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WEB 2.0: THE INDUSTRY OF PARTICIPATION

An Actor-Network Theory Account of Myspace in the Case of Underground Music

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Introduction

Since the contested label of "Web 2.0" was put forward in 2004, the hype and buzz around it spread enormously both on a media and academic level. This was mainly due to two reasons: the enormous spread of Web 2.0 tools and their reach of hundreds of million users, and the opportunity this represented for scholars to not only deal with the related computer-mediated social interactions, but also to treat this as a revolutionary "next big thing." Indeed, on the one side, we saw in the last years the rise of more that 1,500 Web 2.0 sites and tools[1] including wikis, blogs, Social Networking Sites, RSS, social bookmarking, photo and video sharing. Some of them became widely adopted by users, so much so that the professional social networking platform LinkedIn claims to have reached over 53 million members in over 200 countries[2]; Facebook claims to count more than 350 million active users, half of which would log on the website everyday to upload and share more than 3.5 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) each week[3]; 20 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute[4]. So, while being a contested term, Web 2.0 can be considered both a "buzzword" and a set of new technologies and behaviors (Zittrain, 2008) that "have captured the imaginations of millions of users worldwide" (boyd[5], 2006b: 18-19).

While technologies develop under the mottos of "the architecture of participation," "the web as platform," and "harnessing the collective intelligence" (O'Reilly, 2005), they allegedly lead to social interactions online based on collaboration and sharing (Cooke and Buckley, 2008). Those collaborative practices and dynamics, would give a role of first relevance to the collectivity of Internet users. What used to be considered an audience, mainly passive, is now addressed as a more and more active and empowered audience. These people "formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006) are now addressed as *prosumers* (Tapscott and Williams, 2006)[6], *produsers* (Bruns, 2007; 2008), or *pro-ams* (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004), that would be allowed to challenge professional and market hierarchies. So, following the "dominant rhetorics" that arose about Web 2.0, this would represent a new "era" of users' empowerment and active participation, characterized by an ongoing process of democratization mainly based on access to content production and sharing.

There is a double sociological interest emerging from what has been expressed so far. On the one hand, it stands in the huge number of people that engage in highly social interactions mediated by

1 http://web2.ajaxprojects.com/
2 http://press.linkedin.com/about last accessed on December 5, 2009
3 http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics last accessed on December 5, 2009
4 http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2009/05/zoinks-20-hours-of-video-uploaded-every_20.html last accessed on December 5, 2009
5 The reason why this author's name is not capitalized is due to her explicit choice, expressed in "What's in a name?" http://www.danah.org/name.html
6 drawing upon a concept put forward by Toffler (1980)

Web 2.0 that have become an "embedded and routine part of everyday life" (Beer and Burrows, 2007:3). On the other hand, the alleged reconfiguration of hierarchies through active participation that has lead Web 2.0 advocates to argue in favor of a democratizing technology (Allen, 2008: 8) is of main interest for a sociological investigation of this alleged social change.

But the engaging aspects of this issue do not stop here. Indeed, a researcher that decides to investigate this topic will face two challenges. The first stands in the fact that investigating Web 2.0 also means to engage in a study of online communications and interactions that is, as we will see in detail, still unsettled both at a theoretical and methodological level. Connected to this is the second challenge, represented by literature on Web 2.0 and its tools, that is often either driven by deterministic assumptions, or presents partial accounts of the issue. Indeed, many discourses surrounding Web 2.0 embed "narratives of inevitability and technological determinism" (Bigge, 2006: 1) and belong to a long history of studies on the web and networked communication technologies that often have claimed a "revolutionary" role of the next new medium, a history that usually saw the failure of those claims, which should be challenged once and for all. However, many critical studies that would be expected to debunk the "dominant rhetorics" of Web 2.0 in fact partially accomplish the mission, since they often fail to properly account for all the four aspects of Web 2.0, which are: technological implementations, business aspects, active users that easily produce, publish and share content, and underlying political statements (Allen, 2008). By reviewing literature on Web 2.0 and CMC, I will highlight those missing aspects in literature, and with the present work I aim to suggest a way to fill them in by responding to the call for a descriptive sociology of Web 2.0 (Beer and Burrows, 2007) that accounts for technology (Schäfer, 2008) and ownership (Baym, 2009). From Web 2.0 studies we get the urge to approach this topic with a "theoretical remediation" (Beer and Burrows, 2007), while for CMC literature we are called to a non-reductionist approach. I will argue that both calls can be answered by adopting the theoretical framework of Science and Technology Studies, and in particular, the perspective of Actor-Network Theory (ANT).

Indeed, due to its theoretical standpoints and methodological suggestions that will be widely accounted for, this perspective helps to approach an investigation of Web 2.0 and its users that accounts for all of its four elements by looking at them in a symmetrical relationship of co-construction. With this perspective, I will investigate in my study of the Social Networking Site Myspace and some of its underground music-related users whether and how the alleged processes of democratization, user empowerment and active participation can be retrieved.

The choice of a Social Networking Site was mainly due to these Web 2.0 platforms as being

reasonably considered the most socially significant (Beer and Burrows, 2007), and among the Social Networking Sites available, I picked Myspace which was, at the time I started my research in 2007, the most popular one, ranked the fifth most trafficked website worldwide[7]. My interest in this platform was fostered by the constant and ongoing buzz that I was facing when talking to friends and colleagues, as well as when surfing the web. Myspace seemed to be "the next big thing" for many people, and its relevance was quickly growing among musicians (boyd, 2008; Beer, 2008a). So, I decided to investigate my research questions in the field of Myspace and underground music, being the world of music considered the "zero point" of produsage and post-filtering processes (Anderson, 2006; Jennings, 2007), which would characterize Web 2.0 and on which the "dominant rhetorics" also drew upon.

The choice of which methods to employ in this investigation represented one additional challenge. Today, the field of Internet research is still a "shifting ground" (Baym and Markham, 2009) that challenges scholars. Consistent with the perspective adopted, I chose to base my work on an anthropologically-orientated methodology, and in particular one that could respond to the call for an approach able to account for online and offline dimensions as more than merely intertwined (Beer, 2008a): cyberethnography (Hakken, 1999; Teli, Pisanu and Hakken, 2007; Ward, 1999).

By providing an Actor-Network Theory account of the data gathered through this methodology, I answer my research questions by accounting for a symmetrical relationship of co-construction of the users with technology and the underlying ownership aspects.

Aside from finding an answer to these questions, the aim of the present work is also to represent a humble contribution in to help inform the aforementioned aspects that have been overlooked found in the present body of literature, and in suggesting a possible way to deal with those challenges that scholars are very likely to face when approaching a study of Web 2.0.

The work is organized as follows:

In Chapter 1 I will first try to deconstruct the social construct of Web 2.0 by outlining those elements on which the dominant rhetorics mainly draw upon (Chapter 1, section 1.2), and then, outline the "dominant rhetorics" (pgf. 1.3.) and critical studies (1.4.). In light of both, I will pinpoint the general lack of strongly empirically grounded studies that take into proper account all the elements of Web 2.0 in literature, as well as a general tendency of scholars to draw upon deterministic standpoints. I will then argue for the need of a "theoretical remediation" able to account for the convergence of online and online dimensions, and to properly account for

7 As of March, 20 2007. Source: Alexa.com

technology, setting the basis for later arguing that a non-modern epistemology might be a valid standpoint, but without stating, for now, that a specific theoretical background has to be preferred to others (1.4.). Finally, I will describe and frame the motivation behind my choice of the world of underground music as an object of study (1.5.).

In Chapter 2 I will engage in a detailed review of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) literature (Chapter 2, section 2.1.), in order to "learn from history" how communications and interactions online have been studied. In light of this review I will highlight that suggestions have been put forward to fill the need CMC researchers have to adopt a "non reductionist approach" (pgf. 2.2.). One such suggestion puts forward a possible approach which studies communication and interactions online under the lens of Science and Technology Studies (2.3.), which pays attention to the relationship between technology and its users. In adopting the lens of STS in my study of how underground music-related actors interact with and through Myspace, I will dedicate the final part of the Chapter to specific debates within STS that the present work could contemporaneously draw upon and contribute to, and I justify my choice of one specific perspective within the STS field, that of Actor-Network Theory (2.4.).

After identifying the theoretical framework and perspective, I will discuss which methodology to employ in Chapter 3. Also in light of the need for an epistemology able to properly account for the online/offline dimensions (highlighted in paragraph 1.4.), I will recall the scholarly debate dealing with how to approach a study of online interactions also highlighting how the traditional interest of STS in ethnographic methods can constitute a fourth bridge with CMC (section 3.1.), and will argue in favor of a cyber epistemology, which calls for a methodology based on cyberethnography (section 3.2.). Then, I will describe the phases of my empirical research (sections 3.3. and 3.4.) and data analysis (3.5.).

Chapter 4 is dedicated to describing the technological platform I have been investigating in order to both account for my research context and to describe those technological features that I discussed in light of the data I collected, which are described in Chapter 5. I outline these data in four groups: the reasons for getting a Myspace profile (section 5.1.), the business and corporate context of Myspace, and some relative issues that arose (section 5.2.), what users do on (section 5.3.) and through Myspace (5.4.).

I dedicated Chapter 6 to offering an ANT account of the data retrieved, first focusing on the controversies emerging from the data (section 6.1.), then describing and discussing the phases of Myspace translation which resulted in a stabilized and irreversible actor-network (section 6.2.). I dedicated the final part of the chapter to issues of debate that emerged from the account provided,

recalling literature about the specific issues (section 6.3.).

Finally, Chapter 7 is dedicated to recall the data analyzed for answering to my research questions. Here I will argue that, in light of my investigation, participation should be defined (section 7.1.) and that it emerges from my case of study as a mere "taking part in" what I propose to call the industry of participation (section 7.2.). In light of this, I conclude by highlighting how a "missing democratization" finally emerged (section 7.3) and by adding, after a brief summary (7.4), some more general final thoughts on my work, as well as suggesting scenarios for future research (section 7.5.).

While meaningful, the term ["Web2.0"] is also rather bogus. It's like the word "allopathic." It just means doing things right, and it's a bad sign when you have a special word for that.

Paul Graham, November 2005[8]

Chapter 1 - Web 2.0, SNS, And The Related Rhetorics

The label of Web 2.0 was proposed in 2004 to address a set of supposedly user-centered technological platforms and services, and it concerns a phenomenon that has been extensively debated. The debate is due to many reasons: first, Web 2.0 addresses a new set of platforms and applications that has, like every other previous "new" medium, been considered by scholars (as well as by non-scholars in public discourse) as an innovation that would bring with it a revolution in society. Secondly, it has been claimed that Web 2.0 has fostered a specific type of revolution: an increasing amount of power for Internet users, and a general democratization of the web, culture, and society, thanks to the higher level of participation that these new tools would offer to the users.

The concept and tools that are allegedly considered "Web 2.0" can either represent an actual new set of ICTs and computer-mediated interactions or consist in a mere "buzzword" that not only forced its way into almost every web-mediated social phenomena, but also became part of everyday life (Beer and Burrows, 2007). For this reason, Web 2.0 has a sagittal relationship with the contemporary society, meaning that analyzing this phenomenon can give us a clearer view of not only the phenomenon itself, but also more elements to better understand what is going on today in our society. Indeed, investigating what has been addressed as "Web 2.0" and its features can help us make more sense of our world:

> [Web 2.0 is] *a topic that now requires sustained attention from sociologists in the round, and not just those with substantive interests in new media. At the moment it is hard to locate areas that go untouched by the implications of user-generated and openly accessible content – and these implications are sure to spread out across social and cultural spheres over the coming months and years. As we have pointed out here, it even has a range of implications for us as sociologists. Not only does it create for us new opportunities for research, and maybe teaching, but these applications are already being used to say things about us, about the concepts and writers that we use, about our teaching, and about our institutions. Whatever we may choose to call it, it is important that we at least acknowledge that we are being subject to processes of remediation, and to begin to think through how we might respond.* [Beer and Burrows, 2007: 7]

Then, as mentioned above, the rhetoric associated with Web 2.0 is that of a revolution that would

8 Graham, P. (2005) "Web 2.0" at http://www.paulgraham.com/web20.html

bring more participation and thus democratization into the web-influenced society. This lead me to ask: “In the use of Web 2.0 tools, is there a substantial democratization and increased participation? Do these tools and the related uses happen to justify the argument that these media would have strong affordances in regard to participation and democratization?”

In particular, the supposedly participative and democratizing effects of Web 2.0 are hereby analyzed by focusing on one tool of Web 2.0: Social Networking Sites (from now on, SNS). And one of these sites, Myspace.com, is considered here in relation to the world of underground music.

In this chapter I will consider Web 2.0 and its elements, especially focusing on some of its elements that were frequently drawn upon to argue in favor of user involvement, and that have most frequently lead scholars and journalists to put forward the mentioned rhetorics of user empowerment, participation and democratization. These rhetorics will be taken into account in paragraph 1.3, which will be followed by an overview and discussion of the critical aspects of these and other studies, arguing in favor of new theoretical approaches to Web 2.0. Later, I will contextualize the topic within the world of music and I will conclude by outlining the research questions the retrieved critical aspects set the basis for.

1. Web 2.0 and SNS

1.1. What is web 2.0?

Since it was put forward by Tim O'Reilly in 2004[9], the concept of Web 2.0 has spread so widely, and incited so much debate and discussion, that all the contemporary researchers engaging in the study of ICTs and the Internet somehow have to deal with it in some shape or form. Here is how Web 2.0 was first defined:

> *Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an "architecture of participation," and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences.* (O'Reilly, 2005)[10]

Web 2.0 is thus either a new way to look at the web, or a new chapter in the history of the Internet (or both, Zimmer, 2008). The interactions that take place within the Net today are alleged to pivot

9 Even if the first formal definition is from 2005, I mentioned as birth date of Web 2.0 the year 2004, since in that year was held the Web 2.0 conference.

10 http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2005/10/web-20-compact-definition.html

on the spread of the "collective intelligence" (O'Reilly, 2007), which mainly would take the form of collaborative practices and dynamics such as the collaborative filtering and linking that made Google one of the best search engines on the web, as well as other collaborative activities such as tagging (folksonomies), and social networking.

These practices are argued to give to the collectivity of Internet users a role of first relevance as co-developers, (O'Reilly, 2005) and what used to be considered a mainly passive audience is now often claimed to be intended as more and more active (Gillmor, 2004). Under this lens, Web 2.0 could be considered a potential example of knowledge networking, that is, a spread of knowledge that can generates meta-discourses dealing both with the underlying infrastructure (Hakken, 2003), and with the same processes that characterize this transmission and sharing of knowledge. But is it?

Before we proceed to find an answer to this and other questions by investigating discourses raised around Web 2.0, we should pause and clarify how it came to be defined. Indeed, faced with the definition set forward by O'Reilly, which is usually considered the progenitor of the term, other authors have asked what (and "whether") Web 2.0 is. As highlighted by Cormode and Krishnamurty's effort to define Web 2.0 and distinguish it from Web 1.0, the alleged new "epoch" of the web is not represented by merely new technological features. Rather, the distinctions between the "old" and the "new" web would involve three dimensions: technological, structural, and social (Cormode and Krishnamurty, 2008: 1). In other words, Web 2.0 addresses more than a mere technological advancement in web-related tools, but rather it quickly became a social construct whose elements are not immediately identifiable. So, what are the core features of the "new" web, which involves techno-structural and social dimensions?

While the definition proposed by O'Reilly (2005, 2007) is very articulated, its core lies in the development and release of web services instead of packages, where Web 2.0 companies would offer native and web tools like Google that was "never sold or packaged, but delivered as a service" that undergoes "continuous improvement". Moreover, Google also embodies another feature of Web 2.0, which recognizes and embraces the power of "the long tail," which for brevity's sake I will consider as: acknowledgment that the power of small niche markets and sites can collectively overtake the amount of traffic and market created by few blockbuster hits or few most trafficked websites (Anderson, 2006). For this reason, a Web 2.0 tool, or set of tools like Google, has understood the relevance of being able to place ads (through Google AdSense) on "virtually any web page" (O'Reilly, 2005: 2). Now, since what Web 2.0 companies propose is a "rich user experience" rather than a mere purchase and use by web users, and since these companies understood that they can make the most out of the sum of small transactions (like eBay), niche

markets, and little-trafficked websites, it becomes important for Web 2.0 companies to propel users' participation and collaborative actions. Also, it becomes of primary importance to collect data about the users and to keep monitoring their activities in order to release new features that can meet their needs and become widely adopted.

All these aspects flow together into the principles of offering platforms designed to have an "architecture of participation," which would let companies "leverage customer-self service" and "harness the collective intelligence" (which gets translated into practice by exploiting the "network effects from user contributions"). It is here that we start to understand what Cormode and Krishnamurty (2008) meant when stating that in Web 2.0 "users are treated as first class objects" (ibid.: 1). Since the most peculiar element of Web 2.0 companies is that of offering a service instead of a packaged product, their focus is necessarily shifting to the value that is created by the users' and their usage of that service. For example: users are offered services, like Google's Pagerank or Amazon's and eBay's feedback features, that allow them to create, publish and share content. This, in turn, allows companies (like the above mentioned ones) to provide better services and thus entice more people to use the service. The more users that are attracted to the service, the more value for companies who can, for instance, place personalized advertisements on their much trafficked pages (see Google Adsense). Similarly, users create value for Web 2.0 companies as much as they let these service providers collect data both *through* the users' activities and *about* the users themselves. Indeed, on the one side, data collected *through* the users activities (like Amazon's feedback) allow to the company to offer a better service (which is more and more based on owning a non-easily replicable database), while, on the other hand, data *about* the users and their activities let companies both offer services that comply with the users' needs and thus are likely to augment the catchment area, and use these data to address the users with more specifically targeted advertisement.

In light of this summary of Web 2.0, drawn upon what was set forward by O'Reilly (2005) himself, we immediately grasp how deeply intertwined the structural/technological and social dimensions are: Web 2.0 companies provide services instead of products, and collecting information about the users' activities, which refers both to how users use their service and more in general to their personal data, becomes focal. The distinctive elements of Web 2.0, as opposed to Web 1.0 ones, can be summarized as follows:

- While Web 1.0 sites "adopted approximately hierarchical structure, with a front page leading to various subpages, augmented by cross-links and search functions," Web 2.0 sites tend to be less hierarchical and resemble more social networks, where links are bi-directional and often offer a very "user-centered" view of the site, like with customized front pages

(Cormode and Krishnamurty, 2008:2);

- Web 2.0 platforms adopt software and programming language that is easy to modify and develop: this goes back to O'Reilly's (2005) principles of "the perpetual beta" and "software above the level of a single device." Web 2.0 services are "ongoing services" that, also thanks to users' feedback, can be regularly enriched with new features and must be able to work as integrated across different devices;
- Web 2.0 platforms foster users' creation and publishing of content, as well as enhance the formation of connections between the users by providing an "architecture of participation" able to "harness the collective intelligence" (O'Reilly, 2005). Users actions, relationships, opinions, abilities as co-developers, as well as users' related data, create value for Web 2.0 companies, hence the "new" web differs from Web 1.0 in that it has many more content creators then passive "users." This is due to an increased offer by Web 2.0 companies of "technical aids to maximize the potential of content creation" (Cormode and Krishnamurty, 2008: 2), as well as data gathering.

The social and technological dimensions are more than ever intertwined in the realm of Web 2.0, where, as briefly introduced earlier, the users would become active *on* and *through* technology, while technology is designed for users to easily create, publish and share content, as well as connect to other users. In fact, this whole set of tools has also been addressed as "social media" or "social web." As we will see shortly, this interweave of social and technical dimensions has often given rise to opinions driven by technological determinism, arguing that the new tools would lead to some specific social behavior, while some other times it has lead to the perception that the increased degree of sociability of the web would represent a revolutionary empowerment of users over the media.

Far from being exhaustive, the above list of distinctive traits of Web 2.0 can be useful in distinguishing tools and services addressable with the label "Web 2.0" from those that can be classified as "Web 1.0." But this characterization is also helpful to understand and deconstruct the rhetoric that, since 2005, has started to spread out on both an academic and popular level: that of empowerment of the users by becoming more active and participating in this democratic world of Web 2.0. These rhetorics have spread out in regard to all the collaborative user-centered tools and services that belong to this realm, one of which is represented by Social Networking Sites.

1.1.1. A web 2.0 tool: Social Networking Sites

Inside the context of Web 2.0, Social Networking Sites (SNS) are a very important tool, and allegedly the most socially significant (Beer and Burrows, 2007). Not only are they extremely spread-out[11], these platforms would embody most of the Web 2.0 principles and features. They are, indeed, "non-hierarchical" sites (Cormode and Krishnamurty, 2008) that foster the publication of users' data (age, sex location, interests) and content (pictures, videos, mash-ups). Also, the service offered by the owners of a SNS is that of allowing the creation and maintenance of relationships (like for example "friendship" or "fandom"), so SNS are strongly tied to group formation, community building, and sharing.

The first formal definition of Social Networking Sites was proposed in literature by boyd and Ellison (2007), who consider these platforms as

> *[...] web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.* [boyd and Ellison, 2007: 2]

While this definition is a useful basis for starting an investigation of SNS, it also represents a standpoint for discussing what SNS are. Despite SNS being unanimously acknowledged as part of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005; Cormode and Krishnamurty, 2005; boyd, 2008, Beer, 2008a), the topic is so new that scholars have not reached a compromise on a shared definition yet. This is made evident by Beer's (2008a) response to boyd and Ellison's above mentioned definition. Among other insightful critiques[12], Beer does not agree with boyd and Ellison's decision to address these sites as "social network" sites, instead of the more spread-out "networking": while for the two authors "networking" should not be adopted because it focuses on the "relationship initiation, often between strangers" and this is "not the primary practice on many of them [SNS], nor is it what it differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication" (boyd and Ellison,

11 "MySpace already has over 130 million members (a 'population' already over twice that of the UK) and Facebook around 18 million." (Beer and Burrows, 2007)

12 Besides the critical point described, Beer also criticizes boyd and Ellison's approach to online living as reflecting the offline life, considering the two dimensions as intertwined but separated, and he counterargues that we should realize that it is difficult to think of any "unmediated" situations today, and the two dimensions can thus not be considered separated anymore. For this reason, he suggests that "we need to consider other types of theoretical frameworks and teh grounding premises that underpin them" (Beer, 2008a: 522). In light of this, the author also suggests new ways going forward for research on SNS. I will consider both these critiques in paragraph 1.4.

2007:2), for Beer we should drop broad terms[13], and "move toward more differentiated classifications […], not away from them" (Beer, 2008a: 519). It is difficult to describe Social Networking Sites and, consequently, it is tricky for a researcher to face this topic.

Despite the remarkable efforts of scholars like Beer to accurately discuss the topic of SNS "before the dust settles on the path forward" (2008: 517), and although the umbrella concept of Web 2.0 in which SNS are included is itself matter of an ongoing discussion, the vast majority of academics limited themselves to drawing upon boyd and Ellison's definition without problematizing it (see, for instance, Lietsala and Sirkunnen, 2008; Grimmelmann, 2009) and they applied their theoretical backgrounds and methodological approaches to SNS, building a huge amount of fragmented research that has been developed on shifting grounds.

In contrast to these academics, I think that Beer's critique of the definition should be taken into account, and in the present study, I second his suggestion to adopt the label social *networking* sites for two main reasons: first, while appreciating boyd and Ellison's work with special regard to the effort of defining and outline a history of SNS (boyd and Ellison, 2007), I totally support Beer's argument that we need to classify Web 2.0 tools by differentiating them. Secondly, because networking *is*, in fact, the main activity carried out by the users on SNS. This discussion and justification of the definition of the object of study is not only useful for this paper, but also intended as an invitation to other researchers on Web 2.0 tools to carry on the discussion.

On the topic of the shifting ground of SNS studies, we can see that the bibliographic landscape on SNS is quite puzzling: much academic literature, from different backgrounds such as economics (Chapman, 2008), law (Grimmelmann, 2009), communication and media studies (Andrejevic, 2005; Barnes, 2006; Dwyer, 2007; boyd, 2006, 2008;), and computer science (Backstrom, Huttenlocher, Kleinberg and Xiangyang, 2006; Backstrom, Lars, Dwork and Kleinberg, 2007; Ahn, Han, Moon and Jeong, 2007) has taken into account Social Networking Sites. Some have focused on friendship (boyd, 2006; Fono and Raynes-Goldie, 2006, among many others) and management of social capital (Putnam, 2000) on SNS (Steinfield, Ellison, Lampe, 2008; Steinfield, DiMicco, Ellison, Lampe, 2009), as well as on the relation between online relationships with offline ties (Ploderer, Howard and Thomas, 2008; Ahn, Han, Kwak, Moon, Jeong; 2007). Other authors focused on more specific aspects such as the relationship between the intent to blog and the psychological distress of Myspace users (Baker and Moore, 2008), on the importance of engaging in dedicated Social Networking Sites for redressing the impact of racism (Byrne, 2008), on the possibilities for brands

13 In regard to this, Beer suggests that we use a term like "Web 2.0 to describe the general shift and then fit categories, such as wikis, folksonomies, mashups and social networking within it" (Beer, 2008a: 519).

and marketers to make money with SNS (Chapman, 2008), or, also, on the possible use of Web 2.0 for research in social sciences (Snee, 2008). In general, three are the most well-fed fields of study on SNS: teens' online relationships and processes of identity construction (boyd 2008), formation of new types of groups and communities (Baym, 2007; boyd, 2006b), and privacy and surveillance (Acquisti and Gross, 2006; Barnes, 2006; Albrechtslund, 2008).

To add some complexity to this already disarmingly fragmented scenario, we should consider that the scholarly research on SNS have necessarily adopted, in line with the different epistemological backgrounds of the authors, a wide variety of research methodologies (social network analysis, surveys, interviews, ethnography, discourse analysis, data-mining), and this has added confusion to the already puzzled Internet scholars[14].

Finally, we should not forget that, as you read these lines, there is no unanimously settled ground on which to set up these studies, and not just because discussion is still ongoing about what (and whether) Web 2.0 and SNS are, and consequently how they should be approached, but also because Web 2.0 platforms, services, and tools, as well as SNS' features and uses, are constantly changing. This means that there is no clear, well-paved path for a researcher that aims to face a study of SNS.

What is a researcher supposed to do? The answer is easier than one would think. Indeed, despite the fragmentation of literature on SNS and the unsettled ground on which it stands, the vast majority of it shares a lack, which is also retrievable in the wider research on Web 2.0 and, even more generally, on ICTs: these studies often set a dichotomy between online and offline lives; they usually underlie, more or less explicitly, deterministic assumptions; and they often fail to take technology into proper account. Since this lack is not limited to studies on SNS, I will go back to this point at the end of the chapter when I will discuss the issue more extensively and argue in favor of a different approach to SNS, Web 2.0, and Internet studies.

Before doing that, I think it is necessary to outline some elements of Web 2.0 (and SNS) that have been drawn upon for constructing rhetorics and discourses that are often, and misleadingly, taken for granted by scholars, leading them to not properly question technology and sink into determinism or construct the hype about Web 2.0.

1.2. Elements of Web 2.0

Claims and discourses on Web 2.0, Social Networking Sites, and the allegedly new “era” that the web would be facing, have flourished in the last few years. Given, on the one side, the recentness of

14 I will go back to the questions of Internet researchers dealing with qualitative methods in Chapter 3. For an overview of issues and topic see Markham and Baym, 2009.

the topic, and, on the other side, the different epistemological backgrounds and standpoints of the scholars that have been taking part in the debate, it is very complicated to present this issue in a clear and organized way, and thus it is often difficult to consider the phenomenon under investigation in both a detailed and extensive way. For this reason, I will try, in the following paragraphs, to outline some of the core elements that have been drawn upon by scholars to create discourses and rhetorics on the revolutionary, freeing, empowering effects of Web 2.0, which I will then come back to later on. In operating this (necessarily not all-encompassing) dissection of the social construct of "Web 2.0," I will focus on those elements that most have been employed for building discourses on the alleged participatory and democratizing role of Web 2.0 technologies, which I will finally recall in my research questions.

1.2.1. The architecture of participation

The concept of "architecture of participation" goes back about one year before that of "Web 2.0," and it was put forward by the same author. Indeed, before proposing a definition of Web 2.0, O'Reilly already argued that the architecture of a technological infrastructure is fundamental in harnessing (or possibly discouraging) users' participation. By "architecture of participation" he addresses the "systems that are designed for user contribution" (O'Reilly, 2004: 1). Then, drawing upon the example of Free/Libre and Open Source Software (FLOSS) communities and projects that pivot on systems based on developers' contributions, he states that the web applies this model to every user of the system: the web is designed for communication and "the fundamental architecture of hyperlinking ensures that the value of the web is created by its users" (O'Reilly, 2004).

As highlighted by O'Reilly, there are different ways to create and share information, for example: for money, on a volunteer basis, or through an automatic system (Bricklin, 2006). Thus, a technological architecture oriented to participation can have a pivotal role to push information sharing so that the users can be driven to share content and contribute to create collective value even if they are moved to action by egoistical reasons (O'Reilly, 2004).

In his definition of this concept, the author is hence drawing upon the original spirit of the web, as well as to the way its technological structure was designed, in order to claim that the same architecture of the web "ensures that the value is created by its users" (2004: 2). To strengthen his argument, the author takes the case of FLOSS, arguing that this movement and its organizational practices are representative of how a system designed for participation would result in groups of people that would work at an individual level and contribute to create collective value.

The FLOSS movement is indeed offering a quite peculiar example of people that, motivated by

different reasons, start working on a shared source code, which is available ("open"), and collaborate and share knowledge, contributing to both test and develop a progressively improving piece of software, which can also be released to the market by companies.

While, in O'Reilly's opinion, FLOSS would represent an example of the architecture of participation and of the related processes of organizing and participation that such an architecture would give rise to, he later applied the concept of architecture of participation for describing that of Web 2.0 as well, explaining that in order for companies to enter the Web 2.0 world and take advantage of the possible opportunities this outlines, they need to propose platforms able to connect the users and let them create value.

> *The competitive opportunity for new entrants is to fully embrace the potential of Web 2.0. Companies that succeed will create applications that learn from their users, using an architecture of participation to build a commanding advantage not just in the software interface, but in the richness of the shared data.* [O'Reilly, 2005]

This helps to better understand what I have mentioned before (pgf. 1.1.) in regard to Web 2.0 platforms characterized by their treatment of users as "first class objects" (Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008: 1): given the understanding that users' collaboration can create value, Web 2.0 platforms are organized and structured following the idea of the "architecture of participation," that is, inscribing and calling for an active participation of the users. What is meant by "participation" here is that users of the above mentioned platforms "are both producers and consumers of content. [And that] the role of the Web2 substrate is to help in the production of such content, host it, and allow interested users to consume it while interacting with other like–minded users" (Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008: 9). So, the architecture of participation emerges as one of the main features of Web 2.0 platforms and companies which, through that architecture, can benefit from the collaborative activities enacted by the users of the platform by, using O'Reilly's words, "harnessing collective intelligence" (O'Reilly, 2005).

The concept of collective intelligence, which was first put forward by Pierre Lévy (1994)[15] and has since then undergone a long debate[16], addresses the global structure of relationships among people

15 Another definition of the term that was proposed, more specifically related to mass media, is the following: "Collective intelligence is a shared or group intelligence that emerges from the collaboration and competition of many individuals. Collective intelligence appears in a wide variety of forms of consensus decision making in bacteria, animals, humans, and computer networks. The study of collective intelligence may properly be considered a subfield of sociology, of business, of computer science, of mass communications and of mass behavior—a field that studies collective behavior from the level of quarks to the level of bacterial, plant, animal, and human societies." This definition has emerged from the writings of Douglas Hofstadter (1979), Peter Russell (1983), Tom Atlee (1993), Pierre Lévy (1994), Howard Bloom (1995), Francis Heylighen (1995), Douglas Engelbart, Cliff Joslyn, Ron Dembo, Gottfried Mayer-Kress (2003) and other theorists" http://wapedia.mobi/en/Collective_Intelligence

16 A later concept, related to Levy's one, was then put forward by Derrick De Kerckhove (1997), who argues in favor of a "connected intelligence," which is, as he himself declares, a more specific vision of the collective intelligence: it is

who, by connecting and sharing experiences, knowledge, emotions, and so on, create a collective container of knowledge and exchanges:

> *An intelligence distributed everywhere, that is continuously enhanced, that is coordinated in real time, and that leads to an actual mobilization of competences.* [Lévy, 1994, tr. it. 1996: 34]

It is to harness the value created by the *mobilization* of these competences that Web 2.0 companies should, in O'Reilly's thought, provide a platform whose architecture leads to participation. And it is exactly this process of harnessing the collective intelligence that differentiates Web 2.0 companies from Web 1.0 ones:

> *The central principle behind the success of the giants born in the Web 1.0 era who have survived to lead the Web 2.0 era appears to be this, that they have embraced the power of the web to harness collective intelligence* [O'Reilly, 2007: 22]

To understand the deployment of collective intelligence on the Web, O'Reilly sets out some examples, among them Google's PageRank, eBay's reputation system, Amazon's feedback by the users, which show how collective intelligence and the sharing of users' knowledge and opinions can be harnessed. An example of further development of systems like the ones mentioned are Wikipedia, folksonomy systems like del.ici.ous' and, once again, all the Free/Libre and Open Source projects, which are "in themselves an instance of collective, net-enabled intelligence" (2007: 24).

Amongst the characteristics and features named by O'Reilly (2005) in his first formal definition of Web 2.0, the architecture of participation and the harnessing of collective intelligence have constituted the main basis on which scholars and practitioners have drawn upon for putting forward concepts and labels addressing the "new, " "active" role of the users. These concepts then became the ground for the rhetoric of Web 2.0 as empowering, participative and democratic. It is hence necessary to take into account these concepts which at the same time increased the "hype" around Web 2.0 and substantially contributed to its portrayal as a blurred concept and social construct, instinctively coupled with a not-better-defined participation.

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like a more experimental version of collective intelligence, which is considered within a specific network. In other words, the connective intelligence is one of the forms of organization of the collective intelligence, a form that is thus seen as more oriented to the *connection* of two or more people within a specific sub-network dedicated to specific topics or issues. De Kerckhove's concept of *connected intelligence* "pertains to intelligence or knowledge that exists outside of an individual which only becomes pertinent when shared with others. Collective intelligence, by contrast, is akin to the notion of culture; people make decisions as patterned responses irrespective of their interaction with others" (The Infomation Management Roundtable, 4 May 1999), and it focuses more on the process of creating knowledge instead of being centered on its content. For further information about the rise of the two concepts and the differences and relationship between them, see the interview to Lévy and De Kerckhove published at http://www.mediamente.rai.it/mmold/english/bibliote/intervis/d/dekerc04.htm#link002 (in Italian)

1.2.2. How the users would be empowered

An application of this concept of "architecture of participation" has been put forward by Ryan Shaw and colleagues (2005), and this was eventually included in Anderson's *The Long Tail* (2006) under the name of "map of creation" (Fig 1.) which helps to represent the complexity of roles and creative activities in which users are now allowed to take part. Users can play different roles depending on their level of of participation in Web 2.0[17], but they can also set different types of relationships with the content and other users.

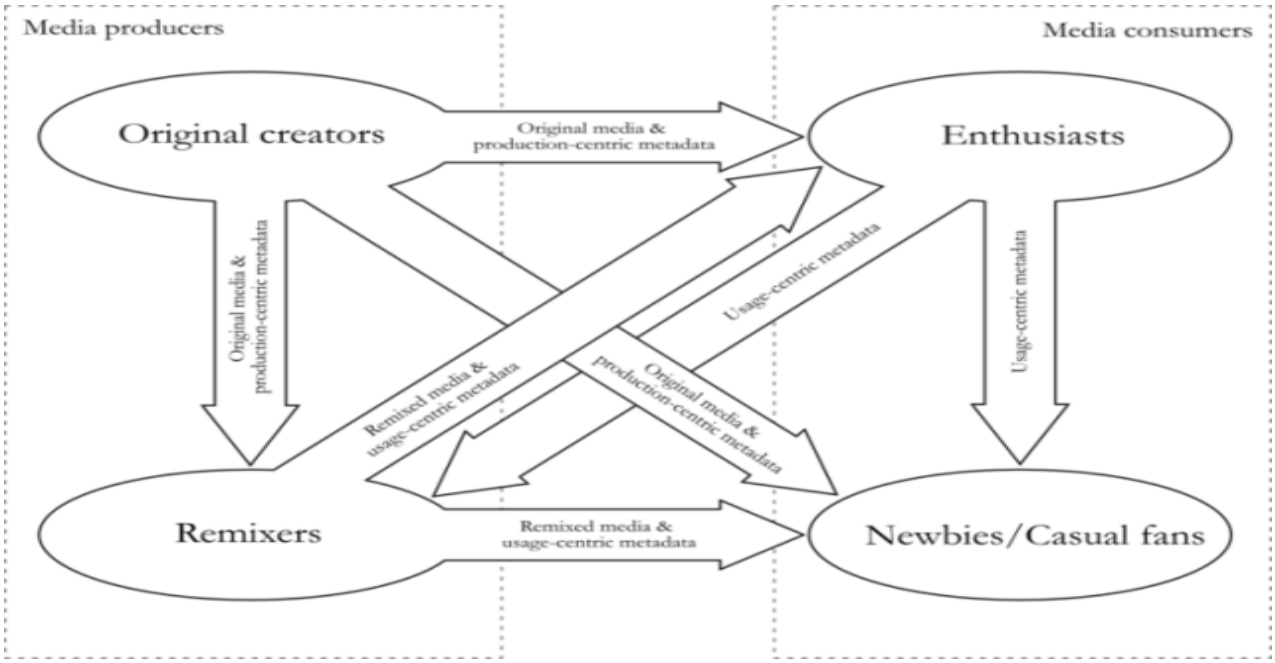


Fig. 1.1 – New map of creation in the remix culture (Shaw, quoted in Anderson, 2006: 84)

This scheme gives an idea of the complex connection and collaboration among the actors involved, and, although it is very articulate, it is incomplete, as Shaw himself declares. Shaw points out how the scheme is not able to give account of the consumers' "need to be viewed as active cultural participants and producers, not just passive receivers of content" (Shaw, 2005: 3). Moreover, from this graphic it is not possible to understand the relevance of metadata for all the other activities (because too many arrows would be needed in order to show that (Shaw, 2005). But the issues with the graphic do not stop at the amount or direction of the arrows. Indeed, as Shaw declares after having adjusted the scheme in the version presented above, creativity and an active participation by

17 In regard to this point, see also the "participation ladder" proposed by Forrester Research Group, that categorizes users' behaviors into a ladder with six levels of participation, quoted in http://blogs.forrester.com/groundswell/2009/08/social-technology-growth-marches-on-in-2009-led-by-social-network-sites.html

the users would be so broad that the landscape of users/producers/remixers/fans becomes much more fuzzier that the scheme is able to account for:

> *I feel that even the revised diagram understates the role of the consumer by focusing on "attention metadata," which has connotations of passivity. Consumers do much more than simply voting with their eyeballs or pocketbooks. Furthermore, the distinctions among the roles of consumer, producer, enthusiast and re-mixer are much fuzzier than this diagram makes them out to be. At the time I created this I recognized that people could quickly switch between roles, but I didn't give enough consideration to situations in which people take on multiple roles simultaneously, consuming and producing at the same time.* [Shaw, 24/05/ 2007][18]

This setting is allegedly becoming then, one where the roles are not identifiable once and for all, but rather on a contingent and situated basis. Moreover, consistent with this view, it would not be possible to talk about pure audience anymore (Gillmor, 2004): since, as also highlighted with the architecture of participation, consumers would be simultaneously users and creators of content, there are not purely active and merely passive groups of people that interact with and through the media. This remixing of roles highlights both an ongoing blur of roles, as well as the possibility for an individual (or group) to play different roles at once.

Indeed, on the one hand, given the massive emergence of amateur producers of content, the lines between professional and amateur production become blurred (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004; Anderson, 2006), and this makes it even more difficult to clearly distinguish what a producer and a consumer are. On the other hand, the same person can act at the same time in different roles. For these reasons, such a distinction is often claimed to not be able to account for the complex processes that are acted in Web 2.0, and scholars and practitioners argue that these categories should be overcome.

It is this conception of the user as a "content generator" that has mainly lead to arguments in favor of Web 2.0 as being participatory, and it is the possibility for these users to have power within the market (becoming "produsers", Bruns, 2007; 2008) and within a specific cultural field (by having amateurs users being empowered by new web tools to compete with "professionals") that Web 2.0 has been depicted as "democratic." Therefore, the concepts of "user-generated content," "professionals/amateurs," and "prosumers/produsers" need to be better understood in order to make sense of the bricks that have been employed to build the rhetoric of Web 2.0 as a participation-lead innovation towards more democratic socio-technical settings. In order to understand whether and how this alleged participation is actually enacted within the realm of Web 2.0, I will thus need to

18 Meantime, the scheme has been updated (http://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~ryanshaw/wordpress/2005/08/15/new-remix-culture-diagram/). Still, the discussion about the previous scheme is useful for highlighing the complex role that Web 2.0 have been alleged to play, and the relative discussion, hereby reported, is significant.

deconstruct it, and I will do this by choosing the most discussed concepts that have been put forward in regard to this, starting with that of user-generated content (UGC).

1.2.3. Empowerment as creation of content: User-generated content

Especially in the field of media studies, scholars have focused in the past on the linear model that sees the communication of a message from a sender to a receiver (Shannon and Weaver, 1949). This model seems to be overtaken by this new allegedly participatory era of the Web where the audience, thanks to the technological tools provided, would become more active, since it is now able to reply back to the message once this has been received. Similarly, the audience that was once limited to merely receiving a technology or good, is now allegedly allowed to create content as well:

> *Participation in contemporary systems is not reducible simply to 'use': The system/user model may imply a break with the broadcast/receiver mode typical of older media (retained to some extent even within 'active audience' theses), but can simultaneously produce a problematic restatement of the under-pinning binaries text/audience, producer/receiver. These binaries are inadequate because ICT networks increasingly involve actors who do not 'use' as earlier audiences used to 'watch'.* [Bassett, 2008: 10]

Along with this necessity to overcome "binaries" in communication comes the idea that the border between producers and consumers of content is getting more and more blurred and that, with Web 2.0, consumers are also becoming producers (Anderson, 2006). Production of content can be achieved both with the creation of content, or by modifying some existing content.

For example,

> *In the blog world, we talk about "the former audience"—readers who have shifted from passive consumers to active producers, commenting and blogging right back at the mainstream media. Others contribute to the process nothing more than their Internet-amplified word of mouth, doing what was once the work of radio DJs, music magazine reviewers, and marketers.* [Anderson, 2006: 83]

Consumers produce not only products or objects, they create content by also showing their preferences and by sharing them with others, becoming then "tastemakers" (Slater and McGuire, 2005) that either co-exist or offer an alternative to traditional tastemakers, such as specialized critics and journalists. With the new ICTs, it is therefore possible to witness a more and more active involvement of consumers in the production of content, and it is not possible to get back to considering this as a mere audience anymore: "the audience is dead" (Bruns, 2008: 254).

User-generated content has started to spread out massively with weblogs[19] (from now on "blogs"),

19 A blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly

but it further developed with the rise of Web 2.0 applications, where the user-generated content sites get more visitors than Google (Robinson, 2006: 20, quoted in Beer and Burrows, 2007).

Literature helps us make a distinction among the content that users usually generate: on the one side, they create a product, while on the other, they provide tagging, rating and feedback that trigger processes of reputation, which are one of the key aspects of Web 2.0. In both cases, they are creating content.

Examples of users creating a product are retrievable in different sectors: in fiction, we see an increasing involvement of fans (Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b); in the press sector, a phenomenon occurs for which the label of "citizen journalism" (Gillmor, 2004; Rosen, 2008[20]) was created to address that "revolution [that started] because technology has given us a communications toolkit that allows everyone become a journalist at little cost and, in theory, with global reach" (Gillmor, 2004, ed. 2006: XXIII). Other examples of user-generated content regard graphic art (like the works published on deviantart.com), the pictures uploaded on Flickr.com, or videos filmed and published by Youtube users[21]. Similarly, publishing content on Wikipedia, or sharing one's songs on Myspace are other examples of this type of UGC.

Besides creating and publishing content, there is also another type of user-generated content that is even more significant for Web 2.0 mechanisms: the sharing of information, rating, and other forms of word-of-mouth recommendations. Such processes are at the core of Web 2.0 tools like social bookmarking services like Delicious.com, where users tag content and "share, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of web resources"[22].

Tagging and rating by the users allow for a categorization of content that is based on folksonomies, rather than taxonomies, which means instead of using rigid categories, the labels attached by the users to the published content become the categories in which that same content is organized

displayed in reverse-chronological order. […] Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (Art blog), photographs (photoblog), videos (Video blogging), music (MP3 blog), and audio (podcasting). Microblogging is another type of blogging, featuring very short posts. From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog

20 Rosen offers the following definition of "citizen journalism": "When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, that's citizen journalism," in a video available at http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2008/07/14/a_most_useful_d.html retrieved on November, 8, 2009.

21 For an overview of User-Generated Content on Youtube, see Cha, M., Kwak, H., Rodriguez, P., Ahn, Y., Moon, S. "I Tube, You Tube, Everybody Tubes: Analyzing the World's Largest User Generated Content Video System", Proceedings of the 7th ACM SIGCOMM Conference on Internet Measurement 2007, San Diego, California, USA, October 24-26, 2007, available at http://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/AY2008/cs7270_fall/imc131.pdf retrieved on November 8, 2009.

22 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_bookmarking

(O'Reilly, 2005: 6). Once content has been tagged, it also gets organized and displayed depending on the ratings given by other users, who can also provide comments and start discussions[23].

Reviews, comments, and recommendation can thus be published and suggested by users to other users, with lower or higher degrees of control by the website owners (for example, digg.com does not filter or edit the users ratings and tagging, while Amazon.com only leaves a part of the website available for the users reviews).

With the label of user-generated content comes the possibility to retrieve different things: indeed, in a "narrow" sense, UGC addresses content that is produced and published by the users, such as the "contents of wikis, blogs, discussion forums, and Social Networking Sites [whose] primary purpose is to be directly consumed (it is read, watched, or listened to)" (Hagermann and Vossen, 2009: 1), while in a wider sense, UGC also addresses actions, like tagging and rating, that allow for user-lead organization of content, rather than creation.

