and lap steel) and Jay Bennett (guitars), their first album, *A.M.* (1995), was similar to the sounds of Uncle Tupelo. *Being There* (1996),

Summerteeth (1999) marked slight departures for Wilco as they experimented with pop rock, alternative and even soul sounds. This earned them critical acclaim from the music press and their fans. Wilco was considered at the forefront of an alt-country movement; a genre that fused the storytelling and twang of country with modern rock sounds. By 2000, Johnston and Coomer had both left the band and new drummer Glenn Kotche was added to the line up in preparation for Wilco's fourth album, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. While Wilco had consistently pushed genre boundaries with their alt-country style, their fourth album was a significant departure in terms of sound and song structure. Wilco has continued their sonic explorations on their latest album, *A Ghost is Born*, which was released in 2004.

Yankee Hotel Foxtrot (YHF) makes for an interesting concluding case. Wilco is not a band of global stature like U2. Instead, they are what marketing types refer to as a "niche" brand. They have a small but loyal fan base but will likely never achieve U2's superstar fame and fortune. YHF features some of Wilco's signature country pop songs, but more often than not, it explores uneasy and unstable sonic textures and teems with odd sounds, noises and feedback. The making and marketing of YHF was a tumultuous process; a process which yielded an incredible story that is now an inseparable piece of the band's brand.

In the spring of 2001, Wilco had just completed a grueling recording process for YHF. Drummer Ken Coomer had been fired in 2000 without warning and replaced with Glenn Kotche. Guitarist Jay Bennett would leave shortly after finishing the album due to differences with the lead singer. Tensions were high within the band but they were excited about the finished album, which they sent off to their record label, Reprise records, in June, 2001. When Reprise finally got back to Wilco, they were less than impressed. Reportedly, executives at Reprise thought "the record was so bad it would kill Wilco's career" (Kot 2001: 2). Reprise "asked [Wilco] to make some changes [...they] told us more things needed to be

done for [the album] to be finished, and we said, ‘This is it. We’re done with this record and we’re happy with it’” (Tweedy qtd. in Kot: 2). Wilco’s refusal to change the album led to the parting of ways between band and label. Wilco was dropped from Reprise but allowed to retain the master copy of their album. Sans label, the album found its way onto the Internet. The band officially offered free downloads for a month, beginning Sept. 18th, 2001. *YHF* received immediate critical praise and fan support. It topped critics’ “Best of 2001” lists without even being officially released (Garritty 2002: 20)! New record labels rushed to sign the band (Kot 2004: 227). Wilco eventually, and ironically, re-signed with another Warner subsidiary, Nonesuch. Finally released in April 2002, *YHF* “became the biggest hit of Wilco’s career” (Kot: 228).

The story behind the album encapsulates many issues facing artists and the music industry at the end of the twentieth century. It is a story of a small band against a big, uncaring music industry; a tale of artists devoted to their craft versus multinational corporations whose only concern is the bottom line. It is music’s equivalent of David and Goliath. More importantly for this analysis, it is a story etched through music, press reviews, CD packaging, and a DVD documentary that paints a unique brand portrait of a popular music band. Fittingly, a review in *The Village Voice* acknowledges that “the story has been repeated so often it’s turned into a minor alt-rock myth” (Hoard: 75). We turn now to see how the marketing elements of *YHF* support or create this story.

The Creative Subsystem – “I Am Trying To Break Your Heart”

At 6min58sec “I Am Trying to Break Your Heart” is the second longest song on the album. The diversity of songs on the album makes it is difficult to find one that could be termed “representative”. However, as *YHF*’s opening track, “I Am Trying to Break Your Heart” offers an accurate premonition of what follows. The song is just three chords but

these lie over a noisy and dissonant collection of acoustic and distorted guitars, bright and muffled pianos and synthesizers, clean and effected drums (listen to Appendix 11). The track begins with a messy intro of ringing synthesizers, detuned piano keys, xylophone notes and odd percussive elements. These build and fade haphazardly; at one point the song seems to disappear before our ears despite being only thirty seconds old. About 45 seconds into the song, an acoustic guitar enters and establishes the chord progression. Slowly, the bass and drums join in. It's almost as if the beginning is a series of false starts until 1min05sec, where Tweedy's vocals commence and the song finally takes off.

The song's structure is more akin to a folk ballad than a rock song. Tweedy's melody lasts five verses before reaching what could be described as a chorus. Tweedy's vocals are usually accompanied by acoustic guitar, synthesizer, bass and drums, but the instrumentation differs for each verse. Verses are followed by instrumental breaks. A Rhodes keyboard, a cowbell and other instruments combine to provide a diverse sonic texture. The rhythm is also complex. The drummer devised "two separate but complementary rhythm lines on a trap kit and a set of hubcaps" using odd percussive elements like "floor tiles" and "tuned metal discs with a distinctive bell-like sound" (Kot 2004: 193). In addition, the breaks feature instruments that sound out of tune or incongruent with the others.

After the fifth verse, Tweedy sings the chorus backed only by the bass, a dissonant piano, and other sounds (best imagined as the plucking of detuned piano strings). During the chorus, sounds and instruments clash against each other, held together loosely by the bass and Tweedy's vocals. After the last line of the chorus (4min14sec), an extended instrumental break begins. After the dissonance which precedes it, the coherence of this section of the song relieves some musical tension and briefly allows the listener to find steadier footing. At about 4min55sec, the drums become effected and the piano seems increasingly dissonant. A

low synthesizer sound enters and results in a cacophonous drone of distorted drums and miscellaneous instruments; a drone which backs Tweedy's final verse (5min26sec). The remainder of the song is a noisy outro in which each instrument or sound seems to be in its own world. A sample from another track on the album, "I'm the Man Who Loves You", enters near the end, adding to the sonic confusion. The song ends in high pitch feedback.

Tweedy's vocals, like many of the instruments, sometimes seem slightly out of step with the rest of the song. He sings lazily and, sometimes, behind the beat. The melody is catchy, though, and helps drive the song. Generally taken to be "a minutely detailed portrait of the singer as blind drunk" (Fricke 2002: 71), the lyrics he mutters reference a lover which, for reasons unexplained, is no longer part of the protagonist's life (physically at least). Allusions to drinking are reinforced by Tweedy's almost-drunken vocal style. The chorus is perhaps the best example, where Tweedy's vocals reach a brief moment of clarity ("I am trying to break your heart") but then quickly fall back into lazy muttering ("but still I'd be lying if I said it wasn't easy"). The narrative sequence of the song also seems out of order as the protagonist drifts aimlessly through different memories of his loved one (see Appendix 12).

Together, the lyrics and sounds of "I Am Trying to Break Your Heart" contribute to a rather chaotic opening number. Dissonant notes, complex instrumentation and atypical song structure give this song, and indeed the rest of the album, much of its character. While this potentially ruins Wilco's chance at mainstream radio play, it serves to stress the band's drive to experiment with their sound and their genre. Wilco may have experimented with similar sounds and ideas on earlier albums (for example *Being There's* "Misunderstood"), but these exceptions become the rule on *YHF*. Underneath all the chaos and confusion of the sonic texture, though, lies a melody that is catchy enough for top forty lists. "I Am Trying to

Break Your Heart” lets listeners know that singable melodies are present on the album, but only for those who want to listen through Wilco’s noisy experiments.

The Managerial Subsystem – Packaging, Video and Web

Figure 16 - Front cover of Wilco’s *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*

Despite the fact that *YHF* was available online before the album was officially launched with packaging, it is worthwhile to examine how the CD was packaged when it finally received distribution in 2002. *YHF* comes with a 10 page double-sided booklet. The primary colours are beige, white, and black (see Fig. 16). Wilco’s name and the album title appear in lower case letters. The booklet contains song lyrics and “landscape” photos of Chicago, the city where the album was recorded. There are no pictures of band members.

The front cover of the booklet features an image or digitally manipulated photograph of the Marina City buildings in Chicago. They are unusually round, like corn on the cob, and appear almost as charcoal etchings. Inside the front cover is a full page photograph of another building. It is almost completely bleached out by the sun. The rest of the booklet features song lyrics interspersed with photos of various buildings in Chicago. Black and white film gives a classy and artistic touch to a photo of Chicago’s skyline or a downtown city street. An office tower extends endlessly towards the sky as the sun leaves other buildings in shadows.

The first flash of real colour occurs at the centerfold: a full page picture of water.

The blue of the water stands in stark contrast to the muted beige, black and white colours that run through the rest of the packaging. A photograph of the sky a few pages later offers another burst of colour, though its muted yellows, maroons and browns are not as vibrant as the bright blue water. On the final page reside the production credits. Wilco's description of themselves on this page reinforces the tensions that plagued the recording of this album:

"Wilco is/was Jeff Tweedy, John Stirratt, Leroy Bach, Glenn Kotche and Jay Bennett with Craig Christiannsen, Ken Coomer, Jessy Greene, Fred Lonborg-Holm and Jim O'Rourke."

Taken as a whole, it is impossible to ignore the emphasis on Chicago, especially on buildings that make up Chicago's downtown. In an odd twist, the original release date for *YHF* was supposed to be Sept. 11, 2001. Before tying the album's meaning irrevocably to terrorism and war, it is important to note that the songs and the photos that comprise the packaging were obviously completed some time before that fateful day. There is no way the album or packaging represents an intentional comment on Sept. 11th. However, since that day, buildings and cityscapes have presumably taken on a new kind of meaning within the American cultural consciousness. Songs with foreboding titles like "Ashes of American Flags" and "War on War" only further link the meaning of *YHF* to the greater context within which America found itself after the destruction of the World Trade Center. Tweedy himself acknowledges that "we made a record about America, and now it feels like these personal moments are politicized in a way I couldn't have imagined" (Kot 2004: 224). In this light, Chicago is not just a city; rather, it is a symbol for all cities in America.