Together with this types of UCG, another very similar type of user-lead activity is pivotal to Web 2.0: word-of-mouth recommendations. Indeed, since technological development and new web tools have made the creation and publication of content easier for everyone, the amount of published content online has increased enormously, and, like reviews and tagging, word-of-mouth recommendations have also been gaining a pivotal role in helping web surfers to make sense of this content. Even if recommendations by users to other users can be associated with UGC, they differ slightly from this, even if they can easily overlap:

> *Although UGC has been closely aligned and often confused with eWOM[24], the two differ depending on whether the content is generated by users or the content is conveyed by users. For example, footage on YouTube that is generated and posted by users is UGC. However, an Internet user who sends her friends a link to a YouTube site is engaging in eWOM. If the content conveyed has been generated by users, it can be both UGC and eWOM. Likewise, if the owner of a digital camera writes an opinion about his or her camera on a consumer review Web site, that opinion represents a type of UGC, because the content originates with the user. If a video including the recommendation of the camera, generated by that user, gets posted on YouTube, it again is considered UGC. However, once the video is e-mailed to other Internet users by an acquaintance, it becomes eWOM. Thus, though UGC and eWOM are distinct concepts, they are related; to be successful, eWOM depends on the dissemination of content, and UGC has less influence without eWOM.* [Cheong and Morrison, 2008: 2-3]

23 See, for example, the websites digg.com or the attention to users feedback by Amazon.com

24 With the acronym eWOM the authors refer to "electronic word-of-mouth", that addresses the same concept expressed by me with "word-of-mouth recommendations."

So, word-of-mouth recommendations, together with UGC, not only enrich the amount of content available online, but at the same time, they also help other users to find, select, and classify that content by offering comments and suggestions.

Moreover, comments, ratings, tagging, and recommendations are pivotal to another mechanisms typical of Web 2.0: "post-filtering" (Anderson, 2006). Since most digital goods are today more easily produceable and publishable, especially within Web 2.0, a "big flip" has taken place in the chain of production and distribution: from "filter, then publish" to "publish, then filter" (Shirky, 2003, 2008): many of the products that characterize the long tail[25] do not get pre-filtered by the media gatekeepers, depending on their predictions of future success, but rather they get post-filtered once they have been published (Anderson, 2005, 2006) (Fig. 1.2):

Pre-Filters	***Post-Filters***
Editors	Blogs
A & R Guys	Playlists
Studio Execs	Reviews
Buyers	buyers
Publishers	Recommendations
Advertisers	Users
TV Networks	Bittorrent
Britannica	Google

Fig- 1.2. "Pre-filters and post-filters" from http://longtail.typepad.com/the_long_tail/2005/07/prefiltering_vs.html

Scholars dealing with new ICTs and cultural industries like, for instance, the musical one (Jennings, 2007; Knowles, 2007), have engaged in the effort of describing in what way the passages of production-filtering-distribution should be reconsidered in light of Web 2.0 tools and the related availability of UGC and users' recommendations, that give rise to "collaborative filtering":

> *Collaborative Filtering (CF) is a promising technique in recommender systems. It provides personalized recommendations to users based on a database of user preferences, from which users having similar tastes are identified. It then recommends to a target user items liked by other, similar users. CF-based recommender systems can be classified into two major types depending on how they collect user preferences: user-log based and ratings based. User-log based CF obtains user preferences from implicit votes captured through users' interactions with the system (e.g. purchase histories). Ratings based CF makes use of explicit ratings users have given items.* [Leung, Chan and Chung, 2007: 2-3]

25 Which, as we mentioned, characterizes, thanks to the ICTs available today, the media and entertainment industries. For summarizing the concept we can say that "the long tail is just culture which is not filtered by economic scarcity" (Anderson, 2006: 46).

By applying this to the more specific realm of music, Jennings (2007) explains these two types of collaborative filtering and recommendation systems that would help people find that material: one is constituted by "intelligent filtering technologies for making automated personalized recommendations of stuff you might like to check" (2007: 2), like categories (multi-level taxonomies), lists of artists related to the one selected (partner matching), collaborative automated filtering (as in web radios), and playlists (ibid.: 106); the other type of recommendation system is more human-based[26], and consists in what is called "word-of-mouth recommendations" (ibid.: 8), that, as we have seen, usually take the shape of blog posts, or of material published on SNS, which basically consist of more or less explicit and developed comments and ratings by whoever wants to give an opinion.

In conclusion, while progressive technological development has made it easier and cheaper to produce digital content, Web 2.0 has been strongly enhancing the publication of such content and the release of digital goods without being pre-filtered. We addressed this as UGC. This may consist of an "actual" digital good, or be a product review or a recommendation (which can be automated or more "human" and voluntary) which can influence the post-filtering of those digital goods. So, while the active role of Web 2.0 users in publishing and organizing content has itself been leading to a rhetoric of participation and democratization, two more specific aspects emerged from the debate above, and need to be further investigated: on the one hand, we see an alleged new role of the users within the market of digital goods (see next paragraph), while, on the other hand, this new role has been claimed to possibly extend so far as to challenge professional hierarchies (pgf. 1.2.5.).

1.2.4. Users' participation as involvement in the market: *Prosumers* and *produsers*

Together with the increased availability of user-generated digital content, and the pivotal role of emerging forms of collaborative filtering and recommendations enhanced by Web 2.0's architecture of participation, a more specific debate has risen dealing with how users, "those people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006), would have been involved as co-creators in collaborative business activities, thus resulting in "a unique form of customer empowerment allowing customers to affect as never before the market power structures and more importantly the shape of future marketing" (Constantinides, Romero, and Boria, 2008: 4, 8).

26 "The human monitors that work on my behalf may not be quite as compliant as the most usable technology is, they have minds of their owns, after all- but by building understanding and rapport with these other like-minded souls, I can keep abreast of a much broader range of sources than would otherwise be possible. They help broaden the horizon of my foraging, with only modest, and often enjoyable, extra effort for me." (Jennings, 2007: 130)

To make sense of these alleged new role of users/consumers as "co-developers" (O'Reilly, 2005), many labels have been suggested, each of which focuses on different practices and attitudes of the former users/consumers:

> *Some call them (us, really) "loyals," (Jenkins 2006a) stressing the value of consumer commitment in an era of channel zapping. Some are calling them "media-actives," (Frank 2004) stressing a generational shift with young people expecting greater opportunities to reshape media content than their parents did. Some are calling them "prosumers," (Toffler, 1980) suggesting that as consumers produce and circulate media, they are blurring the line between amateur and professional. Some are calling them "inspirational consumers" (Roberts 2004), "connectors" or "influencers," suggesting that some people play a more active role than others in shaping media flows. Grant McCracken (2005) calls them "multipliers," stressing their role in proliferating the values and meanings that get attached to particular brands. Each label describes audience practices related to, but significantly different from, the construction of the active audience within media and cultural studies discussions in the 1970s and 1980s.*
>
> [Jenkins, March 19, 2008[27]]

Out of the different concepts proposed, two are particularly stressing an allegedly active and new role of consumers in effecting business processes: those of "prosumer," initially put forward by Alvin Toffler (1980: 265) and that of "produser," suggested by Bruns (2007, 2008) whose aim was to better account for a more active and participatory role that produsers have within the market. Let us quickly consider this debate.

In 1980, futurologist Alvin Toffler put forward the term "prosumer" for addressing a new form of consumption that is mixed with production processes:

> [In the "third wave"] *We see a progressive blurring of the line that separates producer from consumer. We see the rising significance of the prosumer. And beyond that, we see an awesome change looming that will transform even the role of the market itself in our lives and in the world system. All this takes us back to the millions of people who are beginning to perform for themselves services hitherto performed for them by doctors. For what these people are really doing is shifting some production from [...] the visible economy that the economists monitor to the phantom economy they have forgotten.* [Toffler, 1980: 263-4]

While this concept was put forward in a pre-web era, and it was thus referring to an economic, technological and cultural context typical of the industrial age, it is often applied to address our contemporary socio-technical context (Bruns, 2008).

It is from this standpoint that Bruns built his critique of Toffler's concept, and proposed the

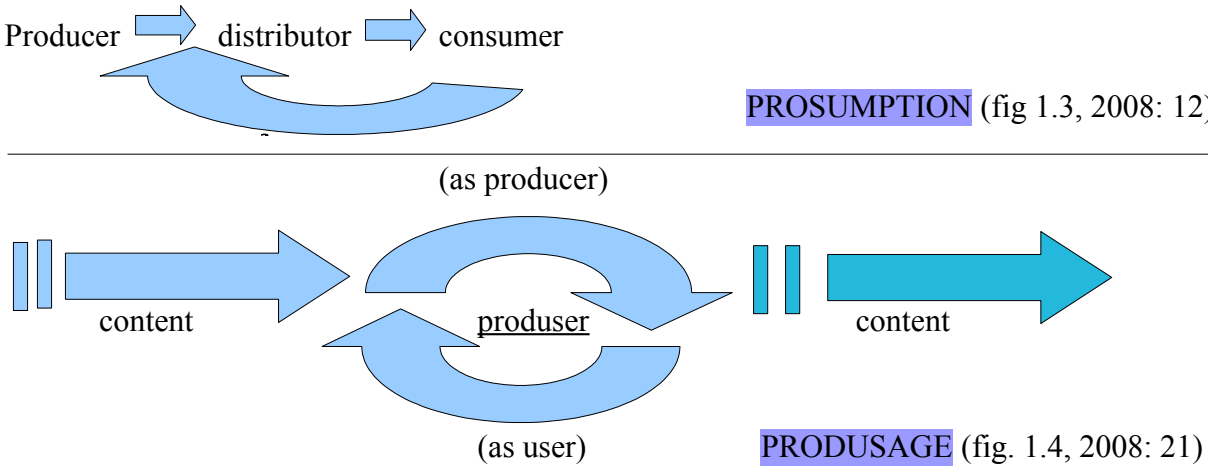
27 "The moral economy of Web 2.0 – part 2" http://henryjenkins.org/2008/03/the_moral_economy_of_web_20_pa_1.html)

alternative one of “produser.” In Bruns' opinion, “prosumer” would refer to a “professional” or “advanced” version of the consumer whose only specific task that differentiates him from other consumers is that of producing feedback on products. For this reason, the process within which the prosumer is placed can be seen as a linear and controlled model of connections that goes from the producers to distributors and then to the consumers, and then back to the producers (with the feedbacks). So, despite the more active role of the prosumer, this would just add a piece to a “capitalist paradise,” where it is still the producers who benefit from this more specific feedback.

The model of prosumption, in Bruns' critique, would not account for the creative production of information and knowledge and the “*ad hoc*, many-to-many, bidirectional exchanges we are familiar with today” (ibid.: 13) thanks to new information and communication technologies, which would be, instead, better accounted for by the term “produsage”.

With the passage from the industrial to the Internet society, we would have assisted a switch from consumption to usage (ibid.: 13-15) since, after being used, digital goods remain available for other people's consumption. Moreover, this content and digital goods can be remixed and re-edited (ibid.: 16). This would be the core of produsage: a “collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement” (ibid: 21) that would have involved (prod)users in a continuous process of “intercreativity” (Berners-Lee, 1999).

A graphic representation of the switch from “prosumption” a “produsage”, suggested by Bruns, is the following:



Participants to this new form of production can then decide whether to act as users, (by employing the available resources), to produce new information and content, or to do both things

simultaneously. *Produsage* (and, similarly, the role of *produsers*) is based on four principles:

- *Open participation, communal evaluation*: everybody can contribute, and other participants establish from time to time the quality if the content released by showing (or not showing) appreciation through quoting and re-editing the contribution;
- *Fluid Heterarchy, ad hoc meritocracy:* participants to produsage activities are not structured *a priori* under an established hierarchy, but everybody has the same opportunities to contribute. Once the contribution has been published, the participants are ordered through systems of "ad hoc" meritocracies that are specific to the context;
- *Unfinished artefacts, continuing process*: the results of produsers' activities are not finished products, but artefacts that are produced collaboratively, which are continuously re-discussed through annotations and comments;
- *Common property, individual rewards*: those artefacts bring benefits to the whole collectivity, since they are and will continue to be available. But the merit for the contribution goes to the single individual who published it (Bruns, 2008: 24-30).

Produsage is then a very complex concept, that can be summarized to differ from former ones, such as prosumption, for its outcomes being not finished versions of a product to be consumed, but rather an ongoing process, accessible to everyone, of continuous revision, publication, discussion, and update of versions of that content (Bruns, 2007: 3).

There is a strong relationship between this type of production/consumption and the new web tools that make it possible (Anderson, 2006). Produsage can indeed be retrieved in blogs, websites like Wikipedia and Youtube, and, more generally, in phenomena like folksonomies and tagging. While produsage, when retraceable, would be able to overcome the traditional market value chain by engaging what used to be a consumer into more democratic and participative processes that would let him/her lead innovation, it is still to be understood whether and how it takes place on other Web 2.0 platforms, as well as how companies, like the ones involved in media and the creative industry, decide to face this phenomenon (Bruns, 2008).

1.2.5. Challenging hierarchies: Pro/am and reputation

As a direct consequence of what we just saw about production and usage being interchangeable and overlapping activities, and, more in general, as an alleged result of all the tools made available by Web 2.0 tools, we see a growing production of content by people that are not professionals, but rather amateurs. Amateur production is another topic that scholars have been involved with in regard to Web 2.0.

While some scholars frame amateur production as a form of empowerment of the users against

media powers enabled by the alleged democraticity of Web 2.0 (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004), and others oppose this vision by considering the spread of amateur content as a killing factor for culture and economy (Keen, 2007), most scholars agree on highlighting a progressive blurring of the categories of professional vs. amateur producers of content. Also, a process of "democratizing innovation" (Von Hippel, 2005) has been proposed for portraying Web 2.0 users as standing on the same level of innovators, by becoming "co-innovators" (Tapscott and Williams, 2006).

In regard to the blurring categories of consumption and production, and underlining also a progressive overlap of work and leisure, as well as of professionalism and amateurism, in 2004 Leadbeater and Miller came up with the concept of "Pro-Am" revolution (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004). Pro-Ams are identified as "a new social hybrid" (ibid.: 20) of "amateurs who work to professional standards [...and are...] knowledgeable, educated, committed, and networked, by technology." They operate side-by-side with professionals, but the boundary between the two categories is claimed to progressively erode, and, since the networked aspect of Pro-Ams would make them able to strongly impact many realms of society (politics, economics, and culture), hierarchies would be questioned. Indeed, The *Pro-Am revolution* forecasted by Leadbeater and Miller addresses a future re-assemblage of society that will see Pro-Ams as "new sources of authority"[28] (ibid.: 71). In other words, Pro-Ams would be creating new, distributed organizational models that will be innovative, adaptive, and low cost, and that will challenge the hierarchical organizations, lead by professionals, that have dominated the twentieth century (ibid: 12).

While Leadbeater and Miller do not directly address Web 2.0, they set out a landscape where Pro-Ams participating in projects that regard music, computer science, astronomy, politics, and involve every aspect of society, are empowered by being networked by technologies (ibid.). Besides that, similar arguments about the ongoing loss of control of communication media by professionals and the consequent loss of control and power by professionals and traditional gatekeepers have been put forward by other scholars (Shirky, 2008, ch.3). Beside arguing that *mass amateurization* is breaking professional categories, he enforces his argument by claiming that the chance to freely publish content gives value to public opinion and provides an avenue for collective action.

The ongoing collaboration between those who used to be categorized as professionals with the amateurs has also been extensively investigated by Henry Jenkins, who focused on fan culture in

28 "The Pro-Ams will bring new forms of organization into life, which are collaborative, networked, light on structure and largely self-regulating. Professionals – in science and medicine, war and politics, education and welfare – shaped the twentieth century though their knowledge, authority and institutions. They will still be vital in the twenty-first century. But the new driving force, creating new sources of authority, will be the Pro-Ams" (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004: 71) .And also: "According to many commentators, the 1990s were a decade in which large corporations were rampant, their control over society virtually unchallenged.1 Yet the rise of Pro-Ams suggests counter trends were at work as well." (ibid.: 9)

media and entertainment industries (Jenkins, 2006a; 2006b). By discussing the relationship of traditional media industries with the more and more active production by fan communities[29], Jenkins states that, also thanks to the new ICTs (which fans have been among the first ones to adopt), fans participate in cultural production by actively producing and re-interpreting media content. He calls this "participatory culture":

> *"Consumption becomes production; reading becomes writing; spectator culture becomes participatory culture. […] Resistance comes from the uses they [fans] make of these popular texts, from what they add to them, and what they do with them, not from subversive meanings that are somehow embedded within them... Alert to the challenges such uses pose to their cultural hegemony, textual producers openly protest […]. Producers insist upon their right to regulate what their texts may mean and what kinds of pleasure they can produce. But such remarks carry little weight. Undaunted by the barking dogs, the "no trespassing signs" and the threats of prosecution, the fans have already poached those texts from under the proprietors' nose"* [Jenkins, 2006b: 60]

Therefore, mainly thanks to networked technologies, amateurs and fans are widely claimed to be progressively eroding the power of professionals and questioning professional hierarchies, since "amateurs can surpass professionals, when they have the right kind of system to channel their efforts" (Graham, 2005).

Still, whether this is positive or negative has been questioned by some scholars like Andrew Keen, who, in his famous *The Cult Of The Amateur: How Today's Internet Is Killing Our Culture* (2007), points out that the democratization of Web 2.0 and its user-generated media like blogs, Myspace, Youtube, which consists of allowing everyone to publish and comment on content online, would be "undermining truth, souring civic discourse, and belittling expertise, experience, and talent." (Keen, 2007: 15) Moreover, Keen, a self-confessed former pioneer of the Internet "gold rush," argues that Web 2.0 users, or better, amateur producers, not all of which are talented, not only jeopardize culture by publishing promotional and often misinforming content, but also focus more on self-display of information and self-referentiality than on listening to what other people have to say. For these reasons, civic participation, individual right to privacy, as well as culture and politics more in general, would be corrupted by Web 2.0 users (ibid.).

It is worth noticing that Keen's claims have been strongly criticized, in turn, by Lessig (2007) and Tapscott and Williams (2006), who disagree on both the quality of his work itself and on his main

29 Jenkins also draws upon Levy's *Collective Intelligence* to frame his discourse into media fandom (see Jenkins, 2006a; chapter 6). In this context, Jenkins claims that fan communities are "some of the most fully realized versions of Levy's cosmopedia, expansive, self-organizing groups focused around the collective production, debate and circulation of meanings, interpretations and fantasies, in response to various artifacts of contemporary popular culture" (Jenkins, 2006a: 137).

argument that professional gatekeepers are needed to preserve the quality of the published. My point here is limited to acknowledging that, despite the rise of clashing opinions on the topic, many scholars agree on stating that the process of the blurring of the categories of professional and amateur producers of content is associated to the spread of Web 2.0 tools.

Moreover, this trend is related to mechanisms of reputation, which represent another core point of Web 2.0-related phenomena. Indeed, as briefly mentioned in previous paragraphs, if we take the examples of Wikipedia and citizen journalism (which have been considered most in literature which regards amateur production), we can see how bloggers today are able to publish, in real time and for free, a huge amount of content that can reach a huge audience. They do not need the approval of an editor, they do not have to submit to political orientation, and they are not subject to time and space constraints. They gain their audience and appreciation through word-of-mouth recommendations and mechanisms of reputation (Anderson, 2006)[30].

This is made particularly evident in the case of Social Networking Sites, which deal with groups of users that filter content mainly availing themselves of "word-of-mouth recommendations." These users "will want to identify the most active and well-connected members of the network [...] who make the community tick" (Jennings, 2007: 212). The processes of reputation and trust building can be based on different criteria, depending on the values of the group/community considered, and they are therefore situated processes. Nonetheless, it is possible to affirm that, in the case of the most famous and widespread Social Networking Sites, like Facebook and Myspace, which do not have a specific objective beyond social interaction, "[...] merit, reputation, and trust have become especially important" (Bruns, 2008: 314) and "the more or less overt evaluation of peers by peers in the community becomes a core practice, as does the evaluation of peer-contributed content as an indirect means of evaluating peers themselves" (2008: 314).

Reputation is thus a core element of Web 2.0 and of SNS in particular[31], also because it helps to find new content, and to evaluate the reliability of the huge flow of content retrievable today on the web

30 In regard to the relevance of reputation mechanisms for Web 2.0, Anderson suggests, by quoting trend watchers ast Frog design, that "We are leaving the Information Age and entering the Recommendation Age." (Anderson, 2006: 107).

31It is important to consider reputation and trust in social networking interactions not only as these being a tool for filtering information, depending on the reliability of the source, but also as an objective for the users of these platform, that mainly use their interactions on SNS for giving a representation of themselves to what they perceive and consider as being their "networked public" (boyd, 2007). It is therefore fundamental not only to spot a user with an high level of reputation in order to trust his information, but it is also as important to get the highest level of reputation, in order to have a good image to one's own "public." As we have seen, it is under many aspects that social networking sites "[...] place the individual within a social context that fosters co-operation through the structure of reputation maintenance" (Donath and boyd, 2004:72) and we can conclude that trust and reputation are the core of Social networking interactions, not only as their distinctive features, but also as a result of them.

by evaluating the trustworthiness of the users that published it[32] (Anderson, 2006), who are, as we have seen, more and more amateurs whose talent and competences are not warranted by belonging to a professional community: reputation of the users is negotiated every time, and that is not attributed anymore only on the basis of the belonging to a specific professional community, but through collaborative negotiations of reputation (Keen, 2007).

Again, whether this is good or bad, or better yet, whether this is in line with the widespread claim of a democratizing Web 2.0 and participatory processes that would take place within its realm, has raised high-pitched discussion among scholars. Indeed, while some scholars argue that the democratic and participatory nature of Web 2.0 triggered a blurring of professional and amateur categories that has lead every user to publish content, and would allow the most talented to emerge (see for example Tapscott and Williams, 2006), others have argued that reputation mechanisms, which lie at the core of Web 2.0 for the above-mentioned reasons, are less and less based on people's talent (Keen, 2007) or on the quality of their work, and more on their popularity on the web, which mainly depends on online performers "putting their leisure time up for sale" and trying to imitate the most proven popular act (Siegel, 2008). These last authors conclude that such phenomena not only jeopardize the participatory and democratic nature of the Web, and of our society more at large (Keen, 2007), but they would lead to the "democracy's fatal turn" (Siegel, 2008: 79) by perverting the principles of democracy into its opposite.

I will not deal here with the issue of whether amateur content and reputation mechanisms keep the promise of a participatory and democratic Web 2.0 that would empower the users in challenging hierarchies and control, or lead to cultural, economic, and political impoverishment. Rather, I want to take a step back and drive a conclusion from these last paragraphs by drawing attention to one specific point: while user-generated content is enhanced by new Web 2.0 tools that, as we have seen, embed users' participation both in their philosophy (O'Reilly's invitation to "harness collective intelligence") and infrastructures (with the "architecture of participation"), much scholarly discussion has not questioned the alleged participatory and democratizing nature of Web 2.0 and the related phenomena, but merely dealt with how users are empowered and whether this is good or bad for our society. In other words, while much has been written on how UGC works (see paragraph 1.2.3.), and in which forms this would allow users to challenge the market (see paragraph 1.2.4.) and professional hierarchies (present paragraph), too little attention has been paid to questioning these processes in regard to commercial aspects of Web 2.0, the interests of the stakeholders, and,

32 Blogs are becoming a very influential source of recommendation because users can get an idea of the person who is writing them (Anderson, 2006: 120): as in offline life, users explore the context, they analyze details, and then they decide to what degree to believe what is written (Weinberger, 2002: 141). Since whether these recommendations will or will not be considered reliable depends on what we think about the recommender, reputation comes in.

finally, how these could more broadly put into question the democracy and participatory nature of Web 2.0 that is alleged to empower users. Instead of taking discussion at a deeper level on the above mentioned points, what happened is that the elements described in the previous paragraphs have been drawn upon for constructing what I call the "dominant rhetorics" on Web 2.0.

1.3. Dominant rhetorics on Web 2.0

After O'Reilly's (2005) pioneer definition of Web 2.0, many scholarly and popular articles and discourse have risen in regard to Web 2.0. Besides the specific aspects we have accounted for, and often drawing upon those elements, an astonishing number of scholars and journalists (or "citizen journalists") have put forward more general claims about this phenomenon. I will try to summarize here the most widespread rhetorics on Web 2.0.

First, the idea of Web 2.0 as leading to a *revolution*, mainly due to the new central role of the users which we have long debated above, has been spreading since 2005. This idea of the emergence of the active user as a revolution came to a head especially after *Wired* founding executive editor Kevin Kelly proclaimed in August of 2005, "We are the Web ... behold the power of the people" (Kelly, 2005). At the end of 2006, *Time Magazine* decided to dedicated its front cover to "you" as "Person of the Year" (Grossman, 2006), claiming that new Web 2.0 technologies would give "power to the people" and allow users to establish a new digital democracy (ibid.: 41-42).

Fig. 1.5. - Time Magazine Cover, December 25, 2006

Since then, this statement about the alleged empowerment of individuals in expressing power and taking influential roles into society, thanks to new ICTs, has been widely drawn upon by scholars and marketers (Cheong and Morrison, 2008) and has often lead to deterministic claims about Web 2.0 as being revolutionary in empowering the users and leading to participation and a more democratic society (Orr, 2007).

Those of you who are not completely new to media or Internet Studies will notice that a long history of claims of revolutionary impacts of media is retrievable in literature, and have been regularly put forward as soon as new technology popped up, especially in regard to "computer revolution" (see Hakken, 1999 ch.2).

This has also happened in regard to the newest communication technologies, with scholars often providing irrational utopic or dystopic scenarios[33] (Scott, 2009). This hype around the revolutionary impact of new technologies, especially those related to networked communication, is indeed retrievable, for instance, in the case of the telegraph, claimed to lead to world peace (see Standage, 1998, quoted in Orr, 2007), as well as, and with much more redundancy, in regard to the Internet.

In particular, the history of claims about the revolutionary impact of the web has to deal with two aspects: on the one hand, hype around the web is embedded in the above mentioned long history of claims of revolutionary impacts of ICTs. On the other hand, arguments about an alleged democratizing and participatory effect of the web are also tied to its accessibility and networked structure that would enable democracy through collective action (Rheingold, 1993, 2002) by leveling hierarchies among consumers/users, every one of which can now access the web, and by that, gain power.

Similar claims have been put forward in regard to Web 2.0. Indeed, even though the idea of Web 2.0 has risen with the burst of the .com bubble, which clearly disproved the rhetorics of a new revolution of the web, many scholars and journalists have not been discouraged in forecasting a new era of the web, characterized, once again, as having revolutionary impacts on society, linked to a more democratic and participatory scenario for the empowered Web 2.0 users.

We can see examples of such claims in the faux histography depicted in "The Future of The Media 2051" (Casaleggio Associati, 2007) that calls for an emancipatory power of prosumption, and claims for cultural democratization and user empowerment that the authors summarize thusly: "Man is God." (ibid.); as well as in those who can be considered the most representative works of this

33 As suggested by Scott, some cultural historians of technology that identify a pattern of recurrent irrationality, both utopic and dystopic, and around emergent communication technologies are Carey, 1989; Jones, 2006; Mattelart, 1996; Robins& Webster, 1999; Spigel, 2001; Winston, 1998, 2006. (Scott, 2009: 7)

"revolutionary" rhetorics: the bestsellers *Here Comes Everybody, The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (Shirky, 2008) and *Wikinomics* (Tapscott and Williams, 2006).

These two books can be considered, in my opinion, the quintessential examples of the dominant rhetorics on Web 2.0, both because they have reached a wide popularity at the popular and academic level, and because they embody all the above-mentioned aspects of impact, revolution, participation, democratization and empowerment; they do this by recalling the elements I have described in previous paragraphs, such as user-generated content, prosumption and amateur vs. professional producers.

Shirky's (2008) focus is more on how new technologies would , on the one side, allow for an increase in the visibility and resonance of individual behaviors, which would gain a pivotal role in relating to others and co-constructing their environment, and on the other side, to re-arrange organizations that, from a hierarchic structure that needs to manage more the transaction costs than its mission, can now, thanks to Web 2.0 tools, rely on "large-scale coordination at low cost." Since social tools allow "action by loosely structure groups, operating without managerial direction and outside the profit motive" (2008: 47), this is an epochal change "built on what the publisher Tim O'Reilly calls an architecture of participation" (ibid.: 17). The authors provide an articulated account of how the fostering of collaboration, sharing, collective action allowed by Web 2.0 leads to an increased power of public opinion and collective action against professional categories.[34] He identifies this peculiarity of Web 2.0 of having the users becoming producers and being contemporaneously audience and collaborators as representing a *revolution* (Shirky, 2008: 107) that mainly lies in "a remarkable increase in our ability to share, to cooperate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations" (ibid.: 21).

Similar claims are put forward, in a more simplistic way, by Tapscott and Williams (2006). These authors, like Shirky, draw upon the collaborative practices allowed by Web 2.0 tools (through peer collaboration, prosumage, amateur production) in order to argue in favor of what they call "collaborative economy," "developer ecosystems," and "open platforms for innovation inviting unprecedented participation in value creation" by amateur and professional developers (2006: 188). Both these authors and Shirky take into account the changing role and structure of organizations in regard to this new era, also by considering how the Coase law[35], while still valid, would have

34 As exemplified by the author through the case of free publishing that has eroded the specialness of professional publishing (Shirky, 2008: 66-80).

35 Which states that "firms will tend to expand until the cost of organizing an extra transaction within the firm becomes equal to the costs of carrying out the same transaction in the open market." Dunay, P. (2007) "Web 2.0 Killed

become weaker since new Internet tools have lowered the transaction costs, leading organization to open up to new collaborations. Also, they both draw upon the Open Source model for proposing a successful example of a collaborative model that could be more widely adopted by organizations and innovators. But besides these, they also share other aspects: they take into account and describe *platforms for participation* (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 183-212), they call for a *democratization of the media* (ibid.: 145), they argue in favor of a *revolution* (Shirky, 2008: 107) that, through user-generated content and the Web 2.0 tools would empower the amateurs to compete with professionals, will allow them to become actively involved in the chain of production of a value that is valuable for everybody, while the hierarchic nature of institutions and organizations would be challenged (Tapscott and Williams, 2006; Shirky, 2008). Unfortunately, they also share the deficiency of not defining or problematizing the concepts of participation, democracy, power/empowerment, and, as as I will recall in the following paragraph, they also fail to take technology into proper account.

Besides these two works, other authors have focused on more specific concepts and Web 2.0-related aspects that also contributed to build the dominant rhetoric of Web 2.0 as being participatory, democratic, and user-empowering. Among these are the above-mentioned Anderson and his *Long Tail* (2006), Bruns' *produsers* (2007, 2008), and Jenkins' *participatory culture* (2006). But also concepts like *networked information economy* (Benkler, 2006), which, similar to that of *participation economy,* (see Lietsala and Sirkunnen, 2008: 80) address the new involvement of capacities of individuals in networks and organization, and have contributed to the dominant rhetoric. As for the two books mentioned above, these concepts are usually put forward to address an alleged participation and democracy and empowerment, without providing an accurate and empirically-grounded investigation and framing of what these participation, democracy and empowerment mean.

By not providing a proper and well-argued account of this framing, or by just getting rid of the problem as Tapscott and Williams do when they ask the reader "how do you know a platform for participation when you see one?" and reply "that's up to you" (2006: 184), the dominant rhetorics about Web 2.0 become a puzzle of pieces that are themselves fuzzy and difficult to analyze. Instead of encouraging other scholars to discuss the single pieces of the puzzle (which I took into account in section 1.2.), these concepts have been widely put together and drawn upon for setting out either utopian or dystopian visions of Web 2.0, arguing in favor of or against another media revolution. In

Coase's Law" at Buzz Marketing For Technology http://buzzmarketingfortech.blogspot.com/2007/03/web-20-killed-coases-law.html. This theorem was put forward by Coase, R. (1937) in "The Nature of the Firm," *Economica* 4(16), 386-405.

conclusion, we were not able to get rid of easy claims of revolutions, and of dychotomic assumptions about new communication media as changing the world or leaving it as it is, and the shallowly investigated concepts outlined above do not encourage scholars to step back from that trend.

As if this were not enough, we need to highlight that if we thought that we had at least gotten rid of openly deterministic and essentialist claims about new web tools, we were wrong. And I am not referring to claims like, "Social Networking Sites (SNS) have the potential to fundamentally change the character of our social lives, both on an interpersonal and a community level," which is the opening sentence from an academic article published February 2009 (Ellison, Lampe, Steinfeld, 2009: 6), but rather to claims about Web 2.0 as being intrinsically democratic, and thus, directly leading to a more democratic and participatory society, as insightfully noticed by Allen:

> *Web 2.0 is a political statement of a kind of libertarian capitalism that appears to suit an era in which societies are more and more intensely 'mediated' by all forms of entertainment and information media, particularly in the economic first–world nations such as the U.S. that are driving Internet development but elsewhere as well. The politics of Web 2.0 are expressed in traditional democratic terms, emphasizing freedom of choice and the empowerment of individuals through what O'Reilly (2005) has termed the "architecture of participation". However, crucially, this freedom and empowerment relates to a more democratic form of media consumption and production, of making the Internet itself 'democratic'. Web 2.0, it is claimed, positions users of the Internet, both large and small, as relatively equal and equally engaged participants. Of course, there have been similar claims to the democratising potential of the Internet for many years [2] well prior to even the emergence of the World Wide Web; what is different now, however, is that, within Web 2.0, the focus is on 'democracy' as a state of affairs within the Internet itself, rather than as a term suggesting ideals of equality in society as a whole, that might be achieved through the democratising possibilities of networked communications.*
>
> [Allen, 2008: 2-3]

In light of what is expressed in this paragraph, we now have more tools for understanding the concept of Web 2.0 and how it has been constructed. While this concept has been put forward in the realm of corporate internet, as is made evident in the O'Reilly definition (pgf. 1.1), its user-focus has steadily grown in recognition (Scott, 2009:5), and Web 2.0 is progressively being perceived as a panacea (or, alternatively, a catastrophe) for our society at large. Drawing upon the concepts that we have widely accounted for, the rhetoric of Web 2.0 as leading to democratization, participation and user empowerment has spread out also because of an overlap of popular and scholarly discourses due to a lack of specialized scholarly discourse (Schäfer, 2008: 42).

The effort of the present work is to help fill that gap by calling for a sociological interest in

problematizing these “glossy images” (Kling, 1991)[36].

1.4. The “others” and the need of a “theoretical remediation”

These “glossy images” have been strongly enforced by a rich amount of literature that goes beyond the ones just mentioned. Indeed, in line with the economic approach of Tapscott and Williams (2006), we can retrieve a group of business-oriented literature that mainly consists of academic literature in the fields of economics and marketing, focused on how to make money from Web 2.0 tools or communities (Scotti and Sica, 2007), or popular manuals on “how to make money” from blogs and Social Networking Sites (Shuen, 2008; Sankar and Bouchard, 2009; Casarez, et. alii, 2008; Hunt, 2009, just to make few examples). Other divulgative books have dealt with how the Web 2.0 revolution would be changing things, and how we are the main characters of this epochal change (Prati, 2007).

Nonetheless, it would be reductive to assert that literature on Web 2.0 is limited to simply enforcing these rhetorics. In fact, we witness in the last couple of years a rich amount of critical approaches to this topic. For instance, Siegel (2008) and Zittrain (2008)'s works help to debunk the “revolutionary” claim of those rhetorics by putting forward the idea that what is going on is something “new.” but not necessarily “revolutionary.” Many others (Sholz, 2008; Petersen, 2008; Zimmer 2008a, 2008b; Allen, 2007; Andrejevic, 2005; Bigge, 2006; Jarrett, 2008; Grimmelmann, 2009; Orr, 2007) have tried to offer critical perspectives on Web 2.0 by warning us against specific Web 2.0-related issues like the exploitation of the users (Petersen, 2008) and of their “free labour” (Scholz, 2008), or privacy and surveillance (Grimmelmann, 2009; Andrejevic, 2005). While some of the positions and claims of the latter -the most relevant of which will be recalled and more extensively discussed Chapters 6 and 7- will turn out to be the most sharable, my aim here is to make a more general argument for offering a specialized scholarly account of Web 2.0 by outlining the deficiencies of former studies on this topic.

As we have seen, the landscape of scholarly research on Web 2.0 is very varied in epistemological approaches. Besides the more technical contributions offered in the fields of engineering and computer science, the more active scholars dealing with Web 2.0 and Social Networking Sites are those in the fields of law (Hodge, 2006, Madison, 2006), economics (Benkler, 2006; Shirky, 2008;

36 “Social change is sometimes treated as a specialty topic within sociology. Yet ideas about social change so permeate the discourse and images of computerization that they should be at the center of attention for sociological inquiry. I do not mean that sociologists should uncritically accept glossy images of "information societies" or "computer revolution" or "revolutionary this and that," which are part of the official story of computerization -- pushed by the marketing arms of computer vendors as well as futurists like Alvin Toffler and John Naisbitt, and sympathetically amplified by journalists in the mass media.” (Kling, 1991)

Tapscott and Williams, 2006), and media studies (Jenkins, 2006, boyd, 2008, Bruns, 2007, 2008). The literary landscape on this topic is very rich, but still (maybe because of the recentness of the topic it deals with) very fragmented. What happened is that, also because of the definition of Web 2.0 being quite fuzzy and unsettled, many scholars have taken a definition of the term and they have straightforwardly dealt with it within their theoretical framework, often lacking additional problematization and what anthropologists and sociologists call *thick descriptions* (Geertz, 1973).

So, my first suggestion to offer specialized discourses on Web 2.0 is that we should start by recalling and outlining its elements. In line with the aspects considered so far, I agree with Allen's (2008) point that the main elements of the web today are four: technology, economy, users, and philosophy. The first element consists of those web-services that "prioritize the manipulation and presentation of data through the interaction of both human and computer agents" (ibid.: 2), that we already discussed in regard to O'Reilly's definition. Secondly, there is an economic aspect which consists of new business models for web companies offering the above-mentioned services, models that are usually based on offering free and attractive services for users whose data can be used to send targeted advertisement (ibid.). This business models have often been disregarded by the above-considered and other studies, which instead tended to focus more on the third Web 2.0 element: the users. These have been claimed, as we know well at this point in the chapter, to be more actively involved in content creation rather than just limited to acting as a passive audience. Still, in regard to the economic aspect, Allen insightfully points out that users are "a key element in harnessing the technologies to achieve the successful implementation of the business approach outlined above". (ibid.: 2). Why did not Shirky and Tapscott and Williams tell us? Finally, a core element of Web 2.0 is the whole philosophy that I addressed as the dominant rhetoric, which sees these new web tools and services as intrinsically democratic.

Once acknowledged that we can conceive Web 2.0 as constituted by these four elements, I argue in favor of setting out a research that will account for all of them. In regard to this, I mostly agree with the suggestion put forward by Beer and Burrows (2007) who made a more general argument for how to approach the topic of Web 2.0 from a sociological perspective, and pointed out "three possible agendas for the development of a viable sociology of Web 2.0: the changing relations between the production and consumption of internet content; the mainstreaming of private information posted to the public domain; and, the emergence of a new rhetoric of 'democratization'" (Beer and Burrows, 2007: 1). I think it should be made clear that if the researcher had to choose among these agendas, she could not overlook its relationship with the other aspects. Indeed, as we have seen, it is not possible to consider, for instance, the changing relationship between production

and consumption while overlooking the alleged democratic nature of Web 2.0 which would depend on the tool allowing virtually any user to access and publish content. Thus, while researches will necessarily focus more on one or some elements, the other pieces of the puzzle should not be overlooked.

So, more attention should be paid to the economic aspects like ownership, which is not usually taken into much consideration by scholars (Baym, 2009)[37] and we should also account for that one element that previous studies on SNS and Web 2.0 have missed to properly take into account: technology. This has been suggested also by Beer (2008a) and Schäfer (2008). While the first, in his response to boyd and Ellison's (2007) directions for future research on SNS, suggests that we consider the market aspects as related to the technological infrastructure in which they are embedded (ibid.: 523), the second underlines the need to acknowledge technological affordances and design, which are not neutral, but rather active in that they shape ways of being (Schäfer, 2008: 89). So, accounting for technology is crucial for two main reasons, which are intertwined: first, because a vast amount of academic literature about Web 2.0 and SNS has disregarded its agency[38], and secondly, because, by looking at technological features, affordances and design, in a word, accounting for technological *agency* (Latour, 1996, 2005; Callon and Latour, 1981) we can simultaneously consider the business model that it embeds, and the *ways of being* (Heidegger, 1962) that it helps to shape[39].

Another issue that is still too present in research on SNS and Web 2.0 is the theoretical assumption that online and offline are interwoven but separated dimensions. Instead, since every interaction today can be considered mediated (Beer, 2008a), it becomes therefore impossible to think of online and offline as self-standing dimensions that merely affect one another. In regard to this, the author argues that we might need other types of theoretical frameworks and approaches (ibid.: 522), or that we need to at least rethink our theoretical assumptions in light of Web 2.0, operating what Beer and Burrows call *theoretical remediation* (2007: 7). This is what can help overcome most of the limits retrieved in the extremely variegated, fragmented, and sometimes misleading literature on Web 2.0

37"Scholars of communication technology need to begin attending critically to questions of ownership, a topic we have generally avoided. While once we socialized online through public sites such as newsgroups, increasingly people are conducting their online social activities within proprietary systems such as social networking sites, virtual worlds, and massively multiplayer games in which the users have few rights and limited, if any, ownership of their contributions. The explicit desire of many Web 2.0 entrepreneurs to appropriate our personal relationships in order to deliver more personalized advertising raises ethical questions we should be prepared to address, as does the reliance of these sites on users' unpaid labor to generate their content." (Baym, 2009: 722)

38 It is worth noticing that even those studies aimed at criticizing the "dominant rhetorics" of Web 2.0, like Siegel (2008), Olivennes (2007) and Formenti (2008) have not deeply accounted for technological agencies.

39 For a call for a study of new media with an approach able to observe and describe the process of technological development see also Lievrouw, L.A. and Livingstone, S. (eds.) (2006), Handbook of New Media (Updated Student Edition), London: Sage Chapters 9 and 10

and SNS. A fragmented literature that, as we saw, has often "failed to understand the complexity and reflexivity immanent to sociotechnical processes" (Hand, 2008: 9)[40].

By following these suggestions, now that I tried to identify *what* Web 2.0, by taking into account the single parts that build its social construct, I will try to answer the question of "how web 2.0?" (Scott, 2009) while filling the gaps which emerge in the literature presented. My directions for doing that will be widely expressed in Chapters 2 and 3. For now, I will frame my object of study and research questions.

1.5. Relevance of the music context and research questions

In light of what has been argued so far, the aim of the present research is to investigate the alleged empowerment of SNS users that has widely been claimed in literature as leading to participatory and democratic mechanisms of active involvement of the users through those UGC, Produsage, and Amateur production allegedly fostered by the "architecture of participation." Also, the alleged challenge to institutional and business hierarchies, with special regard to reputation mechanisms, will be investigated within a research that aims at accounting for all the elements of Web 2.0, with special regard to ownership and technology.

The context of music results in a quite appropriate field in which to investigate those phenomena, for different reasons. First, music is the one context that has been most affected by technological development, from the audio compression technologies such as MP3, which allowed for the easy transportation of music, and peer-to-peer online platforms which allowed users to share it, to increasingly cheaper and easier programs for users to record and produce digital music. Therefore, since music is a highly-technologized field, if Web 2.0 were to influence the emergence of new socio-technical processes, this is highly likely to visible in the field of music.

Secondly, while the above-mentioned technological developments for music have made it easier to produce and distribute music, Web 2.0 is promising to reduce the costs, as well as to challenge the mechanisms of filtering and publicizing:

> *Digital changes in music have given us amateur production and distribution, but left intact professional control of fame. It used to be hard to record music, but no longer. It used to be hard to reproduce and distribute music, but no longer. It is still hard to find and publicize good new music. We have created a number of tools that make filtering and publicizing both easy and effective in other domains. The application of those tools to new*

40 Hand (2008) puts forward his claim in regard to digital culture, but it is hereby quoted since, in light of what is expressed before in the present Chapter, I claim that it applies to the study of Internet and communication technologies.

music could change the musical landscape. [Shirky, 2003: 3]

and this phenomenon of finding and publicizing new music is more and more lead by users through Web 2.0 tools, especially SNS[41].

Third, music is not only a fundamental realm of the produsage/post-filtering processes, where that "big flip" from "filter, then publish" to "publish, then filter" (Shirky, 2003, 2008) takes place, it has also been considered the *zero point,* where this phenomenon started (Anderson, tr. it. 2006: 94, Jennings: 2007[42]).

Besides all these reasons, I also believe that an investigation of music-related processes on a "generic" SNS like Myspace (boyd and Ellison, 2007) would allow other social elements to emerge, like the relationship between the private and public aspects of an artist's life. Moreover, I think that underground music on SNS would be a particularly relevant object of study for outlining possible processes of challenging hierarchies, which in this case two are presented: the music business one[43], and the technological business one (since my case will be that of a proprietary SNS platform).

In conclusion, questioning user empowerment, access, participatory mechanisms and democratizing role of Web 2.0 through a study of how underground music actors deal with and through a SNS will help contribute to both broad academic debates (like the one on privacy), as well as the more strictly music-related debates, like music artists' online reputation on SNS[44].

So, my research question concerns the alleged empowerment, active participation of the users, and democratization of Web 2.0. As applied to my context of study, it becomes the following:

> "in the relationship between Myspace and its underground music-related users, are these latter empowered, active participants? Are these users

41"The cost of distribution has been reduced to free, or near-free levels through digital distribution services, file sharing, peer-to-peer and social media networks. New large-scale web services have emerged which link music producers to consumers via artist similarity, taste profiling and recommendation data as well as linking listeners with shared tastes and interests. These include Last.fm, MySpace, Pandora.com and a range of other social media and networking sites. Included in this distribution network are a rising number of amateur and prosumer music blogs, which distribute and review music content and some of these are attracting significant readerships." (Knowles, 2007: 4).

42 "Most of the problems- and the solutions- in terms of digital discovery are coming to music first. And where music leads, other media may follow [...]" (Jennings, 2007: 2)

43With special regard to the field of music, user-generated content has a central role in academic debate about the role of it, as well as that of collaborative filtering as a taste predictor. Indeed, since music has gone digital, the music industry assisted to the rise of a new working figure: that of the "music supervisor," who gets hired for his/her taste. Often availing themselves of tools like Youtube, Myspace and iTunes, the music supervisors are "taste machines" (Taylor, 2009). This new figure is strictly related to actions of collaborative filtering and, more in general, user-generated content: indeed, if there are professionals hired for their taste, and therefore for their ability to predict what people are going to like, the comments and reviews offered by the users could be interpreted as a sell of free labour rather than an aspect of the users' freedom online (Baym and Burnett, 2009).

44 At this point, one premise is necessary: while music is my object of study, my theoretical framework is, as I will make clear in the following Chapter, that of Science And Technology Studies. Thus, the present research is not aimed at directly drawing upon Popular Music Studies, Fandom Studies, or Cultural Studies. Still, the results of this research could eventually be employed in future research for contributing to those fields, as well.

involved in a process of democratization linked to a challenge business and market hierarchies?"