The focus on cityscapes and lyrics in the packaging leaves little room for band photos. Although Wilco has been around for years, the absence of band photos is a noteworthy marketing tactic which warrants some discussion. Instead of helping listeners

understand the band through what they look like, the artistic architectural and landscape photographs help us understand the band through the types of images and art they appreciate. In fact, Wilco's follow-up album was launched along with an art book containing hundreds of photographs. This positions Wilco as a band that is interested in art as much as in music; a band that believes in the power of art to move and, potentially, change.

Figure 17 - Wilco's website for *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* (2002)

Although it is possible to get a glimpse of the Wilco website as it appeared during the launch of *YHF* (via www.archive.org), the links are incomplete. The following is thus an analysis of the current Wilco site (Wilcoworld.net 2005). Many of the basic links and design elements remain similar and, where useful, I refer to key elements of the *YHF* site.

A splash page similar to U2's introduces visitors to wilcoworld.net. A photo of Wilco playing live appears while links direct users to various sections: News, Shows, Records, Store, Photos, Roadcase, Info and Links. These eight headings appear in previous versions of the site (worded slightly differently). The site graphics mirror Wilco's current CD packaging. Wilco's site generally mimics the CD packaging but interestingly, the primary colours of the *YHF* site are orange, blue and grey; not beige like the CD (see Fig. 17). The "News" and "Shows" links provide what their name implies. "Records" provides details of Wilco's albums and offers sub-links to "Side Projects" and "Books". Members of Wilco

have, over the years, actively pursued other projects such as film scores and collaborations. Tweedy has released a book of poetry, and the band created a book of photography and a CD of unreleased recordings in conjunction with their latest album. This link confirms the band's interest in exploring artistic endeavours across diverse media.

It is somewhat contradictory, then, that the next link is so commercial in its aim. "Store" provides users access to an assortment of Wilco merchandise including baby and pet clothes, outerwear, hats, and accessories. Their CD's, books and side projects are also available here. The "Info" link provides details regarding their management and record label. These details are laid over a black and white photo of the band playing live. More pictures can be found by visiting the "Photos" link where there are a number of live and backstage shots of the band. All the shots are music related and feature band members with their instruments, with the exception of a shot of the band posing with Christopher Walken.

The "Links" page features over seventy links to radio stations, charitable causes, equipment manufacturers and other bands/people who Wilco support. Rather than overtly pushing their politics like U2, Wilco offers fans a chance to know what the band stands for through the associations found on this page. The "Roadcase" link features streamed audio and video from a recent live show. Rather than providing song clips (as at U2.com) or one or two complete songs (as on the Keane site), Wilco offer fans an entire hour long concert (updated every few months). Notably, the band appears to be using the Internet as a different kind of opportunity to interact with fans. Whereas U2 and Keane fans receive digitally the same experience they would physically at a record retailer's listening post, Wilco fans are able to access different musical experiences through the Wilco site.

Wilco, of course, is no stranger to offering music on their site. When they were dropped from their record label in 2001, Wilco immediately began streaming the album over

the web. Wilco's web manager describes the response as "tremendous" with about "200,000 visitors" during the streaming period (qtd. in Dechert 2002). In the absence of a record company, the website was instrumental in marketing and distributing Wilco's music. Tweedy is confident that the album's high sales figures – relative to previous Wilco albums – are in part the result of screening the entire album online (Carr 2005: 11). The passing of music from fan to fan became a key means for disseminating the album, which is likely why Wilco's website so enthusiastically supports unauthorized sharing of their music:

Wilco Announces Official Taping Policy: Wilco does permit audio taping of live performances. We do not allow direct patches into the soundboard. We also do not allow any type of video taping. We encourage the free trade of the music. We do not, however, encourage or support sale of these recordings (Wilcoworld.net 2001)

Undoubtedly, Wilco's loose sharing policy and their dedication to touring helped them gain massive support for an album that some deemed career-ending. To this day, Tweedy views the website along with other digitally enhanced offerings (e.g. bonus CDs) as a crucial part of the band's marketing strategy:

Every few months or so we put a new live show on our site for download. And between YHF and AGIB, we released some tracks exclusively on our site for free. We've been encouraged by the response. This has just become part of the way the band interacts with our audience. It's part of what we do now, and I don't think we're going to stop anytime soon (qtd. in Jardin: 2).

Wilco's website presents them as an artistic band that is music and art-oriented.

Although the site is significantly easier to navigate than Radiohead's, Wilco appears to strive for similar values. They present themselves as collective of musicians interested in music and art. Wilco's site, however, presents a more commercially-friendly interaction with fans. Not only is the site readily navigable, there are plenty of images and sounds fans can access to learn more about the band.

Users can also discover Wilco on iTunes. There is biographical information (including the saga behind *YHF*) and a picture of the band. iTunes also offers an exclusive EP containing 5 songs (4 of which are live recordings from the new album). Since Wilco has not had the push (or the drive) to achieve mainstream radio play, digital networks, be they legitimate or illegitimate ones, become incredibly important sources for distribution. Their online experiments help them achieve greater success and a wider audience.

The Communication Subsystem – DVD Documentary and Reviews of Yankee Hotel Foxtrot

No videos were released for *YHF*. Wilco has not been prolific in the music video category, primarily because they are not the type of band that warrants that heavy a marketing plan. The making of this album, however, was chronicled in a highly acclaimed documentary film by Sam Jones entitled, *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart* (2003b). Released at film festivals around the world just months after the launch of *YHF* and subsequently offered as a double disc DVD, Jones' film is an important accompanying piece to *YHF*. Jones' original intent was to create a movie about the making of a Wilco album, but the film quickly became the story of how *YHF* almost did not get made: "by the time I was done, half of the band had been fired, the band itself had been fired from their record company, and the record in question had been postponed for a year" (liner notes). The DVD intersperses studio and live performances with interviews and footage tracing the precarious development of the album. A trailer for the film, which also serves as a "live video" for "Heavy Metal Drummer", is included on the *YHF* CD.

The first thing viewers will notice about *I Am Trying to Break Your Heart* is the focus on sound and music. From the opening scene where Tweedy struggles to find his melody over a droning "noise", the sound quality is impeccable. Tweedy's pained vocals provide the perfect soundtrack to a film about the making of this album, a process that is displayed as

tortuous for all involved. Music and sound are not only crucial to the soundtrack, but the majority of the film footage depicts Wilco in the studio or with their instruments; they are almost always seen in the process of making music.

The next noticeable attribute of the film is the black and white treatment (see Fig. 18). Jones' choice of black and white film gives a distinct look which lends the documentary both artistic and authentic qualities. Chicago is again highlighted, both in the DVD menus and in the film itself. Wilco looks particularly comfortable in black and white, though the hand held camera work gives a gritty quality to the film which enhances the visible strain of the album-making process. Tensions run high as band members, Bennett in particular, struggle to assert themselves in the musical decision making process; typically Tweedy's domain. Tweedy suffers from migraines and one argument with Bennett over mixing leaves Tweedy vomiting in a studio bathroom. The process only becomes more arduous as Wilco gets dropped from their label and left with no guarantee for a release date of the album.

Throughout the DVD, Wilco is presented a group of dedicated musicians that stand for creativity, passion and music. As the film's opening lines suggest:

In some ways, they made their most ambitious record yet. And ambition is not synonymous with record sales [laughs] you know, this is not a [pauses] this is a masterful dense artistic statement. It could bomb (Ch. 1).

The music industry, on the other hand, represents censure, restriction and the power of business over music. Jones flatters his subjects but it is evident that Wilco is a hard-working band. The constant focus on Wilco at work and on the difficulties of being in a band provides a counter-narrative to the typical, and mythical, "rock star" lifestyle. For Wilco, music is their passion and their life but it is also their job. The film shows the highs and lows of Wilco's job reinforcing their do-it-yourself attitude and their unwillingness to bow down to corporate requests. Whether the documentary represents a balanced view of

the band or not or whether it succeeds as a documentary as opposed to a purely promotional video for the band are questions worth asking. Regardless of the answers though, the video is a window into the discourse that surrounds this band and this album.

Figure 18 - Stills from Sam Jones' DVD Documentary *I Am Trying To Break Your Heart*

Formal reviews of Wilco spend as much time discussing the making of *YHF* as they do discussing the album itself. With a story so compelling, it's no wonder the David versus Goliath thread weaves its way through almost every review. Wilco is consistently described as an ambitious and dedicated group of musicians whose hard-work has brought them mid-level success and critical acclaim (see for example MacMullin 2002; Pareles 2002). Reprise executives, on the other hand, are proof positive of “how screwed up the music business is in the early twenty-first century” (Fricke 2002: 71). Reprise is chided for claiming the record was “not commercially viable”, though there are never any direct quotes from Reprise to this extent (MacMullin: 3). The band's refusal to make changes endows them with ever-elusive “artistic integrity” and they are resoundingly seen as the “artistic underdog who triumphed over the music industry giant” (Wagner 2002: 3). Reviewers, not to mention the band, relish in the irony that Warner essentially paid for the same album twice (MacMullin: 3).

When critics describe the music, Wilco's efforts are seen as "adventurous and rewarding" (Garrity: 20). *YHF* is "a brilliant, challenging album" (Wagner: 3), which receives praise from most reviewers. A notable exception is the review in *The Village Voice*, which argues the album is "basically a good album, even a great album if you are in the mood, though [...] it probably won't be the most extraordinary album you'll hear all month" (Hoard: 75). Reviewers search for ways to categorize Wilco's music and labels like "alt-country" or "roots-rock" are thrown about, though generally as a means of describing what Wilco is not: "The album is an achievement that proves Wilco has officially flown from the alt-country pigeonhole, where the band's three previous albums [...], were neatly placed" (MacMullin: 3). Comparisons to Radiohead's *Kid A* abound, both in terms of musical daringness and sonic texture. *YHF* was rumoured to be "Radiohead's *Kid A* dressed in flannel and cow pie" (Fricke: 71). For reviewers "the Radiohead comparison makes sense. Feedback, bells, whistles, alarm clocks, found noise, plus great globules of piano, organ and other drones carve out an atmospheric space..." (Hoard: 75). But after all the comparisons, the consensus is that *YHF* is a "rock & roll record" (Fricke: 72) that explores a "complex pop-rock sound" (Perry: 35).