Together with an interest in investigating these processes, my research also aims to help avoid those "narratives of inevitability and technological determinism" that surrounded not only discourses on social networking sites (Bigge, 2006)[45], but that, as we have seen, are retrievable in a long history of studies on new communication media and web technologies. In order to do that, I went back to the studies of Computer-Mediated Communication and, through an accurate review of literature, I tried to figure out a theoretical approach able to drive the researcher in studying this topic. To this I dedicated the following Chapter.

45"The media coverage and resultant discourse surrounding social networking sites such asFacebook, MySpace and Friendster contain narratives of inevitability and technological determinism that require careful explication." (Bigge, 2006: 1)

Chasing the next innovation is futile. Unless it is grounded in theory and history much wider than the present moment, it will be outdated by its publication date.
(Baym, 2009: 720)

Chapter 2 - From Impact Studies In Computer-Mediated Communication To The Co-Construction Of Technology And Users

When we want, as in this case, to investigate online interactions and communications, it is necessary to draw upon the studies that have directly dealt with these topics: namely those on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). I will thus focus this literature on the main topics it has been dealing with. Then, I will take into account the traditional classification that has been suggested, all of which underlie different ways of reading CMC literature, but that share a conclusion on the absence of a specific theoretical framework in which to frame the study of CMC. Classifications like the ones I will mention surely help to make sense of the *mare magnum* of publications on computer-mediated communicative interactions, thus helping to describe and point out the object of study. But for a researcher whose aim is to find the proper tools and techniques for investigating this topic, it comes as necessary to investigate further.

Nowadays we arrived at the shared opinion that CMC is a set of everyday activities that are a cross-sectional of, and at the same time integrated with, offline experiences. This, which seems to be an arrival point, needs instead to be taken as a starting point towards the understanding of what it means to communicate through computers today.

I will present, later in this chapter, how (traditional) media studies reveal themselves to be incomplete for comprehensively studying CMC, so that some authors in this field, mainly when they discuss about new communication technologies that have been made available by the Internet, have pointed out the need to adopt ecological and multidisciplinary approaches, taking in consideration also technology as an actor, and thus suggesting that we draw upon *Science and Technology Studies* (STS) in investigating CMC. Thus, I will focus on those studies that highlight the points of contact that CMC studies share with STS, underlining how these branches have been incorrectly considered too far from each other, while instead they tend to converge more and more. The suggestion of studying CMC in light of STS is developed in light of the highlighted need to consider technology and users in a relationship of *co-construction* and *co-production*, which go back to STS.

The third and fourth parts of the chapter are dedicated respectively to STS and to the debates where the present research can find a place. At a general level, I will focus my attention on the debate

about technology and democracy that has been gaining more and more attention by STS scholars, and that also represents a controversial setting for Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) scholars. After extensively discussing this wider debate, I will suggest some more specific topics and debates within the STS field to which my work can add something, and that, at the same time, helped me to understand which perspective within STS would better fit my research. By arguing point by point why and how, I will finally settle under an ANT perspective which, consistent with the literature review presented on CMC and STS, I conclude as being able to account for a symmetric relationship of co-construction of technology and its users, hence to better account for Web 2.0 and SNS. By adopting this non-modern epistemology, it is possible to account for those processes and suggest a way to overcome the limits presented in Chapter 1.

2.1. Review of CMC literature

2.1.1. A thematic reading

This section is dedicated to a thematic reading of literature on CMC. At the end of this review it will be possible to underline some critical aspects of some classifications of literature that have been put forward in this field, and alternative readings will be finally suggested.

2.1.1.1. CMC in organizations

As we will better see later on, studies on CMC have risen within the field of organization, with the aim of studying the impact of introducing new information technologies on the workplace. These studies started at the beginning of the '80s, and they mainly focused on the relationship between e-mail usage and organizational change, with special regard to dynamics of power.

Among the many studies that dealt with the role of CMC in organizations are: that by Daft, Lengel and Trevino (1987), who focus on managers and put forward a model that indicates for what type of messages CMC can be suitable and when, instead, traditional face-to-face communication must be preferred; that by Kettinger and Grover (1997), who carried out a quantitative study for investigating which are the main uses of e-mail at an inter-organizational level; and others, like Suh (1999), that while locating themselves into this field of of study, criticize the starting point of many studies of that epoch, that share this presumption: that the more the amount of the information transmitted, the richer the medium, and that the “richest” media should be preferred to “poorer” ones.

A very relevant work for the study of CMC in organizations is that by Sproull and Kiesler (1991a),

who dealt with the perception that small groups have of the Internet, and with the role of the latter on the relationships between managers and employees. Sproull and Kiesler availed themselves of both field research and laboratory experiments, and concluded that mediated communications cannot transmit many social cues, and for this reason it represents a powerful instrument for managers, who are then more responsible in managing those technologies within the organization, for conveying the process of organizational change (that is unavoidably started with the introduction of computer-based communication). In regard to communication itself, Sproull and Kiesler conclude in this work, that, although richer and multimedia systems of mediated communications could be developed, computer interactions will never be comparable to face-to-face communication.

In a more extended work (1991b), the same two authors concentrate on every relevant aspect of CMC[46] in organizations, highlighting how this, on the one hand, enhances coordination among involved subjects, and reduces isolation of some workers, but, on the other hand, it could cause troubles related to authority and control. This would be due to the intrinsic nature of electronic communication that is *mediated*, and this would only allow the transmission of a reduced number of elements related to the context and to the interacting subjects.

These studies usually set up a comparison between face-to-face and mediated communication, and they conclude that the electronic medium impedes the transmission of many "social cues" (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986). Social cues are elements like body language or voice intonation that would let[47] the actors have more awareness of themselves, of the other, and of these being simultaneously present in a specific social context.

In particular, the fewer number of transmissible signals would cause, on the one side, an increased power for managers, who would then be able to control one more tool for organizing work (Sproull and Kiesler, 1991a; 1991b). On the other side, the scarcity of signals that could be transmitted in mediated communications through these new technologies would allow a sort of leveling out of the organizational hierarchy.

These studies, as we will see further in analyzing the work of Paccagnella (2000, 2002), constitute the core of the approach called "Reduced Social Cues" (RSC), and have been strongly criticized for

46 To which they refer as "computer-based communication" (Sproull and Kiesler, 1991a; 1991b).

47 This idea is rooted in the tradition of two former theories: the "Social Presence Theory" (Short, Williams and Christie, 1976), that considers media's social effects as due to the degree of social presence, or awareness of the presence of the other, that these tool makes available to their users.
Another theory that is relevant to the point is the "Information Richness Theory" (IRT) (Daft and Lengel, 1984; 1986), that is not very distant from the previous, but that is more focused on the transmission and comprehension of messages in organizations, rather than at an individual level. The comprehension of the message depends, under the IRT scholars, on the medium richness, that is the ability of the medium to carry information.

having a technologically deterministic vision; for using a quantitative methodology that would be not appropriate for the object of study; and for what they argue in regard to the intrinsic "freeing" and "democratizing" power of new technologies (Jones, 1998).

Rice also focused on the impact of new technologies (mainly those concerning conferencing and e-mail) on human relations (1984; Rice and Love, 1987) as well as on the way organizations are structured (1987). Also Rice mainly adopted a quantitative methodology, and his research tends to highlight how not only how systems of computer-mediated communication would be a vehicle of information, but also how these can represent a string element of organizational innovation, being then powerful instruments in the hands of the managers, who can decide how to use them to obtain a more efficient organization.

Finally, studies by Webster (1998) and Yoo and Alavi (2001) that deal with the impact of video-conferencing in organizations show how consequences of introducing and using new communication technologies in organizations did not stop being interesting for scholars, who, ten years after the above mentioned studies, still dedicate themselves to this topic, even if the most flourishing period for this remain the '80s.

2.1.1.2. Social aspects of communication, online identity and virtual communities

In the '90s, more attention began to be paid to the social aspects of the Internet. Out of many works the idea of computer-mediated communication as a process of social construction starts to rise and to overcome the conception of CMC as an innovation for enhancing efficiency in organizations.

Not only do different scholars focus of the personal and recreational use of the web instead of underlining a use of this that is merely work-related (Harasim, 1993), and also more attention is paid to the ritual aspects of computer-mediated communication, as underlined by Jones (1997),but, even more importantly, a famous perspective on CMC rises in these years: the SIDE (Social Identity Model of De-Individuation Effects) approach (Spears and Lea, 1992; Postmes et alii, 1998; 2001). This responds to the RSC approach by arguing that those intrinsic characteristics of the medium that the RSC approach considered causing less social online interactions would be, instead, tools that can convey meaningful relationships, with highly social content. The SIDE approach puts forward a distinction between personal identity and social identity, pointing out that the processes of de-individuation that are typical of CMC can reinforce the construction of social identity, because the progressive identification with a group would lead to a lower perception of differences within the group. This process of identification would also be supported by the same lack of "social cues," that

people would face by using their previously internalized social categories.

Also the SIDE approach has been strongly criticized (Lamerichs, Te Molder, 2003) mainly because of its vision of both personal identity and social context as something that is "given," rather than as being the result of a process of ongoing construction. Methodology, as well, which mainly consists of experiments, has also been strongly criticized.

In spite of all this, the SIDE approach is still to be considered relevant for its role of pioneer in highlighting the social aspects of CMC, giving to these an initial attention that will be even more evident in that well-filled branch of studies that, always at the beginning of the '90s, will dedicate to online identity and virtual communities.

The first scholar to focus on online behavior, especially from a psychological point of view, is Turkle, with her book *Life On The Screen* (1995). Thanks to different observations on how people behave online in different environments, the author highlights how the Internet allows one to experience multiple identities at the same time, and to chose from time to time which one to activate. This new process of online construction of the self, which is made available by the opportunity of "being" different characters, also brings the individual to relate in different ways to his/her "former" identity, often stopping to perceive the "real" one as more important than the online ones. Turkle's work will also be important for those studies that mainly investigate the relationship between the online and offline dimensions, since she states that "experiencing that parallelism [between identities and parallel lives online] makes so that both life on the screen, and that offline, are considered with a surprisingly level of equality"[48] (1997 : XVII).

Also MacKinnon (1995), focused on the presentation of self online. He studied the identities of Usenet users as they become constructed during interactions. He adopts the term "person" to address the passage from external user to Usenet user: the "person" is then that entity that interacts online with other "personae." The characteristics of one's online "persona" can be only partially defined by the users, since other users will fill the lack of information with their previously acquired knowledge.

The insightful book *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*by Stone (1995) is also dedicated to the theme of online identity, but with a special attention to gender. The title itself is representative of how the author suggests to approach new technologies, that is to consider both the "promises and threats" that are due by the opportunity to chose whether to show or hide who we are. Online we can be whoever we want to be, and the choice of showing an online

48 Original quote: "l'esperire tale parallelismo [identità e vite parallele on line] fa in modo che sia la vita sullo schermo, sia quella fuori vengano considerate con un sorprendente livello di uguaglianza" (1997 : XVII). My translation.

identity that is consistent with our offline life is the result of a rational choice, and not of a series of contingencies.

Also, in collective imagination, the idea that one's representation of self online could be very different from offline identity starts to spread. In regard to that, let us remember the famous saying "On the Internet Nobody knows you are a dog," started from a cartoon drawing published on *The New Yorker* in 1985.

The interest for the topic of online identity did not end with the end of last century; it is still going on today, even if the interest has switched from the general topic of construction of self online, to more specific settings, as shown for example by boyd's (2007) works. She deals with the construction of identity for adolescents, in relation with the use of new information technologies (Social Networking Sites in particular). Also Grohol (2006) dealt with similar topics, and he considers identity and identification as fundamental for maintaining Internet websites and the connected communities alive and healthy.

It is actually the theme of online communities that starts to interest many scholars during the '90s. The "sacred book" of the works on this topic is without doubt *Virtual Communities* by Rheingold (1993) that put the issue of communities in the limelight even if, maybe, with a too enthusiastic tone, he linked to the idea that these new forms of aggregation would have made available for Internet users great opportunities under the cultural, social, economic, but mainly political[49] points of view.

Other relevant works on the topic of online communities are those by Kollock and Smith (1999), and Baym (1995, 1997). The first two mainly dealt with cooperation in online communities, which are compared with the offline ones, and the same is done by Baym, who underlines the tie between online and offline dimensions (later in this chapter we will focus on the relationship between these two dimensions).

Finally, Jones (1995, 1997, 1999) is a very important author for the study of online communities. In particular, he delved deeper into the topic of Internet communities by investigating in particular online communities and CMC as part of the wider context, that of social life. He put into question the aspects of "space," "hierarchy," and the same notions of "community" in light of the new ICTs. The many books edited by Jones contributed not only to provide descriptions and analysis of online communities and interactions, but they also, and maybe more importantly, contributed to credit and

49 The author will sustain that attitude also towards new media of mobile communication in his *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (2002), claiming for a revolutionary power of those technologies, related to fostering collective action.

legitimize online communities as an object worthy of study.

Finally, this group of studies, which is very rich and heterogeneous, has shown how, since the '90s, a strong interest toward the social aspects of the Internet has started to spread out. In light of this interest for the social aspects of CMC, scholars started asking themselves what kind of relationship exists between online and offline lives. Within these debate, more and more studies converge in arguing that the two dimensions (online and offline) influence each other and can not be considered separately.

2.1.1.3. Online and offline as inseparable dimensions, and CMC in everyday life

The scholars who have stated with more strength that online and offline should not be considered as worlds apart, one of them having a direct impact (a positive, or, as more frequently argued, a negative one) on the other, were Wellman (1997) and Gulia (Wellman and Gulia, 1999).

Wellman availed himself of social network analysis for studying online and offline interactions, he thus focused his attention on social networks and CMC. In Wellman and Gulia's (1999) "Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities," the authors started by criticizing the opposite feelings that some scholars had shown towards the Internet, by being extremely optimistic in some cases, and by proposing hypercritical perspectives in others. Wellman and Gulia go instead for a moderate position about the opportunities that actual communities could take place online: they conclude their article (which is more popular than academic, since it is not based on any empirical research) with the awareness that virtual communities are social settings to all intents and purposes, and for this reason they need to be considered as integrated in, and not opposed to, "real" communities.

Wellman also co-edited, together with Haythornthwaite, *The Internet In Everyday Life* (2002), where different articles about the relationship between online and offline lives are collected. All the authors share the standpoint that online interactions cannot be considered merely in the realm of the Internet, but rather as a part of everyday life. In light of this, the debate centers around the type of relationship that goes on between the two mentioned dimensions, whether the Internet is alienating from offline life, and which forms of human relationships tend to develop in a computer-mediated way.

In regard to this, the spheres of interest are various: the domestic domain, that of online work, that of communities, and civic participation. In all these cases, the authors conclude that the interactions that take place among the users cannot be considered apart from the social networks in which they

are embedded, networks that are simultaneously constituted by online and offline ties.

The mutual influence of online and offline dimensions is also highlighted by two articles published in 2002 in an issue of the *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, dedicated to the "Online Communication"("La Comunicazione in Rete"). The two articles' authors are Baym and Strati. The first pays special attention to the relationship of these two dimensions, underlining that online communication does not replace the offline one, while it is instead strongly embedded in our daily life. Baym underlines the blurred boundary between these two dimensions, arguing that offline contexts pervade online interactions and vice-versa. (Baym, 1995, 2002, 2006).

In Strati's piece, a very strong correlation between the two dimensions emerges as well: the two dimensions here take the forms of "virtual community," and "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Brown and Duguid, 1991; Wenger, 1998), and "professional and occupational communities" (Strati, 1996), which are strictly related to one another. Indeed, the juxtaposition of an online dimension to an offline one is also what allows us to understand innovations (ICTs, in this case) as socially constructed in organizations. In other words, CMC "connects communities of practice, virtual communities, occupational and professional communities, and organization, by making possible the development of virtual interactions between community and organization, which, in certain ways, take the place of offline ones, in some others they integrate or join them, and in yet other ways they invent them"[50] (Strati, 2002: 91).

What could be considered a further step towards the awareness that online interactions could be deeply intertwined with offline ones is the idea of CMC, and, more in general, online experiences, as something that is part of our daily lives.

In regard to that, what is argued by Herring (2004) is relevant: in showing that media tools like Instant Messaging and blogs are little more than a re-edition of the old media (like e-mail, MUDs and MOOs), Herring focuses on how these forms of CMC are not only perceived as familiar, but taken for granted. This is especially true in regard to young users that use CMC for practical needs without paying attention to the distinctions between online and offline.

The gain of awareness about the interdependence of the two dimensions has been considered, in many studies that I will consider later on in this chapter, as one of the core elements that lead to the last phase of studies on CMC.

50 original: "connette comunità di pratiche, comunità virtuali, comunità occupazionali e professionali e organizzazione, facendo sì che possano svilupparsi interazioni virtuali tra comunità e organizzazione che per certi versi subentrano a quelle offline, per altri le integrano o si affiancano ad esse, per altri ancora, le inventano," my translation.

2.1.1.4. The relevance of the context

Another turning point in CMC lies in the attribution of relevance to the social context of communication. Taking the context into consideration means to reject the idea that a technology is intrinsically meant to bring specific consequences; taking into consideration the context means to to start considering the interactions between technological and social dimensions.

One work dedicated to computer-mediated communicative interactions is that by Myers (1987), while Mantovani (1996) considers the context as a set of social norms emerging from the interactions of different actors. He argues that the actors (individuals, groups and organizations) create the context and, thus, the latter can not be left out in the study of CMC because interactions among individuals (and artefacts) are relevant social processes that must be taken into consideration.

A more recent study, specifically dedicated to context, is that by Jones (2002) who discusses the status of context in CMC studies. Jones underlines how this object of study has been handled mainly through an analysis of the textual part of communication, while little attention has been paid (or maybe the argument has been purposely avoided, as the author suggests) to the setting where interactions take place. The author argues that the concept of context that is tied to face-to-face interactions does not fit the analysis of computer-mediated interactions, which have specific features given by the new settings introduced by new technologies at a spatial, temporal and social level.

ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) are framed within the constructivist approach to technologies in organizations by Fulk (1993), who suggests an empirical study about the use of e-mails by small groups in order to highlight that communication technologies, as any other technology, is socially constructed within the context[51].

About the study of context in CMC, another relevant work is that by Jackson (1996), who highlights how, until the mid '90s, much of the scholars' attention had been dedicated to the consequences of the use of technology for communication, without any further attention to the theoretical investigation of the technological construction. Till then, all the studies (consisting of case studies on the introduction of new communication technologies, laboratory experiments, or analysis of the messages sent and received via computer) were based on the conception of technology as artefact, a merely material artefact. Neither the studies more focused on technology, nor those centered on social context, put into discussion this standpoint.

51 Even if, as we will see later, these studies have been criticized for not considering the context as something changeable, but they are said to take it for granted.

Instead, in Jackson's opinion it is fundamental to overcome the idea that technology and context are elements that can be separated, and thus the idea that it is possible to study the introduction of a new technology identifying a “before” and an “after” must also be overcome. Technology has a material aspect, but it is not limited to it. And the context must be taken into account, more as a conceptual tool than a delimitable empirical element.

The artefact must be considered at once material and social; technology and context are embedded one into the other.

2.1.1.5. Methodological implications

In light of what has been written so far, a series of studies rise aimed at trying to understand how to study this new world for which many labels started being proposed: *cyberculture* (Bell, 2001), *digital culture* (Trend, 2001), *virtual society* (Woolgar, 2002), *internet culture* (Porter, 1997), and so on. The texts that became published in the mid '90s are mostly collections of essays (Star, 1995; Jones, 1995; 1997) that propose rich descriptions of different issues, topics, and examples of case studies in computer-mediated interactions.

More in general, given the blurred boundary between offline and online, the now shared opinion about online interactions as being socially rich, and the switch of scholars' attention from communication per se to its social dimension, the methodology suggested is more and more frequently of a qualitative type, and particularly based on ethnography. But the new ICTs open up new challenges for ethnographers who, on the one side, now have new fields to investigate (the web and online community), and, on the other side, now deal with the new technologies which are simultaneously objects of study and research tools. Therefore, the ethnographic research techniques must also be revisited and re-tuned in light of this new scenario.

In regard to this, the first studies are those by Paccagnella (1997), Thomsen, Straubhaar and Bolyard (1998), and Mason and Dicks (1999). The first, besides presenting an empirical case study, deepens the strictly methodological aspects linked to a constructivist approach in the study of CMC as a part of daily life. Paccagnella highlights aspects like research ethics, the opportunity to avail oneself of software for data-gathering, and the changeability of the object of study, namely online interactions, which are not just textual anymore, but more and more multimedia.

Also Thomsen, Straubhaar and Bolyard (1998), and Mason and Dicks (1999), starting with the presentation of case studies, put forward methodological suggestions. Still, even if these studies suggest many inputs, they emerge limited to the studies presented.

As we will see in chapter 3, the first systematic work about methodology is that by Hine (2000), who credited the term "virtual ethnography," to which other works will follow, works where the term *cyberetnography* will be proposed (Ward, 1999; Gajjala, 2002; Hakken, 1999; 2003, Teli, Pisanu and Hakken, 2007) in order to try to underline the inseparability of the online and offline worlds.

In trying to define "virtual ethnography," Hine (2000) highlights how the Internet is a peculiar context for ethnography, since it is both an object of study and the place where the interactions to be observed take place. That "place" is constructed and defined by the uses and interpretations that its users give of it, and it is simultaneously a social context and a cultural product.

More specifically, the author points out that in contrast to what happens offline, on the Internet, the whole spatial setting of the ethnographic research becomes reconfigured because for computer-mediated interactions, it is changeable and not stable as in offline life. Also the concept of "space" changes: it is now more tied to a constant flux and connectivity rather than to a geographical space that is delimited by boundaries, which are not considered as an *a priori* anymore, but rather they are investigated during the ethnographic research together with the other elements.

Also, the temporal location of online interactions is peculiar. Indeed, computer-mediated communication interaction can easily overlap simultaneously with other types of interactions and with other media as well. Moreover, the ethnographer can now also investigate communications that have taken place in the past, for example on forums.

Besides these specific suggestions on method, Hine herself highlights a critical point about the use of the term "virtual," which means "disembodied" and underlies a meaning of "not quite real" (2000: 27).

It is mainly on this terminological disquisition (which underlies a theoretical one) that the counterproposal of "cyberethnography" (Ward, 1999; Gajjala, 2002; Hakken, 1999; 2003) pivots. Under the cyberethnographic approach , the term "virtual" would bring to a reductionist distinction between the "real" and, precisely, the "virtual." This distinction does not account for the multiplicity that is inscribed into these electronically-mediated interactions. Therefore, the term "cyber," as "related to cyborgs," are, under Haraway's definition (1991: 27) "cybernetic[s] organism, a hybrid of machine and organism," like something that is located between the dichotomies of human and non-human, subject and object. Therefore, an ethnographic study that draws from this "cyborg" epistemology as a standpoint will be let multiplicity emerge, as well as many aspects of mediated interactions that are now considered hybrid and more open-ended (Teli,

Pisanu and Hakken, 2007)[52].

2.1.1.6. "Reinvention," creative use, and technology-in-use

Following the constructivist approach, which considers media effects as not *a priori* determined by their features, but shaped by their continuous interaction with the social context, scholars started to highlight the role of users in constructing and re-constructing technical media in use.

Clearly, this idea of constructing and re-constructing strongly recalls the idea of a context in which the re-appropriation of the artefact takes place. The process of "re-invention" (Rice and Rogers, 1980), that is the adaptation of an innovation within the social context, has been analyzed with special regard to CMC by Feenberg (1993). He underlines the active role of the users toward the technology they are using, and he highlights how users switched from a merely instrumental use to a "creative appropriation" of CMC-related technologies.

About his appropriation process, Bakardjieva and Smith (2001) put forward the expression "generative process of technology," a process in which the user, even if he/she is bound to his/her socio-biographic situation, has an active role. The "generative process of technology" develops from the double aspect of the Internet, it having contemporaneously features that limit its use by the users, but it also being subject to change during use. The authors agree on suggesting that the Internet leaves room for users to be creative, which they then, through the way in which they use it, contribute to defining it.

About this specific point, Boczkowski and Liewrouw (2008) also underline that research on new media is usually focused on the "unanticipated users' practices," that is, those creative and unexpected uses of a technology that end up influencing its future design.

Clearly, the re-construction of objects within a context, argument that has been strongly supported by the constructivist approach to technologies in organizations, also helps to see the role of the involved users as active (Fulk, 1993). Orlikowski (1992; Orlikowski and Robey, 1991; Orlikowski and Yates, 1994; Yates and Orlikowski, 1992, Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura and Fujimoto, 1995) also starts from the idea of a relevant social context for a technology, and focuses on the user's action on technology. Much of the author's work moves from an application of Giddens' Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1979, 1984) to the realm of information systems and ICTs. If Giddens writes about the duality of the structure in order to point out the idea that the structure is at the same time the medium and the result of the reproduction of social practices, Orlikowski avails herself of the expression "duality of technology"(1992). Similarly to what was argued by Giddens

52 I will more extensively consider cyberethnography in Chapter 3

about social structure, Orlikowski claims that it is the human action to build technology, both by physically building it, and by locating it into a social context, by attributing to it a series of meanings and specific ways of usage. Nonetheless, in some scholar's opinion (Costello, 2000), Orlikowski's idea of the intrinsically social nature of technology does not adequately account for the materiality of technological artefacts. In other terms, while the structure is a mental concept, and hence can easily be considered completely created by human action, technology has specific features that limit and orient the actions of its users. Not enough attention would have been given to this second aspect in Orlikowski's work. In regard to this, it must be considered the distinction put forward by Orlikowski and colleagues (1995) in their study on the adoption of tools of electronic communication (computer conferencing) within an organization. The distinction is between "technologies as artefacts" and "technologies-in-use."

The authors give much attention to the *technology-use mediation*, which is a meta-structural process (or, a process of the structuration of structuration) which is deliberate, continuous, and organizatively sanctioned, and that fosters the adaptation of a new technology to that specific context. This process modifies the context in a way that is appropriate to accommodate the use of the technology, and it also facilitates the efficiency of that technology over time (Orlikowski et alii, 1995: 424). Within this process of mediation and structuration, the same technological artefact, which is the physical object, can be employed in different ways, depending on human action as well as on the contexts. Different "tecnologies-in-use" can then respond to every "technology as artefact." But these different uses can crystallize and become inscribed in the same artefacts, thus establishing a relation of mutual influence between the structure (fixed into artefacts) and human agency (that is interpretive freedom, and freedom of use, that the users have in regard to the technological artefact).

For what concerns computer-mediated technologies, Orlikowski claims that these are even more open-ended, and that they leave users and organizations even more free in the process of social construction of technology (Orlikowski, 1992: 31).

In spite of Orlikowski 's explicit and reiterated warning on the need to discredit and refuse any type of determinism and direct causality (Orlikowski, 1992; Orlikowski and Robey, 1991), the last studies I revealed in this section have been very similar to the approach of Social Shaping of Technology (MacKenzie, Wajcman, 1985) in that they are criticized of having tried to contrast the technological determinism of earlier approaches by counterposing to it an idea of technology as social production. For this, they themselves would end up in forms of determinism (Button, 1992). As we will better see later on, a proposal for overcoming these critical aspects has been put forward

by Actor-Network Theory (ANT), applied to the study of CMC by Lea, O'Shea, Fung (1995). Many of these aspects, tied to the social construction of technology and to the possible link between CMC and ANT, will be more extensively debated in the following paragraphs.

Anyhow, besides the relevant concepts that we have dealt with in this section, starting from the idea that CMC is not socially poor and that computer-mediated interactions are not straightforwardly determined by the technical device, much more attention has started to be devoted to, on the one side, the social-mediated settings (mainly virtual communities), and, on the other side, to the role of the users in practicing and detecting unexpected uses of technological artefacts, not only within everyday life, but also within socially constructed contexts of use and meanings.

At this point, after having retraced and thematically branched literature on CMC, I will now take into consideration those authors who have themselves proposed classifications of CMC literature. Later on, the critical aspects of these classifications will be highlighted, and alternative readings, able to overcome those limits, will be suggested.

2.1.2 Classifications of CMC literature

It is easy to understand that CMC and its related studies are quite a recent phenomenon. Given the fact that mass diffusion of personal computers goes back only about twenty years ago, we can imagine how young and new academic research on computer mediated interactions and its users is. Moreover, with the passing of time, technologies mediating communication also change, sharpen, and evolve.

The changeability of the object, the recentness of academic studies about it, and the wide variety of approaches and disciplines that faced CMC make it hard to put forward a clear and comprehensive classification of the state of the art. I will hereby present what has been proposed in book and manuals on CMC, (Paccagnella 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Roversi 2004; Wellman's article, 2004), where studies on this topic are usually tripartite following similar but not identical criteria.

2.1.2.1. Wellman's “three ages”

Wellman's (2004) classification of literature is tripartite in what the author calls “the three ages of Internet studies.”

The first group of studies is characterized, under the author's point of view, by the big expectations about this new medium, mainly in regard to its use for economic reasons. It is indeed at this time, in the mid '90s, that the “dot.com” bubble pops up. This is a utopian phase about the alleged revolutionary potentialities of computer mediated communication (Barlow, 1995), which goes

together with analyses that are often tentative and barely supported by data. Alternatively, the belief was that either the Internet would have put into question power hierarchies by fostering a process of democratization, or that it would have reduced face-to-face interactions, hence increasing the risk of propelling the phenomena of individualization.

The second phase singled out by Wellman is that of the "systematic documentation of users and uses." This era starts at the end of last millennium, and it is characterized by, indeed, more accurately documented and organized studies about what had become a fundamental medium of communication, which was by then, part of everyday life. Thus, researchers' attention in this period was dedicated to documenting who Internet users were and how they use the Internet, generally carrying out quantitative research.

Finally, the "third era" begins with the development of less documentarian and more deeply analytical studies. One of the objects of study that characterized this period lies in the types of relationships that users establish online. It is necessary to point out that Wellman adopts the label "Internet Studies" instead of "Computer-Mediated Communication," and despite these domains beginning to overlap since the mid '90s (with the spread of the World Wide Web) before this time, only CMC existed. For this reason does Wellman talk about a prehistoric era before the three eras he mentions.

In order to have an example of how classifications, similar to those put forward by Wellman, can be done of CMC studies, let us see the categorization proposed by Roversi.

2.1.2.2. Roversi's "three periods"

In his *Introduction to Computer-Mediated Communication* [*Introduzione alla comunicazione mediata dal computer*] (2004), Roversi presents the study of CMC as a branch of Sociology of Communication, which started to become autonomous since the end of the '80s. Since then, studies on Computer-Mediated Communication would have developed in three phases: that of "popular" writings, that of the first scientific studies, and finally that of critical studies. Let us consider them more in detail.

The *"popular" writings* mainly consist of writings that slowly start to find place in public domain. Because of the very low level of digital literacy, these writings are very descriptive, while their content is mainly limited to dealing with the effects of the new medium on society. They argue either very pessimistically that CMC would bring us to a fragmented society, or put forward an evident optimism about the big and plentiful opportunities of connecting and sharing offered by the Internet.

Finally, in these studies is often presented the metaphor of the Internet as a "new frontier," which is also proposed by Rheingold (1993), who underlines the pioneering and brave spirits of the first CMC users.

The *first scientific studies* differ from the previous especially due to the higher degree of analysis and the conception of the Internet as a social space. Similarly to what was said in the above paragraph, in this phase the arguments preferred by the researchers are those of online identity and of virtual communities. Still, Roversi also places in these categories the studies developed in the '90s after the spread of the web and graphic interfaces[53]. These new studies are characterized, above all, by the attention of scholars on digital environments intended not so much as merely virtual communities, but rather as out-and-out real social networks (Roversi, 2004: 36). In light of this, during this phase a special attention for the relationship between virtual and offline communities develops.

Finally, with the beginning of the new century, we see the "CMC bubble," which is an enormous proliferation of writings that are different and vary in epistemological approaches and specific objects of study.

Generalizing and summarizing, it can be affirmed that during this phase of studies, scholars tried to critically analyze (and not merely describe) the various aspects of CMC. It is, indeed, this period that Roversi labels as *critical studies*, since the focus switches from the technical features of the medium to relationships, interpretations, uses, and social contexts where communication takes place. CMC finally gets studied as a social practice.

As mentioned, Roversi's classification does not differ much from Wellman's. Indeed, despite being the first dealings with the Internet, and the latter more specifically with CMC, both highlight the study of these new media and phenomena as a progressive transition from expectations and forecasts based on the technical features of the new technologies to critical studies of the social aspects of ICTs, more and more carried out through qualitative methodologies.

2.1.2.3. Paccagnella's "three phases"

Since the '80s, CMC had been initially considered an impoverished version of face-to-face communication. The RSC (Reduced Social Cues) approach has, indeed, focused on the low amount of social cues which could be transmitted in a computer-mediated way.

As underlined by Paccagnella (2000: 179), this approach considers the characteristics of CMC as

53 This clarification about interfaces is very relevant, and too often understated within CMC studies, as we will see later on.

intrinsic to the medium, which leads to specific consequences at a social level. The main representatives of this approach are Sproull and Kiesler (1986, 1991a, 1991b), two social psychologists interested in the effects of CMC at an organizational level, with main regard to workplaces. In their "Reducing Social Context Cues: Electronic mail in Organizational Communication" and *Connections: new ways of working in the networked organization*, the two authors focus on two features of CMC, which are alleged to be intrinsic to and dependent on this electronic medium: the poverty of information transmitted, as regard to social context; and the scarcity of communication norms that are carried out during interactions (Paccagnella, 2004).

The representatives of the RSC approach are mainly interested in investigating the effects of CMC on organizational efficiency in an instrumental (and technological determined) way.

This approach has been strongly criticized both for its underlying standpoint that the medium would determine the amount of information transmissible, and consequently the quality of the communication (considered as a mere exchange of information), and also quantitative methods and laboratory studies that are typical of the RSC approach, which have been considered not completely appropriate for investigating the sociality of human relationships.

Therefore, in the '90s other studies started to spread, always within the realm of social psychology. These studies focus more on the social context, rather than on the width of the band of information transmitted. The representatives of this approach, which will be called SIDE (Social Identity De-Individualization) share with the previous the belief that the amount of information transmissible in a mediated way is less than the amount of information transmissible in face-to-face communication. However, in contrast with the RSC approach, in this case the underlying assumption is not that the consequences are unambiguous and technologically determined.

On the contrary, the analysis of the phenomenon gets more and more complex and articulated by also adding the argument that the effects of the limited bandwidth can be various, and those effects can have different types of influences on the social context. For instance, while the representatives of the RSC approach underlined the alleged democratizing effect of CMC caused by the scarcity of social cues transmitted, Spears and Lea (1994), the most important scholars for the SIDE approach, discuss this phenomenon, and conclude that CMC does not bring to an equalization of status, decentralization, and democratization of decision processes, giving freedom and power to the users. On the contrary, they argue that power relations can instead be reinforced by CMC, because the scarcity of social cues transmittable via computers can be substituted by other means, like emoticons.

Also for another approach, called SIP (Social Information Processing), the RSC model was "guilty" of technological determinism, relying on inappropriate laboratory studies, and setting out a misleading idea of democratization which would be intrinsic to the medium. To this, SIP scholars counterpose the idea of "hyperpersonalization" (Walther, 1996), that is a process of compensation for the scarcity of information and absence of non-verbal indicators with elements retrieved by previous communicative and social experiences (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). In other words, users that communicated in a computer-mediated way would tend to classify interactions and actors by adopting pre-existing categories, and by reproducing and reinforcing the stereotyping of social identities. Nonetheless, the process is seen as situated and strictly dependent on the social context where the interaction takes place.

In short, in the '90s there is a rise of critical approaches to research methods and of the deterministic setting of the RSC model: "the attention switches from the 'effects' and efficiency of CMC, compared to that of other forms of communication, to the processes of symbolic construction of meanings and online action" (Paccagnella, 2004: 183)[54]. The context considered switches from the organizational and workplace one to the personal and domestic one (thanks to the ongoing spread of personal computers), and the object of study, which is not the efficiency of corporate communications, becomes that of the projections of online identities and the establishment of virtual communities.

The diffusion of CMC on the one side, and its study on the other, do reach the daily lives of individuals more and more, and span outside of the strictly working environment. This transition will be complete with the starting of the new century, when the third and last phase of CMC studies will come to light. In this phase, mediated communication is considered a part of the daily life of every individual, and thus a social phenomenon to all intents and purposes. Technology is not considered as leading to specific and predictable behaviors anymore, and mediated interactions are not considered as limited to a mere exchange of information anymore; rather, the complexity of the articulated process of social construction which takes place at every moment of social interactions is understood and investigated also in regard to computer-mediated interactions.

Paccagnella pays much attention on this "third phase" of studies (2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2004), because, in his opinion, the consideration of CMC as a part of daily life would bring with it important methodological consequences. Indeed, consistently with this new assumption and the new

54"l'attenzione si sposta dagli "effetti" e dall'efficienza della Cmc comparati a quelli di altre forme di comunicazione, ai processi di costruzione simbolica dei significati e dell'azione online." ("the attention switches from the "effects" and efficiency of CMC -compared to other forms of communication- to the processes of symbolic construction of meaning on online actions." My translation) (Paccagnella, 2004: 183)

object of study, new methods for investigation are proposed. These belong to the realm of ethnography, which is considered more appropriate to account for the complexity of the considered phenomenon than the previous quantitative and laboratory studies.

2.1.3. The lack of a shared theoretical framework and the need for a multidisciplinary approach

These classifications are of some help in making sense of the vast amount of literature on CMC, but they do not help to guide research on a study of CMC today. Moreover, this literature is characterized by a rich and often unclear multiplicity of terms proposed by scholars, and this adds complexity and confusion in answering the question of how to study CMC. Also, scholars have different opinions on whether CMC should be considered a self-standing field of study within social sciences (Dahlberg, 2004), or not. Some suggest that CMC has peculiar features, that make it something different from both interpersonal communication and mass media communication, "or better: it can lend itself to one or the other from time to time, with no continuity, representing an interesting overcome of the rigid opposition of *one-to-one* mass communication, which has dominated for all the Eighteenth century"[55] (Paccagnella, 2000: 178). In spite of this, there are scholars (Roversi, 2004) who argue instead that CMC should be studied with the traditional tools of sociology of communication, and finally others, who, even if they acknowledge the limits of earlier approaches, suggest an often vaguely-defined multidisciplinary approach. Let us now consider some of these latter scholars and approaches.

In Paccagnella's argument, thanks to the features of new ICTs, CMC can now take place in different ways (*one-to-one*, *one-to-many* and *many-to-many*), and it contemporaneously allows and needs to be considered under different perspectives by adopting an interdisciplinary approach (Paccagnella, 2000). For this reason, (mass) media studies would be inadequate for studying CMC, as first underlined by Paccagnella (2002b), and then, more recently, by other media and communication scholars (Gauntlett, 2004; 2007; Merrin, 2006; Naughton 2006). In particular, in light of the development of the new Web 2.0 communication tools, Gauntlett (2007) highlights the deficiency of research of these operated through traditional research tools that he calls, by contrast, "Media Studies 1.0." The latter would start from the standpoint that media can be read and interpreted by experts who are prepared and specialized for this task, and the clear distinction between a small group of producers of content and a passive audience is still there. On the contrary, "Media Studies 2.0" mainly draw upon the awareness that the audience can be active and offers different meanings

55 Original version "o meglio: si presta di volta in volta all'uno o all'altro uso senza soluzione di continuità, rappresentando un interessante superamento della rigida contrapposizione tra comunicazione *da uno a uno* e comunicazione di massa che ha imperversato per tutto il Novecento," my translation.

and interpretations, among which some can be considered correct, and some others as wrong. Clearly, the investigations should not be limited to the study of the audience, but also its involvement with the medium of communication, which helped redefine the whole communication system. In other words, the suggestion is that of starting to consider the whole media ecosystem (Gauntlett 2007, Naughton 2006).

Still, the question about what theoretical framework in which to inscribe CMC for taking into proper account all these elements, remains. A first suggestion is that by William Merrin (2006)[56], who proposes to fill the, in his opinion, evident gaps in media studies by paying attention to the technology, to how it is constructed, and to how it is used, because without investigating technology it is not possible to understand what takes place around it.

This last point helps me to draw two conclusions: on the one side, it is necessary to pay much attention to the characteristics of the object of study in order to set a proper research agenda (Soukup, 2000); on the other side, it is fundamental that scholars from different disciplines discuss and open up their research to different disciplines.

Paccagnella, Merrin and Gauntlett are just some of the communication and media scholars that acknowledged the need to overcome one's disciplinary boundaries. And others, like Silver and Dahlberg, after operating literature reviews that draw from their different disciplinary approaches, end up with the same conclusion. They underline, indeed, that it is necessary to inscribe CMC[57] within a "meta-field" (Silver, 2004), and to consider it through non-reductionist approaches (Dahlberg, 2004).

In 2004, David Silver set the goal for himself to account for the state of the art of these studies which he puts together under the label of "meta-field." After an accurate review of the texts that he considers being the most relevant for the field, the author highlights that this field of studies, far from being structured, is "canonless," without a set of shared ideas among scholars, and without any specific theoretical framework to refer to. This multiplicity and ambiguity must, in his opinion, be carried on as long as possible by also involving international authors (since he acknowledges a dominance of Western and English-speaking researchers), and he hopes for the interaction of these with those people who are not involved in academia (like artist, activists, technologists, and so on).

The piece from Dahlberg (2004) is, instead, a theoretical disquisition on how the different epistemological traditions involved with the Internet would be limited, and would necessarily breed

56 http://mediastudies2point0.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2006-01-01T00%3A00%3A00-08%3A00&updated-max=2007-01-01T00%3A00%3A00-08%3A00&max-results=15

57 Silver does not refer only to CMC, but to all the wider corpus of literature about "Internet/Cyberculture/ Digital Culture/New Media" (2004)

analysis that are themselves limited and sophisticated by some kind of determinism. In the author's opinion, in most disciplinary fields, technology and social context have been considered separately, giving light to limited and biased researches. Dahlberg argues that media studies, more interested in the *use*, have taken for granted the autonomy of the user in utilizing the technology, denying the social context; "impact" studies on the effects of technology on society failed to problematize technology, and particularly its social construction; studies in political economy, as well as some in the field of Science and Technology Studies, have emphasized the social aspect without accurately accounting for technology. In order to do away with these risks, the author points out that an error, often made by all three cases mentioned above, must be avoided, namely: technologies must not be considered as mere artefacts that are autonomous, but rather as constructed and involved in the construction of a social context. The studies mentioned earlier started with the aim to consider this complexity, but they, in Dahlberg's opinion, all ended up more or less explicitly choosing a causal determination; a "multi-dimensional" perspective is needed.

2.2. For a non-reductionist approach to CMC

In this section, I will extensively analyze some texts which help move to a non-reductionist approach to CMC (and more in general, to the study of new media). The first is an article by Boczkowski and Lievrouw (2008), in which the authors propose a review of both literature on communication studies and on Science and Technology Studies (from now on, STS), and they end up pointing out three elements that are common to both disciplines and work as contact points among the two disciplines related to CMC, disciplines that would be converging.

Starting from one of the mentioned contact points, which I will further discuss soon, I will then take into consideration the critical literature review on CMC operated by Boczkowski (1999), which is focused on the relationship between technology and users. Also Boczkowski classifies literature in three parts, but what differentiates him from other authors is that, instead of limiting himself to putting forward a classification and underlining the fragmented landscape it opens up to, Boczkowski actually contributes to orientating research on CMC.

2.2.1. Boczkowski and Lievrouw: the "bridges" between communication studies and STS

What emerges most from this article is that in the last years we see a growing convergence of communication studies and STS. In particular, the traditional object of study of the first would have been approached with the concepts, methodology, and terminology of the latter, traditionally oriented to consider technology not only under its material aspect, but also as multiple artefacts put

into situated contexts (Suchman, 1987). The meaning of these artefacts is not given, but constructed.

Even if these two branches of studies move from different standpoints and they traditionally consider different objects of studies (or, sometimes, just different aspects of the same objects), they would be progressively converging on three aspects in particular:

- process of development of technology: the inclination of studies on technology to consider mainly production-related aspects, and the inclination of communication studies for the study of consumption, are more and more converging in that both are paying increasing attention to both approaches for the *relationship* between production and consumption;
- social consequences and technological change: today, the introduction of a new technology is not seen within the paradigm of continuity/discontinuity with society, and less revolutionary effects are prospected (actually, this still happens in literature on Web 2.0). Instead, attention is focused on the embeddedness of technology in its ordinary contexts, meaning, and social and cultural uses. In particular, the development model of a new communication technology can be seen as a sociotechnical phenomenon (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006: 247) in which technology is considered as *infrastructure* (Star and Bowker, 2002; Star and Ruhleder, 1996), that is, it becomes *embedded* and *transparent*, visible upon breakdown. Such perspectives help overcome the dichotomies discussed above;
- causality in the technology-society relationship: as we have seen earlier in this work, communication studies have suffered from technological determinism, and STS often tried to contrast this with the idea of "social shaping" of technology, which unfortunately ends up being another type of (social) determinism. But today, elements of "social shaping" and "technology shaping" are more and more seen as being part of a network that from time to time acquires different settings and balances, from which different sociotechnical settings come to light.[58].

About this last point, Boczkowski and Lievrouw underline how this relational and bi-directional vision between technology and society is in line with the STS's approach to a perspective of "mutual shaping" and "co-production" oriented to the approach of Actor Network Theory (Callon, 1986a; Latour, 1993, 1996; Law, 1997).

In regard to this, it does not seem inappropriate to infer that in the field of communications, often scholars limited themselves to underlining the relevance of considering technology (Merrin, 2006;

58 For an empirical application we will see Boczkowski (2004).

Gauntlett, 2007), while in the field of STS, scholars have responded to the limits of (what critics have addressed as) "social determinism" with precise theoretical and empirical clues, taken from Actor-Network Theory. I will further consider this later in this chapter.

2.2.2. Boczkowski: an alternative reading of CMC literature

Recalling the last point listed above, that is, the relationship between technology and society, it is possible to offer an alternative reading of literature on social studies on CMC. This reading focuses on the relationship between technology and users, and it is expressed in a very insightful article by Boczkowski (1999).

The author highlights the switch from deterministic visions (which can be technologically or socially deterministic) to that of "mutual shaping," and he points out that that switch would have taken place in three consecutive phases.

The first phase is that of a *direct impact*, meaning by that, that some specific aspect of CMC would lead to a series of specific consequences on society, and these consequences are what is investigated. Part of this first phase are the approaches of RSC, of Information Richness Theory, and of the SIP one. These studies "clashed" with the need to explain, for example, the unattended uses of a technology, or the different effects that the same technology could have on different groups or individuals.