Consumer reviews of Wilco's album tell a similar story. Out of over 539 reviews at Amazon.ca, the album receives 4.1 out of 5 stars. Reviews begin on April 23, 2002 and continue into July, 2004. Earlier reviews make more reference to the story behind the album, either explicitly "Wilco's fourth proper release, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, has actually been out for around 6 months [...] their old label refused to release *YHF* because they thought it would ruin the band" (Amazon.ca 2005d: Jon, Apr 23, 2002) or implicitly "as you probably have heard, '*Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*' by Wilco was a long time coming" (from Boston, Apr. 23, 2002). Most reviewers defend Wilco's uncompromising stance: "Wilco stuck to their

artistic guns, weathered the storm of key members leaving and withstood an astonishing array of cut-throat tactics from their greed-house record label Reprise” (heavymetaldrummer, Apr. 23, 2002). Compared to the formal music press, it is surprising that not every review makes mention of the story behind the album. That being said, reading the reviews gives one the sense that users already know the story since they have already been involved with the album for some time: “I have been listening to Yankee Hotel Foxtrot for four months now after burning it off the internet” (mookiew, Apr. 23, 2002).

Wilco’s sonic departure is compared with a slew of other groundbreakers, including albums by Pink Floyd, The Beatles, and R.E.M. among others. *YHF* is seen as “a mind blowing experience that takes Wilco from alt-country to art” (Kristofer Basile, July 2, 2004). As the following three excerpts show, the album gets special credit for being complex and challenging:

This record was designed to make you think, so if that isn’t a problem for you, then I can’t recommend this record enough (Dan Contilli, Apr. 23, 2002).

If you want beats that you can pound in your Honda Civic, move on. If you want everything in a nice neat package, with every song following a fixed format, follow the Honda guy out the door. This is music to be enjoyed if only for the sake that it is proof that people still make music for music’s sake (ACustomer, May 2, 2002).

This is for music fans who care about arrangements, compositions, added nuances. Its for fans of Radiohead (and bands like these) where effort is required to understand what the band is doing [sic] (jon, Apr. 24, 2002).

While many enjoy the album, *YHF* has its fair share of detractors. The negative reviews for this album are particularly instructive with regards to branding. Many reviewers are disappointed and do not understand the hype this album is receiving. As they argue with other reviewers, it is clear that this album is not the Wilco they were expecting:

Pay no attention to the average 4 star rating of this CD. It’s terrible. It’s overproduced tripe. There is no “Trace” of the band that gave us

A.M.[Wilco's first Album] left on this album [sic] (Heather R. Ferry, May 31, 2002).

I'm all for growth in a band, but only when it comes via the songwriting, not studio noises and needless audio gimmicks like alarm clock sounds and erratic percussion. Leaves me cold, something I never thought I'd say about a Wilco album (Kenneth Parker, Jr. July 12, 2002).

If you dream of meeting some touches of 'A.M.', never ever listen to this trash. There is no feeling of roots rock or alt-country taste at all [...] I get angry with this betray. That is the worst album in this year, I'm sure [sic] (MOTOAKI, Apr. 24, 2002).

MOTOAKI's disappointment, albeit in broken English, is perhaps the best example of how powerful brands can be. MOTOAKI literally feels "betrayed" by the band because of the expectations they had previously created for him/her. The betrayal turns to anger as the expectations are not met. The brand has let MOTOAKI down; it seems unlikely that (s)he will invest any further time or money into the Wilco brand.

Summary

Through their sound and packaging, Wilco is presented as artistic and ambitious musicians pushing pop-rock's musical boundaries. The events behind the making of this album only serve to further that image. Whether the story is told through the music press, the DVD, or consumer reviews of the album, many listeners likely approached *YHF* with some knowledge of how the album got made. Admittedly, some listeners may have been oblivious to the back story. Others discredit the events completely as one big marketing ploy on Warner's part (Mitchum 2002). But the fact remains that the tale told in this analysis was repeated many times across many mediums and likely shaped preconceived ideas about the music and the band for many listeners. Wilco gained instant credibility as a group of artists who are unwilling to compromise their music purely for business reasons. Their album and website experiments show they are willing to defy sonic and business conventions in order

to stand for what they believe in. What could have been a series of costly events has only strengthened their brand.

Table 1 - Summary table of the brand analysis

Brand Attributes
	<i>Honest, Innocent, Expansive</i>	<i>Avant-Garde Anti-Corporate Anti-Brand</i>	<i>Grandiose Global and Political Rock</i>	<i>Artistic, Uncompromising, Ambitious</i>
<i>Sound</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sweeping piano -Guitar-less -Catchy melodies -Earnest lyrics -Radio friendly song structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Fragmented lyrics -Electronica and “art music” influenced -Atypical song structure -No official radio singles -Defies genre conventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Classic rock lineup -Traditional song structure -Reliance on rock riff -Universal, accessible lyrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Experimental folk-rock -Odd noises and instrument choices -Catchy melody but challenging non-narrative lyrics
<i>Packaging</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Clean, stylized -Simple -B&W band photos of them at work -Lyrics included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dark, dreary, ominous -No text or band photos -Artistic barren landscapes -Hidden booklet with anti-consumption anti-corporate statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Hazard stripes throughout -Design elements link tightly with politically-charged album title -Full of band-photos -Links to political organizations -Lyrics included 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Chicago-focused, particularly buildings in the city’s core -Lyrics included but no band photos -Artistic photos of Chicago instead
<i>Video</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Narrative/ Performance -Earthly, nature-focused, mystical innocence -Band portrayed as down-to-earth regular guys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Non-narrative video blips instead of traditional music videos -Challenging form and content -Avant-garde art videos with no pictures of the band 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Performance based -Barren desert, post-bomb world -Vertigo circles -Grandiose rock gestures -Dynamic energetic performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No videos -DVD documentary of the making of the album -Band portrayed as hardworking, dedicated, artists willing to fight for their music
<i>Web</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Completely integrated with packaging -Easy to navigate -Band photos, music (a few songs), and a band journal all available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Confusing labyrinth -esque type site -Very little traditional band info (i.e. concert dates, photos, music etc...) -Relies heavily on art and text for political and social expression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Completely integrated with packaging -Easy to navigate and with excessive amounts of information about the band -Links to political and social causes -Unique partnership with iTunes and iPod 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mostly integrated with packaging -Easy to navigate -Offers plenty of information (photos, lyrics, other projects) -Used often to share Wilco material for free
<i>Reviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Band described (like Coldplay) as honest, catchy, heart-felt, sensitive -Also described as boring, bland, derivative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Described as difficult (good), challenging, daring, pioneers at the forefront of their genre -Also described as difficult (bad), purposefully alienating and self-indulgent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Described as a return to the old U2 -Classic rock album from grandiose rock stars. -Also described as not very innovative, re-treading old ground 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -All reviews discuss making of the album -Band described as ambitious, innovative, David vs. Goliath -Also described as nothing special, not deserving of the hype.

Chapter 5 – Discussion, Limitations and Conclusions

A brand is a complex interaction of symbols, images, words, and ideas rooted in material structures, practices and processes. Brands do not just happen. Brands are built, in Holt's (2004) words, as a product's "material markers" get filled up; as links are forged between the product and the symbols, images, words and ideas with which it is associated. Brands, therefore, are not simply created at the boardroom table. Marketers and advertisers can infuse products with any number of symbols and images they *believe* will create links to certain ideas but, in the end, there are several other loci where brand ideas form. Consumer experiences, product reviews and numerous other aspects of the consumption process contribute to a product's overall brand identity. Far from a static and stationary object, as the term "product" sometimes suggests, the brand reveals itself as an intricate and fluid entity.

The goal of this research was to apply these notions of the brand to an industry that seldom uses the terminology. Although music is an invaluable cultural good, it is also a highly marketable commodity that is subjected to a product logic similar to many other consumer commodities. The first set of research questions – Can music be considered a branded product? If so, what are the components of the music brand and how are they created? – was designed to understand if and how branding in popular music occurred. Perhaps the most important conclusion of this research, if not already implicit in the analysis, is that branding does take place in the music industry; the music product can be considered a branded commodity. This conclusion has implications for the way artists approach the music-making process and the way record companies (along with others in the industry) approach the commodity-making process. Much the same way the components of the Starbucks or the Nike brand can be analyzed, elements of the marketing mix can be dissected for the music product. The case studies discussed in this analysis specifically

examine the role sound, CD packaging, video, website, and album reviews play in the brand building process. The cases show that brands are not static creations birthed by one particular actor. Rather, they represent an on-going process involving many players. Music artists and their products, like many other consumer products and services, can be branded and this has implications for how music is received by consumers. The subsections which follow this brief introduction (i.e. “The Artist Brand” and “Building Artist Brands”) reflect further on the cases and elaborate on the response to the first research question.

The second research question – How does branding affect artists, their music, and eventually consumers? – is more difficult to address. Even the four examples examined here reveal that the branding process is not uniform; it differs from case to case, from artist to artist. It is difficult to offer broad conclusions that are applicable to all music industry brands. However, using the cases as a starting point it is possible to see how brands create expectations in the minds of consumers. These expectations have repercussions for the type of music that artists decide to create and the kinds of music recording companies decide to produce and distribute. A strong brand may allow artists to expand their line of product offerings beyond music or retain some control over their image, but brands also limit artists in important ways. Again, these conclusions have implications for the creative, managerial and communication subsystems, since branding occurs and impacts every level of the culture production system. The subsections below, beginning with “Artist Brands and Expectations” and ending with “Brand Extensions”, explore these ideas further.