In trying to make up for these approaches' limits, many scholars put forward the idea of *mediated impact*, which is still aimed at explaining the impact of CMC on society, but by adding, this time, an additional element to the process of determination. In other words, technology would cause effects on groups and individuals, who would then (recursively) act on society. So, what becomes focal is the context and the role of the user, which can ever creatively use (Feenberg, 1993) and re-use (Rice, 1987) technology. In light of this active role of the users, who not only re-appropriate technology, but transform it, the third and last phase takes place: that of "*mutual shaping,*" in which technology and users influence one another at any time (and not only during the phase in which technology is designed). It's an ongoing process of *co-construction*. Thanks to this latter approach, it is now possible to account for the *process* instead of the *product* of CMC.

Boczkowski is very insightful to have highlighted how much of the merit of getting to this situation was the rise, within STS, of the approach of "Social Construction of Technology" (SCOT) (Pinch and Bijker, 1984; Bijker, 1997; Bijker et alii, 1987), from which the expression "mutual shaping" has been taken.

The SCOT approach tries to overcome the social determinism of which it has been accused, and can achieve this with the perspective of Actor-Network Theory (Callon, 1986a; Latour, 1993; Law, 1997; Law and Hassard, 1999), which, in its application to the study of technology, takes into consideration users and technological artefacts as embedded in a situated process of "co-evolution"(Callon, 1986b)[59], and "co-production" (Latour, 1991). Within this perspective, social groups and individuals (human actors), cannot be considered regardless of technological innovations, or better yet, of the non-human actors they are involved with.

2.3. Science and Technology Studies

Science and Technology Studies (STS) started in the second half of the 1980s, rising from a "technological turn" in Social Studies of Science (Woolgar, 1991), a turn that moved from an interest toward the interrelationships among science, technology, and society. The STS standpoint is that the relationship between society and technology is not deterministic, but rather, technological objects are socially constructed (Bennato, 2002).

In particular, within STS, one approach emerged: that of the aforementioned Social Construction Of Technology (SCOT) (Pinch and Bijker, 1984; Bijker, 1995; Bijker et alii, 1987), which draws upon the idea that technology is, indeed, socially constructed. Pinch and Bijker (Pinch and Bijker, 1984; Bijker et alii, 1992) argue that technological artefacts are socially constructed in three phases: first, an inventor/group embeds a function into an artefact ("interpretive flexibility"); whose shape is then, in the second phase, destined to change depending on the opinion of the "relevant social group"; and finally a "closure mechanism" of the negotiation sets and stabilizes the artefact (Bennato, 2002).

The SCOT approach highlights then how the process of production (or better yet, of social construction) of a technological artefact is not linear, but rather multi-directional, and to understand that artefact it is fundamental to define the "technological frame" within which it has been thought and created. To argue that a technology is socially constructed, and to thus see its development as multi-linear rather than direct, means to dismiss the idea that it is some intrinsic quality of the technological object that determines it's success or failure. It means to investigate the artefacts. And the observation and investigation of the artefact and its development is namely what SCOT-driven empirical studies are based on.

In line with what is suggested by Boczkowski and Lievrouw (Boczkowski, 1999; Boczkowski and

59 the author writes about a "co-evolution" of society, technological artefacts and knowledge of nature (Callon, 1986b: 20).

Lievrouw, 2008), investigating the artefacts will mean, in my case, starting from the technological elements and considering them within a technological frame as well as in relation with the users, by operating an STS-oriented study of Web 2.0.

Besides this, it is necessary to notice that, even if the SCOT approach focuses on seeing technologies as socially constructed and analyzed in their context of use, it has been criticized with favoring social aspects to technological ones. From these critiques rose the perspective of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Callon, 1986a and 1986b; Latour, 1993; Law, 1997; Law and Hassard, 1999).

The origins of ANT go back the 1980s, and could be referred to Latour and Woolgar's (1979) *Laboratory Studies*, where the authors investigated the processes of construction of scientific reality. After in initial period of more strict attention to scientific processes (Callon, 1986; Latour 1987), ANT began to be applied to social sciences at large (Akrich and Latour, 1992) to later find much application within organization studies (Law, 1994: Cooper and Law, 1995). The specificity of this perspective within Science And technology Studies is that it draws upon the idea "that the social is nothing other than patterned networks of heterogeneous materials" (Law, 1997: 2). This perspective draws upon the effort to overcome dichotomic and essentialist visions of "nature" and "culture," "objects" and "thoughts" (Latour, 1991b), by considering these not as self-standing entities, but rather as elements embedded within networks of human and non-human actors (Sismondo, 2004) in which they interact symmetrically (Latour, 2005). In its application to technology, ANT considers users and technological artefacts within a situated process of "co-evolution"(Callon, 1986b) and co-production (Latour, 1991) of humans and non-humans. This "relational materiality" (Law, 1999) on which ANT relies stands in considering the social and material worlds as depending on the other, and defined through a process of network building where their interests, trajectories, *programs of actions* (Akrich, 1992; Akrich and Latour, 1992) clash, change, are questioned and re-defined, or, in a word, *translated* (Callon, 1986a) into an actor-network that can reach different degrees of stability (Latour, 2005). So, the step further taken by ANT in respect to SCOT can be summarized in Latour and colleagues' suggestion to overcome that ontological dualism between technology and society that SCOT is still portraying (Latour, 2005). And this dualism can be overcome with a non-modern epistemology (Latour, 1993) that considers science and society, users and technology, as constantly undergoing processes of mutual definition and construction, which from time to time get assembled in hybrid (human and non-human) Actor-Networks that can reach different levels of stability (Callon, 1986b).

2.4. "Where in STS?" Debates within the STS field where this work could find a place

In the following paragraphs I will consider elements and debates within the field of STS, or more specifically related to ANT, which inspired this work. After considering the participation of nonexperts in science and technology, I will briefly introduce the wider realm of the STS view of technology and democracy. Third, I will underline some critical aspects of the SCOT approach by discussing the concepts of *interpretive flexibility*, and, more extensively, that of *relevant social groups*. What emerges is that within SCOT, relevant social groups are often taken for granted. However, in this study, I see them as emerging from the field. Then, I will consider how, despite the many studies and suggestions by scholars to study Information Systems under an ANT perspective, only few studies on CMC have done the same. In spite of what has been argued so far, and despite the invitation by some scholars to do so, only some empirical studies of this type are presented in literature. This work would help fill that gap. Finally, I will focus on how human and non-human actors have been studied in the world of music, and I will show how this topic has been considered very relevant, but its study has stopped with "old" media, without focusing on newer communication technologies: in regard to this, the present research represents an input for ANT-oriented scholarship to take these into account.

2.4.1. STS and political aspects: participation, expertise, and democratization.

The interest of STS scholars in political aspects is very widespread and, at the same time, multifaceted and very fragmented. Still today, after 30 years of STS, the theoretical concepts and procedures that have been put forward in regard to politics are difficult to clearly categorize (Nahuis and Van Lente, 2008). If we want (despite my choice of a non-essentialist epistemology for conducting my work) to set up a cartesian dichotomy for pure analytical purposes, we can divide STS interests for politics into two groups: those accounting for the political aspects of technology, and those concerned in an involvement of STS scholars and nonexperts in policy making.

Indeed, on the one side, STS scholars have underlined how science (and technology studies) is inherently political (Jasanoff, 2003; Winner,1980, 1986), and it is important to see technology as political, since it often contributes to shaping our lives without us even noticing it (Winner,1980, 1986): "technology challenges the common meaning of (democratic) politics (Salomon, 2000)" (Nahuis, van Lente, 2008: 560). On the other side, STS scholars have been called to get involved in politics (Bijker, 2003) and science policy making (Webster, 2007).

A similar distinction was put forward by Fuller (1993), in his distinction between a "High Church" and "Low Church." The first category groups those studies concerning the politics of STS that "focused on the interpretation of science and technology and has been successful in developing sophisticated conceptual tools for exploring the development and stabilization of knowledge and artifacts" (Sismondo, 2008: 18), while the "Low Church" is made up by works that aimed at making science and technology "accountable to public interests" (ibid.), and thus the Low Church is "less concerned with understanding science and technology in and of themselves, and more with making science and technology accountable to public interests" (ibid. 18). Still, even this dichotomy, in Sismondo's opinion, does not account for the many overlaps that are indeed retrievable in the many studies that represent the interest of STS for the political aspects of science and technology and the bridges between the two "churches." In the end, both perspectives are relevant and could even be considered not mutually exclusive (Sismondo, 2008).

Given this complex scenario, I will limit myself here to briefly accounting for the "participartory turn" in STS, and for the perspectives developed in STS about democracy and technology in order to finally point out the STS perspective that best fits my research question and theoretical standpoints.

2.4.1.1. The "participatory turn" in STS

Political aspects of science and technology have long been researched and debated in STS, and recently an interest has developed in the aspect of participation decision processes in science and technology (Lengwiler, 2008). While this "participatory turn" (Jasanoff, 2003) deals more with the participation of nonexperts in policy making, rather than the participatory or democratizing aspects of technologies, an overview of these works can help frame the concept of participation.

Indeed, drawing upon Lengwiler's work (2008), and in light of his historical review of participatory science and technology, it is possible to highlight that participation should be conceived as something more than a mere increase in the number of actors involved in decision-making; rather, it should also comprehend the "neglected conditioning effects of power" and focus on the closure of these processes (Stirling, 2008). Including "laypersons" or nonexperts into an agora does not straightforwardly mean to set out a deliberative arena, since this is a place where "opposite interests clash" (Bonneuil, Joly and Marris, 2008). Thus, participation cannot be considered automatically generated by active involvement of nonexperts into "egalitarian notions of public reasoning" (ibid.), but rather investigated in micro contexts, taking into account the situated configuration of power relations. (Lengwiler, 2008).

This critical discussion of the limits emerging from literature make Lengwiler conclude that not only the involvement of actors, which does not automatically create conditions of equality and adequate representation, should account for the power-biased micro context. But also, at a macro level, it has highlighted the need to include in the research a reflection on the wider political and economic conditions, and, in particular, much attention must be devoted to the economic market and its own rules, that is the context where participation is embedded. Indeed, as highlighted by Callon and Rabeharisoa (2008), it would be misleading to consider that, under contemporary market conditions, participation would straightforwardly substitute commercial activities with noncommercial ones (ibid.).

For these reasons, the STS debate on nonexperts' participation helps highlight how accounts of participation that have been given are too deterministic and partial, and do not account for power relations and market conditions. This lack should be overcome by accounting for the broader context and then accurately accounting for the clashing interests within the specific setting. Again.

2.4.1.2. STS perspectives on democracy and technology: why go with ANT

In the last 30 years, the field of STS provided many different perspectives and approaches to democracy and technology. Similarly to what happened in regard to participation, and even more than that, STS scholars have offered an array of studies which, for the sake of clarity, have been categorized by Nahuis, van Lente, (2008) into five groups.

The fist group is what the authors labeled *intentionalist.* This would be characterized by the underlying assumption by its scholars (Winner, 1980, Noble, 1979, Illich, 1973, Sclove, 1995) that there are forms of power and authority that technology developers materialize in artefacts. Thus, technological choice impacts social order, and the role of engineers become fundamental in shaping society in that the design of technology is done for a precise end. The role of STS researchers for this approach should be that of criticizing technological assessments following criteria related to human rights, in order to challenge and discuss the centralized power in the context of design.

The *proceduralist* perspective (SCOT approach; Bijker, 1995, 1999, Pinch and Bijker, 1987) has instead focused on procedures of involvement rather than on design. For these authors democracy is seen as a "deliberative practice with strong participation" (Nahuis, van Lente, 2008: 564) based on the idea of democracy as direct democracy. There must be equality to all participants, and expertness is negotiated.

The third approach outlined by the authors is that of the Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Authors

clustered within this approach (Latour, 1987, 1988, 1991, 1993, 2004; Akrich, 1992, 1995) see technology, as well as politics, as the outcome of a struggle. Democracy is then seen as "a set of historically contingent decision-making techniques and practices." Participation should be opened to non-human actors. ANT is relevant to politics, but, since it can not draw from universal norms, STS researchers can/should construct alternative political ontologies rather than evaluating decision-making processes.

A similar approach is the *interpretivist* (Joerges, 1999, Woolgar, 1991, and Cooper 1999, Pfaffenberger, 1992) one. This indeed draws upon ANT, but adds a discursive dimension. This perspective offers an analysis of discursive construction of hegemonic ideologies. artefacts and democracy are seen as texts whose meaning depends on the discursive contexts. "The interpretive challenge is to unravel the discursive conditions and circumstances by which a political/innovation process both leads to particular outcomes *and* is claimed to be democratic" (2008: 568). Finally, since the STS researcher is considered to contribute to the discourse, she/he must thus show some reflexivity.

The last perspective outlined is the *performative* (Levidow, 1998, Gomart and Hajer, 2003, Hajer, 2005, Mol, 2002) one. This focuses on the central role of the setting and of its bias, which is how it helps to frame problems, engage an audience, and construct the very meaning of participation. There is no ideal of democracy under this perspective either, since it is the setting that induces the meaning for both technology and democracy. Power is exercised via control of the agenda, besides that in decision-making processes. In short, the core focus of this approach lies in the bias of the setting, that by itself enhances and restricts actions, and thus helps some actors and not others.

In my opinion, these classifications, despite being useful for orientating scholars, are too narrow and specific. In particular, they could alternatively be expressed as the more traditional distinction, within STS, of SCOT and ANT approaches. Indeed, as the authors themselves state, perspectives 1 and 2 directly draw from the SCOT approach, while perspectives 3, 4, and 5, are all more or less directly related to ANT. Indeed, approaches 4 and 5, which the authors define as "amendments to the actor-network perspective rather than perspectives in the sense of being shared by broad research communities" (2008: 573), can be considered as more specific visions within the ANT perspective that do not draw from different standpoints, but rather focus on some specific aspects (namely, discursive practices and settings).

I argue, therefore, that the debate in STS about displaced politics can be more generally divided into two approaches: the SCOT-oriented, and the ANT oriented. Then, as Nahuis and van Lente themselves affirm, the main difference between the two approaches (respectively constituted by

Nahuis and van Lente's perspectives number 1 and 2; and 3, 4, and 5) is that the first considers democracy as something abstract and universal, and then investigates technology by leaving the black box of democracy closed, while the second, on the contrary, considers democratic principles as co-constructions (ibid.: 573).

That latter position is the one I share and draw upon in the present work. Indeed, present research is not aimed at drawing from an idea of democracy (and participation) that can be considered abstractly out of its context. Moreover, both the idea that technology is democratic (or not) in itself, and that the procedures for its development are intrinsically democratic (or undemocratic), are considered limited. Instead, together with those elements, the inscription of action programs into plans, designs and artefacts will be considered, paying attention to the discursive dimension and to the settings (and its bias). The translation into a stable Actor-Network will also be considered (Chapter 6), and a more general discourse about participation and democratization will follow (Chapter 7).

Directly related to what has just been discussed is the debate about *interpretive flexibility* and *relevant social groups*. I will dedicate the following paragraph to argue how, in light of the critiques raised on STS within the debate on these two concepts, the present study tries to overcome the limit of the SCOT approach in regard to those concepts, by framing itself in an ANT perspective.

*2.4.1.*3. Interpretive flexibility and relevant social groups

Within this landscape of mutual construction of the technical and the social, who are the "selected" actors of the latter that have a dominant role in (re)constructing technology? The SCOT approach answered this question by putting forward the concepts of "interpretive flexibility" and of "relevant social groups" which are, as briefly introduced above, two core notions of this approach (Pinch and Bijker, 1984; Bijker, 1995; Bijker et alii, 1987). In this paragraph I will discuss both those concepts, problematizing the second in particular. I will underline how relevant social groups are usually considered by the SCOT approach as taken-for-granted as a starting point in investigations, while my aim in the present research is to see them as emerging from interactions and processes in which they are involved, together with technological artefacts.

Under a SCOT vision, the technological frame is established by the dominant social group, which strongly contributes to attributing a certain meaning to artefacts. Once the technological frame changes, the artefact must then change as well in order to fit the new frame. An example can be seen in the invention of the bicycle, whose innovation did not start with the achievement of new technological goals and possibilities, but from a social need that was explicated by the change of

collective hermeneutical frame, or new technological frame (Bijker, 1995). In other words, technological development and the diffusion of an artefact cannot be explained simply through the intrinsic features of the technological artefact; they can only be understood in light of the processes of social construction.

These processes are made possible, in the first place, by *interpretive flexibility*, a concept that addresses the openness of a same artefact to different interpretations by different social groups. *Interpretive flexibility* is thus the "initial availability of the artefact to be object of conflictual and negotiation interactions"[60] (Pellegrino, 2004: 17). That flexibility arrives then to a point of closure when the artefact, constructed also by the meaning that the relevant social group attributes to it, becomes "stabilized" (Bijker, 1995).

The *relevant social groups* are thus groups of individuals that share the attribution of the same meaning to a technological artefact, and there are as many technological artefacts as there are relevant social groups (Bijker, 1995: 77). As explained by Bijker (1992), "In the SCOT descriptive model, *relevant social groups* are the key starting point. Technological artefacts do not exist without social interactions within and among social groups" (1992: 75-76).

But these concepts have been object of many critiques.

A first critique involves the stage in which the SCOT approach confines interpretive flexibility. Indeed, once the artefact has been commercialized and spread out, the relevant social groups assume a core role in defining it. This definition gets inscribed in new designs of the same artefact. At this point, the artefact becomes stabilized. Interpretive flexibility, that had been materialized into the artefact, fades. This conception of interpretive flexibility as materialized into the artefact has been criticized by ANT perspective which considers interpretive flexibility as a "guiding principle, but not only for the conceptualization of technology [.], it is also also applied to the discursive elements that signify artifacts" (Nahuis, van Lente, 2008: 568) In other words, while Bijker (1995) confines flexibility to earlier stages, I (according Latour, 1996) put forward that the fixity of technology comes around further on, and way after the design phase: "like the social closure of scientific debates, technological fixity emerges as society settles on the appropriate meanings that the technology will have, as various actors successful in shaping design are now committed to a particular interpretation" (Lynch, 2003: 329), and, artefacts and the related discourses, are still open to reconfiguration.

Other critiques (Russell, 1986; Winner 1993) are directly addressed to *relevant social groups*, and

60 Original quote: "disponibilità iniziale dell'artefatto ad essere oggetto di interazioni negoziali e conflittuali" (Pellegrino, 2004: 17), my translation.

they mainly address the little attention that has been paid to investigate these groups. Indeed, it is not sufficient to take into account those groups that, by contributing to the definition of technical problems and by putting forward possible solutions, have seen their opinions prevail; but also those that have been left aside; those that did not end up being considered "relevant" (Winner, 1993: 369) must also be considered. These latter, indeed, are equally important in determining that process of social construction of an artefact from which they are cut or kept aside.

Russell (1986) highlights that the concept of relevant social groups is by no means straightforward, as instead argued by Pinch and Bijker (1984). On the contrary, the detection of these groups presents several risks:

> *First, it is easy to omit groups, either because they had no voice in the process, or because they were indifferent to the specific options on offer, positions which none the less need explaining. Second, it is easy to lapse into over-aggregation; the public statements of, say, the TUC or even a single union on the nuclear power program no doubt mask significant internal divisions. Third, the stated objectives or rationale of an organization may bear no simple correspondence to its interests or to the effective function which it performs in interaction with other groups in a structured social context. Fourth, for similar reasons, it is possible for certain sections of society to secure their interests, or to have them secured, without participating directly in conflict.* [Russell, 1986: 335]

Under a theoretical point of view, then, the concept of relevant social groups is prone to criticism from different perspectives. In regard to this, let us consider, for instance, how the vision of historical retrospective, "ex-post," adopted by the SCOT approach for analyzing the diffusion and development of an artefact, cuts out from analysis the alternative possibilities that did not eventually take place, as well as those groups that did not end up being the relevant one (Russell, 1986; Winner 1993).

On a more practical and methodological level, the issues with this concept result are even more evident. Indeed, during the research on the provocative question, "who says what are relevant social groups and social interests?" (1986: 369), Bijker "answers" that this category is constructed by social actors and by the researcher: "relevant social groups are, under [the approach of] social construction of technology, always relevant to the eyes of the researcher, of that who analyzes them"[61] (Pellegrino, 2004: 17). Thus, it is the researcher that sets, by following the actors, and retrospectively looking at a technological artefact, which social groups are relevant.

In light of all the critical points highlighted in this paragraph, I conclude that the concept of relevant

61 Original quote: "i gruppi sociali rilevanti sono, nella costruzione sociale della tecnologia, rilevanti sempre agli occhi del ricercatore, di colui che li analizza" (Pellegrino, 2004: 17), my translation.

social groups is hard to justify not only theoretically, since it is not sufficient to account for the many aspects of the social construction of the artefact considered, but also in its translation of this concept into a metholodogical dimension is problematic (Pellegrino, 2004). Moreover, the way in which the SCOT approach deals with flexibility is limited and does not fit the standpoint of the present research, that is instead that of an ongoing coconstruction.

Therefore, I will drop the SCOT-oriented concepts discussed, and, for the reasons explained, I locate my work under an ANT perspective.

2.4.1.4. CMC and ANT

At a first glance, the relationship between CMC and ANT would not appear very justified or encouraged, given the scarce amount of literature on the topic. Still, some inputs to study CMC in an ANT perspective have been strongly put forward, and over time they do not seem to have changed the will to encourage other researcher to do so.

Let us start with the definition of "new media"[62] offered by Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006), who address these as "*infrastructures* for communication and information that comprise particular types of artefacts, practices and social arrangements; they are socially shaped in distinctive ways and have characteristic social consequences" (2006: 8). In the author's opinion, these multiple objects of study must be framed in a research that can account for their peculiarities, being that the these objects are: infrastructural, recombinant, ubiquitous and readable through the network metaphor (Lievrouw, 2002a).

The most relevant suggestions emerging from Lievrouw's work are about the infrastructural and networked nature of the Internet, from which derives the need to set the research in a way that, on the one side, the *infrastructure* (Star and Bowker, 2002; Star, 1999) emerges, and, on the other side, that the interrelations among the (technical, personal, and institutional) elements that constitute this infrastructure can be properly considered. In regard to this, it is here that Actor-Network Theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1993; Law, 1997; Law and Hassard, 1999), comes into play.

This approach is also considered by Bell (2001) in his study on cyberspace. Even if the author moves from a Cultural Studies perspective, he underlines the need of a study that considers different approaches, both at a methodological and theoretical level. Bell highlights, indeed, how a strictly "cultural" approach could neglect to pay the necessary attention to technology, which is instead the traditional object of study of Science and Technology Studies. And in particular, he highlights the fundamental role of Actor-Network Theory in warding off any type of determinism.

62 The author explicitly declares that she considers the Internet within the realm of New Media (Lievrouw, 2002b)

A work that deepens the discourse about the need to apply ANT to the study of media and mediated interactions is Couldry's (2003). He focuses on the very limited attention that has been devoted in literature to the connections between ANT and media studies/CMC, drawing from that the question of whether ANT could contribute to media theory. After considering ANT's limitations and possible contributions, he answers positively to his question, underlining how ANT's anti-functionalism and anti-essentialist assumptions could be very fruitful in problematizing the actors involved in CMC and in investigating the asymmetries of power that are inscribed in the media (Couldry, 2003: 2). So, without thinking of ANT as a "completely new theorization of social order, nor even a new way of analyzing social action" (2003: 3), but rather as an anti-functionalist inspiration and as a set of research tools, it should be considered in CMC studies.

Some examples of CMC studies that included ANT are, for instance, those by Lea, O'Shea and Fung (1995), Boczkowski (2004), and Turner (2005). The first deal with electronic communication within organizations, for studying in particular the implementation of new technologies, while the latter focused on the Internet and the world of journalism.

Lea, O'Shea and Fung (1995) observed the introduction of a CMC system in one organization to highlight the process of co-construction of the new e-mail organizational system. This study, published in 1995, was quite an alternative to all the other CMC studies, and being an alternative was one of the aims of the authors, who underlined the importance of investigating the relationship between content and context as mutually shaping, and as elements that are not selfstanding, but whose borders are continuously re-shaped by actors' interactions. The ANT perspective is explicitly pointed out as helpful in studies like this, and as a better alternative to other approaches such as the "context-behavior approach" proposed by Fulk and his colleagues (1992) who, in a vision of technology as socially constructed, do not consider context as something changeable and continuously re-shaped. In conclusion, Lea, O'Shea and Fung 's study is both an example of an application of ANT to CMC, and, most importantly, a theoretical justification of studying CMC within a constructivist approach to technology that avails itself of ANT concepts for properly considering human actors and technology, content, and context as symmetric and continuously changing. With this, they overcome every reductionism, and are still able to account for complexity.

A less pioneering, but still very relevant work, is one by Turner (2005), who reads from an ANT perspective the use of the Internet by journalists by examining one in particular. The author brings the example of a journalist who daily publishes links and news on a website, adding personal comments. In doing this, the journalist holds at once the roles of journalist, reader, and credit-line. Under an ANT perspective, this is not just a use of the Internet for proposing an online version of a

journal, but rather, the journalist creates a series of ties with other human and organizational actors and technological artefacts, and all this takes the shape of a network where the traditional categories fade, and the way opens up for a complex analysis of the hybrid actors involved.

Finally, Boczkowski's book *Digitizing the news* (2004) offers an example of a study of journalism in an age of the Internet that considers at once organizations, communication and technology by operating an analysis that draws upon organizational studies, media studies, and STS with the adoption of an Actor-Network Theory-like perspective.

Boczkowski ends his ethnographic study of three online journal publications by framing the Internet not as a revolutionary medium, but rather as a new technological element within journalism practices. Thus, change is considered emerging from the relationship among: starting conditions, "local contingencies", the medium's peculiarities, its uses and meanings created by its users within the context, and the re-construction of context in light of the new tools.

Again, besides constituting an example of a well-developed application of a multidisciplinary approach, Boczkowski's work helps to argue in favor of the need to consider all the socio-historic characteristics of similar phenomena, as well as to pay attention to the processes (rather than the product!) of construction, production and use of a new medium, and to consider also the related offline construction of content and artefacts (Boczkowski, 2004: 172).

In conclusion, all the works considered in this paragraph help give a theoretical justification as well as proof of feasibility of CMC studies that are able to account for users and technology as co-constructing or co-producing one another. And since these studies only represent, as we saw, a very restricted part of CMC and STS literatures, my research could productively take place within this realm.

2.4.1.5. Human and non-human intermediaries in the world of music

There is no specific disciplinary field that deals with the study of the relationship of technology with the world of music. Rather, this object of study belongs to multidisciplinary fields, such as Sound Studies[63], that still need to be defined (Pinch and Bijsterveld, 2004). Nonetheless, STS have brought, and still can bring, much to this growing field with special regard to the strong tie between music, and science and technology (2004: 636).

Indeed, sound and music studies usually deal with topics and aspects that directly refer to STS'

63 "Sound Studies is an emerging interdisciplinary area that studies the material production and consumtion of music, sound, noise, and silence, and how these have changed throughout history and within different societies, but does so from a much broader perspective than standard disciplines such as ethnomusicology, history of music, and sociology of music" (Pinch and Bijsterveld, 2004: 636)

constructivist approach, as well as to STS traditional topics of interest, for instance: space reconfiguration in the recording studio (Théberge, 2004), learning of sound engineers (Porcello, 2004), and the re-organization of public/private dimensions in light of the use of listening technologies (Bull, 2000). Of particular interest for STS studies of music are the intermediaries[64], also called "boundary shifters" (Pinch and Trocco, 2002), or "go betweens" (Bijsterveld and Schulp, 2004). These terms usually address those particularly creative individuals that are located between different professions, and those individuals foster the introduction of new music instruments.

Concerning the relevance of intermediaries and mediators (Latour, 2005), ANT-oriented studies have flourished. In particular, those by Hennion (1989, 1997), who, in his work on the music producer as intermediary between artist and public (1989), operates an important theoretical justification of the study, from an STS perspective, of topics that traditionally belonged to cultural and art sociology. In regard to that, Hennion argues that the boundary between science and culture must be overcome, since these fields are limited in themselves, and need to be amplified and enriched. Indeed, if Science and Technology Studies begin from technological objects and proceed to go "down" to the human world, cultural sociology follows the opposite path: starting from the need for expression and landing in the realm of produced and consumed cultural artefacts. By themselves, neither of the two approaches allows, in Hennion's opinion, to satisfactorily account for creative processes (ibid.: 401)[65]. Instead, the study of the art and music world as an expression of society must take into consideration the fundamental role of intermediaries. The intermediary "is not at the interface of two known worlds, he or she is the one who constructs these worlds by trying to bring them into relation" (ibid.: 406). For instance, in Hennion's case, the observed intermediary is the music producer, who stands between the artist and the music consumer by experimenting in his study-laboratory, and who represents at once the public to the artist, and his/her music to the media. This study highlights the situatedness of actions, and, even more importantly, it draws from non-essentialist standpoints; finally, it sets out an analysis coherent with those standpoints which concerns the mutual construction of social and artistic world in a technological-mediated way.

Technological mediation, or better yet, the role of nonhuman actors in the field of music, has been the object of many studies in Science and Technology Studies. The interest in music by these scholars mainly regards music instruments as technological artefacts, whose actual use by musicians ("following the instruments") is considered fundamental. These types of studies which

64 Actually, sticking to Latour's terminology (2005: 39), it would be the case here to talk about "mediators" instead of "Intermediaries." Nonetheless, I chose to keep the terms "mediators" in adherence to the quoted works.

65 "This division, by creating objects without societies and societies where objects are mere pretexts, prevents any considerations of the act of creation" (Hennion, 1989: 401).

are mainly focused on how the introduction of new music instruments (Bijsterveld and Schulp, 2004), technological tools (like the synthesizer, Pinch and Trocco, 2002), or new ways of using them (Waksman, 1999; McSwain, 2002) have brought into discussion norms, rules, and values of the music world (2004: 640).

This attention for the non-humans involved in artistic practices is made explicit and theoretically justified in another, more recent study by Hennion (1997) which is explicitly dedicated to the role of intermediaries and mediators in music. Here Hennion argues in favor of a "relational sociology" that considers the inscription of our relationships into objects: in different terms, "relational sociology must be able to examine the connections between non-human mediators and the social groups -performers and audiences- the most visible producers and receptors of musical objects" (Hennion, 1997: 433). These non-human actors that enter and influence the chain of production/consumption/distribution are lyrics, sounds, instruments, repertoires, venues, media, etc. The role of these mediators is fundamental, since it is dependent on the choice of some of these instead of some others, that music and its social meaning are socially constructed and inscribed into material devices (ibid.: 415).

The relevance of technological tools for the social and music worlds has also been underlined by a peculiar article by Hennion and Latour (2003) where the two operate a strong critique to Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction* (1936). Among other critiques, the two authors write against Benjamin's idea that, in art, the original work would be impoverished every time it gets reproduced. On the contrary, Hennion and Latour claim, "reproduction is active recreation" and, "technique is everything but mechanical" (2003: 4). Under this vision, it is possible to affirm the active role of intermediaries and mediators in actively (re)constructing the music world they take part in.

To summarize and conclude: what emerges is that the world of music has been a field of interest of STS that mostly dedicated their attention to the role of technological artefacts in these contexts. Despite the fact that much has been written to justify the study of art as social expression, and some works have been published about an STS approach to the world of music, it is still limited the amount of academic literature that deals with these topics (Pinch and Bijsterveld, 2004: 636) and there are still many fields that have not been explored (Jones, 2000).

One of these fields is, namely, that of Web 2.0 and Social Networking Sites, which have an important role in re-defining music practices (Beer, 2008b). In particular, SNS' involvement in blurring the boundaries between culture producers and consumers, between artist(s) and audience, has influenced the role of intermediaries (here intended as record labels, venues and producers),

which seem to become progressively less relevant (Suhr, 2008: 259). But, what about the technological mediator constituted by the infrastructure?

In light of what has been revealed in this paragraph, we see that technological intermediaries/mediators are supposed to have a fundamental role in music, and should be properly considered. At the same time, as of the moment in which this thesis is being written, no study about Web 2.0 and music world that sees these elements as co-constructing, and that pays attention to the role of the non-human actors involved, has been retrieved. While the present work is not directly contributing to this debate, since it does not focus on the artistic practices themselves, but rather it investigates them as part of wider social interactions and communications, I hope that it will help suggest to scholars an object of study that has not been explored in the field, but that, as introduced here, and as we will see along this work, presents interesting dynamics that would be worth considering.

2.5. Chapter summary

The aim of this chapter was to offer a review of literature, in light of which to locate my work from a perspective that would allow me to account for all the four elements constituting Web 2.0 (Allen, 2008, see Chapter 1), especially focusing on technology and economic aspects in a non-reductionist way. In order to offer a review of literature on CMC that is as exhaustive as possible, I highlighted three possible paths that can be taken: a thematic one, one based on the traditional classifications, and one, posed as a solution to the limits of the previous two, which focuses on the relationship between CMC and STS. The first path through CMC literature helps to get an overview of the huge amount of topics, methodologies and approaches that have been followed by CMC scholars over the years. This contributes to set some examples of possible objects of study within CMC. The second analysis path, dealing with the traditional classification of CMC studies, offers three possible reading keys to literature. Nonetheless, these classifications are accompanied by their author's concluding comment about how media and communication studies are not able to account for the complexity of CMC processes. The need for a multidisciplinary approach emerges, but this remains undefined.

In response to that, the third path highlights the contact points and ongoing convergence of CMC and STS. This way of reading literature does not open up the field to an undefined multidisciplinary, but rather it offers a solution to CMC researchers by giving them a theoretical framework and a relative methodological set, both provided by STS, in which to locate their researches.

Later in the chapter, I focused on this latter field of study, and, in particular, I outlined how, within

it, the ANT approach best fits my research. By refusing essentialist assumptions, this perspective allows for the study of democratization and participation as situated in a specific setting and emerging from a struggle between technology (and its programs of action) and users. I propose the adoption of thus a non-human (Latour, 2005) perspective (as also done by Hand, 2008) as a possible solution for overcoming those "approaches to digital technology [that] are dominated by essentialist and abstractionist models in that either the function or form of technology is taken to be inherent in the artefacts or in the cultural forces shaping them, [by embracing the] need to explore some of these assumptions in the ground" [ibid.: 59-60]. Hence, this approach could help overcome the lacks retrieved in former studies on CMC, as well those on SNS and Web 2.0. In order to better understand how this translates into a methodology, I will account for how ANT standpoints fit an approach, that of cyberethnography, that I will discuss in the following Chapter, arguing that it can also help in finding a path on the "shifting ground" (Baym and Markham, 2009) of Internet research.

Chapter 3 - “How Do I Do That?”: Methodology

The present Chapter represents a sort of bridge between the theoretical part carried out so far, and the more empirical and situated account of my research. Indeed, on the one side, I will account for my research agenda, the methods I used, and the cases I have studied. On the other side, in line with my previous suggestion of drawing upon an Actor-Network Theory perspective (section 2.4.), I propose to approach the “shifting” ground of Internet research (which also will be discussed) through cyberethnography.

First, I will recall and further discuss the relationship between ethnography and the Internet. Then, I will account for the debates of online vs. offline and cyber vs. virtual, clarifying issues and characteristics. Then, I will explain why, in line with what argued in the previous chapters, I decided to chose the cyber one. I will also suggest that the traditional interest of STS in ethnographic research could be considered a “fourth bridge” (that would add to the three highlighted in paragraph 2.2.1.) between these and CMC.

Finally, I will briefly describe the preliminary phase of my empirical data gathering in order to show how it oriented my subsequent data gathering. In other words, I will make clear why some methods employed in this explorative phase resulted in being more useful than others. In this part, I will also describe the settings of my participant observation. One in particular, Myspace, will be extensively considered in the following Chapter.

The final part of the present Chapter deals with the main part of my data gathering, which I carried out through online and offline observation and interviews. Also I will deal with how I analyzed the data I gathered. This description is set out in order to make the readers completely aware of how the research was executed.

3.1. “How do I do what I have to do?”

3.1.1. Inquiring the Internet

As seen in Chapter 2, around the mid 1990's, many scholars (Baym, 1995; Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, 1995, among many others) started engaging in the study of the Internet as this was a place for highly social interactions. For this reason, many qualitative, and especially ethnographic, studies started to flourish (see Chapter 2). But, even if the qualitative methodology was largely argued to be the more appropriate to let the symbolic elements emerge, the new “field” of the Internet was challenging the researchers that somehow had to face the new features, interactions, and meanings;

the employment of ethnographic, or, more in general, qualitative research methods to the Internet was not so straightforward. Scholars, with their previous experience and methodological skills, had to find their own way to apply these to the new context of study, and the concern about how problematic this was started to raise questions and concerns in academia: in 1999 Jones was asking: "the new social formations may require new forms of inquiry, too. How will sociologists, ethnographers, communication scholars, and anthropologists, for instance, grapple with issues related to studying electronic communities?" (1999: xvii). In those years, while qualitative studies of the web kept flourishing, the methodological question of Internet investigation also started to be confronted in books like *Doing Internet Research* (Jones, 1999) and *Virtual Ethnography* (Hine, 2000). In both texts, Internet research is debated and questioned, and some methodological suggestions are offered, even if not systematically, for approaching this ever changing new "world." As Jones points out: "The analogy of the Internet as a forest composed of thousands of separate trees is appropriate, but we are still at the point where we have to gain a better understanding of the trees themselves, before the forest makes any sense" (1999: xxiv). In this collective book, some authors focus on the differences and integration of qualitative and quantitative research (Sudweeks and Simoff, 1999) others underline how the two branches of Internet studies that focused on, respectively, user and content analysis, should merge into a critical textual analysis that takes into account the peculiarity of Internet texts (Mitra and Cohen, 1999); others instead focus on the relevance of employing participant observation for taking into proper account the relevance of social contexts in online interactions, which also overlap with offline ones (Kendall, 1999). In other words, every scholar is suggesting different elements on which to focus, as well as relative techniques to employ. But, on one element do all the scholars seem to converge: doing Internet research is not a mere transposition of "paper and pencil methods" to the web. Instead, investigating the Internet means, first of all, to face its peculiarities, such as undefined boundaries, ongoing change, multidirectionality of information, overload of this latter, and so on.

Cristine Hine also extensively dealt with Internet Research, in her insightful book *Virtual Ethnography* (2000)[66]. Hine considers many relevant aspects related to the study of the Internet. First, she underlines, again, how doing research online means to re-define the same methodology by facing the challenges that applying those methods to the new context presents: given the multiple meanings and uses that the considered users can make of the Internet, a strong presence of the researcher is fundamental. Still, now the researcher does not have to leave his/her physical place to go "on field," and past interactions can be studied. At the same time, this is challenged by the impossibility of studying lurkers or other non-visible actors. Because of these challenges, the

66 and later with a collection of essays called *Virtual Methods* (2005)

researcher needs to proceed step-by-step, adjusting his/her research agenda, and being as reflexive as possible for avoiding biases. Hine concludes by pointing out the relevance of the context in online interactions, the inseparability of these from the realm of offline life, and finally, the relevance of ethnography in understanding, in regard to the Internet, the construction of meaning within the online and offline contexts (Hine, 2000).

So, literature focusing on which methods to adopt (and how to adopt them) to investigate the Internet shows, on the one side, the relevance and complexity of this type of researches, underlining how it is not possible to set once and for all how-to guidelines. On the other side, a general tendency in adopting an ethnographic approach, able to account for all the situated social aspects of online interactions, arose.

Since then, Internet researchers not only had to keep finding a way to investigate the Internet, but also, the context has been changing: with the web developing and people using some of its services and dropping others, with communication becoming growingly ubiquitous, and more in general, with an increasing and ongoing spread of the Internet in our daily lives. Still, in the field of Internet research, not much has changed: within this debate, ethnographic and qualitative approaches keep being highly suggested (Hine, 2005), but the question of how the Internet should be investigated within this research approach is still open. Indeed, as Baym and Markham (2009) pointed out this year, the Internet has put into question "previously assumed and invisible epistemologies and practices of inquiry" (ibid.: vii), and this questioning is ongoing, since the computer-mediated interaction, uses and meanings attributed by the users keep changing in always new and often unexpected ways. As the authors admit, not only does the Internet "change the way we understand and conduct qualitative research" (ibid, xviii), "but novel research terrain brings with it novel difficulties. It is hard to know how well older theoretical and methodological frameworks can be applied to understand contemporary social formations. Can we still draw on theories that were developed in an earlier epoch, and that referred to different sociotechnical contexts, to frame our inquiry and explain our findings? How do we apply procedural models to a study when these models do not seem to fit anymore? How can we move beyond documenting the new to saying things of lasting value about phenomena that change so rapidly?" (ibid.: xiii).

The context of study has changed, but the same questions have remained. Even if the authors offer (also thanks to the collected papers), some suggestions on how to face specific problems when doing qualitative research online, like defining boundaries, dealing with notions of privacy, and offering a "good quality" qualitative research, the lack of a shared way to approach Internet inquiry is still evident.

Nonetheless, even if this lack of a single and methodological approach to the Internet turns into a more shaky path for the researchers, this must be considered neither surprising (given the vast amount of methods adopted in social sciences), nor even completely undesired. Indeed, these challenges pointed out a series of epistemological presumptions from which every social scientist was drawing, and they should be taken as a way to question one's assumptions and decisions on which method to adopt. And hopefully, this will lead to more complete and grounded research.

Not surprisingly, I myself faced the problem of how to approach and face the unforeseen difficulties of a qualitative research of Myspace and its users. To manage this problem, I went back to my theoretical field, that of STS, and especially of ANT-driven studies. As we will see in the following paragraph, not only does the field of STS offer some indications for carrying out an empirical research of the Internet, but it also represents a possible "fourth bridge," connecting studies on CMC, and STS, intended both as theory and research methodologies.

3.1.2. Methods for studying computer-mediated interactions: A "fourth bridge"?

Even if, as we just saw, scholars in social sciences and media studies are divided on which methodology to adopt when studying the Internet and its mediated interactions, they generally share the common idea that the Internet is not a mere "place," but also a "cultural artefact" (Hine, 2000) which, indeed, needs empirical methods to be "revisited" to fit this new realm of online social interactions (boyd, 2008; Orgad, 2009). Even the single aspects taken into account by scholars are different in regard to this issue, the general opinion is that an ethnographic study of the Internet is the one which would best allow social elements to emerge, and, therefore, micro-sociological studies, which aim at offering in-depth studies (instead of generalize-able data) are the one to be preferred (Hine, 2005; Markham and Baym, 2009).

This same approach has been traditionally shared by STS studies, and I am hereby suggesting that the methodological approach to science and technology of these studies can represent a fourth "bridge" between communication studies and STS, in addition to the three previously highlighted "bridges" proposed by Boczkowski and Lievrouw (2008) that I presented in Chapter 2.

Science and Technology Studies draw upon the standpoint that science and technology are not "objects" in themselves, but highly social activities:

> *S&TS takes a variety of anti-essentialist positions with respect to science and technology. Neither science nor technology is a natural kind having simple properties that define it once and for all. The sources of knowledge and artifacts are complex and various: there is no scientific method to translate nature into knowledge, and no technological method to translate*

> *knowledge into artifacts. In addition, the interpretations of knowledge and artifacts are complex and various: claims, theories, facts, and objects may have very different meanings to different audiences*
>
> [Sismondo, 2008: 10]

Drawing upon this epistemological background, STS scholars traditionally engaged in qualitative research, and mainly ethnographic methods (Hess, 2001) in order to grasp those processes that lead to the construction of science and technology. In particular, within the STS field, the approach of Actor-Network Theory has both drawn upon ethnographic methods and added new food for thought within this debate. Indeed, since the ANT perspective draws upon the idea of a "symmetry" (Callon, 1986a[67]) between humans and non-humans, which means "not to impose *a priori* some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and material world of causal relations" (Latour, 2005: 76), the focus of the research is not only on the social processes that lead to the construction of technology, but also on the role of this latter in co-shaping the social. In other words, ANT scholars investigate "how actors enlist other actors into their world and how they bestow qualities, desires, visions, and motivations of these actors" (Latour, 1996), these actors being both human and non-human. Because of these standpoints and objects of interest, the employment of STS for qualitative and ethnographic research is brought, within the ANT perspective, to a further level, that is, the idea that a qualitative study of science and technology should take into account the agencies and roles of both human and non-human actors within the processes of translation (Callon, 1980, 1986) that lead to the formation of hybrid actor-networks (Latour, 2005).

Within ANT-driven studies, one text is fundamental in discussing method: John Law's *After Method* (2004). In this precious book for scholars who are about to approach an empirical study of science and technology, Law criticizes the scientific method adopted in social sciences, which is usually considered an abstract and self-standing set of tools that can be applied to the object of study. This view of separated realms, namely those of method (with its tools and procedures) and of the object of study, recalls those essentialist and cartesian dichotomies deeply criticized by Latour (1993), and overcome by the ANT approach (Hand, 2008). Instead, Law underlines how, in the first place, a method is not a tool or set of procedures that enables the researcher to grasp the self-standing reality. On the contrary, method is "productive of realities than mere reflecting them" (2004: 70). Moreover, he points out that, being that the world is "fluid" (see also Mol and Law, 1994) and characterized by multiplicity, scientific methods and their allegedly objective accounts would not necessarily be able to give proper account of what is being studied. On the contrary, studies that, instead of aiming at offering a clear, objective, and complete account of reality, limit themselves to

67 For a discussion of the concept, among others, of "symmetry" see also the critique by Collins and Yearley (1992), and the respective reply by Callon and Latour (1992).

proposing a more complex and not necessarily complete account of the fluid studied object, are to be preferred. These studies, also by accounting for the choice of method, or "method assemblage" (2004), tend to be more transparent and closer to the considered phenomena: since reality is fluid, the scientific method cannot be considered a valid external tool for offering a complete and reliable account of it (Law, 2004).

Keeping this in mind, and sharing Law's argument, I will hereby try to account for the reasons that lead me to adopt certain methods in order to account for my object of study. Nonetheless, the present work does not aim at providing any representative, complete or objective account of "reality." On the contrary, I will try to offer a situated account (also shaped by the methods adopted) of a case, that of underground music-related actors dealing with Myspace, which is a situated micro-sociological set of processes that leads to the stabilization of an heterogeneous actor-network. In order to do that, I have availed myself of ethnography, which, as an "experiential way of knowing" (Hakken, 2003: 143), allows me to gather the situated aspects of the socio-technical ecosystem (Star and Ruhleder, 1996) in question.

I availed myself of both participant observation, online and offline, and of in depth interviews. In the present work I will try to report my data (as well as the process of data gathering) with as much detail as possible in order to avoid turning the output of the research analysis into some "hard facts" or "indisputable evidence" (Latour, 1987: 139) that would be taken for granted, since they are not accompanied by the process that lead to those results. On the contrary, I will try to let the reader follow me, as I "followed the actors" (ibid.) in my research. Before doing that, though, one more aspect must be considered, since it is not only focal for the debate on methodology and epistemological assumptions in STS, but it was also a pivotal element for my research: it consists of the overlap of online and offline dimensions, as well as the related debate about "virtual" and "cyber" ethnography. To this I dedicate the following section.