The third and final research question – What do new technologies do to the process of marketing and branding? – was designed to account for the current climate in which the popular music industry finds itself in light of new technologies of production, distribution and consumption. All of the cases here employ websites, digital downloads and other new

technologies as part of their marketing plans. These innovations barely scratch the surface in a world of ring tones, podcasts and satellite radios, but they provide preliminary insight for the discussion of how new technologies impact branding. While digital downloads and other web spaces offer artists new avenues for the distribution of their music, these arenas may cause difficulties for brands. Artists will have to think carefully about how their brand identities are maintained and supported in light of downloadable files and cell phone ring tones. The implications of these conclusions are far-reaching as artists, the recording industry, and consumers incorporate new technologies into the processes of production, distribution and consumption. The subsection labeled “New Technologies and Artist Brands” endeavours to address these issues and points to the implications of this research and further areas of study.

One last note is needed before proceeding with the conclusions. It would be easier, and tidier, to enforce a direct comparison between each of the cases herein. U2 or Keane for example, provide photos in their CD packaging whereas Wilco and Radiohead have assorted artwork. This, one could assume, makes Radiohead and Wilco more artistic or less image conscious. Brands, however, are not built by one element alone; each element interacts with all the others. It is the lack of photos, the nature of the sound, the website, the unique use of video/radio and the description of Radiohead in the music press that gives the band their anti-corporate avant-garde nature. Wilco may be presented similarly as Radiohead in some respects, but their artistic and uncompromising brand image comes primarily from a series of events that were, to some extent, out of their control (i.e. getting dropped from their record label). Direct comparisons can be overly reductive in this regard.

Instead, Table 1 (see pg. 101) offers a summary of the four cases. It highlights how elements of the marketing mix combine to create different brand identities for each of the

acts considered. Although brands can be built across many different media, the bands studied here use similar avenues for marketing their product (CD packaging, websites, etc.) since all the bands fall roughly within the same genre and they are all mass produced by major record labels or their subsidiaries. The choice of a particular medium and the message employed in that medium says a great deal about the brand itself. Radiohead's refusal to release traditional videos or singles or U2 and Keane's reliance on band photographs in packaging and videos are all statements from (and about) the respective brands. Table 1 is therefore better used as a reference chart; a reminder of the important elements of each brand story. The conclusions that follow are not intended as direct comparisons between brands but rather as a discussion drawing on all four cases and highlighting key points regarding branding and the popular music industry.

The Artist Brand – Music Consumption Involves an Entire Collection of Symbols

Branding in the music industry, like in many other industries, takes place at every consumer touch-point with the product. For the case of music, all the various marketing elements work together to brand *the artist*. The product, then, is not simply a compact disc, but rather the artist *and* their products. This is the process I have circled around throughout my analysis and it is likely best termed “artist branding”. I use this term because it is more encompassing than Negus' (1992) idea of the brand, which he refers to as an image or logo in which the crux of the artist is distilled and then replicated across marketing materials (71). Artist branding, instead, refers to the collection of sounds, sights, reviews, concerts and merchandise that feed an artist's overall perception. Sound is an especially powerful part of branding since the emotions evoked during the listening experience ultimately shape the way

listeners perceive the artist(s). The term artist branding is probably closer to what Negus refers to as the “total star text” (73).

As with other brands, artist brands are constructed in part through marketing materials and in part through actual consumer experience. In addition to traditional marketing elements such as design, logos and packaging, sound, video and press reviews are also sites where the branding of artists occurs. Evidently then, it is not simply music that is consumed but an entire collection of symbols and associations. While this conclusion may seem intuitive, it is important to acknowledge how influential these symbols and associations are. This is recognized for the case of Nike; it is barely mentioned for the case of music.

Building Artist Brands – The Creative, Managerial and Communication Subsystems

Negus (1992) suggests that these symbols and association (i.e. the brand) are carefully constructed in a conscious and calculated manner by the marketing department. Although much of the branding process may occur at the managerial level, I hope this analysis adds to Negus’ argument by showing the importance of both the communication and the creative subsystems. The creation and maintenance of a brand is a negotiation between musicians, managers, marketers, critics and ultimately, consumers. The reason Hirschman’s (1986) “Culture Production System” model is particularly appropriate for this analysis is its recognition of the various players/levels involved in the production and distribution of cultural products. With this framework in hand, branding surfaces as a process that takes place at each of the subsystems.

The brand inherently begins with the artist. Keane’s outfits may change, but they remain a guitar-less trio; each member has clearly defined musical roles. It is possible that a member might leave or that they may add a guitarist but the brand’s very core will have

changed. Sound is also at the brand's core. The sound on any given U2 album likely affects the look and feel of the ensuing marketing materials. It is not coincidence that the bull's-eye image on the *HTDAAB* CD and DVD packaging is linked to the lead single, "Vertigo" and that the red and black hazard stripes suit the album title well enough that a listener would be forgiven for assuming the two were conceived at the same time. Fast's (2000) analysis of U2 confirms the importance of sound. She quotes an interview with Bono:

"The music tells you what to do and in the end that's what you gotta do. The music tells you what clothes to wear, it tells you what kind of stage you should be standing on, it tells you who should be photographing you, it tells you who should be your agent... And so if I want to take the [sun] glasses off, I just gotta change my tune (33)

For Bono, a band's entire image appears to be wrapped up in the sound. The music drives all the other elements.

Further evidence of the artist and their sound being the core of the brand is offered more explicitly by a marketing executive at Capitol/EMI as he explains the marketing strategy for Radiohead's *Kid A*: "A marketing plan at its most basic should be a reflection of a band and its music. Radiohead has come over the years to seek their own path in terms of the music they make... They are artists" (Krugman qtd. in Siegler: 80). The make-up of a band, the personalities and dynamics between band members and the sounds they produce all shape the brand stories that can be told about any particular artist. As with any product, physical form and function should be the starting point.

Once at the managerial level, however, artists undergo other processes that ultimately affect their brand. The CD packaging, videos, official website and concert tours are all shaped, to some extent, by the managerial level. These marketing elements, for efficiency and impact, are generally styled such that they can be integrated across the various media in which the band is presented. All of the bands studied here are extremely well integrated

across media (U2 and Keane more so than Wilco and Radiohead). This ensures that no matter where consumers experience the artists, their brand experience will be undiluted. There's scarcely a photo of U2 that does not have hazard stripes and Keane's wordmark is repeated on several occasions. The managerial subsystem, experts in commodity-making, knows that the most effective way to advertise its products is through consistent presentation of brand imagery and symbols across media.

Finally, the importance of the communication system in the brand building process cannot be underestimated. I believe this is more so for the cultural industries than for other products. The role reviewers and critics play in creating awareness and directing the discourse of a particular film, album, play or other cultural goods is undeniable. Music is a difficult thing to describe. Reviews of sound recordings in music and popular magazines vocalize consumers' experiences with albums and thus affect the way an artist becomes branded. That being said, reviews of the albums examined here seem to be in line with the sound, packaging, and other elements of the marketing mix. However, reviews also expand artist brands, adding adjectives and ideas that can come to define the band over time.

The other important feature of Hirschman's model is the formal/informal and controlled/uncontrolled dichotomy. The cases show that much of the brand building process lies outside the control of those building and profiting from the brands. Wilco's artistic and uncompromising brand identity, for example, is more a result of events that happened to them as opposed to an image that they created themselves or one that was created for them at the managerial level. The creative and/or managerial subsystem can attempt to define a brand as expansive, honest and innocent but it is not until that discourse gets repeated and accepted by all levels of the culture production system, and of course by consumers, that the project is fully realized.

Artist Brands and Expectations

Armed with a sense of how artist brands are created, it is important to turn our attention to how artists and listeners are affected by the branding process. Most significantly, the construction of a brand results in the creation of expectations within the minds of consumers. If brands act as a guarantee or promise of quality (or at least familiarity) for consumers, then brands are liable to confer meaning onto products or experiences that may or may not be there. The power of brands is most keenly felt when they disappoint and the expectations created by the various branding elements may facilitate this disappointment. The Starbucks brand may promise a relaxing morning but the reality may be far from that.

All the artists studied here, with the possible exception of newcomers Keane, show some evidence in support of this point. Consumers and critics most often judge a band's latest release based upon their previous experiences with that brand. In many ways, this becomes one of the determining factors of album enjoyment. A band's decision to alter their sound or image can be a welcome occurrence but it can also ruin a band's loyal fan base. MOTOAKI felt betrayed by Wilco's sonic adventures. Even Radiohead, whose fan base I would argue is tolerant of a certain level of experimentation, had difficulties getting everyone to accept the mysterious sounds and marketing methods of *Kid A*. Even though a clever marketing strategy meant "the press, like fans, ate up the mystery that began to surround the record in late summer..." (Siegler: 80), previous consumer experiences with Radiohead had created expectations that were difficult to overcome: "I think many people bought [*Kid A*] because they loved *Ok Computer* and were expecting the same [...] People were looking for rock like they found on *Ok Computer*" (Lyndon Roeller, Music Retailer, qtd. in Siegler: 80). In this light, sound, design elements, hype in reviews etc. all clearly play a role in constructing expectations of the brand in the minds of consumers.

U2's case, on the other hand, shows the sense of relief that can come with fulfilling expectations. In most reviews there was a collective sigh of elation that "the old U2" had returned. Fans and critics expected certain sounds and ideas from the band; it was up to U2 to either deliver or disappoint. By focusing their videos, packaging and other marketing efforts in the manner they did, U2 was able to spread the idea that they were back to the politically charged rock that first propelled them to prominence in the 80s. Whether or not the quality of *HTDAAB* is better or worse than early U2 is irrelevant to this analysis. What remains important is that, as one reviewer notes, "the U2 of 2004 seems guided by how people expect U2 to sound [...]" (Rayner: 5).