3.2. Online Vs. offline, virtual Vs. "real"? No, "We have always been cyborgs"!

As seen in the previous paragraphs, the scholarly debate on how to approach a study of the Internet and computer-mediated interactions has focused on the necessity to discard the idea that experience and knowledge about doing research offline can be transported, as it is, in the realm of online interactions, which has happened in the past:

> *The sociological subject is powerful, shifting, and, in terms of qualitative research design, confusing. Our research models do not fit the multiphrenic subject very well. For example, when conceptualizing, defining, protecting,*

> *interviewing, or observing the subject of inquiry, tradition dictates that the research participant have demographically verifiable characteristics. We are taught as a basic rule of thumb in methods courses to identify and categorize, even if only to protect the rights of our participants, but also to use these categories to help us build our interpretive frameworks. In internet research, this rule of thumb about categorizing has tended to result in researches juxtaposing what happens online with what happens face-to-face, or to search for the real or authentic.* [Baym and Markham , 2009: x-xi]

This juxtaposition must be rejected for different reasons, some of which have been already considered above: first, the Internet opens up the complexity and number of specific characteristics of the setting and of the interactions that must be taken into account (Hine, 2000), while the idea of offering a "real" or "authentic" account through the mere employment of a specific method is clashing with the fluidity of reality and with the role that method itself has in the construction of the research object and outcomes (Law, 2004). But, besides those arguments, there is another important reason why that position has to be criticized: a vision of the online and offline realms as separated dimensions would in fact establish another of those essentialist dichotomies against which I have argued, drawing from ANT studies.

3.2.1. online/offline

Such a dichotomy would not account for the hybrid actors and relationships that engage in online interactions. For this reason, I will hereby put forward first the inseparability of online and offline dimensions, and then I will focus on the "cyborg" epistemology, which argues in favor of considering online actors and interactions as a hybrid of human and machine, instead of "virtual," which could be intended as something that is "less than real" (Hine, 2000). This is not a mere play on words, but rather a different epistemological background in which to frame researches related to the Internet, including mine.

The first element to take into account, before moving to the cyborg epistemology and the related realm of "cyberthnography," is the inseparability of online and offline dimensions, which has been extensively argued for in literature. Indeed, many scholars (Baym, 2002; Sade-Beck, 2004; Orgad 2005, 2009; and the same Hine, 2000, among many others) have highlighted how online research cannot overlook the overlap with the offline dimension.

Orgad (2009) points out that the distinction between online and offline has never been set up in regard to older media like radio, tv, and (cell)phone. Instead, life online has often been considered distinct from offline life (ibid.), and "in research terms, this view established cyberspace as a plausible research field site (Hine, 2000) and advanced investigations of online social spaces

independently of offline social relations" (Orgad, 2009: 36). So, besides having many scholars set up this distinction, which is both epistemological and methodological, a tendency to prefer online data for researching the Internet was retrievable (see Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Orgad underlines how, once assumed that online and offline are inseparable dimensions, the researcher should choose the combination of methods for online and/or offline data gathering that most fit her research question and that are practicable. In any case, they need to rely on data able to account for an understanding of the relationship between the online and offline worlds of the actors considered (Orgad, 2009: 51).

In summary, every researcher approaching a study of Internet-mediated communication and interactions should carefully ask him/herself what kind of methods and what kind of data (online and offline) are more relevant for studying the context and to answer the research questions. All this must be done while keeping in mind the increasingly hybrid nature of media and communication where the line between online and offline dimensions is blurring (Orgad, 2007; 2009; Herring, 2004).

3.2.2. Cyberethnography

The idea that the online and offline dimensions are blurred is also taken into account by Radhika Gajjala, which takes the discussion one step further by linking the above-mentioned trend in communication studies to consider CMC and Internet-mediated interactions as "hybrid," with the epistemological approach of "cyberethnography," which is deeply rooted in this idea of hybrids, and of which Gajjala herself is one of the leading figures.

In responding to the above-mentioned work by Orgad (2009), Gajjala articulates the arguments presented. In particular, she argues that, while agreeing with Orgad's main point, that online and offline are inseparable dimensions, there is one more step to take for accounting for this inextricable overlap (also highlighted by Beer, 2008a). An adjustment to terminology can help us consider online and offline not only as inseparable dimension, but as a single dimension itself :

> *We cannot really separate our being online from our being offline, because online and offline are not discrete entities. In a sense, using this vocabulary, Orgad is trying to emphasize the simultaneity of being online and offline, and she does it well. But the vocabulary itself limits our ability to study practices of everyday life in relation to internet communication.* [Gajjala, 2009: 61]

In other words, in the author's perspective, we should overcome the terms "online" and "offline" that recall two different dimensions, and adopt another vocabulary, able to help both researchers and readers to account for hybrid actors and interactions. For this reason, she sets out the term

"cyberethnography." This concept is set forward to address the study of the "cyborg selves" or "cyberselves" (ibid.) of the actors when these interact both online and offline, and in relation to those digital technologies that mediate (and simultaneously construct) the self.

Cyberethnography draws upon the concept of the cyborg, which is intended as an hybrid entity of human and machine (Haraway, 1991). This concept is able to overcome the separation among online/offline, human/non-human, virtual/real. Drawing upon this, researchers can account for those heterogeneous and "fluid" (Law, 2004) aspects that characterize the world, and especially Internet-mediated settings and practices. A study of cyberspace which mainly consists of an anthropological approach to this hybrid settings, actors, and interactions (Escobar, 1994) is then put forward.

The methodology proposed is then that of *cyberethnography* (Hakken, 1999; Teli, Pisanu and Hakken, 2007, Ward, 1999). This technique is not substantially different from Virtual Ethnography (Hine, 2000), since it still consists of observing and maybe taking part in what happens online, but it was labeled differently in order to underline a completely different epistemological starting point. Indeed, Hine asserts that virtuality addresses something "less than real":

> *virtual ethnography is not only virtual in the sense of being disembodied. Virtuality also carries connotation of "not quite" adequate for practical purposes even if not strictly the real thing* [Hine, 2000: 65]

So, again, a dichotomy arises from language: virtual and real would be two self-standing realms, one of which is considered to be "less real" than the other. This dichotomy, as well as the above-discussed one about online and offline, is not able to account for the heterogeneous, fluid and mutually shaping social practices that are carried out by actors in mediated and unmediated realms, or better in a hybrid dimension such as that of cyberspace.

On the contrary, cyberethnography refers to cyborgs for overcoming this separation among online/offline, human/non-human: Ward suggests indeed that cyber-ethnography outlines that a "hybrid space is rapidly emerging that is neither absolutely physical or virtual," and Teli, Pisanu and Hakken add that "It could be helpful [...] for managing the continuous online/off-line stress attending the following daily interactions of computer mediated groups. In this sense, cyberethnography itself is hybrid" (2007: 5). This inherent hybridity is what we can summarize in Hakken's phrase "We have always been cyborgs" (1999: 5), that the author uses to address Latour's book, *We have never been modern* (Latour, 1993), where the French criticizes the cartesian and *a priori* dichotomy between nature and culture. In Hakken's opinion, a "cyborg" addresses "*all* the entities that carry human culture" (ibid.), and accounts for the ongoing processes of construction that are not considered in the essentialist dichotomy mentioned above. When it comes to methods,

cyberethnography, as pointed out by Ward (1999), does not differ from regular ethnography for main changes in method and its application, bur rather it sets, as we just saw, a different standpoint.

In conclusion, I am hereby arguing that the need for a "theoretical remediation" (Beer and Burrows, 2007) for approaching the study of Web 2.0 and, more in general, the Internet-mediated communications and interactions, (chapter 1.4.) can be faced by adopting a non-modern epistemology (Latour, 1993) that also leads to a methodological suggestion for confronting the long and still ongoing debate about how to carry out a qualitative study of the Internet: adopting a critical and reflexive (Law, 2004: 153) approach to methodology.

Indeed, Law's point on how methods construct the object of the study could help the necessary critical thinking about the observed practices pointed out by Orgad (2009), and go a step further in the critical view that the researcher should have, not only on the object of study, but also on how he/she decided to study it (therefore questioning the role of the methods adopted). But ANT can have an even stronger relationship and helpful role within another debate among media and communication scholars: the issue of the dichotomies of online/offline, virtual and real. In light of this, my suggestion is for *cyberethnography* (Gajjala, 2009; Hakken, 1999; Teli, Pisanu and Hakken, 2007, Ward, 1999) since this approach adopts a lexicon, and draws upon an epistemological standpoint (that of hybrid actors called cyborgs), that aims at accounting for the fluid and heterogeneous processes outlined by ANT, by considering actors and practices not moving between online and offline realms, not being more or less real, but rather as entities and actions that are inherently hybrid.

In light of what is written so far, I will present, in the following paragraphs, the methods adopted in the present research, which can be placed within the realm of cyberethnography. I will do that by accounting step-by-step what motivated my choices, and how the methods employed were emerging as the most likely to adopt in order to both answer my research question and account for the object of study, in line with my theoretical framework and positioning within the methodological debate.

3.3. Preliminary phase: participant observation

The presentation of the methods adopted will follow a chronological order, explaining the research issues step-by-step and highlighting how I decided to face them, preferring some methods to others, and how I adjusted my research agenda in line with the issues faced.

3.3.1. Previous experience on Myspace and setting of the research

The first time I heard about Myspace was in Spring 2005 when I was spending an year abroad in Berkeley, California. One day, one of my housemates asked me whether I had a Myspace profile. I answered negatively, and as soon as I had finished answering I could clearly see an expression of surprise on her face. She replied: "Oh, you should definitely have one! Everybody here is on Myspace!"

That same day, I registered on the website, and started managing my profile by filling in personal information and adding both American and Italian "friends," noticing that many of the latter had never heard of Myspace either. So I kept sending e-mails to the people I knew back in Italy, to get them to register and keep in touch with me. When I went back to Italy, in July of the same year, I noticed a general interest in the this website from people that I knew. People were starting to talk about it, but not many had actually registered yet. As months went by, I noticed an increase in the number of people that I knew registering on the website and requesting to be my "friend." By 2006, almost all the people I knew were talking about this platform, and many of them also had a profile. Also, during my frequent interactions on Myspace, I was noticing a very widespread use by bands, both mainstream and underground ones. The latter, that were usually previously connected to me either by local setting or by music genre (that I put in my "interests" section on my public page) were consistently asking me to be added as a "friend," and eventually started sending me messages and posting comments on my page regarding new tracks or albums they were releasing, or advertisements of some shows they were about to play. With time, friends of friends (both individuals and bands) were added to my "friends" list, and the amount of information exchanged and of communications increased. In the meantime, when hanging around at show or just talking to my friends, I started noticing not only a sensible spread of the use of Myspace, but a particular relationship between this platform and music bands. It was in light of this that I decided to dedicate my research on Web 2.0 and participation in the field of music, taking Myspace as an object of study.

I started my PhD project on these issues in 2007, after being present for two years on Myspace with a personal profile. In order to conduct my empirical research, I also set up an additional profile, dedicated to my academic interests, and, in particular, to the present project.

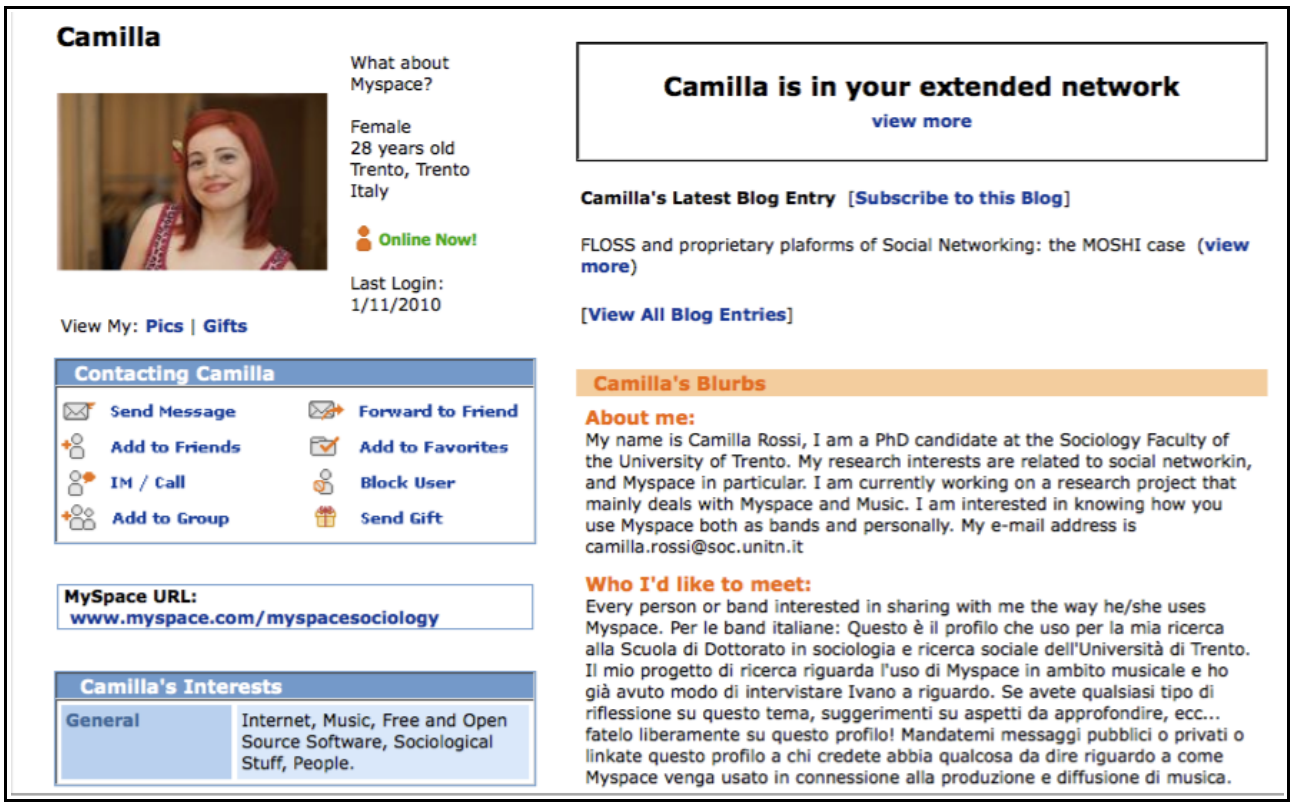


Fig. 3.1. - My research profile page retrievable at www. Myspace.com/myspacesociology

This page turned out to be quite useful when approaching bands to interview, and especially for getting people to know about my research interests, as well as getting more "professional" contact with people. Indeed, given the topic studied, which many people feel as belonging to a category of leisure and usually labeled as "fun," it was important to immediately set a type of professional relationship with people I did not know before, as well as to set a more professional frame for interactions with people that I previously knew, when dealing with my research.

3.3.2.Participant observation: Myspace and "S" (music center)

In October 2007, when I started my data gathering, I had by then become familiar with the website for some time. This, while offering me a very wide experience of the platform features, its netiquette, as well as how it had been changing over years, could have turned into a risk of "going native." In order to avoid this risk, I accompanied my online observation on Myspace (a field that will be extensively described in the following Chapter), to an explorative participant observation offline (Gobo, 2001; Dal Lago, De Biasi, 2002; Cardano, 2003), in order to try to have the "natives" speak and drive me through what was important to study. I carried out this offline participant observation for two weeks in a music center which I will hereby call "S."

This center, located in Bagnacavallo (RA), Italy, was a quite interesting setting, because it is a point of aggregation for young underground local bands in the area, since it offers two rehearsal rooms

and a music recording studio. Therefore, bands hang out there, and I had chance to listen to their discussions and talks before and after both rehearsal and recording sessions. The center inhabits a two-story building; rehearse rooms are located at the ground floor, while the recording studio, the kitchen (made available to bands during their recording sessions as well as to the center's staff), a bathroom and an open office where the center's staff works, are located on the first floor. In the office there are three computer stations, two of which are occupied by the staff, while one is left available for free to bands and friends that hang out in the office.

During my observation, I was then able to listen to the discussion of bands during their recording sessions (since I also had access to the recording studio), and to their talks with band mates and staff. Also, I was able to observe people surfing the net, and ask them to tell me about what they where doing.

This period of observation allowed me to better understand how online actions, especially the ones regarding Myspace, are embedded into daily offline ones. I could grasp the relevance that Myspace has in the daily actions and discourses of the actors I observed. Indeed, band members, who had chance to discuss about "band-related stuff" mainly when meeting to rehearse or record, were often discussing about the number of views they got on Myspace that week; they were updating each other about the management that some band members had been carrying out since the last time they met. Also, during recording sessions they often mentioned Myspace, especially in two cases: on the first hand, Myspace was mentioned when they asked the sound engineer to get their recording "a sound like" some other band, whose Myspace profile they were asking the sound engineer to check and "get inspiration" from to mix their tracks. Also, the vast majority of bands was asking the sound engineer to get the mixing done as soon as he could, sending them at least one previously chosen track to be uploaded on the band's profile. This was considered especially relevant, since the bands had been updating online information about their recording activities, and they needed some tracks to show what they were doing in the studio as soon as possible.

Another very relevant piece of information about the usage of Myspace in daily life and work activities was retrievable when, during the second week of observation, the Internet connection stopped working for four days. This one case of breakdown made the infrastructure visible (Star and Ruhleder, 1996); that is, on the one side, it made lots of discourses arise about the inconvenience of not having Myspace working (more than regular e-mail service), and, on the other side, it allowed me to observe what happened immediately after the Internet service was re-stored. In this case, even if I previously had chance to acknowledge the crucial importance that actors attributed to Myspace, I was partially surprised in seeing that, despite being one of the people I was observing working

with the Internet, and in spite of their inability to get another Internet connection during the previous four days, the first website that two of the staff members visited, who were present when the service was restored, was their Myspace profile, even before checking their e-mails.

All these days of observation thus allowed me to grasp how embedded the usage of Myspace is in daily activities of band members and other people working and living in the art world of music. Still, I needed more detailed information about how these people use this platform and what their discourses about this online (or, better, hybrid) world are. For this reason, I preferred to keep the useful data gathered with this participant observation for an explorative phase and go on with my data gathering with interviews with band members and online ethnography, because both methods allowed me to observe and get first-hand accounts of what these people do day-by-day with Myspace, instead of giving me the reduced perspective I had in the music center. So, I started carrying out my online observation, as well as interviews.

3.4. Second phase: Online observation, interview(s) and interviewees

For the above mentioned reasons, I decided to focus my data gathering on online observation and in-depth interviews, which are "a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation" (Boyce and Neale, 2006: 3). Indeed, this technique allowed me to grasp those discourses, as well as underlying opinions to the online behavior of the observed actors that would have not been visible online, and that, as we will see in Chapter 6, was very relevant in analyzing the translation process that involved them and Myspace.

So, I kept carrying out my online participation on Myspace, focusing on the profile pages of the bands I was about to interview in order to have for every band both data retrieved from my observation as well as those made available by interviewing the one member who managed the profile page the most.

The choice of the actors to interview was done by following the methodological suggestion of "following the actors" (Garfinkel, 1967; Latour, 2005), which basically was applied to my research practice by having the actors suggesting me which future steps to take. Indeed, I decided to start interviewing bands hanging around at "S," while every following interview was fixed on bands that previous interviewees referred me to.

I carried out online observation, and parallel face-to-face in-depth interviews with 26 band members, 12 of which were in Italy (linked to the music center), and 14 of which were in the U.S.

The latter were located in Berkeley, California. Also, I interviewed two sound engineers in Italy, and a manager of an independent music label in San Francisco. Consistent with the qualitative research methodology adopted, and my theoretical framework, these interviews, are not aimed at being in any way "representative" of the object of study, but rather were useful in enriching the landscape of discourses and representations of Myspace in the world of music. All of the bands interviewed are underground bands, meaning that they are either without contract or have a signed contract with independent record labels. This was partially a choice of mine, since I wanted to investigate the allegedly participative and democratizing usage of Myspace, and a more interesting point of view could, in my opinion, be offered by investigating those bands that could possibly be more empowered by these technological tools. But the choice was only partial, since I did not previously set strictly limited boundaries in my field to underground bands, but I was also driven to investigate independent bands because the following of the actors lead me there.

In carrying out the interviews I had a general outline of themes that I wanted to talk about, but I did not use structured interviews, since I wanted to leave the interviewee free to highlight new possible aspects worth investigating. Thus, I had a set of general questions about Web 2.0 and Myspace, which are reported in the following boxes (Fig.s 3.2. and 3.3) that I usually asked, allowing the interviewee to drive the rest of the interview with what he/she thought was interesting to mention.

what do you think Web 2.0 is?
what kind of tools did you use before?
were they on line or off line tools?
are you using them now?
in the same or different way?

Fig. 3.2 – General questions about Web 2.0

- do you use myspace?
- what is myspace?
- how much do you use it?
- what do you use it for?
- what do your friends use it for?
- do you like it? why?
- could you tell me three great advantages and three great downsides of myspace?
- is there anything that you would say either to Tom or to other myspace users if you could?
- why do you think Myspace is so succesfull?
- in your opinion, is it better or worse than similar tools? why?
- is there any special relation to myspace and music? in what sense?

Fig. 3.3. - General questions about Myspace

The phase of intensive and actual data gathering, which I hereby called the "second" phase, extended from March 2008 (when I started carrying out the first interviews parallel with relative online observation) until April 2009, when I concluded my stay in Berkeley, California, where the last interviews to foreign users were carried out. Online observation of Myspace profiles and activities of the involved actors were carried out in line with the above mentioned methods of "virtual" (Hine, 2000; 2005) and cyber ethnography (Hakken, 1999; Teli, Pisanu and Hakken, 2007,

Ward, 1999), and the whole process of data gathering was carried out in light of the methodological suggestions suggested by Law (2004), and the Internet researchers discussed above (see Markham and Baym, 2009).

3.5. Data analysis

The data analysis I carried out was inspired by Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), in particular in regard to its suggestions about the process of coding: "grounded theory coding is more than a way of sifting, sorting, and synthesizing data, as in the usual purpose of qualitative coding. Instead grounded theory coding begins to unify ideas analytically because you kept in mind what the possible theoretical meanings of your data and codes might be" (Charmaz, 2006: 71).

As I wrote, this process was "inspired" by Grounded Theory, since my whole research cannot be completely labeled as "grounded," since I did not literally stick to the suggestions of this approach, which directs the researcher to follow a quite precise set of steps (see Charmaz, 2006). Nonetheless, the general inspiration to construct an analysis which is strongly *grounded* into the data, which also are constructed in the situated context, was generally shared in my work. Indeed, in line with my theoretical approach, I already outlined how my research did not draw upon theories or hypotheses to be confirmed or refuted, but rather it aimed at observing a process in action and let the actors speak. For this reason, my research question, that initially dealt more generally with how music-related users engage with Myspace and Myspace-mediated interactions, also kept changing with time, in light of the phenomena highlighted by the actors. I, indeed, tried to have the actors and the data speak for themselves as much as possible, and, also in my data analysis, I followed this suggestion.

In particular, to analyze the data that I transcribed once collected, I availed myself of a software for qualitative data analysis: Nvivo7. Thanks to this software I was able to "create and handle qualitative research documents that are both rich and dynamic [...as well as to...] connect them in many ways" (Richards, 1999: 27). The main advantages of availing myself of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis consisted of an improvement of efficiency and rigour (Silverman, 2004, ed. 2005: 189-192) to my analysis. Indeed, this software let me record on one single file all the collected and transcribed data, and then, it let me highlight (literally and metaphorically) the points that more frequently and more strongly emerged from the data. In light of these focal elements and concepts, I provide, in Chapter 5, an account of the data retrieved. Before that, I will engage in a description of Myspace, to which Chapter 4 is dedicated.

Chapter 4 - Myspace

4.1. Myspace and other social networking sites

As introduced in Chapter 1, Myspace is classified under the group of Web 2.0 tools that takes the name of "Social Networking Sites." We have already seen (pgf. 1.1.1.) that there is an ongoing debate about how these platforms should be defined. Indeed, boyd and Ellison's (2007) definition[68], despite being often drawn upon without being problematized, has also been criticized and questioned. Indeed, as pointed out by David Beer in his "response to boyd and Ellison" (2008a), the field of Web 2.0 in general, and, more specifically, that of Social Networking Sites, are very complex, and it is extremely difficult to define, specifically characterize, and classify them. For this reason, Beer's article both sets out specific critiques to boyd and Ellison, but also argues, more in general, to push this debate a little further before "closing down" the definition of what a SNS is (ibid.). In particular, he focuses on the relevance of including, in SNS-related researches, an investigation of the economic and business models and structures underlying these platforms[69].

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Beer's critiques are very relevant from many points of view, and I have been trying to take them into account in present work (in my theoretical standpoints, chapter 2; in my research questions, pgf. 1.5., and in the methodology I adopted, chapter 3). First, they are useful in highlighting how this new topic of interest for scholars is still to be defined, and further discussion would be helpful before closing down the definition on SNS, which risks being limited from the start. Secondly, his more specific questioning expresses the need to consider online and offline realms not as separated, intertwined dimensions (as boyd and Ellison do in their article), but rather, as a single hybrid dimension, as well as his argument in favor of accounting for the economic and ownership aspects of Web 2.0 and SNS. For this reason, we can conclude that, in talking about Social Networking Sites, every researcher is left with an open debate he/she has to deal with, and within which scholars can provide a reasoned definition of what a SNS is, and this definition can also contribute to the ongoing debate.

Since I already underlined in chapter 1 that the use of terms like "Web 2.0" and "Social Networking

68 "We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site." [boyd and Ellison, 2007: 2]

69 I am not saying that boyd and Ellison follow the marketing line but that the direction they point toward leaves us open for missing out on some key opportunities for a critical engagement with it. It is not that there is a particular problem with the direction they suggest, it is of course highly important to understand the questions they highlight, but what it is to say is that there are other questions, particularly about the workings of capitalism, that it is important that we do not overlook. [Beer, 2008a: 526]

Sites" are often employed by authors without providing their definition, and this helps increasing confusion and misconceptions, I will provide here my definition of SNS, in light of the one I investigated: Myspace. Thus, I will provide a definition of this specific platform, which must not be considered general and inclusive of every similar tool. At the same time, as other scholars dealing with SNS would probably notice, this definition overlaps with many parts of the ones put forward by both boyd and Ellison (2007), and Beer (2008a).

Drawing upon my research on Myspace, this platform can be defined as:

> A web-based corporate service offered for free to individuals that, after registering and accepting the Terms of Use Agreement are allowed to: (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection which is called "friendship," (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. It also allows bands to create profiles with the same mentioned features, plus: (4) a player where the band can upload up to six tracks, and decide what kind of restrictions to put on every song, and (5) an automatic play and view count. [partly adapted from boyd and Ellison, 2007]

This definition is, for the above mentioned reasons, both tentative and specifically related to the platform into question, but I will take this as a starting point for the more detailed description revealed in present chapter, as well as a definition that somehow merges Beer's (2008a) critiques with boyd and Ellison's (2007) definition.

As noticed by boyd (2008) and Ellison (boyd and Ellison, 2007), Myspace is not the first Social networking site. The first, SixDegrees.com, appeared online in 1997.

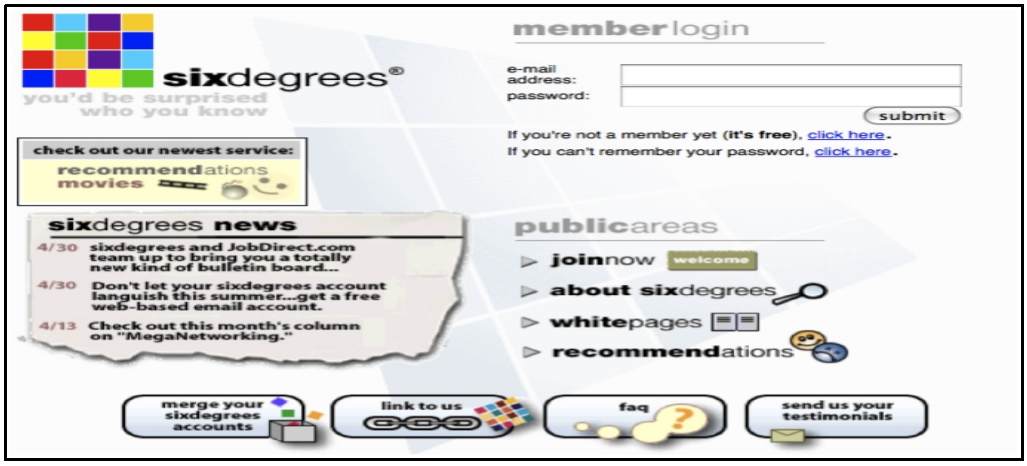


Fig. 4.2. -Sixdegrees.com in May, 1998. Source: http://web.archive.org/web/19980521124353/http://sixdegrees.com/[70]

This can be considered the first social networking site, at least under boyd and Ellison's (2007:2)

70 Most of the images were retrieved thanks to the website web.archive.org. For an account of the use of Internet Archives for social research see De Paoli, S. (2008).

definition. Indeed, it allows individuals to create profiles, add friends and connect with them and with other people. From 1997 to present day, there are many Social Networking Sites that have been launched and crowded by Internet users[71]. Among these, Myspace is one of the most successful ones, together with Facebook.com and Bebo.com[72].

In particular, Myspace.com had been one the most visited Social Networking Site until the beginning of 2008. It held the position of being the 10th most visited website worldwide in December 2005, and gained the 5th position by mid-2006 (Table 4.1), which it kept until Facebook rose and overtook Myspace in 2008 (Fig. 4.3 and 4.4)

	17/08/05	**26/10/05**	**04/01/06**	**17/02/06**	**15/06/06**	**04/01/07**	**20/03/07**	**09/08/07**	**07/10/07**	**12/11/07**
1	Yahoo!	Yahoo!	Yahoo!	Yahoo!	Yahoo!	Yahoo!	Yahoo!	Yahoo!	Yahoo!	Yahoo!
2	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Google	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Google	Google
3	Google	Google	Google	Google	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Google	Google	Google	Microsoft Network (MSN)	Youtube
4	Passport.net	Passport.net	Ebay	Ebay	Baidu	Baidu	Youtube	Youtube	Youtube	Windows Live
5	Ebay	Ebay	Passport.net	Passport.net	Myspace	Myspace	Myspace	Windows Live	Windows Live	Microsoft Network (MSN)
6	www.163.com	Microsoft Corporation	Amazon	Myspace	www.sina.com.cn	Youtube	Windows Live	Myspace	Myspace	Myspace
7	Microsoft Corporation	Amazon	Myspace	Amazon	Yahoo! Japan	www.qq.com	Baidu	Baidu	Orkut	Facebook
8	Amazon	Myspace	Microsoft Corporation	Microsoft Corporation	www.qq.com	Orkut	Orkut	Orkut	Facebook	Wikipedia
9	Google UK	Google UK	Google UK	Google UK	Ebay	Windows Live	www.qq.com	Wikipedia	Wikipedia	Hi5
10	Myspace	AOL	AOL	Bbc online	www.sonu.com	www.sina.com.cn	Yahoo! Japan	Facebook	Hi5	Orkut

Table4.1 -"Top ten" sites worldwide 2005-2007 – Source Alexa.com[73]

Indeed, in 2006, Facebook.com, that was initally released in 2004 as a Harvard-based academic

71 For a list of active SNS see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites, and for a list of defunct ones, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_defunct_social_networking_websites

72 http://social-networking-websites-review.toptenreviews.com/

73 "Alexa Internet, Inc. is a California based subsidiary company of Amazon.com [...]Alexa ranks sites based on tracking information of users of its Alexa Toolbar for Internet Explorer and from integrated sidebars in Mozilla and Netscape" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexa_Internet)

SNS, was opened to the public and started gaining a huge amount of users and traffic that finally made it more successful than Myspace in 2008, as shown in Fig. 4.3. and 4.4.:

Fig. 4.3. -comparison of monthly unique visitors of Myspace.com and Facebook.com, Source Comscore[74], June 2008 (http://www.techcrunch.com/2008/06/12/facebook-no-longer-the-second-largest-social-network/)

Fig. 4.4 -comparison of daily reaches of Myspace.com and Facebook.com in 2008/2009 – Source: http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/myspace.com

Besides the ranking and temporary supremacy of Myspace over other Social Networking Sites, which makes it a sociologically relevant object of study, I will focus on the specific aspects of this platform, focusing on how it changed with time, with particular regard to the world of music. I will deal with this in the paragraph that follows.

Myspace was first launched in 2003, and it was started by Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson, employees of Intermix Media, Inc. that wanted to create an alternative to the previously released, and increasingly failing, Friendster.

74 ComScore (http://www.comscore.com/) is a private company that collects and provides data about consumers behavior. Its method is mainly based on the comScore panel, which includes about 2 million people under continuous measurement on a global basis, with 1 million residents in the U.S., and the remaining 1 million distributed across more than 170 countries. Then, it calculates users behavior on the basis of statistical methodology (source: http://www.comscore.com/About_comScore/Methodology)

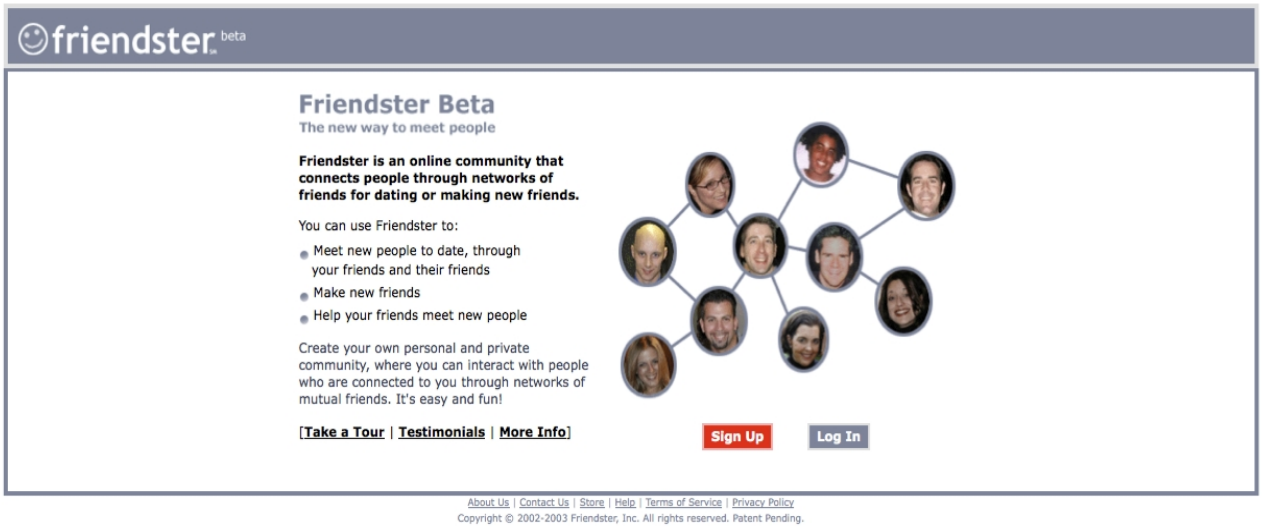


Fig. 4.5 -Friendster.com as of November 2002 - Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20030831075248/friendster.com/index.jsp

Friendster, launched as a Social Networking Site mainly dedicated to dating, which turned out to have both management problems and the inability to meet the users' requests and needs, has been summarized by Joen Doerr (one of Friendster's venture capitalists) as: "We completely failed to execute, everything boiled down to our inability to improve performance"[75].

So, while Friendster was losing success and traffic, Myspace was launched as a similar, but improved and constantly improving, platform. In particular,

> *MySpace was able to capitalize on Friendster's alienation of many of its early adopters, especially when users began encouraging their Friends to switch services after a subscription fee scare (Tom Anderson, personal communication, August 2, 2007). MySpace wanted to attract estranged Friendster users (Tom Anderson, personal communication, February 2, 2006); it was designed to be a close replica of Friendster with additional features that resembled other popular social media sites and fewer limitations (Tom Anderson, personal communication, August 2, 2007). Although the founders of MySpace realized that social network sites could be used for more than dating, they included all of the dating features. Many frustrated Friendster users left Friendster and joined MySpace.* [boyd, 2008: 98]

As we can see from Fig. 4.6., the layout of Myspace's first version was a little bit more polished than Friendsters', but the winning elements of it could have been the flexibility of Myspace to cater to the users' responses and preferences of usage.

75 New York Times, October 15, 2006 "Wallflower at the Web Party " by Gary Rivlin retrievable at http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/15/business/yourmoney/15friend.html?ei=5090&en=3e9438ed349f7ce7&ex=1318564800&adxnnl=1&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=all&adxnnlx=1160935459-sNG2JSXPcNq7ZEaFg46TrQ

Fig. 4.6. -Myspace.com in October 2003. Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20031004101518/http://myspace.com/

In 2005, Newscorp chairman and managing director Rupert Murdoch purchased MySpace from Intermix Media, inc. for $580 million. Since then, the already evident corporate aspects of the platform were made even more evident[76]. While "the commercial aspect of the site is quite apparent" (Barnes, 2006: 2), it is curious to notice that this platform is not listed among the business platforms by Tapscott and Williams (2006: 212).

4.2. Myspace and music

From Myspace's launch in 2003, an initial interest by musicians and music fans began to rise. Some of these people, like many other "individual" users, were unsatisfied Friendster's users whose profiles had been deleted for allegedly violating Friendster's terms of use. Instead, Myspace understood this need and fostered the music-related connections of groups and people (boyd, 2008), and Music pages were made available starting in 2004. The following Figures (4.7-4.9.) display a music profile in February 2005, shortly after this option was made available.

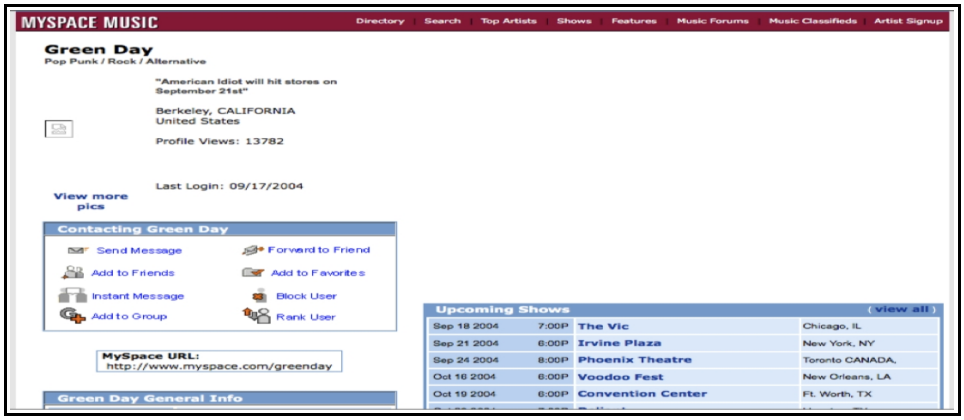


Fig. 4.7. -Myspace.com/greenday in February 2005. Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040918044439/http://myspace.com/greenday

76Currently, "Murdoch is getting: a gold mine of market research, a microscope into the content habits and brand choices of America's capricious youth market — not to mention millions of potential new customers for News Corp.'s Fox subsidiaries." (Verini, 2006: 244)

Fig. 4.8. -Myspace.com/greenday in February 2005. Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040918044439/http://myspace.com/greenday

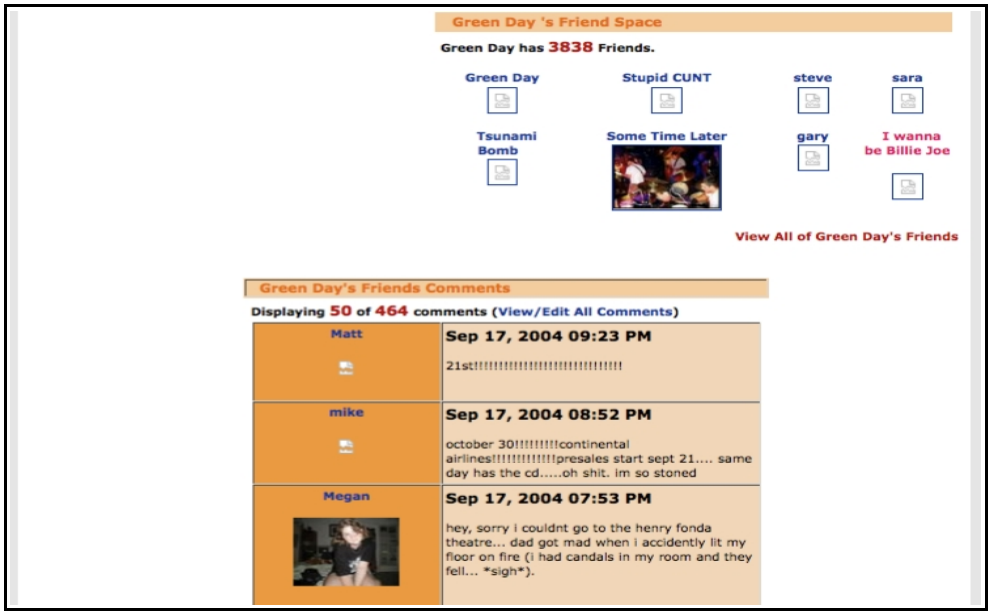


Fig. 4.9. -Myspace.com/greenday in February 2005. Source: http://web.archive.org/web/20040918044439/http://myspace.com/greenday

This relationship with music is explained by one of the two founders of Myspace, Tom Anderson[77] (quoted in boyd, 2008):

> *Many of MySpace's early adopters were passionate about music, primarily indie rock music and hip-hop. While Friendster had forbidden bands from creating profiles, MySpace encouraged bands to use the site to*

77 Co-founder of Myspace, together with Chris DeWolfe

> *communicate with fans (Tom Anderson, personal communication, September 28, 2006). MySpace even developed features to further support the bands, an act that was greatly appreciated. In Los Angeles, promoters began leveraging MySpace to promote shows by offering VIP passes to those who Friended them. Fans valued this practice and encouraged their friends to join to take advantage of the opportunity.* [boyd, 2008: 99]

We can infer from these lines that the strong relationship between Myspace and music was not limited to the decision of platform owners to make music profiles available, but it went on through the years, up to today, with many initiatives, among which the most relevant are Myspace Secret Shows and Myspace Records.

Myspace secret shows consist of music shows put together via (and organized by) Myspace, that mainly let the users add their national "Myspace Secret Show" profile as a "friend", in order to be the ones to get informed about these "secret" shows in their town, allowing them to go to the show.

Fig. 4.10. How "Myspace Secret Show" works – source http://www.myspace.com/secretshowsuk

This feature is partly displaying the strong interest of Myspace owners to foster the users' interest for music, but a further and even more evident step had been made in 2006, when Myspace Records was founded. This music label is part of Myspace Corporation, as is also written in the profile page:

> *We're the little record label inside of the MySpace mothership, and we've just kept on growing since we started up in 2006. We've been putting out music from all the bands that we like, and lots of our friends have been liking them too.* [Source: http://www.myspace.com/myspacerecords]

Besides these initiatives, one final element is to be underlined about the relationship between Myspace and music: Myspace Music, a "a spin-off that will be a joint venture with major labels Universal Music, Sony (NYSE: SNE) BMG and Warner Music (NYSE: WMG) owning minority stakes. The fourth major, EMI, is not party to the deal initially, but people involved in the negotiations told The New York Times it would probably join soon. The new MySpace Music, which will take advantage of the social network's 30 million unique monthly users and 5 million existing band profiles, will sell music free of digital rights management, and also offer ad-supported streaming audio and video."[78]

Myspace Music has always been highly trafficked, and it placed as the third most visited music portal in June 2009:

Top Online Music Destinations by Unique Audience

Site	Unique Audience (000)
AOL Music	22,686
Yahoo! Music	20,571
music.myspace.com	**12,130**
MTV Networks Music	11,177
MSN Music	8,095
Pandora.com	4,658
Rhapsody	4,429
Live Nation Network	4,321
Sony Music Entertainment	3,932

Source: The Nielsen Company, June 2009, U.S. Home and Work

Fig. 4.11. - "Top online music destinations"[79] source http://www.marketingcharts.com/radio/myspace-music-traffic-grows-1017-9832/nielsen-top-online-music-destinations-ranked-unique-audience-june-2009jpg/

In addition to these features, the sheer number of band profiles can give an idea of how strong the interest of musicians into Myspace (reciprocated by the platform owners) was, and still is. Indeed, by mid-2006, 1.4 million was the number of registered band profiles[80], while "in December 2006, MySpace music had 16.2 million unique visitors and 475 million page views,"[81] and in January 2007 Myspace was recording 7 million band profiles[82]. Let us see now the features provided by the platform both for owners of individual and band profiles.

78 http://www.dmwmedia.com/news/2008/04/03/myspace-unveils-music-joint-venture-three-major-labels

79 "The Nielsen Company is a privately held global information and media company, and is one of the world's leading suppliers of marketing information (Nielsen Consumer, formerly ACNielsen), media information and TV ratings (Nielsen Media Research), online intelligence (Nielsen Online), mobile measurement (Nielsen Mobile), trade shows and business publications (Billboard, The Hollywood Reporter, Adweek)" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nielsen_Company). "The Nielsen Company employs advanced data collection methodologies and measurement science" (http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/about/Profile) to observe and forecast consumer behavior.

80 Tapscott, D. (2008) *Grown up digital: how the net generation is changing your world*, p. 201

81 http://www.techcrunch.com/2007/01/18/jigg-that-music/

82 http://www.techcrunch.com/2007/01/18/jigg-that-music/

4.3. Myspace features

As briefly mentioned above, Myspace allows users to get a "profile" which gets publicly displayed as a homepage, organized in different sections which are mostly frames set by the Myspace design. These sections are organized into two columns: in the left column, there is a box with personal information like name, interests, personal picture, location, last login, and a personal phrase. Just below this introductory frame, other boxes are displayed: one is the "contact" table, where clickable options about different actions (like "send message," "add to friends," "instant message," and so on) are displayed (Fig. 4.12).

Fig. 4.12. - Personal information box and "contact" table, personal profile. Visualized on the left colum of a personal profile, from myspace.com/tom as of November 29, 2007 retrieved at http://web.archive.org/web/20071129155208/http://www.myspace.com/tom

Below this, there's room for a music track that the user can upload by clicking on the option "add to profile" on the playlist from a band's profile, if this option is made available by the band (Fig. 4.13).

Fig. 4.13. - Music track upoad. Visualized on the left colum of a personal profile, from myspace.com/gabbagabbacami

Below this, the "interests" box is displayed, where the users' tastes in general, as well as in areas of music, tv, movies, and other stuff, are displayed. Finally, below these boxes, we find the "information" table: displayed here are the status, orientation, religion, weight, and more strictly

personal information, depending on which ones the users decide to provide. Finally, other information can be displayed in case the users filled out all the other parts of Myspace form. These information regard schools that the user is or has been attending, and groups he/she belongs to (Fig. 4.14 and 4.15.).

Tom's Interests	
General	Internet, Movies, Reading, Karaoke, Language, Culture, History of Communism, Philosophy, Singing/Writing Music, Running, Finding New Food, Hiking, Travel, Building alternate communities
Music	**Bands**: Beatles, Superdrag, Jackson 5, Weezer, Sex Pistols, The Carpenters, Vain, Radiohead, Teenage Fanclub, Rocket from the Crypt, Pitchfork, Oasis, Rialto, Supergrass, Travis, The Doors, Cheap Trick, Simple Plan, Alice Cooper, KISS, A*TEENS, The Beach Boys, The Velvet Underground, Journey **Solo Artists**: Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Elvis, Brendan Benson, David Bowie, Rick Springfield, Barry Manilow, Paul Stanley Solo Album, Bob Dylan, Rod Stewart **Singers**: Michael Jackson (age 14 & under), Karen Carpenter, Whitney Houston (particularly The Bodyguard soundtrack), George Michael, Louie Louie, Robin Zander, Frank Sinatra, Steve Perry, Gerard Way, Kelly Clarkson **Albums**: *Appetite for Destruction* - Guns & Roses; *Life* - The Cardigans; *A Hard Day's Night* - The Beatles; *Dookie* - Green Day; *Blue* - Weezer; *One Missisipi* - Brendan Benson; *Two Steps from the Move* - Hanoi Rocks; Led Zeppelin I, The Doors, *In The Valley of Dying Stars* - SuperDrag; Survivor *When Seconds Count* - Rick Springfield, *Working Class Dog* - Pink Floyd, *Wish You Were Here* - The Shore **Instruments**: The Er Hu, Piano, certain guitar tones (Rocket from the Crypt, Sex Pistols, Rolling Stones) **MySpace Artists**: **Limbeck, Butch Walker, The Fictions, The Ettes, Feable Weiner, Billionaire Boys Club, Halfway Home, The Pacific, The Honorary Title, Stranded Alone, Kill Hannah, FallOutBoy, Melee, The Shore, The Summer Obsession, Kino, Cary Brothers, The Volunteers, The Howl, Head Automatica, Seel Fresh, Jupiter Sunrise, Keane, Say Anything. Tsar, Much The Same, Plain White T's!**

Fig. 4.15.- Example of Tables with additional personal info: "details" and "schools" visualized on the left colum of a personal profile, adapted from myspace.com/tom as of November 29, 2007 retrieved at http://web.archive.org/web/20071129155208/http://www.myspace.com/tom

Movies	**Films</**b>: Lawrence of Arabia, Ben Hur, Patton, Spartacus, Gandhi, The 10 Commandments, Apocalypse Now, Beauty &; The Beast (the cartoon), Thin Red Line, Titanic, Gladiator, The Patriot, Breakfast at Tiffanys, Un Coeur en Hiver, The Empire of the Sun, Gone With the Wind, The Godfather, 2001, Clockwork Orange, Blade Runner, Deer Hunter, Mean Streets, Grease, Urban Cowboy, Saturday Night Fever, The Sound of Music, Copland, Dances With Wolves, Good Will Hunting **Directors</**b>: Kubrick, Francis Copolla, Steven Spielberg
Television	Desperate Housewives, Lost, 24, American Idol, Grey's Anatomy, Prison Break
Books	Nietzsche, George Orwell, Milan Kundera, Laurens van der Post
Heroes	Friedrich Nietzsche, Laurens van der Post, Frederick Dolan

Fig. 4.14.- "Interest boxes" visualized on the left colum of a personal profile, adapted from myspace.com/tom as of November 29, 2007 retrieved at http://web.archive.org/web/20071129155208/http://www.myspace.com/tom

Tom's Details	
Status:	Single
Here for:	Friends
Hometown:	Los Angeles
Ethnicity:	White / Caucasian
Zodiac Sign:	**Libra**
Smoke / Drink:	No / No
Education:	Grad / professional school
Occupation:	President, MySpace

Tom's Schools	
University Of California-Los Angeles Los Angeles, CALIFORNIA Graduated: **2000** Student status: Alumni Major: Film - Critical Studies	1999 to 2001
University Of California-Berkeley Berkeley, CALIFORNIA Graduated: **1998** Student status: Alumni Major: English & Rhetoric Clubs: DECAL: Literary Theory	1994 to 1998

The information displayed on the left column is more "stable," meaning that it displays those tastes and characteristics of the users that do not need constant update, unless he/she wants to, which rarely happens. Usually this type of information is published once for all, and then maybe slightly updated, aside from the songs added and the personal image, which change more frequently.

Instead, on the right column, we mainly find information and content that is related to the users' activities.

Fig. 4.16. - Some Myspace features (individual profile)

The activities and content displayed on the right column are: blog posts, more information about "who I am," where the users have more room to write down a self-presentation, and a "who I'd like to meet" section. Below these, a very relevant part of every Myspace profile is displayed: the "Top Friends" (Fig. 4.17).

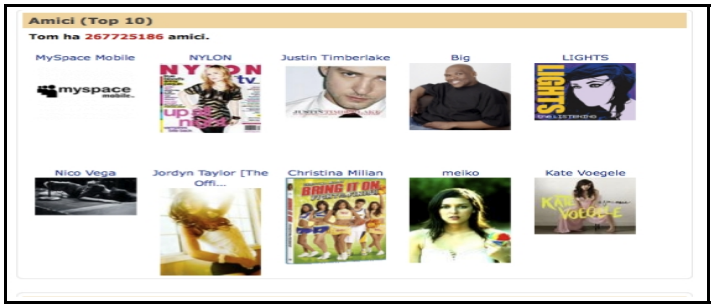


Fig. 4.17. - Myspace's "Top Friends" - souce http://www.myspace.com/tom

This feature allows one to pick users listed as friends and to sort them by preference. Initially only 8

"friends" could be displayed, while now users can chose between a "Top 4" and a "Top 24":

> *Eight was the maximum number of Friends that the system initially let people have. Some users figured out how to hack the system to display more Friends; there are entire bulletin boards dedicated to teaching others how to hack this. Consistently, upping the limit was the number one request that the company received. In the spring of 2006, MySpace launched an ad campaign for X-Men. In return for Friending X-Men, users were given the option to have 12, 16, 20, or 24 Friends in their Top Friends section. Millions of users did exactly that. In late June, this feature was introduced to everyone, regardless of Friending X-Men* [boyd, 2006a: 10]

This feature, as we will see in the following chapter, is very relevant for those self-presentation and reputation mechanisms to which Myspace activities are mostly dedicated.

Below the "Top friends" is displayed the last part of every Myspace profile, that dedicated to public comments. Here, only the users listed as friends can post messages or link content (while, on the contrary, every user can send private messages, regardless of being "friends" with the receiver). The visibility of the profiles depends on the setting chosen by the user: personal profiles can be set as "private," which means that only "friends" are allowed to see the profile. On the contrary, this option does not exist for band profiles, which can only be "public," that is, visible to everybody: both Myspace registered users and random web surfers. Still, images and videos, as well as full blog posts, can only be visible after becoming someone's "friend," a status that is achieved once a "friend request" is sent/received and accepted by the receiver.

One final important feature for every Myspace user, whether a band or an individual user, is the personal, unique web address (url) that they can reserve for themselves (this is the one single piece of information that is not allowed to be changed by the system) and use as a personal contact. In other words, once the url is picked (Myspace sends the users many reminders to suggest that they to pick one), users will be able to promote their page by mentioning the address, which is www.myspace.com/ + the name chosen. This contact, as we will see, is particularly relevant for bands, which can use it as a personal address to promote their activities to their audience, other bands, and representatives of the music business.

In general, in the left column we have what can be considered the "profile" information, while on the right are displayed "friends" and "comments". These constitute the core of Myspace, as well as Social Networking sites (boyd and Ellison, 2007). This is not very different for bands, but, before claiming that, I need to consider also the features specific to band profiles.

The most important feature regarding band profiles is the player (Fig. 4.18.) where bands are allowed to upload music that is not protected by copyright, or which they have the rights to publish.

Users can upload up to six music tracks, and they can decide whether or not to make the following options available: “add to profile,” for allowing users to add the track to their profile; “download”; leave “comments”; and “lyrics,” which is the link to the track lyrics.

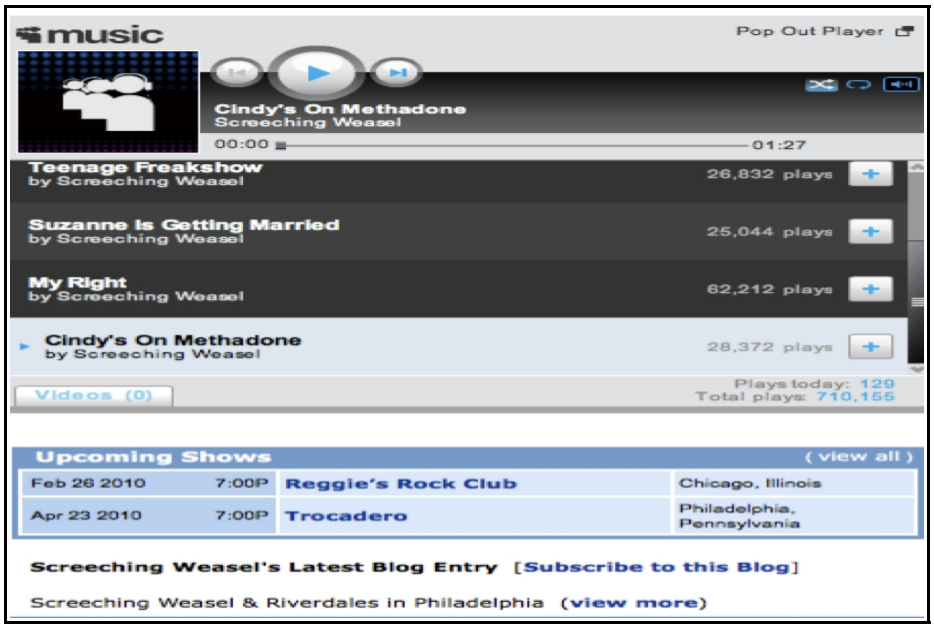


Fig. 4.18. - Music player and “upcoming shows” table (band profiles) - source http://www.myspace.com/officialscreechingweasel

This player also displays, as we can see from Fig. 4.14, the number of plays that a song gets. Also, the bottom line of the player table shows a link to “statistics,” where more detailed information about the number of plays (the count) is offered: in particular, by clicking on the “statistics” botton, both the total count and daily count of plays are displayed for each track.

Just under the music player, another specific tool for bands is displayed: the “next shows” table, where tour dates are displayed. By clicking on one tour date, page visitors can get more specific information about location, time, and price of the show (this depends on what information the page owners upload), and bands can also chose to directly sell tickets through this tool.

Other specific music-related features include the information boxes, which display different types of information from the individual ones we previously saw. Indeed, in the left column, bands are required to fill boxes regarding: the date on which they created a Myspace profile, band homepage (if they have one), band members, bands that they have been influenced by and the ones whose sound is similar to theirs, whether they have a signed contract with a label, and, if so, what type of label this is (indie/major). An example of the display of (some of) this information is represented in Fig. 4.19:

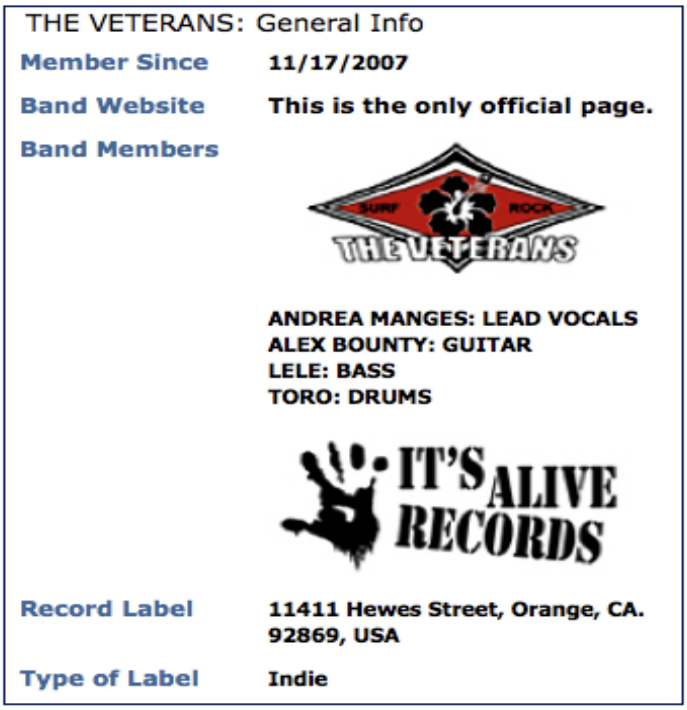


Fig. 4.19. - "General info" box (band profiles) – source http://www.myspace.com/veteransitaly

As briefly mentioned above, music profiles are also highly based on social networking, since the pages can be divided, like the personal one, by: band information (and, in this case, the music player, which also helps to represent the band's artistic identity), friends/fans, and comments. While not unlike individual users, music users consider all of myspace's features relevant; some of these, like the play count and the "top-friends" list, emerged as particularly relevant from the data-gathering. On the basis of what is revealed in this Chapter, I will set out the main data gathered from my field. To this I dedicate the following Chapter.

Chapter 5 - Stories From The Field

The presentation of the most relevant data gathered from the field will follow a sort of chronological order, starting with the first phases of getting a Myspace account, and later continuing with the actions and interactions that the actors interviewed and observed perform *on* and *through* this social networking site.

In particular, the Chapter is divided in four parts: in the first paragraphs I will consider how the actors involved in my empirical research got to know about Myspace, and how they decided to get a band profile. Also, aspects related to what lead these users to not stop at simply creating a MySpace profile, but rather propelled them to continuously manage their profile, will be extensively discussed.

Secondly, I will focus on how the users dealt with the infrastructural and economic context of Myspace, underlining their (un)awareness of the Terms of Use Agreement and of the ownership of the data they publish.

The third and fourth part of the chapter are dedicated, instead, to what follows the initial phases of adoption of a Myspace profile, and what the users do on this site, and how they relate both to technological features and, through these, to other actors. In particular, the third part deals with processes and activities that are carried out *on* Myspace, such as publishing information and adding friends, while in the final part, I will underline those activities that the users outlined as the most important ones that they carry out *through* Myspace: promoting the band and organizing shows.

5.1. “Be there, or be nowhere”: why to get a Myspace profile

The first things I have been asking the interviewees were about how long they have had a Myspace page, why they decided to get one, and why they keep up with it. The following paragraphs are dedicated to the different answers they gave me, underlining not only how they got to know about Myspace and what initially motivated them to start the profile, but also what elements convinced them to actually manage it consistently.

5.1.1. “You should get one!”

Something that almost all of the interviewees have in common, is that they got to know Myspace because some friends of theirs were using it, and in the vast majority of cases, those friends explicitly suggested the interviewee and his/her band mates to start their own profile:

We started using Myspace in April/May 2006, quite late... maybe 2005, I

can't remember. We heard of it, if I remember well, for word-of-mouth with other bands who told us that you could use it to contact other bands

[I. M., 36, IT.]

We heard of it in 2006/2007, we saw some bands that had it [...] *it was full of bands. All of our friends were like: "C"mon get it! Get it!"... I know you'll never do it...", but then in September we got a profile, in September 2007* [...]. *It was both other bands and friends that suggested us to get one*.

[L.B., 25, IT.]

In these cases, we see how the social pressure of peers and other bands is the dominant factor in the decision to actually start a Myspace page.

Sometimes, this pressure is not limited to a suggestion, but, as in the following case, some band's friends actually started a page on behalf of the band:

Actually our friends started our myspace for us at the end of 2004, I didn't know about myspace really, and the idea I had was that it was kind of a trashy website... my friends told me that it was just a way that I could put my music on the Internet for free if I wanted to show people in other places, add pictures... it was a way to easily display your band to someone who didn't know you, that's why we started it. [Someone put it up for us] *because I didn't know what the website was, or I barely knew... back in 2004 it wasn't a common thing to have.* [...]. *They put on a couple of songs and at the beginning we didn't use it very much, as long as the songs were there, and we could show them to people, we didn't like to log in that much or anything... that changed over time.* [M.S., 20, U.S.]

In this case, even if the interviewee declares not to have known about Myspace at the time when their friends started it for his band, we get the impression that he somehow knew of Myspace's existence, but he did not have a very good opinion of it. He thought it was "trashy." For this reason, the friends' pressure was not limited to a vague suggestion, but became a published profile that the band had to deal with. As M. S. himself explains, they decided not to care about it at the beginning, but actually started managing their profile later on.

So, what mainly brings people to get a Myspace page, which is something that, as we will see later on, requires time and effort, are word-of-mouth recommendations. Indeed, even if , as shown in Figure 5.1., Myspace has a specific tool that allows users to invite friends to get a Myspace page, none of the bands interviewed were contacted via e-mail, neither personally, nor as a band member, to join Myspace.

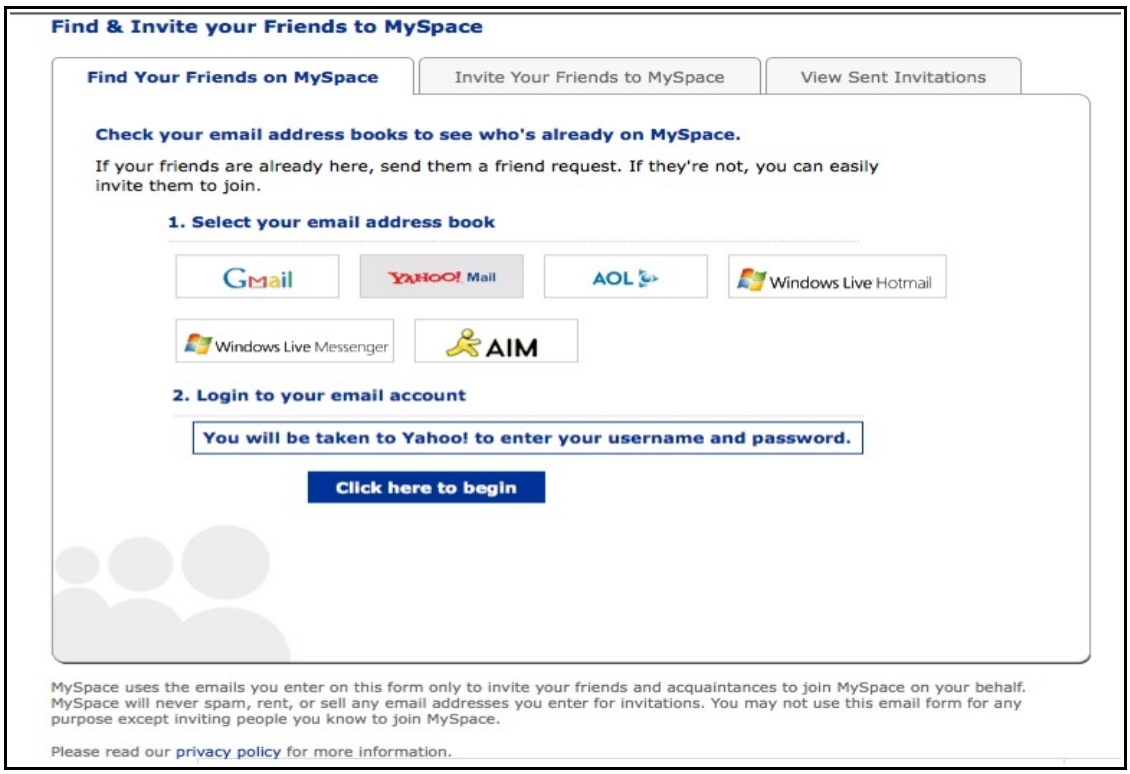


Fig. 5.1 – "Invite friends" feature. Source myspace.com

The Myspace invitation tool lets the users choose the people to invite among the members in their contact lists on the most widespread e-mail provider like Gmail, Yahoo, AOL, and Hotmail, as well as Instant Messaging platforms which are widely used: Windows Messenger and AIM. So, even if this tool would seem to be really functional and useful for inviting friends, it is through word-of-mouth recommendation that these invites emerge as taking place.

Finally, besides the cases mentioned above, there is another type of social pressure that can effect getting a Myspace profile for bands, a type of pressure coming from outside the friends circle, like in the case of K's band:

> *[...] you know... people kept asking us: "Where's your Myspace page?", and stuff like that, so... we built a couple* [K.D.A, 42, U.S.]

These people can be, as some interviewees explained, people related to music labels, venues, promoters, or just other bands. An increasingly consistent process since Myspace spread, the Myspace URL (which was made available in 2005), is one of the bands' contacts that is somehow taken for granted by the people that might want to reach them. To have a sense of this, we should just walk around the streets and read some flyers about gigs: there's a very, very high probability that you will find some web address like www.myspace.com/*bandname* under the bands name.

Indeed, as we get from K.D.A.'s answer: the question is not whether a band has a Myspace page,

but rather *what* the page is.

This opens up another reason why people get to have a profile: because Myspace is considered a standard in music.

5.1.2. Myspace as a standard

During my participant observation offline, I met many band members that went to the music center to record tracks, to do their rehearsals, or to just hang around to chat with the staff members. I constantly asked them whether their band(s) had a Myspace profile, and none of them answered negatively. The staff members were constantly checking the Myspace profiles of the bands they were about to record in the studio, and, sometimes, they also downloaded the songs published on Myspace in order to adjust them, for example, by adding a programmed drums track.

During the studio sessions, bands often asked the sound engineer to get them "a sound like..." some band, and, in order to get an idea of what they meant, they asked him to go either on their Myspace page and listen to the published music tracks, or to find them on Youtube and watch a video.

Myspace is considered, as interviews also confirmed, a standard in music, the one most-employed Internet tool for music, something that you cannot be without:

> *you need to consider that today, if you have a band, the matter is not whether or not to get a Myspace page: Myspace profile is a necessity, it has become almost obligatory, because if you're not on Myspace, you are nobody. I mean, you are just washed up, nobody will contact you, nobody will look for you, you don't have the opportunity to promote what you do* [R.T., 29, IT.]
>
> *If you have a band and you don't have a Myspace page, you just don't exist. Everybody would go look for you on that site, and if they can't find you, it's just like you do not have a band* [A.F., 19, IT.]

And there is no doubt about which platform to chose for putting music online:

> *Well, we chose Myspace because, until the M.E.I.* [a festival where they met people suggesting other websites, that the interviewee doesn't remember], *we thought that it was the only one existing.* [L.B., 25, IT.]
>
> *There's a lot of different sites that we could put ourselves on, but Myspace's just kind of like the standard amongst musicians, I guess* [J.M., 20, U.S.]
>
> *Now there are similar sites like BEBO and Facebook, but in my opinion, I don't know, surely they didn't gain as much ground as Myspace did for music* [N. S., 24, IT.]

As the interviewees state, there is no way to not have a Myspace page, either because they did not know of any other platform that could be as useful for them, or because this website is the one that everybody expects a band to have a page on.

An indication of how widespread and standardized the choice of Myspace is is the idea that now Myspace is considered as being invisible:

> *Now, it is like Myspace wasn't there anymore. At the beginning some bands had a page, but not all of them, now everybody has one, so, you have the feeling that Myspace doesn't even exist* [M.C., 32, IT.]

Being invisible does not mean being less powerful or relevant in mediating and influencing people and processes. Myspace is here claimed to be, using the terms put forward by Star (1999) in regard to infrastructures: "transparent to use", which means that "it does not have to be reinvented each time or assembled for each task", (ibid.: 381) and invisible, in a way that it only pops up to the users' eyes when it is not working ("visible upon breakdown", ibid.). Being transparent and invisible, does not mean to not be there anymore. Instead, the community that uses the infrastructure, in our case Myspace, has conventions that depend and are dependent on the features of the infrastructure (ibid.).

Moreover, the aspect of invisibility recalled by the interviewee also refers to the spread out and almost established trend or even a norm, of getting a Myspace profile for bands, which do not even consider not having a page on this website. This is consistent with what the musicians answered in regard to whether they know of any band that does not have a Myspace profile:

> *Yeah, I know some bands that don't have a Myspace page, but these are only bands that are very very very small... I mean, they are like 15, and they just do punk rock covers, those things you do at the very beginning, and they don't play shows... they don't even know whether they'll keep playing*
>
> [L. B., 25, IT.]

So, the main concern with getting a Myspace page would be about actually having a band. Once you get a band, and you know you will be playing for at least a little while, Myspace becomes a must have. Actually having a band is not even a prerequisite; in fact, sometimes people get a Myspace page as soon as they get an idea for some music-related project.

Indeed, what once happened was that the sound engineer at "S" decided to set up a promotion agency for a girl band that had to be put up. He called a couple of friends and met them for dinner. When they found a name for the promoting agency and defined the project, they decided to set up a casting call for girls that were able to both sing and play, to set up a girl-band for which they would have write and record music tracks. The day after, the same guy that had the project idea designed a customized Myspace page and put it online. The project never took off, but the page was out there.

In another, more successful case, one of the interviewees set up a Myspace page for a band that he put on with his housemates for what was meant to be a single show:

> *I put* [the Myspace page] *on... uhm... last year... I don't remember exactly when* [...] *We were going to play some shows, and so I wanted people to know, it was kind of a band that we were doing specifically for a show that we could play. And since we play... these two roommates of mine and me, since we practice at the house, we were like: "well, we'll just do covers that we do all the time at the house, so we don't have to worry". And so... we ended up playing three shows because I wanted to play more than one, since we were practicing...* [I picked Myspace because] *it's easier than doing... than doing an e-mail, because a lot of people that I know, I won't get their e-mail address, because I could just send 'em a message through Myspace and they'll get it. So, it took a very little amount of time to create it, and then to send to people that I knew the info for the show, so it was very quick* [...] *I didn't create it to really trying to promote the band, I was more trying to invite friends to and see it and make them aware of it, and if I was... I could see how other people, they really want the name of their band to get around, and they have ideas that they are going to... and they have a bunch of tours and go play. But I knew that this kind of project was going to be very small, like... originally it was just one show.* [R.G., 22, U.S.]

In this case, the interviewee decided that Myspace would be useful for his project because it would allow him to contact all the bands' friends to let them know about the one show they were about to play. This is an example of a re-appropriation of the tools offered by Myspace that is instead used, as the interviewee himself declares, to promote a band, while his objective was to quickly and easily contact people that he knew might be interested in going to see the show, whose e-mail contacts he did not have. Since this musician had been previously playing in other bands that had a Myspace page, and he had a personal profile as well, he decided to add the "friends" of that profile to the Myspace profile of the band he was setting up for that one show; he used networks from his past and personal Myspace profiles to grow the network of this one.. What is important to notice in this case is that, out of all the people he had online contacts with, the ones he thought could be interested in this music project, were not in his e-mail address book, but rather "friends" with him or with his old bands on Myspace.

From what is explained in this paragraph, we should notice that Myspace is considered a standard for musicians, and the first tool for promoting not just a band, but even a single project. Also, this platform emerges as the one where people get to have most of their online music-related contacts, which reveals another, less immediate and explicit element that helps understanding why Myspace is considered a must-have for musicians and music-interested people. Finally, from the last piece of interview, we also get that this tool is considered so easy-to-use that it is sometimes preferred to "old" media communication tools such as e-mail, because appears so immediate and accessible. I will further discuss this latter aspect in the following paragraph.

5.1.3. Myspace's accessibility

Once people get to know about the existence of Myspace, and they are motivated to get a profile, either by friends, other bands, or just because they get the sense that this tool comes out as a sort of norm, a standard that you need to accomplish in order to be acknowledged as an existing band, they start a page.

But together with these motivations, there are also other reasons why, since the starting phase, these people claimed to be motivated to manage the profile: because of its alleged accessibility, which is interpreted under similar, but slightly different meanings by the actors.

The first meaning attributed to accessibility is the ease-of-use that the users feel about starting and managing their own profile:

> [...] *most people are too lazy to hire someone to make a nice website for them. 'Cause a lot of people just don't know how to make a website, and they don't know how you can set it to so you can see, for example, how many views and all... just kind of mixed up things, and so it's convenience, you can set it up in a moment a Myspace page, and there'll be a little counter, and even if the counter is wrong, but it's still a counter*[...]
>
> [R. G., 22, U.S.]

Myspace, indeed, offers templates that just need to be filled in with information that, once the registration is done, will be displayed in the profile. It is quite immediate for people who are web savvy at even the most basic of levels to set up and manage a profile. Modifications can be made, as we will see later on, to the graphic aspect of the profile, either by using some external Myspace editors, the one that Myspace provided, or HTML language. Nonetheless, it is not necessary to know any programming language for using all of the features provided by Myspace, as we can see from the following figures. Figure 5.2 shows the very first phase of the registration process to get a music profile, while Figure 5.3 summarizes the initial setting phases, which can be skipped, and deal with adding information about the music genre, about the kind of contract (this field is required) that the band has, or does not have, possibly inviting friends, and uploading pictures and music tracks. The following figures (5.4 and 5.5) show instead a custom Myspace music profile and a standard “home” page, which is where the user can manage, change, upload, update, and delete content and contacts.

Fig. 5.2 – First phase of the registration process (for bands): the form to fill in. Source myspace.com

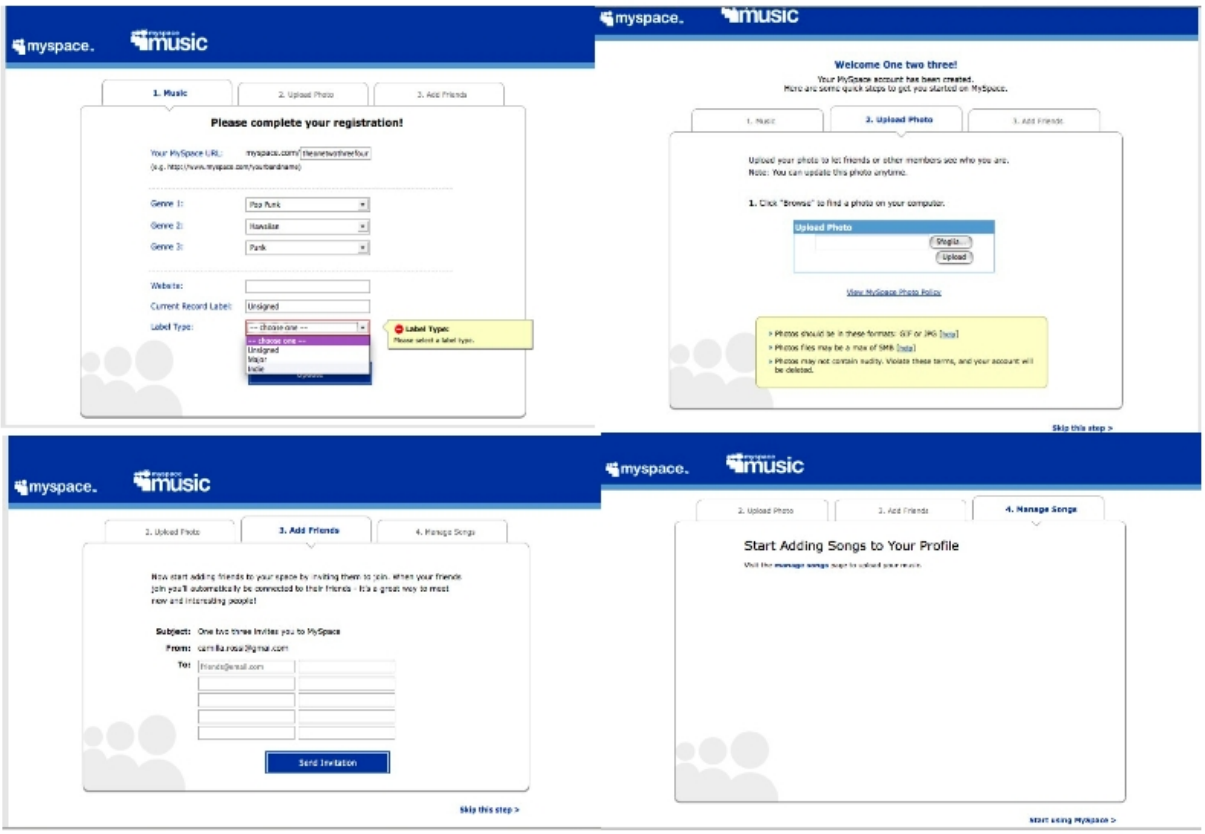


Fig. 5.3 – Initial setting after registration. Source myspace.com

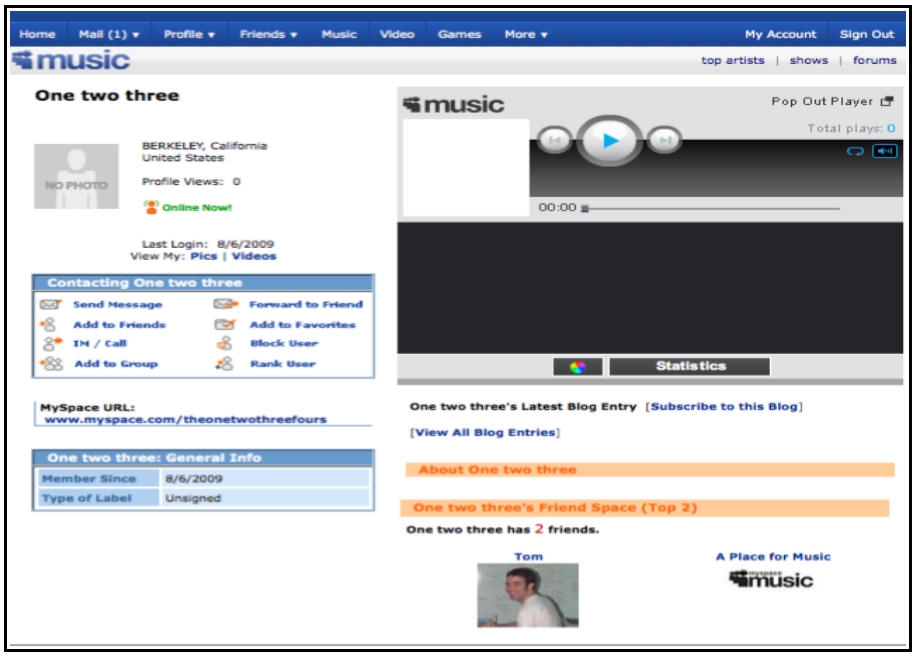


Fig. 5.4 – Standard (and early) music profile, public. Source http://www.myspace.com/theonetwothreefours

Fig. 5.5 – Standard (and early) "home" page, private. Source http://www.myspace.com/theonetwothreefours

As we can see from the pictures, the registration and management processes do not require any additional ability aside from those needed to surf the web. As we will see later on, this accessibility is also claimed as one of the reasons that lead the users to prefer Myspace profile to a traditional web page:

> [...] *that's hard to do, while Myspace is really easy to use, that's why we did that first.* [J. M. 20, U.S.]
>
> [We didn't think of getting a website because...] *we are totally lazy... total laziness... because of that, and because we don't have much familiarity, you know, even if we are in 2008 and we are 20, we do not have much familiarity with programming and stuff like that.* [L.B., 25, IT.]

So, we could say that, as opposed to a traditional web page, Myspace is seen as a tool that is highly available and manageable to all the people that are "lazy" and do not know how (or, are afraid to attempt by themselves) to create on a website. This is seen as an easy alternative to previous publishing and promotional tools online. But we will go back to this later on.

Now, it is important to add that Myspace is also accessible for non-registered users. Indeed, this social networking platform, differently from its precursor, Friendster, and also from its "epigones," like Facebook, makes the page (if set to "public," like all bands profile are, by default) visible and accessible to all web surfers, even if they are not registered to Myspace. Consequently,

> *it's a service most people know how to use, it's pretty accessible: if you tell people to go to our Myspace it's easy for them, and also because you can have the music on the website, just like six songs for anyone to listen to, really easily... so it's an easy way for people to listen to us* [J. M., 20, U.S.]

This gives us an example of how "accessible" means not only that it is easy to set up and manage, but also that the pages are actually reachable and visible to every user of the web. This turns out to be a great advantage for bands, that can get people to see their profile just by digitizing the band name on Google, or by distributing the URL of their Myspace page (www.myspace.com/bandname).

The URL, in particular, is considered a very useful tool for getting in contact with labels and venues:

> *Before Myspace you could send stuff to labels or venues, but that stuff wasn't necessarily listened to, and the whole thing was less immediate. It took way more time to the venue manager to listen to the stuff. I am thinking for instance to the case of a person that works in a office, and had to take extra time to listen to the stuff... instead now, with more and more people working at a computer, you can just simultaneously open up a band page and listen to it, and in case you are interest in a band, you just contact them, always through Myspace.* [I.M., 36, IT.]

Finally, besides the ease-of-use and visibility of Myspace profiles, it is the same networked infrastructure of the platform that the interviewees claim makes the information hereby published

more accessible:

> *I have seen some blogs and traditional web sites, I mean... this* [Myspace] *is way more accessible, you immediately find the pages, you have everything there, you don't have to digit a thousand passwords for accessing stuff... If someone feels like uploading personal stuff, if you want to put up a picture that touches you, you want... I don't know, those who write stuff, you know, there's often touching stuff, but if you feel like you want to put up your tastes and interests, tac, if you want to pretend to have some tastes he can do that. You immediately get to see all this stuff, and then it's important because for a band... it's important on the other side, in the sense that it matters for bands that there are also individuals on Myspace, not only other bands... it is important that not only people playing music meet there, but also that there is also a, "public" that could eventually come and see your show, or that maybe wouldn't even be likely to go, but in the end, they get curious because they see that you band is playing here and there, and maybe his/her friends are going....or they see that they friends know the band, so... it's important for a band, as well as for people in general..*
>
> [L.B., 25, IT.]

This goes back to the concept of "networked public" put forward by boyd (2007), meaning that a number of people that are connected to the band (profile) by the relationship of "friendship", which basically turns into a stream of constant and automatic updates about the information that gets published on the profiles of one's *friends*. In other words, what is claimed to make Myspace accessible is the concentration of a huge amount of information that intertwines the personal and the band's stuff, all within the same platform. From this aspect, accessibility translates into *immediacy*. This immediacy mostly lies in retrieving information without having to switch to another website, but just by spending time on Myspace, browse pages, and maybe adding somebody as a friend, and consequently getting information on an automated basis. This immediacy of information retrieving and contact making works for every user: venues, other bands, and personal profiles, which can be useful in getting (or managing) a public.

> *With Myspace it was more... it's easier to have fans that you don't know personally, get to go to maybe like our show on the other side of town or something, because they can see more easily that you're playing there. And I guess you could do that with a website, but I don't feel like people ever looked at websites that much, like a band's website [...] And then also, I guess the social networking aspect of it, it is pretty easy, because it's really easy to get in touch with venues, and other bands, and... we've gotten a few friends, or just random kids who just, found us on Myspace, you know, through searching, so that's nice, too i guess.* [M.S., 20, U.S.]

So, "the social networking aspect of it," is said to make Myspace more accessible, meaning that it makes the information published by its users more immediately retrievable to other Myspace users, as well as visible to non-registered users.

Having all the information (or most of the information that the users are reasonably interested in) on one single website makes it possible to get those "accidental discoveries" (Jennings, 2007) that bands can benefit from:

> *Because Myspace is easier, since if I, for instance, am on Google and I'm just surfing the web, it would never come up to my mind to write to some band, or to look for a friend of mine's band, while instead, on Myspace,you are hanging out there, and you go to some bands pages, and you surely happen to get to some other bands pages...* [N. S., 24, IT.]

So, we can summarize by saying that Myspace is claimed to be accessible. But accessibility means more than one thing: first, Myspace is considered accessible because its set-up and management are easy also for lazy people or those who are not web-savvy. Second, Myspace is accessible because it makes information visible also to non-registered web surfers, and this features makes it peculiar amongst Social Networking Sites. Finally, saying that Myspace is accessible also means that its social networking structure makes information easy to retrieve without changing websites or digitizing keywords into some search engine, but just by browsing Myspace personal and band profiles, which are networked together, and finally by automatically getting updates about what our *friends* are doing. This makes it possible to not only accidentally discover information, but also to put less effort in the discovery, which works more on a "push" basis rather then a "pull" one, which is more typical of traditional websites.

What are the differences that the interviewees point out between traditional websites and Myspace? How is Myspace different from other platforms? We have seen that Myspace is a sort of standard in music, but, are there other websites or platforms that music-related Internet users have taken into consideration or use? I will focus on this in the following paragraphs.

5.1.4. *Myspace, what else?*

As briefly mentioned above, there are different alleged reasons why the interviewees said they decided to get a Myspace page. Often, they compare this tool to more traditional ones, such as "traditional" web pages, but also to music forums. Other times they call into question newer tools, like other Social Networking Sites or Web 2.0 platforms dedicated to music. In regard to these, in some cases, they put forward examples of sites they decided to put their music on besides Myspace. But, more often, these examples are used by the interviewees to show how they considered Myspace the best and only option for them compared with the other options, and they explained why they decided to discard the other options in favor of Myspace. I will hereby present first the

more traditional alternatives, and then tools which are more similar to Myspace, clarifying why the interviewees said they liked or disliked them, and why they decided to adopt or dismiss them.

Some of the band members I have interviewed can be considered "natives" of Web 2.0, that is, young users of the web that did not experience the phase that preceded Myspace and its contemporaries. Some others, instead, lived the transition from 1.0 to 2.0, and account for that by comparing their earlier experiences online with the contemporary one.

In this case, two ways of living this transition emerge: either they stopped using "traditional" tools, or they kept their presence on those websites but in a less active way, lowering the amount of time they spend there.

As an interviewee explains, bands that used to have a website decided not to use it anymore, because they liked Myspace's features better:

> *Very many bands, like ours, used to have one* ["traditional" webpage]*, but they don't use it anymore. In my opinion Myspace is like a chain of information, a word-of-mouth [...], which didn't happen with websites.* [I. M., 36, IT.]

In this case, having a website is seen as an alternative to getting a Myspace page because of the time needed to keep both the pages updated. But sometimes, usually in the case of bands that have been putting lots of effort in their artistic career, and that have at least one band member active in the music sector, like K.D.A, who, besides a musician, is a producer and music promoter, bands decide to keep the existing webpage, and get, in addition to that, a Myspace page.

K.D.A's bands have had a webpage since, respectively, 1992 and 2001. He is the one in charge of promoting the bands, and he has been doing that by updating and managing those websites, plus online distributors:

> *The primary place is iTunes and then there's about 20 other distributors that have the recordings, I also sell directly from the band's website using a tool called mysongstore, so I can upload songs and encode the songs in whatever site I want* [K.D.A., 42, U.S.]

Besides all these tools, K.D.A started his bands' Myspace pages "something between four and six" years ago. Since then, he has been managing all of these pages, claiming that he considers them equally relevant for getting his bands visible online:

> *For the most part I see them ["traditional" webpages and Myspace profiles] all as the same, they are just like a biche of different storefronts, it's like having one company with a store in every town, so... the primary websites... pretty much have the same things: they sell music, they have pictures, they have diary or journal entries, videos... And there isn't any big*

> *difference that I can think of between Myspace and let's say [bandname].com... the only thing I use the single websites for and that I don't do on Myspace is... if I'm working with other artists, or I have demos that I wanna share with other people, let's say like the hidden part of the website, share, be collaborative... So that's really like the primary function of having I guess a single website... But I actually don't know... do more people find us on Myspace, or do more people find us searching the name of the band and then going to the website? 'Cause we get feedback from both sources... so I think it's just who stumbled on which first*
>
> *[...] with the personal website you don't get that public aspect, so Myspace has this public aspect where when somebody makes a comment, everybody sees that comment and they could make additional comments if they want and you don't have that features on individual websites* [K.D.A., 42, U.S.]

So, even in this case, which is a rare example of a coexistence between "traditional" webpages and Myspace profiles, the latter is considered a very relevant tool which needs to be put on and managed. In no case did the interviewees mentioned the possibility of not having a Myspace profile, because it also helps bands to "get that public aspect" by displaying public comments on their profile[83]. This need to have a Myspace page is particularly evident in regard to younger musicians that did not experience the switch from Web 1.0 to 2.0.

Indeed, none of all of the younger users interviewed, all of whom have a Myspace page, declared having a "traditional" website. As seen in the previous paragraph, bands just think it is easier for them to get a Myspace profile, rather than a website, while the benefits they believe they are able to get from them are the same, if not more with Myspace than with a website.

For instance, when asked whether any website other than Myspace could equally satisfy his band, N. answered:

> *In my opinion, at this moment in time, no. Not right now. Undoubtedly when you have an album, you have to send it to music labels, you have to send the actual, the actual CD, but that* [Myspace] *gives you an incredible help, at least in finding live shows* [...]. *But actually, if you think about that, this is weird! I mean, before* [Myspace] *you could have your website and, all the same, you could send an e-mail from a band e-mail address to the music label and maybe they could listen to your music online anyways if you had a "music section" on your website. It's just easier* [with Myspace]
>
> [N. S., 24, IT.]

In this case, again, no fundamental differences are highlighted between websites and Myspace profiles. But rather, this latter comes out as a valid alternative to a web page, mainly because of its accessibility.

83 Indeed, if the tradtional web page does not have a guestbook page, this service is unavailable. Morevover, even if the guestbook is there, it is placed on a different pages than the homepage, hence, it is less easily retrievable than on Myspace, where it is diplayed in the main profile page.

Sometimes instead, the choice of using Myspace, rather than a website or a blog, is a forced choice. For example, when it comes to finding information, and the band member is acting just like the common user who looks for information, what he/she has to face is a lack of updated information on websites, and so he/she needs to turn to Myspace to find what he/she is looking for:

> *I like going to the websites... I think it's a thing of convenience* [using Myspace] *though, too, because if you like all these bands and you can see them all together, maybe it's more appealing, 'cause it's more lazy to adding a bookmark on your computer, or remembering where the site is, but.., I went to... today... my friends' band G. T., I went to their website, I haven't been there in a long time, and it hadn't been updated in like a year!!! Like a long time... Their Myspace is updated all the time! ...but I enjoy the website a little more, just because there's more space for... the things...*
>
> [R. G., 22, U.S.]

The issue with up-to-date information, which is sometimes retrievable on Myspace but not on other sites, also deals with the choice of most bands to discard non-Myspace options. Indeed, not having updated information is also a reason why some bands decided to stop using "collective" websites or portals dedicated to music.

> [Before Myspace] *we were on S. and R.B.* [two local music portals]. *Those are not exactly blogs or personal websites* [...]*, but like... S. is not updated anymore,* [...] *while R.B. ... I never really understood what it was exactly. I put our information there, but nobody ever told me anything... and now it is not updated anymore either, oh, actually, sometimes the page doesn't even show up* [L. B., 25, IT.]

As the interviewee explained later, these portals do not allow you to get a profile by yourself, but you have to fill in some information on the band, and then the profile is created by the portal web managers. For this reason, bands have no interest in checking the portal unless it gets updated, since they cannot update the information themselves. Instead, on Myspace they can manage their profile, and the decision whether to update the information is up to them.