It is also worth returning briefly to Reprise records' refusal to distribute Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. Creative differences between the band and the label caused Reprise to demand significant changes to the album before they released it. Apparently, Reprise was expecting something much different than what they received from the band. As a review in the *New York Times* points out, "the music, [Reprise records] said, veered too far from the rootsy rock that Wilco was known for" (Pareles 2002: 1). The record label had expectations for the kind of product Wilco would produce. They also likely had expectations about what Wilco's audience would tolerate. The album simply did not fit the mold. For Reprise, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* was off-brand.

Artist Brands and Creativity

The notion of expectations creates interesting tensions for those involved in the music business. For consumers, the expectations brands create may lead to disappointment. For artists, though, brands can constrict creativity. Once a brand image has been created,

artists may be expected to live up to it and provide listeners with an experience they deem fits with previous brand interactions. This may dictate the type of music artists can create.

Brands work, at some level, because they are a promise. Part of the reason consumers are attracted to brands is because they know that a McDonald's Big Mac tastes the same regardless of where in the world they decide to indulge in the signature burger. Beyond consistency of product, consumers also know that a McDonald's *experience* is similar anywhere around the world. Consistency applies differently for music artists. U2 cannot release the exact same album twice and get away with it (though some might argue that this is exactly what they have done). If Madonna has taught us anything over her twenty year career, it is that music artists need to evolve in order to survive. However, fans *are* looking for a U2 *experience* each time they invest in the band. Music brands are thus expected to evolve their product enough to keep it interesting yet maintain the overall artist experience listeners have come to expect and rely on.

Fans and critics tolerated U2's forays into electronica-influenced music and self-reflexive imagery through the 90s, but it is only now that U2 has returned to fulfilling expectations that they have been re-crowned "World's Best Band". Whether or not U2 felt pressure from fans, critics, their record label or even themselves, to return to the U2 of old is difficult to ascertain. Regardless, knowing that the world wants them to keep putting out albums that sound like the old U2 likely affects the way they approach the creative process.

Wilco's creativity almost cost them dearly. Reprise records tried to restrict Wilco's creativity by forcing the band to change the sound of the album so that it would live up to brand expectations. Wilco responded without compromising; their experimentations with expectations got them dropped from their record label. Luckily, the story ended well for Wilco and, now, creative experimentations are a core part of the Wilco brand. Their new

CD, in fact, has one track which is 15 minutes of pure feedback. It is unlikely that Wilco fans would have accepted a song of this nature a decade ago, during Wilco's early career.

Whether expectations come from a record label or from listeners, the result may be detrimental for the band's creativity. Radiohead's experimentations on *Ok Computer* and *Kid A* infused their brand with a healthy amount of daringness but their latest two albums have not seen the sales success of the former two. For Radiohead, maintaining the image of an ever-evolving, ever-experimenting band is not an easy feat. In this long but telling interview excerpt, Radiohead's bassist explains his thoughts on the subject:

'I think, as long as you keep moving, you're all right,' he said. 'The thing is you're always developing and expanding. It's a protean thing and a public image can't keep pace with it. So it - the process of success - is like this slow-drying glue that sets around you, that slows you down and gums you up. And while all that's happening, your own life's going on at the side of it, with your own relationships and your own experiences and that becomes sort of calcified as well. And the whole thing just grinds to a halt really. And then you suddenly find yourself in the paper or on the cover of a magazine and your life and experiences have become summarized. And once it's summarized, it's over. So the trick is to try to be in the corner of people's vision, but not full on.' (Greenwood qtd. in Smith 2000a: 10)

Once the band is summarized into a brand, movement is restricted. Music making and public image are not necessarily in time with each other. Brands can limit the chances musicians are able to take; they can calcify the creative process. Artists can become trapped in this regard; slaves to their image. On the one hand, artists need a successful and well-defined brand identity which is marketable and easily communicated. On the other, artists need the freedom to explore their own musical abilities; regardless of wherever this may lead.

Do consumers want music that simply fulfills expectations? Do they expect certain sounds and ideas and dismiss a band if those ideas are not met or are consumers tolerant of bands that play with expectations and perhaps even shatter them? Unfortunately, these are sweeping and general questions; the answers are subjective and individual. Courtney Love

offers some insight in this regard though. At a music conference speech, she argues that artists cannot survive simply “by meeting the current public taste, the taste from the last quarterly report. I don't think you can last by following demographics and carefully meeting expectations” (Love 2000). While Love’s argument may not answer the above questions, it serves to highlight the tensions which face musicians who are constantly releasing new products that are expected to live up to expectations, be it public taste or business needs. Creativity bumps uncomfortably up against the boundaries of expectation.

Artist Brands and Standardization

If branding is taking place in the popular music industry, as this analysis suggests, then it is possible the music product itself is being affected. Adorno (1938) argued often and convincingly that mass production and mass distribution led to uniformity among cultural products. For Adorno, product logic subjects music to order and rationalization. Not only is the process of creating and distributing music standardized but, in an effort to create popular hits, music itself is forced to follow a rigid format (1976: 25). In short, there is “a standardization of the thing itself” (1972: 100). Commodification has a negative effect as music creation no longer challenges boundaries; music simply follows a proven formula.

More specifically related to branding and marketing, Klein (2000) argues that a proliferation of brands leads to increasingly limited choice. Branding strives to make consumers feel as if they are having a unique experience, even though that unique experience is occurring at Gap stores around the globe (Klein: 129). In line with Marx’s (1978) idea of commodity fetish, consumers begin to attribute mystical and otherworldly qualities to products of our own creation. The use value of the object has been abstracted to such a point that consumers believe there is a true difference between a Gap shirt and a shirt of

another brand name. For Klein, the uniqueness of the brand blinds us to standardization of the product; “constant cloning” is the result (131).

Applied to the music product, it is possible to see numerous instances of cloning. This is understandable since success in the music industry is a rare and risky venture; relying on already successful brands or on popular brand images helps mitigate the risk on the part of the record companies. If a company is successful with a particular brand image (say Britney Spears or The Backstreet Boys), me-too imitation brands (Christina Aguilera or N’Sync) are sure to follow (in actuality, not much different from the world of packaged goods). Imitation brands offer slight differences in brand identity, but the music itself is often interchangeable. Courtney Love’s earlier aversion to being treated as a brand (see pg. 25) highlights how standardization is almost inherent to the process of branding: “Keep talking about brands and you know what you’ll get? Bad clothes. Bad hair. Bad books. Bad movies. And bad records” (2000). For Love, branding breeds standardization and imitation. Uniform products signal decreased quality.

Standardization means applying rules and rationalization to a process that may be better off without them. The marketing needs of an album begin to drive its very content. One such example of how these rules can affect the process of music-making comes from a Canadian “new rock” outfit named Nickelback. Instead of recording their album, *The Long Road*, all at once, as is typically the case for rock bands, Nickleback decided to record the “catchiest” songs first and send them to the record company to commence marketing for the new disc (Bliss 2003: 36). In an interview, Nickelback’s producer praises the band for “knowing what works at radio” and for making sure that “everything they write is aimed for pleasing the masses” (qtd. in Bliss: 38). For the producer, part of the joy of working with Nickelback comes from the fact that the band knows the rules of the game and they come

with songs designed to fit those rules. The producer concludes “you have to do something that is obvious sounding. There are little rules that you have to do and [Nickelback] is more aware of those rules [...] It all aims towards corporate-sounding rock” (qtd. in Bliss: 38). Nickelback’s approach, probably not uncommon, is a startling example of a band that has willingly designed their music to fit marketing demands and record-label (perhaps even listener) expectations.

The fact that artists and their albums are wrapped up in brand identities and marketing plans can cause issues for music that does not “fit” those plans or images. In an excerpt from *I am Trying to Break Your Heart*, a Rolling Stone editor shares his opinions on Wilco’s *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* and the difficulties of marketing music products:

If I was an executive [high up there] at a record company and I listened to Yankee Hotel Foxtrot, I probably wouldn’t get it. Why don’t I get it? Because it doesn’t tell me exactly who it’s for, it doesn’t tell me exactly what it’s about and it doesn’t tell me exactly how much it will sell (Fricke qtd. in Jones: Ch. 17).

Fricke highlights the fact that music, as a business, must respond to certain needs. Record companies do not sign bands because they like them. They choose bands they believe have a marketable product and image. A band’s marketability is therefore inextricably linked to the ability of record companies, and to some extent audiences, to define what the band is about, whom they can be marketed to, and importantly, how much that market is worth.

These factors will, in a sense, lead the decisions record labels make about which musicians they decide to sign and mass produce. If a certain brand of sensitive piano-driven pop (as exemplified by, say, Coldplay) is topping the charts, the response from other labels will be to follow suit with their own brand of the same formula (i.e. Keane). Comparisons to Coldplay, warranted or not, are likely positive for the Keane brand. If record companies can

slot bands into pre-determined images that they *think* will sell, this limits the amount of risk companies are taking with the actual music itself.

Artist Brands and Control

Although the previous conclusions paint a relatively negative picture of brands in the music industry, branding may afford artists some control over their own image. Influence over the marketing process likely varies from band to band. No two recording contracts are the same and undoubtedly some bands are able to retain greater authority over how they appear and are presented through their music, packaging, photographs, websites and videos. Even the limited information available on Keane and Radiohead's marketing strategies reveals that bands exert varying amounts of control over the marketing process, be it on account of their status (in the case of Radiohead) or their foresight (in the case of Keane) (for Keane see Burrell 2005; for Radiohead see Siegler 2000).

Keane's situation is instructive because their branding seems to be driven by the band rather than by their label: "When the band left Fierce Panda [the band's old record label] and signed for Island [the band's current record label], Keane insisted that they should retain control over their branding" (Burrell: 16). Before Keane signed with Fierce Panda, they worked with Moving Brands to define how the band should be presented. They retained input into the marketing process through their contract with Fierce Panda and were able to negotiate control of their brand as they progressed to a major record label contract.

Whether or not the other artists examined here have as much control over their brand as Keane seems to have is difficult to deduce. U2 and Radiohead likely have enough clout from past successes to afford them some freedom in this area. Certainly, for the case

of Radiohead, the decision to air video blips as opposed to traditional videos seems to have been a band-initiated idea. As the CEO for Capitol records relayed at the time:

Spin [magazine] said I probably peed my pants when I heard Radiohead wouldn't be making a video [...] But frankly, I've spent most of my career dealing with creative artists, so I took their decision as a given. I thought 'OK, here's our challenge: Let's figure out a way to make people aware of the album regardless' (Roy Lott qtd. in Siegler: 80).

In this instance, Radiohead has earned enough trust from their record label (most likely due to previous high-selling albums) to allow them to push the boundaries of music marketing. Their influence over the website or CD packaging is undoubtedly similar.

The idea of control is probably best viewed as a continuum between brands that are artist-driven versus those that are imposed upon the band by external sources (e.g. the record label, band manager, etc.). Arguably, artists in control of their branding will be less likely to be misrepresented than artists who are simply subjected to the process. Without detailed data from the many players involved, it is difficult to argue which bands control their brand development, or which ones are slaves to an image outside of their choosing. Based on sheer popularity and clout (Radiohead, U2) or foresight (Keane), the cases examined here appear to be artist-driven. Even though much of Wilco's brand story relies on the events that occurred with Reprise records, Wilco still comes across as in charge of their brand identity.

Artist Brands and Fabrication

Elsewhere in music, branding as a means of artist control may not be as applicable. Bands today are just as likely to "make it" as they are to be made. Reality television shows such as *Canadian Idol*, *Becoming* or *Making the Band* lay bare the amount of fabrication that occurs behind the scenes for some pop music groups. They show how secondary musical talent and skill can be in the process of achieving fame and/or success in the music industry.

The record label and the television shows seem to hold control of how artist brands are formed. Echoes of Peterson's (1997) "fabricating authenticity" resonate here as the "Idols" reveal themselves to be brands that can be created overnight with the right kind of exposure. Fetishization occurs as the songs these stars sing are secondary to the artist brands that are singing them. Fabricated bands and other instant stars may not be as common in rock as in pop, but likely they still occur. Acts can be put together solely to fill a marketing gap. Packaging, videos, interviews and biographies can all be constructed to fit a certain image. It is conceivable that even sound itself, in many cases, might be manipulated to match an overall brand identity. Here, the artist brand is controlled not by the artist but by external forces looking to fill potentially successful markets.

Brand Extensions

Perhaps the most obvious implication for artist brands – though the least discussed in this thesis – is the area of brand extensions. Artists with strong enough brand identities are able to expand beyond their core product (i.e. music) into other markets. U2's iPod, Radiohead's collection of short films or Wilco's book of photography are the most overt examples from the cases, but many other artists are experimenting with clothing (Wu-Tang Clan's Wu Wear), fragrances (Britney Spears' Curious) and undergarments (Jennifer Lopez's J-Lo line) among others. New reality television shows featuring behind-the-scenes footage of pop stars like Nick Lachey and Jessica Simpson's *Newlyweds*, or Britney Spears and Kevin Federline's *Chaotic* offer new revenue streams for artists whose music careers may potentially be becoming less important aspects of their overall brand. Brand extensions serve not only as added revenue for artists (and/or their managers, labels, etc.) but also as yet another arena where artist brands can be built.

I have to a large extent avoided discussing brand extensions as I believed it was first necessary to investigate how artists build a brand that is strong enough to be affixed to products that are sometimes significantly removed from the original music product (e.g. perfume?). For artists who present themselves as artistic or anti-corporate, a perfume line would seem off-brand. But if the Britney Spears brand is about beauty, desire and sexuality, then perfume seems like the logical next step for the brand. If Wilco began advertising cologne for men, the brand image advanced in this thesis would crumble. Instead, they offer an artistic book of photography, complete with extra outtakes of the band's experimental recordings. The offering is completely in line with their brand. U2's partnership with Apple, on the other hand, was seen by some critics as "selling out". U2 present themselves as music-focused rockers with strong political beliefs; an affiliation with a large corporation undermines this image.

New Technologies, New Spaces for Music Consumption and Artist Brands

The above discussion and implications of artist brands comes at a unique time. Currently, the popular music industry finds itself in an unenviable position. New innovations are wreaking havoc with old business plans and increased competition from other entertainment products (e.g. DVDs, video games, etc.) has taken a dent out of the sale of recorded music. New outlets for the sale of music (e.g. iTunes and Puretracks) are evolving and creating markets where none existed before. Internet service providers, not previously considered major players in the music business, are now central points for the discovery and distribution of our favourite songs. New possibilities for building and maintaining artist brands abound. Be it on cell phones, iPods or the Internet, the business of music is changing and no one seems certain which business models, if any, will prevail.

All the artists studied here have used new technologies to explore different ways to market their product. Whether it is the case of Wilco streaming an entire album online because they were left no other choice or U2 offering a 450 song digital box set, these activities are evidence of the fact that new avenues are opening up for the branding of music artists. Album packaging and music videos, arguably two of the biggest brand building media, are now simply two options among many. Unique partnerships with online distributors, fan websites, cell phone ring tones and a host of other music related services are now available for bands to spread the message about their brand.

As an increasing amount of music is available in digital format, traditional imagery associated with the music product is affected. Branding has typically been a visual affair, but now consumers are being presented with less visual data. Album imagery is absent or barely visible over outlets like iTunes or LimeWire. With mp3s and other digital sound files, CD packaging is reduced, at best, to a thumbnail image. As more and more digital music gets transferred to iPods and other portable players, artists and the brand imagery that typically accompanies their products is reduced to not much more than text. These avenues for brand expression, as I have shown, are an important part of the music consumption experience, affecting the way we make meaning out of music and artists.

To account for this, artists will need to strive to maintain their brand by exploring options such as the U2 iPod. In addition to offering regular album packaging, U2 took the extra step of branding the physical medium through which listeners would be listening. On a regular iPod, U2 appears simply as one line of text among hundreds of other bands. With the *HTDAAB* black and red branded U2 iPod, on the other hand, users are constantly presented with integrated brand messaging. Undoubtedly, iPods and other portable players will evolve to provide space for album imagery (in fact, the newest line of iPods uses the

technology of the iPod Photo to allow for the storage of album cover art). As record album sleeves offered different branding opportunities than CD booklets, so too will a new kind of pixel-based album art evolve.

For some artists, particularly up-and-coming artists, new technologies and new spaces for music consumption are playing key roles in the marketing process. Wilco's clever use of their website as a distribution point for *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* may have initially been the result of necessity but the strategy revealed itself to be an innovative and effective way to build support before the band began touring the album. Arguably, the massive support generated through their web offering made Wilco a sought-after band and facilitated their re-signing with a new label.

For artists without label contracts, the Internet offers the ability to market their music and their brand relatively inexpensively. Band sites and other spaces such as garageband.com or myspace.com offer independent artists access to thousands of potential fans and afford fans unique opportunities to form relationships with unsigned artists. As much promise as some of these new spaces provide, the fact remains there are still many more artists striving to succeed than there are artists who will actually achieve success. With so much music available, the challenge for artists will continue to be getting noticed. This is where branding and marketing play an important role; it is also normally where the managerial subsystem focuses many of its resources. If artists are planning on bypassing the managerial subsystem (i.e. distributing their music without the help of a record label), they will need to invest time towards understanding the functions normally carried out at the managerial level. The importance of branding and marketing in creating awareness for the music of independent artists will not diminish simply because they have decided to market

their music directly to consumers. This places added responsibility on artists as they need to perform both as experts in music-making and in commodity-making.

Although new innovations may offer interesting avenues for marketing the music product, artists and their record labels may be ceding some control of the branding process to consumers as a result of new technologies. As Amazon.ca incorporates customer reviews into the buying process, informal and uncontrolled discourse plays an increasingly important role in shaping perceptions of artist brands. Customer reviews are standard fare on e-retailer sites, and referrals (e.g. “if you liked that, you might also enjoy these”) are increasingly influencing the direction of online shopping experiences. iTunes even features user-created playlists – lists of songs a particular user deems worthy of sharing with others – to help guide purchase decisions. Users can find other listeners with similar tastes and take cues from their playlists for future musical selections. Referrals, user playlists, reviews and other informal and uncontrolled sources of discourse are becoming an established part of the consumption process allowing listeners to stumble upon new bands in a myriad of ways. While it might be expected that informal and uncontrolled sources would foster an environment where the dominant brand discourse was questioned, perhaps even, negated, the discourse in the customer reviews analyzed here was generally similar to the popular music press. Regardless, artists will need to ensure their brand ideas are not diluted across these new avenues.

This is the area I believe requires the most additional research. How effective are customer reviews and referrals? How significant a role do informal and uncontrolled sources play in the decision to purchase and/or consume products? What sources are the most credible contributors to brand image? How effective are web spaces such as myspace.com or garageband.com in building successful artists and spreading the word about independent musicians? The case studies explored here merely offer a glimpse of how new technologies

are being used as a means of marketing music products. The previous questions thus remain only partially answered. However, U2, Radiohead, Keane and Wilco, show how unique and innovative branding and marketing plans can be constructed and enhanced outside of the basic realm of music video and CD packaging. With these ideas for future research in mind, we turn now to some limitations of this thesis and avenues for additional research.