Besides music portals, other alternatives emerged as having been considered by the interviewees. Usually, these are more specific web services that can add something to what is already allowed by Myspace's features, music forums, or other Social Networking Sites.

In regard to other services, we already mentioned iTunes and music distributors, which are employed to sell music online, a service that hadn't been made available on Myspace until recently and have also turned out to be problematic (see "the Snocap" issue, pgf. 5.2.3.). Another case is that of specific services such as file transfer:

> *I can't remember the website, but I have been using this one website where you can put your entire cd on as a drive and send it to people... I think it's*

> *called yousendit.com, that wasn't for public access, you pay a fee, and you can send large files over the internet, and that was the other thing I used, but that was more professional, that was sending it to people that I thought could help our band* [M. S., 20, U.S.]

Tools like this or iTunes are employed for specific actions like direct online selling or file transfer that are not available on Myspace. In the rare cases in which the interviewees chose to use these online services, this choice is never seen as an alternative to using Myspace, but rather as complementary to that.

Other websites that been mentioned by the interviewees are forums which are considered a completely different thing from Myspace. Indeed, it is not possible to upload a music profile on forums, but just personal ones, which are rather simple and mainly consist of an avatar with a nickname. The only way to get a band presence on forums would be with advertisement banners for which the band has to pay a fee. But none of the interviewees has declared to ever have availed him/ herself of this service. Forums are only called into question when it comes to retrieving music information online, on a "read" basis, rather than for publishing content and information.

Finally, other options that the interviewees declare to have considered but then not adopted, are other Social Networking Sites, like Facebook.

What happens in these cases calls us back to the idea of Myspace being considered a standard, a norm, for music. Indeed, the interviewees that said they had a personal page were more likely to have it not on Myspace, but rather on Facebook and (in one single case) on other platforms:

> *I have a personal page [...], no, not on Myspace, my personal profile is on Tribe.net and Facebook.com* [K.D.A., 42, U.S.]

As mentioned, the only platform that is considered worth having for music bands, is Myspace:

> *I heard Facebook has a service, like band pages... but in general I think social networking sites are annoying, and I mean, I use it for my band, 'cause it works pretty well, but like... uhm... There's a lot of different sites that we could put up ourselves on, but Myspace's just kind of like the standard amongst musicians, I guess.* [J. M., 20, U.S.]

So, there is a clear perception of Myspace as dedicated to music, while other social networking platforms are considered as more focused on personal aspects that the interviewees are not interested in as musicians.

In conclusion, there are different alternative options that musicians considered besides Myspace, but none of them was able to replace it. Indeed, most of the alternative options, like forums, portals, and other Social Networking Sites, have been discarded. Instead, traditional websites have either been carried out in parallel with Myspace profiles or, more frequently, dropped (if they had one) or

dismissed (if they thought of getting one). And the only websites other than Myspace the interviewees claimed to use are sites that are complementary to Myspace in that they offer services not available on it.

Thus, Myspace turns out to be not only a standard and an accessible tool, but the single platform or tool that, out of the different options available, is the preferred one.

5.2. Getting to know the context

When taking the first steps towards Myspace, users start acting within an infrastructural, economic, political context that is represented by the platform owners and management. What do the users know and think about this? What are their discourses about the contextual features of their online activities on Myspace?

Following a chronological order, I will start with the most immediate aspect: the Terms of Use Agreement, which need to be accepted in order to successfully register on Myspace. Secondly, I will take into account the interviewees' discourses about the history and ownership of the platform, and I will finally focus on specific issues related to the content ownership.

5.2.1. Terms of Use Agreement

It is a standard practice, when dealing with software and platforms, to go through the acceptance of terms of use or license agreement during the registration phase. Indeed, like every commercial or non-commercial product or service online, before benefiting from a working product or before getting an active profile on the site, the user is required by Myspace to accept the "Terms of Use Agreement" after having read the "Privacy policy." (attached in Appedix A and Appendix B).

The most relevant data about the knowledge that the users have of these documents is that all the interviewees declared not to have read either the "Terms of Use Agreement" or the "Privacy policy." Indeed, when asked whether they read them, the usual answer is:

> *No, I didn't [laughs]... who does that?* [M. X., 30, U.S.]

With special regard to publishing content, hence with special regard (also) to music-artists and their publishing, Myspace Terms of Use Agreement underwent a revision that resonated in the media in June 2006 when a famous episode took place: the music artist Billy Bragg took his songs off of Myspace after publishing them because of a "tricky" part of the "Terms of Use Agreement," namely point 5c of the early 2006 version of the agreement[84] which stated that, "By posting Content on any public area of MySpace.com, you automatically grant as well as represent and warrant that you

84

have the right to grant to MySpace.com, an irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive, fully paid, worldwide license to use, copy, perform, display, and distribute such information and content to MySpace.com and that MySpace.com has the right to prepare derivative works of, or incorporate into other works, such information and content, and to grant and authorize sublicenses of the foregoing" (Myspace Terms of Use Agreement, 2003- Early June 2006[85]).

In light of this point, Billy Bragg pointed out that:

> *The real problem is the fact that they can sub-license it to any company they want and keep the royalties themselves without paying the artist a penny. It also doesn't stipulate that they can use it for non-commercial use only which is what I'd want to see in that clause. The clause is basically far to open for abuse and thus I'm very wary* [86]

The whole question brought Myspace administrators to change the document in question, by deleting the above-quoted part, and adding the following:

"MySpace.com does not claim any ownership rights in the text, files, images, photos, video, sounds, musical works, works of authorship, or any other materials (collectively, 'Content') that you post to the MySpace Services. After posting your Content to the MySpace Services, you continue to retain all ownership rights in such Content, and you continue to have the right to use your Content in any way you choose" (Myspace Terms of Use Agreement, after June 15, 2006. See Appendix A).

Neither Billy Bragg's protest, which got media coverage, nor any concern of the interviewees with publishing legal issues was ever mentioned in the interviews. This is quite a relevant aspect which needs to be taken into account: I have been interviewing people of different ages, and different Countries, some of which were also very socially and politically active. Nonetheless, none of them ever mentioned to have read the "Terms Of Use Agreement" to ever have heard of disputes, such as Billy Bragg's one, about this issue, nor even to ever having had any specific concern about Myspace's possible ownership of the content they could publish or have published.

One of the alleged reasons for this, is, as mentioned above, the generally shared and firm belief that now, nobody ever reads any agreement related to online products and services before accepting it. This is due to three main reasons: first, there are way too many websites and services whose terms of agreement you have to accept for registering and using the platform/software/service; second, these documents are way too long to read for the users, who want a quick and easy way to do

85 For a comparison between that version and the following one (attached in Appendix A of the present work) see http://www.ondaground.net/blog/. The reason why the original text of Myspace "Terms of Agreement" is not attached to the present work is due to its unavailability online. It was indeed, impossible for me to retrieve the original text even through Internet Archives.

86 http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/06/08/blly_bragg_myspace/

things; third, these users either know that there is probably going to be some “tricky” aspect in these documents, which probably allows the website owners to claim some rights over the users' data, or they think that since Myspace is a “free” service, there is no clear connection with legal and economic issues, and the Terms of Use are just something that is now related to every product, but users won't spend time reading it, since it can not be “harmful” for them.

Under this latter point of view, a “free” service emerges as seen as an innocuous tool, and also, since this is a service, the perception of some interviewees is that you do not need to pay (either with money or with personal data) anything to get it:

> *It is a service that I use, it is me doing something [...] it is not like I am buying something* [M. C., 23, U.S.]

But we must point out that “free,” in the case of Myspace, is “free as in free beer, not as in free speech”[87]: it is more about not having to pay for it, rather than in regard to liberty. Also, the idea of not having a product, like specific software tools that allows you to do something, but just becoming part of a community, is often not considered as something to pay for; hence, there is little concern about “what will they want back from me?”.

Other times people are aware that they are getting a service that somehow they will have to pay for, but, in this case, the deal seem to be acceptable. This calls back to the other above mentioned perception about the possible “trickiness” of these Terms of Use Agreement, which gets resolved with an economic justification of the exchange:

> *I know that Myspace can take my data and stuff... I don't know, but whatever it's taking, I get a service. It's something that is useful for me and my job, so... even if I have to give my data... it's a good service... it's fine to me* [I. L., 28, IT.]

This is a quote from a girl I met during my participant observation who was discussing the trickiness of Myspace “Terms of Use Agreement”[88].

It is also worth noticing one more final point: the idea of having one's content or data automatically yielded to a website's owner emerges to be perceived as possibly dangerous for people more than for bands. Actually, we will see how the overlap of personal and “artistic” information makes it impossible to think of the artistic dimension as separate from the data that people (or we ourselves) publish about our person. The carelessness of ownership issues for band members is also due to the

87 As opposed to the famous Stallman's quote about the meaning of “Free” in “Free Software”: “"Free software" is a matter of liberty, not price. To understand the concept, you should think of "free" as in "free speech," not as in "free beer” (The Free Software Definition, http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-sw.html)

88 Her phrase is quite clear in calling into question the economic value of exchange: I have some profit from this, and some others will probably get profits over me and my actions on it, but, in the end, it is fruitful for me, so it's ok (in regard to this, see also the discourse about economic justification reported in Siegel, 2008)

fact that most of the bands I have been interviewing act at an underground level, and their main objective is to have their music listened to, and to be able to play shows, not that of making money with their music. For this reason, they do not care much about the possibility of yielding rights to their content, but rather focus on publicizing it with free (like "free beer") and accessible tools. Still, this attitude and behavior, as we will see in paragraph 5.2.3., can turn out to be dangerous in case the band finds a contract once the tracks have been released on Myspace. Before addressing that, I will carry out the discourse about what the interviewees say about Myspace's infrastructural aspects by dealing, in the paragraph that follows, with the corporate aspects and ownership of this platform.

5.2.2. Corporate aspects

As expressed in chapter 4, Myspace was founded by Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson; Myspace's parent company was eUniverse, which was later renamed Intermix. In July 2005 Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation paid "$580 million in cash to acquire Intermix Media Inc., a Los Angeles-based company whose chief asset is MySpace.com."[89] This news was covered by all the main journals and magazines, both online and offline. Nonetheless, most of the interviewees said they did not know who even owns Myspace. The few that did expressed a negative opinion about Rupert Murdoch and his multinational business, but the opinion was not negative enough to warrant a cancellation (or a dimissal of the idea of acquiring, for prospective users) their Myspace profiles.

As J.M. says:

> *I don't like that's it's a corporate entity... and I think a lot of people don't like that... but at the same time I think it's brought a lots of friends together, a lot of musicians together, and a lot of people heard a lot of music that they wouldn't have otherwise...*
>
> *Q: so the good things are more than the bad ones?*
>
> *A: Yeah!* [J.M., 20, U.S.]

On a general level, the American interviewees showed a higher awareness of information about the corporate aspects of Myspace, while all the Italian ones told me they did not know anything about who owned it, and did not take these aspects into account at all during the whole interview. Still, not all of the American interviewees were informed about the buyout of Myspace by NewsCorp. This is particularly relevant if we consider that all the interviews in the U.S. were made in the Bay Area, an area of California with a very high level of social and political awareness and concern. In particular, many of the interviewees were part of a Co-op, which is a cooperative organization very aware of

89 http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/18/business/18cnd-newscorp.html

environmental, human rights, and socio-political issues.

One of these co-op members told me:

> *Really? Are you sure it* [Myspace] *is owned by Murdoch? When did that happen? The news didn't say anything about it! It's weird... I'm wondering why they didn't... weird...* [M. X., 30, U.S.]

As we saw, the media covered this news, but some people probably did not notice that. And when they signed on to Myspace, they did not pose to themselves the question of who the owner is, which is interesting considering these co-op students are usually very politically active and aware of such aspects. Even more peculiar is the case of those who, like J.M., he himself belonging to this type of cooperative organization, decided to let the corporate aspects pass, and get a band profile anyway.

In conclusion, similarly to what happens in regard to getting information about the "Terms of Use Agreement" and the "Privacy Policy," not much attention is dedicated to the corporate aspects of Myspace and, even when the artist has an awareness about this and he/she is morally opposed to it, this does not stop him/her from getting, or keeping the Myspace profile. There are some cases in which the corporate aspects of the Myspace management is forcedly faced by its users, as we will see in the next paragraph which is dedicated to specific issues related to content ownership.

5.2.3. "The Snocap issue"

We have seen how none of the interviewees said they had read the Terms of Use Agreement. This generally ended up in risks that did not realize into visible problems for the interviewees, except in one case that has to do with music copyright, which I will call "The Snocap issue."

In September 2006, Myspace partnered with Snocap. This is a platform founded in 2003 by, among others[90], Napster's "father" Shawn Fanning, who partnered with Universal Music Group and provided a platform that allows users to legally download music tracks online and share them in such a way that the tracks' authors get the royalties of these tracks. It is the choice of the artist or band which tracks to publish, which audio quality to make available, and which restrictions should apply to their content, on a track-to-track basis. This news was publicized by Snocap as an "empowerment" for the users: "Snocap's partnership with MySpace empowers the music community in a profound way by allowing artists to establish a direct commercial and social relationships with their fans [...] MySpace artists will be empowered to sell their music directly on their profiles and provide fans with the html code to create their own digital storefront in support of their favorite bands."[91].

90 Jordan Mendelson and Ron Conway
91 http://www.snocap.com/press/releases/?id=15

In other words, this partnership would have allegedly improved the services available for small labels and mostly band themselves to sell their tracks, but the data I gathered depicted this partnership as not so fruitful for bands. This was due to the ownership issues mentioned in paragraph 5.2.1:

> *Myspace partnered with a company called Snowcap, and Snowcap's contract... they changed the contract so that if you're uploading your music on Myspace, Snowcap will own your music for the rest of your life. It wasn't intended to do this... they just didn't know how to write the contract properly. So every band's doing... sure "agree" "agree" "agree"... and Snowcap went basically out of business, for multiple reasons, but the bottom lines were that they didn't even know their own contract, so I see cases where Myspace... they just wanna get a player, and some sorts of sells... I don't know... but they weren't looking at the bigger picture of how that affects the community, you know, in this case the artist community and their site's community-based, do you think they'd been thinking on how does this community work... be that of making sure that our standards are the same as in that community... So... that built a lot of... within the musician community, the recording label community, that built a lot of concern that companies like Snowcap and organizations like Myspace were not fully aware of how to go about implementing some of these features, especially for the average person comes out here doing their own record label, or people that don't read contracts and just pushing the button... you would assume that you wouldn't suddenly see your song appear in a film, and find out that you have no rights to royalties, 'cause Snowcap is the one who distributed it...*
>
> [K.D.A., 42, U.S.]

So, this partnership caused some troubles for the bands that decided to publish and sell their songs on Myspace. And, as K.D.A. pointed out, this was perceived, by the more interested users that tried this tool, like a betrayal to the community, which is seen as a group of non-expert users that mainly do not read the contracts, and that should be provided with easy-to-use tools that should not turn out to be tricky or somehow harmful for them.

Two things are at stake here: first, bands (as well as other users) do not usually read the contracts; secondly, in light of this and of the whole "community" and openness rhetoric (ie., "a place for friends"), the integration of Snocap service by Myspace is considered to be a sort of betrayal towards its users. Even if, as K.D.A. explains, this episode is seen as more of a misunderstanding and inability to write a reasonable contract by Snocap and Myspace, rather than a deliberate effort by these to stitch up the users, it is still seen as a betrayal.

A final note must be added: the possible concerns that a music artist can have about publishing content on Myspace are not limited only to who will own the content once it is published, but they span to how a release could effect the band's chances to sign a contract in the future. Indeed, as K.D.A. expressed, there are cases of bands in which music labels were interested, but, when they

found out that the band had already published a certain number of tracks on Myspace, they were not willing to sign them a contract anymore. Indeed, if music has been online, available for listening or even downloading for free, the chances are slim that someone will want to invest money to release an album containing those same tracks, or even some of them. So, also in this case, the carelessness about the possible risks, and the will to share content on Myspace regardless, brought the band to face issues that they did not even think of.

In conclusion, to summarize this and the previous two paragraphs, what emerges is a general carelessness of the users to accurately read the documents they accept in order to get a Myspace profile, as well as to access Myspace Services. Also, and more generally, what emerges is that little attention and concern is exhibited by the users, even the more socially and politically active ones, to the whole structure of Myspace's ownership and to the possible consequences of this. This puts forward two aspects: on the one side, there is a widespread perception that these tools are harmless and "free," and thus will not require any effort or payback by the users. On the other side, when the adoption of Myspace tools is considered as potentially dangerous, the dangers are seen as less relevant than the immediate benefits.

Finally, the idea of "trust" comes out as fundamental. Indeed, since Myspace is considered, as we will see further on, a community of "friends," the idea that contracts could be tricky does not serve as a warning for users to be more careful about being informed before they sign one, but rather might be interpreted as isolated cases in which the owners of Myspace (unintentionally) betrayed the community. So, the general feeling towards the Myspace environment is that of a good, harmless, trustworthy, and candid community, rather than that of a lucrative, exploiting or even a possibly harmful corporate entity.

Now that we figured out how the interviewees claimed to consider Myspace, why they adopted it, and what their perception of its general economic and legal setting is, I will focus on how they use it and what their discourses are about it. This can be helpful in understanding what they do with it, but also, what the representations and ideas are that they have about this platform and its tools.

5.3. Life *on* Myspace: being "friends," publishing infos, and getting reputation.

Once the registration is completed, the bands (have to) manage their profile. How do they do it? Through what tools in particular? Which interactions do they develop? Answers to these and other similar questions, and the related interpretations given by the interviewees, are the focus of the following chapters.

5.3.1. "A place for friends"

As we saw in Chapter 4, Myspace's world-famous slogan is "a place for friends." But what is the definition that the users give of it? What is their opinion of this platform, and the set of interactions mediated by it? I have been asking them how they would explain what Myspace is to a completely non-web-savvy person, and these are examples of the answers I got:

> *It is a community that meets on the Internet to exchange information, mostly in regard to one's tastes, or, if you are someone who produces some content, for having people to listen to it. For example, I produce songs, in the sense that I have a band, and... these songs to be heard by people that I don't know and that don't have a chance to come to our live shows or to get our CD, and I make them listen to my music on it [Myspace]* [L.B., 25, IT.]

> *Myspace is this one website where you can upload your music, upload your bio, the dates of the shows you'll be playing, find friends, and also find people that is maybe willing to hire you on some shows or maybe for something even bigger like music productions* [N., X., 30, U.S.]

As we can see, Myspace is defined as a "community" or as a website where you can promote your music and find "friends." Music promotion and the management of personal relationships are two activities that always emerge as deeply intertwined. This is also due to the semantics of Myspace, that uses the term "friends" indistinctly. Indeed, the term "friend" is used to address all the profiles of people or bands that one user might want to "add," which would mean listing them among those who are directly connected to their profile, allowing them to send not only private messages (that also "non-friends" could send), but also to post public comments on the band/person's profile. As figures 5.6 and 5.7 show, a band can browse Myspace and, once they find a profile, be it personal or music, they are given the option to add them as "friends," with no distinction:

Fig. 5.6 – Managing a band profile: option to add a person as "friend". Source myspace.com/gabbagabbacami

Fig. 5.7 – Managing a band profile: option to add a band as "friend". Source myspace.com/lesbeatles

The same happens on the public version of the band's page, where the profiles added will all result in being displayed as “friends”:

Fig. 5.8 - “Top friends”, Public. Both individuals and groups/bands are listed as “friends”. Source myspace.com/theonetwothreefours

The interviewees often refer to other users as “friends,” no matter who these “friends” are. This semantic choice by Myspace is leading to a re-definition of the meaning of the word “friendship” (boyd, 2006a), and it kind of levels out (at least semantically) the hierarchies in the music business (labels, band, audience, fans, venues).

But the users do not limit themselves to aligning with the Myspace assigned label of “friends” to other users; there is also a generally widespread behavior by the interviewees which is oriented to establish and maintain friendly relationships on the website. This mainly turns into practice with the acceptance of almost all friend requests, the following of Myspace's netiquette, and the attention paid to being more well-behaved than previously done on other platforms.

The first aspect is the widespread tendency to accept almost every friend-request:

> [...] *I mean, I get more friends requests than the ones I send, I am not used to go on other pages and look around for friends... then... about adding people as friends, I mostly do that when I get a friend request, I look at the request and say “approve” almost always, unless it is a nazi band, I nearly always do approve requests* [L.B., 25. IT.]

This much shared tendency is shown not only in the declared predisposition to add every profile, unless in rare and exceptional cases, but also in the opinion that the interviewees said to have had towards those people that are to selective in adding friends or accepting friend requests:

> *A thing that I really can't understand, is this: people that maybe get their personal profiles* [...]*, and and they only add you if you satisfy some specific requirements or if they are fine with you... I really can't understand that*
>
> [N. S., 24, IT.]

This opinion is probably influenced by the generally widespread will of bands to have their music as visible as possible, and, indeed, the accusation is directed at “personal profiles,” but it is also supported by the general opinion about what is supposed to happen in the friendly environment of

Myspace, as the same interviewee clarifies a little later:

> *[...] or I can't understand people that maybe set their profile to private. I don't like that! I mean, for what fucking reason would you get a profile on Myspace, one of the most visited websites in the world, and you don't want to be seen by people or you are acting like you're better than everybody else?... this makes no sense at all... at that point, you just don't get a profile, this is what I think. [They didn't just want to get a website for free] because anyways the default setting is on public, not private [...] I am really pissed by that! And I accept adds from everybody, every band... [also people that play or listen to different music, 'cause] in the end it is a community, and, after a fashion, we all have to live together somehow... [so] we give friendship to everybody, and if I find private pages I am just very pissed*
>
> [N. S, 24, IT.]

Again, the idea that Myspace is a community populated by "friends," or, at least people acting friendly, turns out to be an opinion that also drives the tendency of bands to add everybody as friends, with less restrictions than those they would be likely to apply offline. This is enforced by two elements: first, being friends on Myspace does not necessarily require being in touch: once the friendship request gets accepted, the two involved profiles are automatically listed as "friends," regardless of whether or how often they will ever contact each other. The second element, strictly relating to the former, is that this "friendship" will last unless someone deletes the other from the friend list. This option is barely used, and it is addressed as undesirable by the same news feed tool called "friends updates," introduced by Myspace in late 2007. In this "friends updates" section of a profile's home, it is possible to see the history of the friends' activities like adding pictures or videos, updating their profile, and becoming "friends" with somebody, information that will appear like shown in Fig. 5.9:

Fig. 5.9 – Friendship update on the "Friends update" news feed feature- home page (source myspace.com/gabbagabbacami)

What is particularly worth noticing is not that this tool was introduced, but rather that it only displays a notification when someone becomes "friends" with someone else, and not when a profile gets deleted from a friends list. In other words, we are immediately informed that "dan" became friends with "Path of Resistance," but, in case one of the two ever decides or will choose to not be friends anymore, no information would be given by Myspace neither to the involved "friend" that

has been deleted, nor to other "friend" profiles.

This feature is quite representative of how "friendly" netiquette is highly valued and enhanced both by the Myspace features and (consequently) by the users.

Another "netiquette" element, which is very widely adopted and recommended in relation to "friendship," is the "thanks for the add" message, which is supposed to be sent by one of the profile users that just either sent or received and accepted the friend request. If I ask someone to become my "friend" and this person/band accepts, I should go on their profile and post a public comment saying "thanks for the add," while, in the case the other people/band wants to thank me for having asked for their friendship, they would post on my public profile the comment "thanks for the request."

This will be the first message that they can publicly post on each other profiles, since, before becoming friends with someone, it is only possible to send private messages. This calls us back to "trust" aspects: indeed, the only people that can post public information on our page are those who we either explicitly asked to be our friends, or whose request we accepted, allowing them in both cases to visualize private content (if we have some), and to say whatever they want about us, in a place that everybody can see[92].

So, in other words, the general feeling gleaned from the interviewees, as well as users that have been observed in their online interactions, is that of being part of a "community" populated by "friends." There is a widespread politeness towards other users in general, and a high level of trust in "friends". Moreover, and this gets us to the final point, the public display of content is considered not only encouraged and in line with the environment of this website (as we saw in the last piece of interview), it is not just a demonstration of friendliness, but it enforces future friendly behaviors, as well. This is mainly due to the fact that the big amount of information made public on Myspace, which is more than on other music-related non-social-networking sites, makes the users feel more responsible towards their behaviors because they could be easily identified and socially sanctioned in a negative way:

> *In a forum, for instance, you can be more offensive and rude, because you can hide yourself behind a nickname, and also because the discussion is limited to that time and space. Who posts on a forum could also not have ever anything to do with the others [members], while on Myspace you have friendship requests, friendship gets requested and accepted. There is more*

92 As we saw in Chapter 4, it is possible to set up Myspace so that we can approve (or not) comments before they get published, but this setting turned out to be quite rare to adopt, especially for bands. Anyways, this tool only let the profile owner to work as a "gatekeeper" of the published information, but is is still only friends that get the opportunity to post comments.

> *respect, friendship, community, it would be illogical to say things that are not nice to someone, because if you have something against me, you don't even ask for my friendship. If I get someone's request for friendship I think it is because this person wants to be, either at a personal or just musical level, be your, "friends".* [I. M., 36, IT.]

So, on Myspace you can not "hide behind a nickname," because of the high level of personal information that gets published, and the friendliness that this enhances reinforce that allegedly trustful environment where the information is published. Indeed, when a break of this netiquette takes place, the involved actors can either decide to leave it on, publicly displayed, relying on the viewers' ability to consider that as an isolated episode about which enough information is displayed to be able to to interpret the level of seriousness of the episode, and who wrote what, or, as it often happens, the comments gets deleted by the profile owner:

> *Obviously [on Myspace] there is no flaming, or it is very rare and moderate, for example, once the guitar player in my band wrote "Dio bo'" [*an abbreviation for a blasphemous exclamation*], I mean, not even with the final part, and one of another band members wrote "please don't say obscenities on our space, you surely need to be taught to be polite", we left the public comment there [on the profile], 'cause then, anybody can go on their page and see what he actually wrote, and it is not something to complain about. But they eventually deleted it.* [N. S., 24, IT.]

A final note must be added about this widespread perception of friendliness on Myspace: this, as an episode told by one interviewee helps to describe, can sometimes be limited to the online world, and not always have a respective translation in offline life: the interviewee [N. S., 24] tells about one time when one of the bands on their "friends" list started slandering them behind their backs, alleging that they had more page views on their page than they deserved. The interviewee's band did not get to know this through Myspace, but from offline friends. In this case, in which other people, who are "friends" on Myspace, start saying bad things against someone, the offense does not take place in the safe and friendly environment of Myspace, but is left to be confronted and resolved in the offline dimension.

In summary, from the data collected, Myspace, analogous to what its slogan says, seems to be perceived as a "place for friends." Indeed, the use by Myspace's platform of the term "friend" to address other users that might be added to one's contact list propels and symbolizes a lot of the "friendly" behaviors that are not limited to the establishment of a netiquette that barely gets violated, but it also turns into both a widespread perception of this environment as a place where people are well-disposed towards each other and there is a general attitude of willingness to publicly display personal information, including comments by other people. The exposure of

personal information, which is part of this process of framing and keeping Myspace as a "friendly" environment, happens to overlap with the exposure of more professional or artistic information, and this mash-up of information is, in turn, part of the reputation processes on this SNS. This second aspect will be investigated in paragraph 5.3.3., while I will focus on the information overlapping in the one that follows.

5.3.2. Overlapping information

I already outlined in Chapter 4 the main differences and aspects of personal profiles and music profiles. What this paragraph focuses on is the overlap of the personal and artistic dimensions, which is especially likely to take place when these two types of profiles are connected. What is peculiar on Myspace, if compared to other SNS and platforms, is that this website got to be very widespread for bands and other music-related users, but if we had to find a label for this SNS, it would still be that of a "generic" one, meaning that its focus is on personal relationships, rather than being overtly dedicated to music. This aspect is not to be overlooked when it comes to how bands interact on Myspace, since these interactions take place not only among music-producers, but they also extend themselves to take place with many personal profiles. Also, band members can have personal profiles as well, and all these elements contribute to create a very peculiar environment where, as data contribute to claim, personal information gets frequently mashed up with artistic information. In light of this, in some cases, as we will see about reputation mechanisms in the following paragraph and especially in part 5.4, the practices of attributing an online reputation get redefined in a way that draws upon more "traditional" offline mechanisms. In other cases, the perception of the band members I have been observing and interviewing is that having both a band and personal profile, and maybe having the latter displayed in the band "top friends" can create, at the same time, privacy issues, and affect the band image.

The one most relevant example is that of J., the lead singer from a quite successful Italian underground band, whom I met during my participant observation at the music center. J's band has had a Myspace profile since 2005 and it counts, at the time being, 7,453 friends, of which 28 are listed in the "top friends" list.

He also has a personal profile, for which he uses his first real name and the band name as a last name[93]. His connection to the band is retrievable through three elements, all of which are publicly accessible (for "friends" and non-"friends") on the band profile: his name and role in the band are

93 This is a quite common practice for the music genre the band is playing, which is punk rock. The tradition came from the Ramones, whose member used to address themselves as "brother" and always called themselves "firstname" Ramone. After that, nearly all pop punk and some punk rock bands adopted this practice for themselves as well, as a sort of tradition.

listed in the “band members section,” his profile is placed at the first place of the “Top friends” list, and pictures with him are published in the “Pics” pages, reachable with a click of the mouse. Most of the time, either a picture's caption says he is depicted in the image, or he has been “tagged,” which means that a the part of the picture where his image is displayed is framed and links to his Myspace page.

For all these reasons, it is not difficult for any person visiting the band page to get the relationship that exists between him and the band. This kind of display of personal band members' profiles into the “Top friends” list is very common: for the bands that have been part of my research, every time one or more of the band members had a personal profile, these were listed into the “Top friends” list, which means they were more directly and visibly linked to the band.

Going back to J.'s example, he had been putting personal information on his profile, on whose “Top Friends” list was displayed (and thus linked) his girlfriend' profile, and this girl was listed on the band's “Top” list, as well. She had been using Myspace in a very personal way, publishing information about being in a relationship with J., publicly exchanging comments with friends about her activities, some of which involved him as well. Some of this information regarded their holidays, and was online under the form of pictures and of comments disclosing when and where they had been for vacation, whether they had fun or not, what they liked and what they did not.

So far, nothing surprising either in regard to the managing of a band profile or of a personal page emerged. What became troublesome, or at least annoying for J., was people asking about his vacations both on his personal and band page as well as offline, when he was playing shows. Indeed, because of these linking processes that are immediately retrievable and instantly accessible to all Myspace users (also since the girlfriend's profile was set, as default, to public), everybody could know where and how he spent his spare time, and hence it was difficult for him to keep his artistic profile separate from his personal one. He eventually chose to set his pictures to private, allowing only the people listed as “friends” on his personal page to see them, and asked his girlfriend to publish less material that could display how he spent his free time. This would not assure the protection of his privacy as an artist, but it reduced the amount of intrusions as much as was possible.

This case is very useful for taking into account a very tricky aspect of Myspace structure and the ways of using it: indeed, besides this site being, as we saw, a platform where both personal and music profiles (now also other artistic ones) cohabit, it is the same “network” structure that allows and enhances browsing from page to page, retrieving data and content that does not come alone, but rather together with a set of information related to the previous pages visited and the ones to which

it directly links. For instance, the single one picture published by J.'s girlfriend was not just a picture on her personal web page or blog: by being displayed on her profile, that single picture was linking to her and her boyfriend (who was also tagged), and so this picture was giving information (under the form of click-able avatar link on her "Top Friends" list) about who the person depicted was. By jumping on his profile, the previous amount of information was added with additional data and content regarding this person and his artistic profile. This huge amount of information, that is either immediately displayed or very easily accessible, is made even richer by the contextual elements that add other information, which is more and more about "relationships" rather than about only the single profile owner.

So, two processes are at stake: on the one side, given the network structure and the setting of Myspace profiles, there is an augmented amount and richness of information about these profile owners; on the other hand, also in light of this, both personal and artistic information inevitably overlap. To these elements we must then add what was underlined in previous paragraphs: the inclination of Myspace users to display public information and be open and friendly to each other.

All this leads to crashing arguments and interpretations, which can hardly find a shared conclusion about how Myspace should be used: it is both reasonable (and pushed by both the users attitude and Myspace features) for J.'s girlfriend to have a public profile displaying pictures of her holidays, and for J. to be willing to keep his artistic profile separated from his personal information. But, at the same time, one of the two would be forced to not to use Myspace in the preferred way in order to allow the other to be able to fulfill his/her objective. In this case, being that the two users involved were boyfriend and girlfriend, it was up to them to find a reasonable mediation (which resulted in limiting the damages for both, rather than in an optimal solution for even one of the two), but in most cases, it is just out of one person's power to manage similar situations. Indeed, when one registers on Myspace, the disclosure of personal information takes place under different forms, and is often published or made available by people that we barely know. Hence, no negotiation is usually possible, and the consequences of this disclosure are unforeseeable and often unmanageable.

The trickiness of this disclosure is not limited to the unavoidable overlap of personal and artistic, or more public, aspects, but also effects the reputation mechanisms, which are very relevant for every Myspace user and fundamental for bands. I will deal with this in the following paragraph.

5.3.3. Myspace-mediated reputation

As discussed in previous parts of this work, reputation is very relevant to Web 2.0 mainly because

of the little amount of filtering that gets done before content and information get published. Rather, the information is sorted by the users, who put out mechanisms of reputation both for browsing and selecting users they want to be connected with, and for being "successful" online. Having a high level of reputation on Social Networking Sites is one of the objectives for the users of these platforms, who mainly use their SNS-mediated interactions for giving a representation of themselves to what they perceive and consider their "networked public" (boyd, 2007). If this, as boyd (2007) points out, has recently started to become relevant for individual users, it is even more important in relation to bands, who are traditionally seeking to address and please an audience, and to get a larger and larger public. But, how do reputation mechanisms work on Myspace? How do bands get to be considered "good" bands with their online behavior?

Similarly to what was outlined by the few previous studies (Beuscart, Couronné, 2009) about reputation on Myspace in regard to music, the data I gathered point out the following elements as main success (and reputation) indicators: number of friends, likeliness of published comments, and number of views and downloads (when the option is made available) of tracks. Indeed, I have been asking my interviewees how they use Myspace on a regular day, and the answers I got did not differ much: in the end, they all pointed out the same core actions and tools.

> *First I log in and see if there are any new fans that are wanting to ben friends with the band, so I go though, accept them... most of the times I just go through and accept anybody who's interested* [...] *So... I clear that out, uhm... sometimes I respond back to e-mails to various people...* [...] *so there's letter writing and then it's on to posting various news, what's coming up... and updating calendar with the shows that are coming up... and then it's on to picking photos... you should like pick them out ahead of time and then... upload the photos... after that... you maybe do a little bit of design.*
>
> [K.D.A., 42, U.S.]

> *Well, I log in... no, actually the very first thing that I do is going to the actual profile page before I log in, and I look the play count...* [...] *That was always the most important thing, and the first thing I go to. Then I log in, and personally I didn't really care about if we got... It would be a nice thing to see like people asking you to be your friend, but usually people I thought would think we are cool anyway. [...] And so... I look at that, and look at the messages, and the messages were usually a little nicer, 'cause they're about things that people are willing to say in front of everyone, those are nice, 'cause they are more personal, and people say like... very nice things, and rarely bad things...* [... then, friendship requests] *it takes us forever to add someone, so I just look at it and just forget it, and sometimes we would have like a hundred friend requests or something, just sitting there, and it would take us like a month to go through them, and... I don't really care about that stuff... and...the other main thing that I would do on Myspace is once we got*

> *shows, we were reeeeally into Myspace. Every time we had a show we would go through eeevery single one of our friends and post our flyer on their wall, or whatever it is... and that was one of the main things that we ended up doing on Myspace, we did that a lot... we don't do that so much anymore...* [M. S., 20, U.S., 21 U.S.]

Even if the second interviewee says that his daily management of Myspace has been changing over the years, and he is particularly indifferent about some tools (e.g. friends requests) which are, instead, usually considered important, these two pieces of interviews point to similar elements, which are part of the daily management of bands profiles: taking care of friendship requests, e-mail (called "messages" on Myspace) writing, checking public messages, uploading pictures, updating the information about shows they are going to be playing and eventually posting flyers on their friends' pages, doing some design and checking the play count. These elements are all, at the same time, widely considered as relevant, but *how* they are relevant is a matter of controversy in regard to reputation. Therefore, I will consider them separately by grouping them as follows: friends and top friends, updates and constant presence, profile customization, and play counts.

5.3.3.1. Friends and top friends

About friendship requests, we saw that there is a widespread attitude to add nearly everybody, unless they are bands or people supporting political views which the band do not share at all, like "nazi bands" [L. B., 25], or profiles of people that are "not actually trying to join us as a band, they were just doing their own marketing" [K. D. A., 42]. Besides that, usually the objective is to get as many "friends" as possible. This is due to two reasons: first, even if the content of the profile is publicly available also to non-friends, it is more immediate to keep in contact with, and send information to "friends," thanks to the news feed tools and to the Bulletin feature that instantly allows a user to send the same message to all of the "friends" profiles. The second reason is that the number of "friends," which is displayed in the band profile, might help gaining a higher level of reputation.

Another very relevant element related to "friends" is how the profile owner decides to have them displayed in the "Top Friends." Indeed, the level of reputation of these "Top friends" positively or negatively affects the reputation of the band, which, in turn, contributes to their friends' reputation. Even though bands put effort in managing the "Top Friends" list, there are different interpretations of what a "Top Friends" list should look like in order to give high reputation to the band. As we saw, most bands put their band members' profiles first, usually together with a the record label profile (if they have one), and bands that play the same genre. But, for example, displaying personal

profiles on the "Top" can be considered not very professional:

> *For example I look at their Top Friends list, and I look what are the first profile listed. If I see bands, and maybe good bands, or bands that they have been playing with, then I get the idea that they are good, but if I see personal profiles listed I get more the idea that they are not very serious about music.* [W. K., 39, runner of an indie label, U.S.]

Also, having many friends is usually considered to directly label the band as "popular," but some people started being skeptical about this, how this interviewee explains:

> *You know, now there are some software tools available online, that help you get an enormous amount of friends by automatically sending out hundreds of friend requests every day. I use that, and it totally works! But I think lots of other bands do that, so, you know, I still have a general feeling that a band with many friends is popular and successful, but you always have to know that they can just have availed themselves of these automated tools, you never know...* [F. L., 31, IT.]

So, even if the number of friends still helps to understand the level of reputation of a band, it started being a matter of discussion.

5.3.3.2. Updates and constant presence

Ask some members of a band with a Myspace page how often he/she logs in to Myspace for checking and managing the profile, and you are highly likely to get the following answer: every day. That is what the vast majority of the interviewees told me, as well as what I could see by checking band profiles. The feeling that you have to take care of your profile, and to constantly update it with new material, and keep up with e-mails and comments, is a very widespread idea, which also has the practical implication of having at least one band member logging in everyday.

An updated profile is one of the main reasons that attract visitors to the page. As L. says:

> *You need to be somehow stable as a band before getting a Myspace profile, because, if you set it up and then just don't take care of it, that would look disappointing* [...]. *If you don't constantly manage and update it...If a band does not take care of its profile* [...] *nobody will visit the page anymore... I have noticed that, at the beginning we were taking way less care of it than we do now, and we had like two or three play counts per day, two or three views everyday, while now we have... I don't know exactly, but way way more...* [L.B., 25, IT.]

So, the need to "take care" of one's page, which is put into practice through checking and managing the profile as above-mentioned, is considered both something that is necessary for a band's reputation as well as a way to increase the number of views, and thus gain more reputation.

Nevertheless, also in this case, the amount of time dedicated to "taking care" of one's band's profile is a matter of argumentation: even if some work must be done in order to keep the band's presence alive online, there is disagreement about how much effort one band should put into managing its Myspace profile. Indeed, while some interviewees claim that you need to update online content and keep up with promotional activities, others argue that bands still need to show their interest in music as primary to other aspects, like social networking interactions:

> [There] *are bands that put together some like shitty songs that have good production value and do everything right: they respond to friends, they add friends all the time, I hate that. I hate bands that add friends uhm... and everytime they have a show they post on everybody's wall... so it happens that everybody's wall's full of advertisements basically...* [M.S., 20, U.S.]

So, "taking care" of one's profile, which is here described as "doing everything right," emerges in this case as being one set of activities that is aligned with Myspace, but that can both become annoying for other users, and, in case the songs are not "good," portray the band as a promotional project, more than an artistic entity. In both cases, the reputation of the band would be lowered as a result instead of being increased by a polished music profile.

In this case, again, the main attitude of bands emerges as being in line with the networking and up-to-date aspects of Myspace, but this feeling is not shared by everybody: we could summarize by saying that frequently updating one's profile is a sort of requirement for being taken seriously on Myspace, but, at the same time, there is disagreement about how these updates and promotional activities should be carried out in order to get (or lose) reputation. The same controversies take place in regard to customizing the profile's graphic aspect.

5.3.3.3. Profile customization: to "pimp" or not to "pimp"?

What characterizes Myspace from other Social Networking Sites is that it allows a higher degree of profile customization (Quartz, 2009: 45). This was initially limited to the opportunity to use HTML language to change the graphic aspect of the page, but, since many users did not know how to use this language, an huge number of free (in the sense of "free beer") Myspace editors started to be available online. This are very easy-to-use services where you pick a layout sample, modify it, and you are automatically given the string of HTML text to insert in the information forms inside Myspace in order to have the profile look like the one you chose. Later on, given the more and more evident interest of Myspace users for personalized profiles, Myspace introduced a feature that lets users customize the profile without exiting the platform:

Fig. 5.10 – "Customize profile" feature, integrated into Myspace. Source myspace.com/theonetwothreefours

Thanks to the mentioned tools, the users are more free to decide whether and how to personalize their pages. Again, whether and to what degree the profile should be customized, and what this implies for the band's reputation are matter of argumentation among the users.

> [I changed] *font color or things that need to be improved for readability... like... for a long time I just used the standard template so I got in there and did some designs... on the sides... so that [it] had a customized look and feel.* [K.D.A., 42, U.S.]

In this case, two elements emerge as motivating the personalization: readability, and the "customized look and feel," which recalls the offline artistic world of music, where music identity has always gone hand in hand with aesthetic elements, such as graphic and dress codes. Those codes are settled and embedded into socio-cultural practices related to music, but, with the introduction of Myspace, they had to be re-defined in light of this, and at the same time, they influenced its framing. For instance, the music genre and level of reputation are said to have a close relationship with a Myspace graphic layout:

> *I think that you can tell what kind of band a Myspace band is pretty quickly, I mean you can tell what kind of genre they are within a couple of seconds, and you can also tell if a band doesn't have a genre pretty quickly or if they are trying to fit in with a genre that they don't belong to... [...] especially with older bands the use Myspace, you can tell very quickly that they are out of touch, that they are not relevant, 'cause you look at their profile page and there's something... [...] to me, you can look at profiles really quickly and, this is judgmental but I think I'm right, you can look at a profile pretty quickly and tell if the band is gonna be good or not, without listening to the music almost... and that's not always true, but usually you can say that the band is going to be bad, just because most of the bands are bad, and I feel that the bands that aren't bad somehow are able to convey... like they have classier Myspace pages* [M.S., 20, U.S.]

This piece of interview puts into light different issues: first, it is not possible to generally argue in

favor of a straightforward relationship between the graphic aspect and the music genre of a band, because, while it is easy for some genres with a more defined set of aesthetic marks to be portrayed on a graphic layout, it is more difficult for other genres. Secondly, a strong relationship between the graphic aspect of one band's profile, and the quality of the band, thus its reputation, clearly emerges ("you can look at a profile pretty quickly and tell if the band is gonna be good or not, without listening to the music almost"), but, at the same time, it is not possible to establish a direct connection of specific elements with specific reputation mechanisms: for instance, in the above quoted piece of interview, the profile of a good band is just said to be "classier," but it is not clear what "classier" means, in strictly graphic terms.

In other words, there is a generally shared concern about profile customization, which recalls both the need to be present online through the attentive care of one's profile, and to the need of bands to inscribe their cultural background into their online (as well as offline) aesthetics. Also, there is a shared feeling that the look of a band's profile gives information about the band's background and musical qualities. But, at the same time, there is no shared opinion amongst bands, about how a profile should look like in order to straightforwardly allow the band to gain a high level of reputation. This has much to deal with the overlapping of offline and online (or better yet, Myspace) dimensions, which leads to a re-interpretation of codes and meanings that belonged to the offline sphere, in light of the online ones. For instance, the readability of a band's profile was an unknown issue in offline life: how should that be inscribed into a band's way of personalizing its page? Should the band give more importance to having a personal page, or should it face this strictly online issue? Should a band give more relevance to Myspace practices, such as personalizing one's page, constantly keeping in mind the web standards such as simplicity and readability of graphic layout, or should they put more effort in publishing good music and care less about the social-networking aspects? The opinions differ among the interviewees. Once the decision is made on a situated basis, even more complexity arises: how should a profile be decoded? what do (un)readability, high level of customization, and other graphic elements mean? In spite of the shared feeling that some sort of connection between the graphic layout and the band's reputation is expressed by all the users' interviewed, no shared meanings emerge as widespread and taken for granted about *how* this relationship is (or should be) translated into practice.

5.3.3.4. Play counts

The complexity of arguments and discourses that, as we have seen, arise about every single aspect of managing Myspace bands' profiles so far, including the graphic aspects, does not affect one single element: the play counts. This comes out, indeed, as the only element about which a shared

and clear meaning is attributed by users: the more play counts a band has, the more successful and popular it is. Hence, the more reputation it gains.

This emerges, on the one side, in relation to the band's own opinion of itself:

> *[...] to me the play count is the most important thing. That's what I always cared about, and I guess, what I thought was funniest was that people that aren0t in bands don't look at the play counts as much I think... But to bands... I mean, to me... that was everything, like... that was the most fulfilling thing about Myspace... probably. Seeing people listening to your music, and knowing exactly how many people are listening to your music... That was always the most important thing.* [M.S., 20, U.S.]

In other terms, what mostly makes the band feel like they themselves are popular and successful is the number of people that visit their page daily and listen to their music. Also, being that there is a visualization of play counts listed for each song, they also get information about which tracks in particular are more listened to.

On the other side, the play count is used to decode the level of reputation of other bands:

> [In order to understand a band's level of success] *I look at how many comments get written every day on their page, and at the number of plays* [...] *I also make a comparison between Italian and American bands, because these* [latter] *usually have more views and plays, but I think this is due to the higher level of population in the United States... so* [...] *...I kind of make a proportion depending on the Country* [L.B., 25, IT.]

So, the number of play counts turns out to be one of the most considered elements in order to grasp the popularity of a band, even when compared to other elements, like the number of friends:

> [I don't look much at a band's number of friends]*, you know, it doesn't mean much, in the end, because there are people that have nothing to do, and can stay on Myspace all day looking for people to add, then, yes, there is often a correspondence between the number or friends an the level of success of a band, but, the main correspondence is with play counts* [L.B., 25, IT.]