Limitations and Future Research

Any research comes with its own set of limitations; this thesis is no exception. The overall framework for the project is derived from Hirschman's (1986) "Culture Production System" model. The rigid divisions of the creative, managerial and communication subsystems give the distinct impression that there is little interaction between the three subsystems. In reality, there is likely significant overlap and interaction between the creative, managerial and communication levels. The role of the band manager, virtually avoided in this thesis, is an excellent example as it straddles the line between the creative and the managerial subsystems. Managers shape the band to prepare them for the record companies, but they also defend the band's interests from the interference of the record companies. Overlap between the systems also makes it difficult to distinguish between products of the various levels. A music video or radio single is at once a product (i.e. part of the managerial subsystem) and an advertisement (i.e. part of the communication subsystem). Despite these minor drawbacks, Hirschman's model is an excellent framework for separating and evaluating the various levels of production in the cultural industries.

Beyond the model, I have argued that branding occurs at many different sites. Due to the scope of this project it was not feasible to consider every experience consumers could have with music brands. Concerts, merchandise, newsgroups, fan sites and discussion boards

are all likely important consumer experiences. Along with the music press reviews examined here, discussions about albums on the radio and on television serve to shape the overall perception of an artist and their work. Specific ads for bands or albums also play a role, though these are difficult to find since they are often retailer-driven (i.e. “Radiohead’s newest CD now available at HMV”). Many artists are outspoken enough to frequently end up in the news, or in tabloids. Bono’s political tours receive almost as much hype as his musical ones. All of these other appearances and elements are technically part of the communication subsystem and should be considered as potential brand-building moments; they likely deserve equal the attention I have given to sound, packaging, web, video and reviews.

Brands are intricate objects (or subjects) of study. They are especially difficult to analyze as slices in time, as I have tried to do here. For the sake of depth, I chose to analyze the marketing elements of just one album per band. An equally valid method of approach would have been to analyze these brands over time. What elements change? Which ones remain constant? Instead, I summarized longitudinal information by providing background about key events in the band’s history so that the bulk of the analytical focus rested on describing the various marketing elements in detail.

Similarly, components of the marketing mix were analyzed separately (i.e. sound, packaging, video, etc.). Although my analysis does not likely do justice to any one element – a musical analysis of a Radiohead or Wilco song, done properly, would entail an entire thesis of its own – this separation of marketing elements may lead to the assumption that they are unrelated. Branding, however, does not exist in isolation; each piece complements the other. I hope the links forged throughout the thesis served to make connections between the various elements of the brand stories.

I have also advanced the idea that brands are, to a certain extent, social constructions. My opinion of the Keane, Wilco, U2 and Radiohead brands, then, may not be shared by others. While I have personal biases for and against the bands presented here, I have tried to stick to the task of describing the brand stories as they are presented through the marketing materials. In other words, whether I believe Radiohead is anti-corporate or not is irrelevant to the fact that a significant amount of their marketing material is geared towards *presenting* them as anti-corporate. Unfortunately, as Frith (1996) points out, descriptions of music are always ideological. Words like “challenging”, “avant-garde”, “artistic” and “uncompromising” are never neutral. The very terms we rely on to describe bands are already loaded with assumptions and judgments.

These four bands were selected because of my familiarity with their music and their histories. However, this means I have had brand experiences which likely affected (and continue to affect) my overall perception of these artists. I have been to some of their concerts, read some of their biographies and followed their reviews. Although my accounts may have been affected by this exposure, I believe my familiarity with these artists allowed me to present a relatively detailed view of their marketing strategies without ignoring the larger context within which the bands exist. I am not convinced I would have been able to analyze artists with which I did not have some previous interaction with as much rigour.

Due to the constructed nature of brands, there are certain aspects of music marketing that can only be informed through interviews or ethnographic work with bands, managers, record labels and consumers. A survey of reactions to a band’s marketing tactics would also be a useful addition to a thesis of this nature. Although I attempted to provide a consumer perspective by including customer reviews from Amazon.ca, the reviews are a slightly unreliable source. Due to their anonymous nature, it is impossible to judge whether

postings are authentic (i.e. from real customers) or whether they are from those involved in the actual marketing of the album (i.e. fake posts to boost the products ratings). However, in the absence of obtaining direct consumer feedback, the reviews taken as a whole provide a snapshot of a particular type of consumer discourse surrounding these bands.

Finally, I have, to a certain extent, ignored the issues of genre, gender and the role these play in branding music. Genres can be brands in their own right. Alt-rock and indie, for example, are as much brands as they are descriptors of the music that gets categorized as such. I looked at the rock genre, and more specifically at four male bands within that genre. A very worthwhile project would be to examine the different marketing codes and conventions associated with different genres, potentially including individual artists instead of bands and female artists as opposed to males. Sound is generally taken to be the defining characteristic of a genre, but do marketing materials like CD packaging, image, video and web show significant similarities or differences across genres? Are these different for female artists? If other genres were studied, different spaces might reveal themselves as crucial avenues for the marketing of the music product. When is the last time, for example, there was a music video for classical music? For DJ driven music, would it not be more appropriate to look at record sleeves instead of CD packaging? Do female artists use different media (or use media differently) to build their brands? Each genre has its own codes and conventions; this analysis helps explain specifically how Keane, Radiohead, U2 and Wilco used the codes and conventions of rock, along with their sizable marketing budgets to create their particular brand image. Many more questions remain about other artists (female and male) and other genres.

Summary and Implications

Adorno (1938) feared that commodification threatened the ethereal and sublime qualities that make music such an invaluable piece of our culture. Marx (1978) worried that our fetish with the commodified product stole focus from the actual product itself. For Adorno, this meant diverted focus on music itself and more attention to all the elements that contribute to the commodity character; all of which were extraneous in his mind. With Adorno and Marx's ideas in mind, this thesis sought to examine the effects of commodification specifically with respect to the music industry and the music product. My research has provided an overview of the music commodity from popular music scholars such as Negus, Jones and Peterson and of branding and marketing critiques from researchers in the area of communication and cultural studies. By combining the two sets of arguments, this thesis endeavours to contribute to communication and cultural studies scholarship by detailing the commodification process as it pertains to the marketing and branding of music artists and their products. It also has implications for those involved professionally in the business of making, distributing, marketing and consuming music. The major conclusions are summarized (see Table 2) and discussed in further detail below.

Table 2 - Summary of Questions, Conclusions and Implications

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Conclusions</i>	<i>Implications</i>
Can music be considered a branded product? If so, what are the components of music brands and how are they created?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artists and their products can be analyzed as brands. - The “artist brand” is the sum of words, logos, images, sights, discourse and sounds affecting overall artist perception. - Artist brands are created at the creative, managerial and comm. subsystems. - Consumers also serve as players in the creation of artist brands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Music consumption involves an entire collection of symbols. - Artists need to be aware of the elements that contribute to their brand image. - Record companies need to consider how branding affects their artists
How does branding affect artists, their music, and eventually consumers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Branding creates expectations. - It may affect artist creativity and lead to increased fabrication and standardization among music products. - Brands may offer artists control and allow for brand extensions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artists need to be aware of the limitations brands can place on their ability to create music. - Marketing plans/needs should not drive music production. - Brand extensions may offer added revenue but can be off-brand.
What do new technologies do to the process of marketing and branding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New outlets with which to spread brand messages are arising. - As a result, there are more informal and uncontrolled sites where branding occurs. - Branding is becoming less visual. - New technologies offer artists the ability to bypass the managerial system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artists and record companies need to work harder to maintain consistency of brand messages. - New forms of non-traditional branding need to be explored. - Greater responsibility on artists to understand branding and marketing

Throughout this thesis I have shown that, despite its status as a cultural good, music and music artists are commodities that have been subjected, like cereal or a loaf of bread, to marketing plans and branding campaigns. I have combined Negus’ notions regarding “brands” and “total star texts” to advance the idea of the “artist brand”. A primary force in the consumption of music, the artist brand is the collection of texts that contribute to an artist’s overall perception among consumers (including sound, image, video, web, concerts, and press reviews among many others). Consumption of music, then, is far more than simply an act of listening. It involves an entire collection of symbols, images, emotions and beliefs. The creative, managerial and communication subsystems work in tandem with actual listener experiences to create artist brands through marketing materials and other discourse that surrounds a particular artist. While branding is a useful tool for maximizing marketing

efforts across diverse media, branding also creates expectations among consumers, critics and others. Expectations can trap artists into a particular sound or image; this can hinder artist creativity. Branding can also result in increased standardization of the music product as music companies invest safely in images and brand ideas with which they have seen previous success. If brands are artist-driven, they may offer artists a level of control over the way they are represented. Strong brands can also be extended into other markets but brand extensions can do as much harm as good if they are inappropriate with respect to other brand efforts.

This investigation and its conclusions have implications for all parties involved in the business of music, be they artists, managers, record labels, distributors etc. Artists need to be informed of how important a role branding will play in their career. Courtney Love may not be able to look into a mirror and see her brand identity, but when others see her on stage or in the tabloids, she is much more than simply a woman playing guitar. For independent artists not yet at Love's level of brand awareness, an understanding of how artist brands are created will help them utilize new means of marketing to try and succeed without the help of major labels. While proper branding may help artists get noticed, it may also pigeon-hole them into a particular image or sound. An understanding of the elements that contribute to brand identity will help artists recognize the challenges they face upon each new release.

Record labels also need to consider the effects branding can have on artists. The goals of music-making and the goals of commodity-making are not necessarily the same, nor should they be in many instances. Artists exploring new sounds and ideas may create music that is not readily marketable or easily branded. Should music of this nature be dismissed on this account alone? Should marketing efficiencies and target markets be driving the creative process? As music-specific companies get folded into multi-national entertainment companies and corporate consolidation in the industry continues, the pressure to deliver

results is only going to increase. Establishing and owning some of the world's most popular brands may be a beneficial financial strategy but it may be detrimental to the quality and diversity of the music product.

In light of the rapid and significant developments in the technologies of music distribution (e.g. iTunes, myspace.com, LimeWire, etc.) and consumption (e.g. iPods, cell phones and other portable players), this thesis also has implications for service providers, content producers and others involved with new technologies of music. As new services (e.g. satellite radio, podcasting, etc.) flourish, new avenues impact the branding and marketing of music artists. Service providers and content producers will need to find new ways of establishing and maintaining brands as the means of distribution and consumption change.

Since Adorno and Marx, communication and cultural studies scholars have written about, and explored the effect of, the commodification of cultural goods. Our fetish with the mystical and transcendent attributes of Marx's commodity has not been totally unearthed by this study of the music industry's culture production system. However, it is possible to see how the various elements of the marketing mix serve to create a commodity that extends far beyond the musical material encoded on any given album. Aside from artists, record companies, distributors and marketers looking to understand the relationship between music as art and music as commodity, this thesis should benefit communication scholars with an interest in music or marketing/branding. I hope this research provides communication and cultural studies scholars a unique way to consider the impact of brands and branding across the cultural industries while taking into account the complexities presented by the consumption of cultural products. These ideas are not limited to music alone. The process of branding occurs with cultural goods beyond music (e.g. books and films), and further research should be conducted in this area to account for other cultural industries.

Fin

Unfortunately, much of the music press interpreted that as collusion and we ended up being the scapegoat. We sort of became the Ford Pinto of the music business. Our brand, our name got such a bad rap against it that it was virtually impossible to undo (John Woloschuk, lead singer of Klaatu, qtd. in Duncan 2005: 3)

How much do you feel like rock stars, I'd asked? There had been a wary pause, before Jonny pitched in with 'I don't know. It feels like Radiohead are famous. But that no one knows who we are. (Jonny Greenwood, Radiohead guitarist, qtd. in Smith 2000a: 10)

The story of Klaatu makes for an interesting concluding note on the matter of branding and music. Klaatu, a Toronto band that sounded somewhat like the Beatles, released an album in 1977. It contained a song that became an international hit: "Calling Occupants (of Interplanetary Craft)" (Duncan: 3). Being publicity shy studio musicians, the album packaging was designed completely anonymously, without the names of band members, writing credits, or band photographs appearing anywhere on the album (Duncan: 3). Since many of the songs sounded vaguely similar to Beatles music, a rumour took off that the album was genuine Beatles: "For a brief period of time, most of the western world was willing to entertain the notion that the Beatles had reformed to release a secret album [...] under the new, mysterious name of Klaatu" (Duncan: 3). Eventually, the truth was discovered and disappointment ensued. Klaatu had simply wanted to remain anonymous because they believed "a public image usurped the music" (Duncan: 3). Instead, as the quotation atop this paragraph suggests, their brand never fully recovered from the expectations it had set. Even trying to avoid having a public image turned into an image of its own; one created by consumers based on the brand materials they had at their disposal (i.e. the sounds, the mysterious name and packaging).

Klaatu's story is one of many that hint at the impact of branding on music artists and their products. Limitations notwithstanding, I believe this introductory work shows that the branding of artists and their music has important consequences for how music is produced,

distributed, consumed and experienced. The act of consuming music is integrally linked to the act of consuming music *brands*. As Radiohead's guitarist acknowledges in the interview excerpt above, brands can be so important that they often eclipse the individuals who comprise them. It is not the guitarist who is famous, nor necessarily any of the band members. Rather, it is the artist brand that people buy, trust and believe in. The line between culture and commodity blurs even further.

Appendix 1: Print Sources for Album Reviews

Album reviews were pulled from major music magazines and newspapers from North America and the United Kingdom. Magazine reviews were generally located through the Proquest database and newspaper articles were found with the help of Factiva.

The album reviews were generally pulled from the time surrounding the launch of the album though, in some cases, concert reviews or interviews with the bands from other time periods were also analyzed.

The following is a list of all the sources used for formal album reviews:

Billboard
Blender
The Globe and Mail
The Guardian
The Independent
The London Times
The National Post
The New York Times
The Observer
The Toronto Star
The Village Voice
The Washington Post
Rolling Stone
USA Today

Appendix 2: “Somewhere Only We Know” (audio)

Appendix 2 is provided as an audio file on the accompanying Appendix CD. The song is playable on a regular CD player, or via computer. It should appear as song 1.

Appendix 3: “Somewhere Only We Know” (lyrics)

Lyrics (transcribed from CD packaging)

I walked across an empty land,
I knew the pathway like the back of my hand.
I felt the earth beneath my feet,
Sat by the river and it made me complete.

Oh, simple thing, where have you gone?
I'm getting old and I need something to rely on.
So tell me when you're gonna let me in,
I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin.

I came across a fallen tree,
I felt the branches of it looking at me.
Is this the place we used to love?
Is this the place that I've been dreaming of?

Oh, simple thing, where have you gone?
I'm getting old and I need something to rely on.
So tell me when you're gonna let me in,
I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin.

And if you have a minute why don't we go,
Talk about it somewhere only we know?
This can be the end of everything.
So why don't we go somewhere only we know,
Somewhere only we know.

Oh, simple thing, where have you gone?
I'm getting old and I need something to rely on.
So tell me when you're gonna let me in,
I'm getting tired and I need somewhere to begin.

And if you have a minute why don't we go,
Talk about it somewhere only we know?
This can be the end of everything.
So why don't we go, so why don't we go,

Hmmm ohhhh,

This can be the end of everything.
So why don't we go, somewhere only we know,
Somewhere only we know.
Somewhere only we know.

Appendix 4: “Somewhere Only We Know” (video)

Appendix 4 is provided as an mpeg video file on the accompanying Appendix CD. The video should be playable via computer.

Appendix 5: “Idioteque” (audio)

Appendix 5 is provided as an audio file on the accompanying Appendix CD. The song is playable on a regular CD player, or via computer. It should appear as song 2.

Appendix 6: “Idioteque” (lyrics)

“Idioteque” – Lyrics (transcribed from audio with help from www.sing365.com)

Who’s in a bunker? Who’s in a bunker?
Women and children first
And the children first, and the children
I’ll laugh until my head comes off
I’ll swallow till I burst, until I burst
Until I

Who’s in a bunker? Who’s in a bunker?
I have seen too much
I haven’t seen enough
You haven’t seen it
I’ll laugh until my head comes off
Women and children first, and children first
And children

Here I’m allowed
Everything all of the time
Here I’m allowed
Everything all of the time

Ice age coming, ice age coming
Let me hear both sides, let me hear both sides
Let me hear both
Ice age coming, ice age coming
Throw it in the fire, throw it in the fire
Throw it on the

We’re not scaremongering
This is really happening, happening
We’re not scaremongering
This is really happening, happening
Mobiles squirking, mobiles chirping (more birds squirking/more birds chirping?)
Take the money and run, take the money and run
Take the money

Here I’m alive
Everything all of the time
Here I’m alive
Everything all of the time
(x2)

(vocal sample) The first of the children (if I don’t steal the children?)

Appendix 7: *Kid A* (video blips)

Appendix 7 is provided as a folder on the accompanying Appendix CD. The folder contains three video blips from *Kid A* in QuickTime format. The blips should be playable via computer.

Appendix 8: “Vertigo” (audio)

Appendix 8 is provided as an audio file on the accompanying Appendix CD. The song is playable on a regular CD player, or via computer. It should appear as song 3.

Appendix 9: “Vertigo” (lyrics)

Lyrics (copied from www.u2.com)

Unos dos tres catorce! (yea...captain)

Lights go down, it's dark
The jungle is your head, can't rule your heart
A feeling's so much stronger than a thought
Your eyes are wide
And though your soul it can't be bought
Your mind can wander

Hello hello (hola)
I'm at a place called Vertigo
It's everything I wish I didn't know
Except you give me something I can feel, feel

The night is full of holes
As bullets rip the sky of ink with gold
They twinkle as the
Boys play rock and roll
They know they can't dance
At least they know....

I can't stand the beats, I'm asking for the cheque
The girl with crimson nails, Has Jesus round her neck
Swinging to the music (x2) (Oh oh oh oh)

Hello hello (hola)
I'm at a place called Vertigo
It's everything I wish I didn't know
But you give me something I can feel, feel

Check mated, hours of fun, check mated

All of this, all of this can be yours (x3)
Just give me what I want and no-one gets hurt....

Hello hello (hola)
We're at a place called Vertigo
Lights go down and all I know
Is that you give me something
I can feel your love teaching me how
Your love is teaching me how,
How to kneel, kneel...
Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah (x2)

Appendix 10: “Vertigo” (video)

Appendix 10 is provided as an mpeg video file on the accompanying Appendix CD. The video should be playable via computer.

Appendix 11: “I Am Trying To Break Your Heart” (audio)

Appendix 11 is provided as an audio file on the accompanying Appendix CD. The song is playable on a regular CD player, or via computer. It should appear as song 4.

Appendix 12: "I Am Trying To Break Your Heart" (lyrics)

Lyrics (transcribed from CD packaging)

I am an American aquarium drinker
I assassin down the avenue
I'm hiding out in the big city blinking
What was I thinking when I let go of you

Let's forget about the tongue-tied lightning
Let's undress just like cross-eyed strangers
This is not a joke so please stop smiling
What was I thinking when I said it didn't hurt

I want to glide through those brown eyes dreaming
Take you from the inside, baby hold on tight
You were so right when you said I've been drinking
What was I thinking when we said good night

I want to hold you in the Bible-black predawn
You're quite a quiet, domino, bury me now
Take off your band-aid 'cause I don't believe in touchdowns
What was I thinking when we said hello

I always thought that if I held you tightly
You'd always love me like you did back then
Then I fell asleep in the city kept blinking
What was I thinking when I let you back in

I am trying to break your heart
I am trying to break your heart
But still I'd be lying if I said it wasn't easy
I am trying to break your heart

Disposable Dixie cup drinker
I assassin down the avenue
I've been hiding out in the big city blinking
What was I thinking when I let go of you

(vocal sample)
Loves you
I'm the man who loves you

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