In contrast to the debated relationship between other features and how they indicate a band's reputation, play counts is instead considered the one most reliable and straightforward indicator of a band's success. Nevertheless, in the paragraph that follows, where I will summarize and draw some conclusions, I will underline how this element, about which the users provided consistent and shared arguments, is still open to argumentation when it comes to inscribing it and its meanings in offline life.

5.3.3.5. Back to reputation

After all this exposition of the interviewees' discourses about reputation on Myspace, there are some conclusions that we can draw. But before I do that, I will hereby summarize the most problematic

and relevant emerging questions about reputation, that, together with other issues, will be included in more theoretical discussion expressed in Chapter 6 and developed into conclusions in Chapter 7.

The first issue deals with *how* reputation is relevant on Myspace. What emerged in regard to Myspace-mediated reputation, is the widespread opinion that a very strong relationship between reputation and this web site exists. In regard to that, what mostly emerges as driving users' actions on this SNS, is, indeed, the attribution and gain of a high level of reputation. Also, users' discourses point out that managing one's profile, plus the feedback that gets posted, or numerically visualized (such as number of friends, views, and play counts) on this, is focal to reputation mechanisms. But, what emerged from a more accurate analysis of these elements, taken one at a time, is that there is no shared discourse about *how* these are to be interpreted and used in order to attribute reputation. On the contrary, arguments about these features' relationship with reputation are clashing, and, except for the play counts case, the meaning that users attribute to them are situated and depend on many factors, hence they are very different, and no commonly shared opinion about how these actually take part in reputation mechanisms is retrievable.

Going back to the features mentioned in previous paragraphs, but even more clearly in regard to play counts, a second issue arises: how does Myspace-mediated reputation got to integrate with its offline side? Indeed, in contrast with the features that, even if taken only within the online context, become stabilized without the actors having a common interpretation of them, play counts emerge as being considered by all the actors as an indicator of reputation. Nonetheless, the question becomes tricky when we call into question the way in which this indicator gets embedded into previously existing reputation mechanisms that traditionally take place offline. Indeed, a band that has a high number of play counts will not necessarily be granted a high level of reputation, if this is not supported by a high level of offline reputation:

> *There has been a few times when I feel that a band is getting like... too overexposed and I don't really like them that much and I delete them, I did that... Uhm there's a band I saw called V. G., from New York, and they put out a record... I saw them by chance, there wasn't that many people there, and I thought they were ok, but I wasn't crazy about them, and then all of a sudden, uhm I added them on Myspace, 'cause I saw them, and I thought "well, maybe I'll se them again", and maybe I'll like them a little more. But I went to their Myspace page and I saw their views hit like five hundred thousand and, you know, even if it's not five hundred thousand different people, even if it's a few looking at that many times, people are obsessing about this band, and it's a little too water down so I deleted them.* [R. G., 22, U.S.]

This case exemplifies how having a correspondence between online and offline reputation mechanisms is necessary for these dimensions to support each other; otherwise, the general level of

the reputation of a band would be lowered. It is necessary to consider how reputation is embedded and interpreted within Myspace and, more specifically, through its single features. But this processes cannot be understood without taking into account the offline dimension in light of which, even the play counts, the feature most commonly understood as straightforwardly related to reputation, is discussed and opened up for situated interpretations.

This overlap and indivisibility of the online and offline dimensions are particularly evident in regard to what is considered in the part that follows, that takes into account, respectively, the promotional activities and forms of collaboration that take place through Myspace.

5.4. Main activities *through* Myspace: promotion, collaboration

Besides the above considered activities that take place *on* Myspace, other actions are carried out *through* Myspace: what does a band use Myspace for? What actions do they take through Myspace?

In contrast to the previously discussed activities that are mainly limited to the online environment, like gaining online reputation, getting lots of friends, updating the profile and getting more views, I will hereby deal with those actions carried out *through* Myspace, that is, by using it as a tool for doing something that goes beyond the mere scope of online interactions. There are two activities that emerged the most as being carried out through Myspace: promoting the band and organizing shows. The next paragraph will deal with the first, while the latter will be the focus of the next part.

5.4.1. "The same rules apply," plus one: promoting the band through Myspace

What do bands do with Myspace? They promote their band. That's what I was told by the interviewees: that Myspace is the most useful tool to make yourself visible to an incredible amount of people, in an easy and fast way. As we saw, Myspace is widely accessible to everybody who has basic web competency, and this is also true in regard to people with different promotional skills and competences: everybody, whether they are professional promoters or amateur users, is immediately given the same tools to make their voice heard. Thus, this availability is particularly relevant to those underground bands, like the ones that are part of my empirical research, that either have a contract with a small, independent record label, or are unsigned and that are therefore used to self promotion, (sometimes addressed by interviewees with the acronym of "diy": do it yourself). These bands have always had to design flyers and post them around, talk to people about the shows they were about to play, market their new tracks or upcoming demos and albums; now, they are given tools which easily allow them to do that with less effort and time, within a platform that is very

populated by people, more or less famous bands, as well as music producers, and managers of venues and music labels. From this point of view, Myspace, would seem to have become an empowering platform for these users: is this actually so? Only partially.

Indeed, what emerges from my data gathering is that, on the one side, the users emerge as actually feeling and being empowered, because they are allowed to easily promote themselves online and in some cases they actually gained opportunities to make their bands more visible. On the other side, this "empowerment" emerges as being limited to these few chances of advertisement, of which the following cases are two examples:

> *R. Magazine has by chance heard of us on Myspace, I don't know how, maybe they got there though some of our "friends"' profile, and they contacted us. Then, I gave them my cellphone number, and they interviewed us, just like that... without me even having to look for them* [I.M., 36, IT.]
>
> *Well, once, some people that are presenting a radio show... we contacted them on Myspace, and then we started sending messages to each other... [...] they finally invited us to the program* [M. X., 30, U.S.]

Band members like these two usually claim to be very satisfied with the opportunities that Myspace provides them, and they always argue that they would never be able to get such opportunities if it were not for Myspace. Still, out of all the interviews and cases I observed, the two mentioned examples are basically all the bands were able to get: they got to be interviewed at radios, to maybe have a dedicated article in some local newspaper, but not much else. Thus, they are unable to ascend the traditional music business hierarchy[94]. This is due to two main reasons: first, because labels, besides the few widely advertised single cases, like that of Arctic Monkeys (that found a contract thanks to Myspace), mainly adopt traditional talent-scouting processes to find bands to sign

> *No, actually, we never signed a band because we found it on Myspace... and actually, we don't even take the effort on going to Myspace for finding them... we just go with the usual channels: people that we know suggest bands that they think are good, we go to a show, and then we decide whether they are good and fit our "style" for signing them.* [W. K., 39, runner of an indie label, U.S.]

The second reason is that, even with the introduction of Myspace, "the same rules apply," not only in regard to getting a contract, but more generally, to becoming a successful band:

> *You know, people say Myspace has revolutionized the music industry... Myspace has made so that DIY so much more accessible... and that's not true. It may give people an easiest way to a external level, but besides that, the same rules apply. So... people like to think that the whole music industry*

94 For example by getting to sign a contract, in case they are unsigned, or by signing with a major , in case they are under an indie one.

> *has been turned upside down but it hasn't, because these bands that they think they can make it now, can't really make it...* [M. S., 20, U.S.]

In other words, what this interviewee is saying is that Myspace actually empowers the band members to manage their self promotion, and it helps them to reach more people with their music, but this does not make them more successful in itself, because in order "to make it," you need to follow "the same rules": play good music, and have the right image. In regard to this, Myspace ends up adding a level of difficultly to be able "to make it": now, in fact, having the right image means not only to promote oneself offline by following a certain behavior, dressing code, and stage presence, but it also means to be "good" in advertising the band image on Myspace:

> *So... people like to think that the whole music industry has been turned upside down but it hasn't, because these bands that they think they can make it now, can't really make it... because they don't have the right image, and at some point, you can put yourself out there and do everything right, but if you don't have the right image, you're not probably gonna make it... [...] I think that you have to be very careful... with the DIY thing... because... if you kind of think about it ... this is kind of lame, but... it's a little... Myspace is an equal opportunity for every band, right? Because, no matter how good you are, or how bad you are, you can communicate with everyone, I mean in terms of how good you are as a musician, you could be the best bad in the world, and you could have the worst band in the world right here... and they'd have the same accessibility to the same things, they can both message this other band that they wanna talk to, so... I think that because everyone has the same opportunities it can be a problem because... [...] I guess you can have three bands in the Myspace kind of thing: there's good bands that are bad at the Internet, bad bands that are good at the Internet and good bands that are good at the Internet... and the good bands that are good at the Internet are like one in a million I think.* [M.S., 20, U.S.]

We could summarize this, by saying that with Myspace, "the same rules apply," plus one: indeed, we saw how, besides the actual empowerment that the users get from Myspace, which makes their music retrievable and accessible to many more people, and that gave them some radio and journal interview opportunities, this empowerment ends when it comes to actually "making it" With the aim of acquiring a signing contract with labels, Myspace does not emerge as being particularly helpful, and, in regard to becoming a successful band, Myspace turns out to even add one more step in the path to success: the need to be skillful in representing oneself online.

In conclusion, the retrieved data partially support the argument that Myspace's accessibility would empower the users: the empowerment is actual when it comes to having more people listen to one's music, and getting more contacts with more and different people, some of which also belong to the business of the music industry. On the other side, this empowerment is virtual concerning the opportunity for these underground bands to get a contract in order to become a band that "makes it,"

and thus to ascend the hierarchy of the music world. In addition, even if Myspace makes promotional tools equally available to its users, somehow empowering them, it also disadvantages them, since it makes another skill necessary to "make it" in the music industry: the ability to promote one's band online, which was not so relevant before Myspace spread out.

5.4.2. "Let's put up a show": collaboration between bands

As many interviewees underlined, the other most useful aspect of Myspace, given its widespread adoption and accessibility, is its helpfulness in connecting with other bands to put up shows together. As we saw, Myspace enhances the opportunities to get new people and other bands to know about one's own band. Putting on a show increases the opportunities to find and contact bands and venues, making the whole organizing process faster and easier:

> *we [...]booked most of our shows with the Myspace e-mail account. Some clubs want you to e-mail them or call them, but most of them prefer using Myspace. So... it's the easiest way to get in contact and then it's nice because everyone in the band has the same password, so we can all use the mail account, and we can all see the e-mails* [J.M., 21, U.S.]

Again, Myspace's accessibility and widespread adoption turned out to make it the standard platform for organizing shows. Indeed, even if e-mail still emerged as being relevantly used by bands to contact venues, the most widespread tool is Myspace because, as the interviewee argues: "it is the easiest way to get in contact." But, who are these people getting in contact with? In order to do what?

These bands are both contacting the venue directly in the same "traditional" way, unless Myspace's private messages are more and more frequently preferred to e-mails, and, most commonly, they are reaching other bands that they think would be interested in playing a show together.

> *A thing I keep saying to younger bands* [that didn't experience the "before-Myspace" era] *is that they don't realize... in some sense before Myspace is was even more satisfying because you had to "earn it": you actually had to call a venue, send a demo, there was a whole procedure to follow, and it was really hard to play a show out of your town, that meant sending out a demo, than you had to get in touch with the venue, and this was going on for a while... in some sense, it didn't even existed a "collaboration" between bands, because the single band was referring to the venue, and then it was the venue runner who organized the gig by putting together different bands, so the contact was between the band and the venue. Instead now, and this is the main positive aspect of Myspace, bands get in contact with each other, and maybe a band has some contacts with a venue, they put up a show, and then there is the "exchange of date".* [I. M., 36, IT.]

As I. M. claims, bands mostly contact each other, and then one of the two bands (usually the local

one) eventually takes the contact with the venue, then an "exchange of date" usually concludes the process. Thus, the core of the organization is between one band and the other, and only later the venue will be contacted; the gate-keeping role of the venue owners is reduced. Moreover, the collaboration between bands does not usually end up with the show, but goes on with the "exchange of date":

> *It means that, if, for instance, we get contacted by a band in Milan and we organize a show here with them, then we expect them to book a show for us in their town, it works like that...* [A. F., 19, IT.]

So, the organization of a show is mainly in the bands' hands, while the venue gets to have a more marginal role. Thus, besides fostering the usual contact activities between a band and a venue, Myspace is considered, by all the interviewees, as particularly relevant in enhancing, if not creating, what we could call "peer collaboration," which addresses the cooperation of a band with another band.

> *You try to set up shows together with other bands, for example you try to reach foreign bands and bands from other regions to have them play in your area, and then that band does the same with you. So... you try to export live music out of Myspace, and so, not only in your geographical area, but also in other regions of your Country and of the world. This always by finding support in a band that has a "presence" in that area, as you have one in yours. Through Myspace you contact each other, you like each other, you share the same music genre, then... you put up shows together.*
>
> [R. T., 29, IT.]

Through Myspace, self-organization and peer collaboration are then fostered in a way that makes them more self-sufficient in putting up shows without necessarily calling into question event organizers or necessarily having the venue managers filtering who and where bands can or cannot play. This aspect is almost univocally considered a positive element introduced by Myspace, and the enhancement of "peer" collaboration would almost directly lead to considering Myspace a way for band to gain more power on the traditional organization of the music world by letting them overcome, for example, the gate-keeping action of venue managers.

But two critical aspects must be considered, as pointed out by some interviewees: first, this collaboration, mainly based on "exchange of dates," often happens to be instrumental, and sometimes does not even get reciprocated:

> [...] *bands would e-mail us on Myspace saying like "we are coming through Los Angeles, can we play a show with you?". And I was like "fuck that... you're not anyone I know, you and I know that if we went to your town you wouldn't help us, you're just trying to manipulate this like... tool, but you don't care about anyone else, you're, being selfish", that was my idea of that*

> [because...] *I think that people want their band to be the one that makes it, and I just had some experiences where people were like "Can we play a show with you?" and we would hook people up for the shows, and then they wouldn't do the same thing... because it's a lot of effort to put a show together, especially like, if I have a new band coming from Portland to play in Los Angeles with us, they are not gonna get anyone to go... it's us being kind to them... it's us giving them our audience... and bands don't reciprocate all the time... I find that really annoying.* [M.S., 20, U.S.]

What this piece of interview highlights is that the collaboration that Myspace is often said to foster has not much to do with a will to support each other, or to work together for a common objective. On the contrary, these Myspace-mediated activities would only fulfill a band's own interest in getting to play a gig and to have an audience: these actions emerge as being basically utilitarian, and working on a self-serving basis, rather than being rooted into a collectivity that shares common values and objectives.

The second critical aspect, which is strongly related to the latter, concerns how Myspace deals (and is often claimed to deal, in the public opinion) with music-related collectivities: how does Myspace lead to re-interpretation, and is it interpreted in light of the pre-existing music collectivities, such as music scenes? Are the interactions mediated by Myspace leading to community-like aggregations?

Local music scenes (Bennett and Peterson, 2004) that traditionally took place in the offline world, underwent some sort of re-interpretation in light of the introduction of Internet platforms such as Myspace. In particular, this is relevant in regard to those collectivities that rise around music: music scenes. Similarly, but not perfectly equally to the academic definition of a music scene[95] (Straw, 1991), the interviewees shared the idea that this consists of a "community of people, being them musicians of music-listeners, that share the taste for a music genre, that have the same attitude, and that meet at shows and collaboratively support each other under different ways" [A. C., 34, IT.].

In regard to this, Myspace comes out as having questioned the existence and characteristics of music scenes. As an interviewee underlines, there is no direct correspondence between the offline partitioning of people into music scenes, and the categorizations applied by Myspace, which only categorizes a band for the music genre and its geographical setting. What he explains, indeed, is that music scenes are more than belonging to the same music genre and sharing the same geographical area:

> [Bands on Myspace] *can't be clustered in music scenes, because on Myspace there's too many bands to do that... you can't... and the genres are*

95 As we will see in Chapter 6, the concept of music scenes is widely debated, especially within Popular Music Studies, but the first and most adopted definition is that by Straw, who defines them as "that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization" (1991: 373).

> *too big, there's... you know, you can knock them out like hip hop, punk, indie... you can't, I don't care about another indie band, like... I think that people are... aidsurfin because the people that write about Myspace are old, they are just some dudes that have no clue... like... I'm still a real person, I'm not my Myspace page, and the people that I care about making it, isn't whoever sounds like me, its my friends, and people that I think are good. Like... at the end of the day... I think it's silly, because these are like musicians, and it's creative people that like care about the real world, and care about like real interaction, it's all about, you know, like music is all a mission, and I think that to assume that we are some sort of like... machines...* [M. S., 20, U.S.]

So, bands on Myspace could not be clustered in groups that represent music scenes, or into communities of people that share offline interactions and actually "care about each other." And this would be due to the offline part of interactions being left out of Myspace. There is no (clear) online correlative version of these shared offline "missions" on Myspace; because all the "mission-related" activities are too strongly bound to offline interactions, which are set aside within the realm of Myspace.

In line with all this, even stronger arguments were set forward by interviewees, many of which argued that Myspace, which, more than any other music-related Internet tool, gained the attention, efforts and time of people interested in music, would have lead to an impoverishment of music scenes:

> *Music scenes are dead. They don't exist anymore.* [...] *it has a lot to do with Myspace, because now people that like music meet on it, and they leave out all those elements that are more important for the scene...* [I mean]*... like, in the old days, when I was hanging out with friends, I could know whether they belonged to my scene or not... it's the attitude* [and you understand a person's attitude] *by how they behave everyday... It's not much about, and this is important, anyways, that on Myspace you don't really know if a person actually loves the same music you do, and has the same attitude that you have, but... even if you meet at shows besides interacting through Myspace... it is not enough... I know if a person is part of my scene not just because he wears a t-shirt or goes to a show... it is how he lives his daily life, what beer he likes, the places he hangs out in, and so on...*
>
> [A. C., 34, IT.]

Basically, the interviewee highlights a very similar argument to that expressed above: the sharing of attitudes, values, and behaviors that make a music scene out of a collectivity, are not properly retrievable in Myspace-mediated interactions which instead can be motivated by different reasons that don't necessarily move from communal objectives and values.

In conclusion, Myspace emerges as fostering collaboration, but this collaboration is claimed to not draw upon deeply shared values, motivations, and interests. On the contrary, the online music-

related activities that take place through Myspace are highlighted by the interviewees as being motivated by mainly instrumental and egoistic objectives. Moreover, they underline how, in turn, the progressive growth of selfish objectives that is allegedly supported by the use of Myspace would have corroded the traditional community-oriented attitude of music scenes.

5.5. Chapter summary

As we saw (section 5.1.), the users claimed that they decided to get a band profile, mainly because of a more or less explicit social pressure. Then, they were motivated in keeping their profile because having a profile on this SNS platform is a standard for musicians and bands that has not many competitors, and also since they considered Myspace to be very "accessible", or easy to use. Later in the chapter (section 5.2.) we saw that the interviewees showed a general lack of care and interest in the infrastructural and economic context of Myspace, also because of a generalized perception of this website as being harmless and safe. Consistently with this perception, we also saw (section 5.3) that the interviewees put forward a generalized tendency on Myspace to well-behave, be polite and "friendly", which is also enforced by Myspace display tools. This shared trend in being "friendly" also deals with a disclosure of personal information, which is also due to the overlap of artistic and personal profiles of band members. This is something that band members, as well as the people close to them, have to cope with. The disclosure of information is partially related also, as we saw, to the gain of reputation, for which some features, like the "top friends", a constant update of one band's profile and customization of this latter, and the number of play counts have been highlighted by interviewees as strongly related to, in a way that Myspace comes out as not changing much the reputation-related processes in underground music. Finally, we highlighted (section 5.4.) that the actions mainly carried out *through* Myspace, which are promoting the band and organizing shows, on the one side make promotional activities easier and foster collaboration between bands, but, on the other side, they both somehow force the users to gain new promotional skills (related to the online and Myspace world) and reveal the alleged collaboration activities as usually being very egocentric in the end.

In this concluding part, my aim will be that of sorting out of the discussion expressed so far and extracting a set of elements on which to draw the more theoretical discussion that will be carried out in the following chapters. I hope the readers will not be disappointed in reading that I will not extrapolate any concept able to univocally and straightforwardly explain how and why people interact on and through Myspace. On the contrary, I will try to clarify this matter without abandoning the rich complexity of the data revealed. Keeping this in mind, I will hereby set out the

main elements that came out from data gathering, and set the basis for further discussion.

First, bands usually became familiar with the existence of Myspace through word-of-mouth recommendations, coming from both friends and other bands. Then, the motivations that most lead them to register on the site and start a profile usually came from both friends and bands, and venues or other music-related actors, that consider this as a standard, a must have, if you have a band or play music. Indeed, this idea that you "cannot not have it [Myspace]," is extremely widespread, and strongly influences a band's decision to get a profile.

Secondly, once the band gets registered, it is also the ease-of-use and immediacy that motivate them to continue managing it, and put in time and effort. These latter elements, indeed, are fundamental for getting people to check the profile, augmenting the number of profile views and play counts, which help to both promote the band, and heighten their online level of reputation.

People on Myspace end up aligning with the sites' main features and suggested attitudes: they act in friendly ways to everybody (only very few and limited episodes of flaming took place), the publishing of material (also personal one) is supported, and Myspace's netiquette is very respected. But issues arise, when it comes to seeing these features and attitudes "in action": often, due to the networked structure of Myspace, issues can arise because of the overlap of personal and artistic information. At the same time, the above-mentioned perception of friendliness could become problematic for the users: indeed, they are usually very inattentive to aspects like the Terms of Use, the ownership of the content they publish, and the general economic asset beyond Myspace. Despite that, in some cases, problems related to these aspects (such as Billy Bragg's media-covered case, as well what we called "the Snocap issue"), arose and had to be faced by the users, who declared to not be much concerned about such aspects. This carelessness is likely to be mainly due to the objectives of the people I interviewed, which is to get as many people as possible to listen to their content, while they do not aim at making immediate money: thus, they have a feeling that content or data ownership is not a matter of concern for them, because there is no big deal going on. Another reason for this lack of care and concern, is that by many actors Myspace is seen as a "free" service, that deals with a community of friends, therefore, no big fear seems to be felt by the users. Finally, the economic justification is one more reason that the users expressed to explain their lack of care for economic and legal aspects: they, indeed, can acknowledge that Myspace is a corporate entity, and they also have a feeling that this might want to have some sort of "payback" for offering this service, but, even in this case, the fear of selling one's data or content is overcome by the immediate benefits that Myspace offers, making this "exchange" fruitful, in the interviewees' opinions.

But what about the interactions that take place on and through Myspace?

We underlined how on Myspace, similarly to what has been argued about many other Web 2.0 sites (Anderson, 2006), reputation is focal because it helps to sort all that information that is now published without being previously filtered. In line with this, many of the interviewees' activities are aimed at having a high level of online reputation: adding “friends,” displaying them in the “Top Friends” list, keeping the profile updated, customizing its graphic aspect, and getting as many profile views and song plays as possible.

But, while all the actors considered carry out those actions, and for the same objective (reputation), the functioning of reputation mechanisms on Myspace is ambiguous and not clearly identifiable: meanings are situated, and reputation is attributed on a individual level, also drawing from previous personal experience and group values. Also, the attribution of reputation is not limited to online interactions, but also overlap with offline experiences. So, even if there is a shared opinion of Myspace as being a tool for gaining reputation, there is not a shared knowledge on how this reputation gets attributed or gained; instead, the different aspects of this relationship between Myspace's features and attribution of reputation give rise to clashing discourses.

Finally, two more points are to be set out with regard to the actors' use (and interpretation) of Myspace for fulfilling their music-related objectives, such as promoting their band within the music world and business, and organizing shows.

The first aspect is that, despite the general perception of Myspace as being a community-oriented environment populated by “friends,” what the actors mainly pursue are individual objectives, using Myspace more on an instrumental basis, rather than drawing from shared values and objectives: this is especially evident in regard to the idea of music scenes, which emerged as not having a place on Myspace.

Finally, the second aspect regards the alleged “empowerment” that Myspace would bring to its users, allowing them to carry out DIY activities thanks to the availability of accessible tools. While these tools constitute an advantage for the users in promoting their band and in having their music more widespread, they also add new skills to the ones that musicians previously needed to have to become successful: now, in addition to “traditional” competencies, bands also need to be skillful social networkers and online promoters.

All the elements outlined in these conclusions will be extensively taken into account in the Chapters that follow, in order to understand, at a more theoretical level, whether and how Myspace is actually emerging from the data gathering as a participative and democratizing platform.

Chapter 6 - Stabilizing participation(s)

The data analysis that I will express in this Chapter is inspired by three elements. First, I give non-humans the role of actors, which is "a type of agency that is more open than the traditional natural causality" (Latour, 2005: 10). Second, I try to provide an explanation of the social as something that does not remain stable throughout technological change. Finally, I do not limit the analysis to a deconstructionist approach, but try to overcome it and give account for those new "concepts and procedures" that reassemble the social (ibid.: 10-11), directly drawing from the actors' explanations of how they deployed controversies (ibid, 23).

All the analysis presented in the present Chapter is inspired by these elements, and it is aimed at giving an account of how Myspace features and music-related actors give rise, by interacting with one another, to a new assemblage which takes the shape of an actor-network of humans and non-humans. All the above-mentioned account will take into consideration the main matters of concern emerging from the data gathering, and will end in a discussion about how Myspace got black-boxed, with particular concern with how the participation of the users is inscribed within this actor-network. This will introduce the final question of how users' alleged empowerment, participation, and democratization are configured by the interactions of the heterogeneous elements considered (Chapter 7).

6.1. About controversies

As I highlighted in the previous Chapter, there are many issues at stake in the adoption and usage of Myspace for musicians. When it comes, for example, to chose whether and how to get and subsequently update a profile, on which information to publish, on what to do with and through Myspace, different and clashing discourses may rise. These "controversies" take place when "the intervening actors develop contradictory arguments and points of view which lead them to propose different versions of the social and natural worlds" (Callon, 1986: 3). Looking for controversies, then, will help us understand the process that lead to possible closure and stabilization. This is what this chapter is about: understanding the "establishment and the evolution of power relationships because all the fluctuations which occur are preserved" (ibid: 4).

In other words, considering controversies means for the present work, to investigate more accurately issues, matter of discussion and decisions that are taken by the users, as well as the possible uncertain points on the basis of which the clashing power relationships will eventually settle and get stabilized.

> *The use of the term "controversies" is not aimed at defining a research object, but rather at suggesting a perspective of observation. Studying social phenomena as controversies means to focus attention on the complexity and dynamism of collective life* [Venturini, 2008: 7[96]]

This is pivotal to answering my research questions because, on the first hand, the alleged participatory and democratizing nature of Web 2.0 is also depending on the possibility for actors (in my case the myspace users) to question, discuss, and take part into controversies.

Secondly, because my approach draws from the idea of the social as something uncertain that, instead of being set *a priori*, is seen as something emerging from the complex web of interactions between human and non-human actors (Latour, 2005). This will allow us to understand the configuration of power relationships within the actor-network constituted by Myspace, its owners, and its users. Only in light of this setting of power relationships will we be able to answer the question of whether and how Myspace users are performing an active participation, that is said to empower them, within this network.

First of all, I will need to set out the main actors at stake in the case I considered. I will try to understand what their objectives are, and how these develop together with the process of network building. The actors involved are: Myspace owners and managers, Myspace features, music artists using Myspace, and the music world more at large. For now, I will try to stick with my path of "following the actors" (Garfinkel, 1967; Latour, 2005), and thus I will first focus on the music-related actors and their trajectories.

6.1.1. Actors and trajectories

Even if I draw from the epistemological assumption that during the process of mutual construction, neither the human actors considered, nor the technological affordances in question, can be considered separately. The following presentation will consider them separately for a mere analytical reason: in order to focus on their characteristics and trajectories that will be relevant into the translation process considered below.

The people observed and interviewed in my research are members of underground bands using Myspace. The usual process of *enrolment* of these bands into the use of into Myspace is usually initially enacted by some friends or people from the music world (managers of venues, event planers) that highly recommend that they get a profile on Myspace. Usually, the main argument used is that "everybody is on Myspace," configuring this as an *Obligatory Passage Point* (Callon,

96 Original quote: "L'utilizzo del termine 'controversie' non serve dunque a definire un oggetto di ricerca, ma a suggerire una prospettiva d'osservazione. Studiare i fenomeni sociali come controversie significa concentrare l'attenzione sulla complessità e sul dinamismo della vita collettiva" [Venturini, 2008: 7] My translation

1986) for them to widen their audience and to create and keep contacts with possible fans, other bands, and actors involved in the music industry (such as labels and venues). The registration phase is then portrayed as obligatory to have a presence online, which is necessary for being recognized in the world of music as an existing and active band.

> *If you are not on Myspace, you are "nowhere" it's like you don't even exist.*
>
> [M.C., 32, IT.]

In regard to registration, I previously noticed how this has emerged as being linear for all the users in question. By linear, I mean that no controversies rise within the process: indeed, the users find it quite straightforward to follow the registration steps, and when it comes to reading the Terms of Use Agreement and privacy policy, all of them decided to skip them.

Once the registration is completed, it comes to the process that Sundén called "writing oneself into being" (2003)[97], which addresses how the users create their online selves, being not dis-embodied from their offline life, but rather engaging in the hybrid and heterogeneous landscape of cyberspace:

> *Jenny Sundén (2003) argues that, in order to exist online, we must write ourselves into being. From the flow of text in chatrooms to the creation of Profiles, people are regularly projecting themselves into the Internet so that others may view their presence and interact directly with them.* [boyd, 2006a: 17]

At this point there is a enormous amount of human and non-human entities that come into play: Myspace users, with their personal experiences and attitudes, artistic objectives, and previous experience and knowledge of the music world get to deal with technological features that, because of how they have been designed and realized, have particular affordances. Also, many other actors become "virtually" (Levy, 1998) available for engagement: that is all the other users that one might get to interact with on Myspace.

Myspace's technological features have affordances, which means that these features have been designed in a way that allows a set of possible actions and ways in which they could be used (Norman, 1998: 9), which include unpredictable and unforeseen actions. In Latour and Akrich's words (1992), a prescription, or affordance[98], is "what a device allows or forbids from the actors – humans and nonhuman – that it anticipates; it is the morality of a setting both negative (what it prescribes) and positive (what it permits)." (ibid: 261).

Once assumed that technology inscribes a specific *program of action* (Akrich, 1992; Akrich and

97 Drawing upon this concept, boyd (2006) discussed the processes of "writing communiy into being" on Myspace.
98 "Prescription, proscription, affordances, allowances" (Latour and Akrich, 1992: 261)

Latour, 1992), which in our case is that of the business model underlying Myspace, the question that arises is: how do users engage with technological affordances? Which, in other words, means: how do the users appropriate those technological features? And, how do the technological affordances inscribing Myspace's programs shape the users' actions and behaviors?

6.1.2. Where are the missing "users"?

Myspace allows and forbids certain actions to and from the users by inscribing a *program of action* (Akrich, 1992; Akrich and Latour, 1992) in the affordances of its features. By that, I mean that the music-related users, as well as other users get *interessed* (Callon, 1986a) and *enrolled* (ibid.; Latour, 2005). In light of the data which, at least at first glance, show a general alignment of the users with the technological device, I will draw upon Latour's discussion on how non-humans can act and displace goals and exercise a (moral) power. Indeed, he points out how humans can be substituted by means of delegation to nonhumans (ibid.). This emerges with strength in regard to the data collected about Myspace usage. Let us see this more in detail.

6.1.3. The "excluded middle"

As analyzed in the previous chapter, Myspace is seen as a standard in music. Being registered on Myspace is perceived by music-related actors as a necessity to be acknowledged by other bands and a possible audience. Similarly to what Latour (1992) observes in regard to the car alarm sound that forces the driver to fasten his/her seatbelt soon after starting the car, the necessity for bands to be registered on Myspace in order to be acknowledged would help build what he calls "*a law of the excluded middle*" (ibid.: 152), meaning that the artefact in question is making "logically inconceivable and as well as morally unbearable a driver without a seatbelt" (ibid.: 152). In this case, it is the technological artefact that enforces the *program of action* that predicts that a running car cannot avoid having a driver with his/her seatbelt unfastened.

In our case, something similar happens. The *program of action* which is enforced is "if you are not on Myspace, you don't exist (meaning by that "you won't be recognized and acknowledged as a band)." The main difference with the case highlighted by Latour is that, in the case of Myspace, there is not a single technological artefact that enforces the *program of action*, but a strong social pressure by peers who have already been *enrolled* by Myspace (and other users). Also, the existence of the excluded middle, which would consist of bands that do not decide to get a Myspace profile, is made possible, and then, the exclusion of the excluded middle is also made possible: bands can exist without having a Myspace page, but they would be necessarily disadvantaged in regard to their visibility and acknowledgment. Instead, bands feel forced, or at least highly motivated to get a page

because mediators such as peers and representatives of the music business recommend them to get a profile, or even ask them for their URL on Myspace. For this reason, even if not made compulsory by law or technological affordances, the *program of action* "if you don't have a band you don't exist" is enforced, and then the ones that have a band but do not have a Myspace profile are excluded, they are the "excluded middle." Indeed, non-users are seldom retrievable, and, in my research, none of the actors mentioned non-users[99].

6.1.4. "A place for friends": involving the users

Again, Latour's article "Where are the missing masses?" (1992) offers another example which is useful for describing the processes of *translation* (Callon 1986a; Akrich and Latour, 1992; Latour 2005) involving Myspace and its users. Analogously to what Latour asks the reader to do in regard to the "artefact" door and the people using it (1992: 154), I will hereby summarize (table 6.1.), on the one side, the actions that Myspace users would have to take if Myspace did not exist (which is another way to say "what they where doing before Myspace was released"), and, on the other side, how they fulfill their needs through Myspace:

Without Myspace	• advertisement of shows by sending e-mails, text messages, spreading word-of-mouth, and sticking posters in strategic spots. • having their demo/album ready to be sent to labels, as well as available to sell at shows and, again, by word-of-mouth, or through their website (in the rare cases they own one) • organizing shows by contacting venues, having them listen to their music (mainly by mailing them a CD) and trying to get booked for the show • in many cases, the underground bands taken into account were also trying to "support their scene" by helping bands within the same "scene" with promotion and booking of tour dates. Getting in contact with other bands of the same "scene" mainly meant going (even many kilometers away) to help with their show, keeping in contact via e-mail and mobile phone, and finding new similar bands through word-of-mouth • building of a reputation: the reputation was mainly built within the music scene, meaning that the closer the band was to the "scene" values (music sound, band attitute, personal attitudes of band members), the higher the reputation: being considered a "good" band was mainly dependent on situated meanings.
With Myspace	• Advertisement by posting comments on other pages, sending messages and bulletins. Also, the information can be displayed in the band profile, and people can get information about the band by visiting (voluntarily or by accident) the page • Once the band has a even a single track, this can be uploaded into their profile, and the band can either ask friends and other people (both Myspace users and non-users) to go and listen to them, or people can autonomously get to their page and listen to them

99 Just in one case, the interviewee mentioned former users.

	• Managing and updating of the Myspace profile, new elements contribute to assign reputation to the band: profile layout, display of information, page views, play counts, as well as content published both on their own, as well as other people's pages. • Collaboration with other bands, mainly to put on shows.

Table 6.1 - What the music-related actors would do (or were doing) without Myspace, and what they instead do with Myspace

As we can see from the table outlined, Myspace allows music-related users to advertise their band and promote their music and activities more efficiently. For instance, they do not need to walk around towns and put up flyers about their show; they can just raise awareness among their target audiences with a few clicks of the mouse. Besides that, Myspace opens up the band to a de-localized dimension: immediately after the publishing of a track, the whole world (and not just Myspace registered users) is enabled to listen to it. And this happens also in regard to all the information they publish on the profile. They are immediately given a virtual (Levy, 1998) world-wide audience. Also, with the use of Myspace, information retrieval works more and more on a "pull" basis. Indeed, keeping the "push" of information that the bands enacts, being that this is faster and more automated on Myspace, the "pull" of this information (which is the possibility that people get to access it, instead of being sent information from someone else), is propelled: once the information is "out there" on Myspace, hundreds -and in some of the observed cases, thousands- of people access it, and so the chances that someone, to whom the actors would have never thought to send the information, gets to know about the band's existence or activities increase enormously. Before the spread of Myspace, indeed, people could only get to know about the band on either a "push" basis (having the band telling them about what they where doing) or by accidentally seeing a flyer or poster, or by word-of-mouth. Now, that *accidental discovery* (Jennings, 2007) information is brought to a world-wide level, and the number of people involved is in the range of billions of people.

So basically, the three reasons that make Myspace interesting to music-involved actors, are that: Myspace is a standard; it makes the former operations of self-promotion easier; it opens up the band to a de-localized, world-wide dimension, and it enormously increases the number of virtual audiences. Therefore, bands register on the site, manage their pages, and try to promote themselves at their best. This process is what scholars within Actor-Network Theory call *translation* (Callon, 1986a; Latour, 1987, Callon and Latour, 1981), which will be considered in detail in regard to the object of study of this research in the paragraphs that follow.

6.2. Myspace translation

Within Actor-Network Theory the concept of *translation* (Callon, 1986a; Latour, 1987; Callon and Latour, 1981) is focal, since it represents those processes of setting and enforcing associations of humans and non-humans who, through these associations, co-construct each other and give rise to another heterogeneous network of actors, with specific features and power relations.

> *By translation we understand all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred to itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force: "our interests are the same", "do what I want", "you cannot succeed without going through me"*. [Callon and Latour, 1981: 279]

This is exactly what has taken place in regard to Myspace and those (music-related) individuals that became users of this platform. Indeed, at some point, when Myspace was growing and spreading out, the main argument that convinced bands to get a profile was that they could not have succeeded without it. In addition to this, it is important to underline that with the spreading of Myspace, this latter was gaining power, which, in an Actor-Network lexicon, means that it was acquiring more and more actors aligned with its *program of action* (Latour, 1991). A translation was taking place, and through this translation, a new network of hybrid and heterogeneous actors was emerging.

In our case, the type of translation that has been taking place is that of a "displacement" or "delegation" (Latour, 1992: 156) to the non-human Myspace features, a set of actions regarding music and social interactions that where previously carried out mostly offline and through other devices.

Let us consider both the process of translation and its resulting Actor-Network (Latour, 2005) in detail: I will do that in the following paragraphs by highlighting the phases of translation, the actors involved, and the Actor-Network that results from this process. This distinction is set out for purely analytical purposes, and does not call back to any underlying assumption about these phases or actors being something by themselves, and possibly being conceivable as they are without the processes they are involved with.

6.2.1. The phases of Myspace translation

The phases of translation, as highlighted by Callon (1986a) are mainly four: *problematization*, *interessement*, *enrolment*, and *mobilization*. During the phase of *problematization*, some actors determine a set of actors, they define their identities "in such a way to establish themselves as an obligatory passage point in the network of relationships they were building" (ibid.: 6). This "renders

them indispensable in the network" (ibid.). Thus, *problematization* has taken place in regard to Myspace when the owners and designers of the platform set out the profiles, or "identities," of the possible users: they could be individuals, bands, and representatives of the music business, that can all interact in an immediate and centralized way through Myspace in a way that is enforcing of the idea of Myspace as "a place for friends."

To get in contact with other actors, and for being conceived as an existing band, as we saw, bands had to go through the *Obligatory Passage Point* (ibid.) of registering onto Myspace and running one's profile. As Callon highlighted, the *problematization* also sets out a system of associations and defines what entities "want" (1986a: 8). This is retrievable, for example, in the creation of music profiles: the specific features of a Music Profile, that differentiates it from personal profiles, like the play count, as well as the information fields that are required to display, among other information, whether a band has a signed contract and, if so, with what type of label (major or indie), are all part of the phase of *problematization.* Indeed, the fields required, as well as the music-related features of Myspace, underlie a definition of the identity of "bands," as well as what they might "want": they might want to know how many times a track has been listened to, they might want to let labels know that they do not have a signed contract, and so on. More in general, the easy-to-use and free (as free beer[100]) platform they were offering to the users would rely on the idea that the latter wanted something accessible and immediate to use, as opposed to previous Internet-related tools.

In this phase, Myspace outlined the other actors that might be involved, and it set itself as an obligatory passage point for getting easier and world-wide contacts with a heterogenous set of individuals, and indicated the acceptable actions a user must take in order to go through the Myspace's obligatory passage (most of which, as we will see later, are *inscribed* into technological features).

But it is in the following phase, that of *interessement,* that those actors, whose properties and identities had been defined, "are consolidated and/or redefined" (ibid.: 9). During this phase, the links between actors and entities are consolidated, and other relationships are disassociated. For instance, music-related actors and their practices, once they get *inscribed* by Myspace, are associated to the usage of the technological features and linked to other Myspace users (or visitors) while they are physically released from the localized and situated contexts and interactions (with

100 The expression is derived from Richard Stallman's definition of Free Software. The author, in clarifying the double meaning that the word "free" has in English, states that "'Free software' is a matter of liberty, not price. To understand the concept, you should think of 'free' as in 'free speech,' not as in 'free beer.'" (The Free Software Definition, http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-sw.html). On the contrary, in the case I make here, users perceive the platform as free, in the sense of "free beer," meaning that they do not need to pay for it. Nonetheless, as we have seen along this research, they are giving back something to the platform's owners, like personal data and amount of traffic generated by collective usage.

both humans and non-humans) in which they were previously embedded. By registering and creating a profile on Myspace, bands enter into an heterogeneous network whose (still virtual) links are set by mechanisms of "friending" with other Myspace members (as well as, in part, to other visitors of their profile), that attribute them reputation through new processes and criteria. They no longer rely only upon their offline social ties and promotional processes. Also, they are prevented from flaming by both Myspace netiquette and by the Myspace's Terms of Use Agreement, which states that offensive material and profiles would be deleted. In other words, by getting *interessed*, Myspace music-related users enter a hybrid space made up of "friendly" users, and they are immediately virtually connected to the whole world, including previously very hard to reach subjects, like labels, music producers, foreign venues, and so on. All this happens following the *program of action* inscribed in the Myspace business model (on which I will soon discuss more extensively), which benefits from having users populate the website and create traffic. Also, by *interessing* the users to the socio-technical platform provided, potential competing associations are prevented or interrupted, while the heterogeneous actors involved in this process are ready to construct a system of alliances which will start to take shape with the following phase, that of *enrolment.*

Indeed, with the phase of *interessement*, the identities and properties of the actors are consolidated, and a possible network is configured. Still, the alliances amongst the actors, which would lead to the rise of the mentioned actor-network, are not established, yet. The actual establishment of alliances and associations takes place during the third phase, that of *enrolment.*

The phase of *enrolment* only occurs when the *interessement* is successful, meaning that the actors accept the previously identified roles and align with the designed trajectories and associations, hence contributing to the emergence of an actor-network. In the case of Myspace, *enrolment* occurs when the users, whose roles had been identified by the owners of the platform and that had been inscribed into the technological features provided, are accepted and engaged by the *enrolled* users. More specifically, to have the music-related actors be *enrolled*, negotiations among those potential users, Myspace technological features (inscribing the underlying business model), and other users will take place, and the *enrolment* will only be successful if the negotiations end up with an alignment of the parties in question.

As highlighted by Callon (1986a), there are different types of *enrolment* that can take place: "physical violence (against predators), seduction, transaction, consent without discussion" (ibid.: 12). In the case considered in this research, band members were *enrolled* with seduction (Myspace is "the place to be"; it is accessible and can be very fruitful for promoting one's band and activities)

that resulted in a sort of "consent without discussion," given that the decision of the interviewees to register on Myspace was pretty straightforward, and did not even undergo a consideration of either Myspace's Terms of Use Agreement, or getting information about the socio-economic structure of ownership of the platform. So, the vast majority of the bands considered in my study that did not have any particular concern or prejudice about Myspace, who underwent to a "seductive" *enrolment*, and the rest were *enrolled* without any question or discussion.

This phase is crucial, because it is during the *enrolment* that roles and identities can be redefined and become determined. Music-related actors accepted the roles defined by Myspace for them, and, by registering they allowed the treatment of their data as stated in the "Privacy Policy" and to behave in accordance with the "Terms of Use Agreement." Also, they agreed to fulfill the role identified for them, which is that of being a band who wants to get world-wide visibility, and which aims to get a reputation online in accordance with the reputation mechanisms inscribed in Myspace: getting many play counts, having many "friends," and so on.

The final part of the process of translation takes place with the phase of *mobilization*: "to mobilize, as the word indicates, is to render entities mobile which were not so beforehand. […] Through the designation of the of the successive spokesmen and the settlement of a series of equivalencies, all these actors are first displaced and then reassembled at a certain place at a particular time" (Callon, 1986a: 14).

This phase is identifiable in the case of Myspace by considering how bands, the audience (individual users) and the representatives of the music business, from formerly being dispersed and not accessible (or, at least, not as easily accessible) to one another, have been *mobilized*. In other words, after the *enrolment* of some users into the platform, some have played the role of spokespersons to represent the emerging actor-network, and, by representing it, they contemporaneously transformed and displaced it, they made it "mobile": both data about the number of users, media coverage and what we could call "peer promotion" act like spokespersons that represent Myspace and its usage outside of the platform. This takes the shape of numbers, words and discourses that depict Myspace. Usually, these representations, as we saw, portray Myspace as an "accessible tool" and as a standard (both discourses by peers and data about website traffic ratings contribute to this representation), which is particularly helpful for bands to get contacts, and that is part of this participatory and revolutionary era of the Web called 2.0.

By getting through this final phase, an actor-network is assembled, and the actors involved, by the processes of association that lead to this new assemblage, get "translated" or transformed by co-constructing each other. The result of this led, in our case, music-related actors to be willing to be

portrayed as users of Myspace, and to agree to align with the practices of use and representation that are inscribed into Myspace. Indeed, as we saw, they all have a perception of what Myspace is, and how it is to be used, and they all behave accordingly. By getting *enrolled*, these actors agreed to align with the trajectory of Myspace owners, whose business objectives had been inscribed into the technological features provided.

Nonetheless, the processes observed during my research are more complex than this straightforward description of translation can explain. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 5, controversies arose, even if these were never made evident by the actors through their online behavior on Myspace. This is an important point, which is crucial in understanding the dynamics of power within the process of translation, and consequently, within the new actor-network that emerged from it. This can be made more clear with an accurate consideration of inscription and de-scription, which will be subject of the paragraphs that follow.

6.2.2. Myspace as intermediary: script and de-scription

In the investigation of how society and technology[101] co-construct each other there are two questions that, as highlighted by Akrich (1992), emerge: one regarding the constraints exerted on the actants by the technological artefacts, and the other concerning the amount of negotiation power owned by the actants:

> *The first has to do with the extent to which the composition of a technical object constrains actants in the way they relate both to the object and to one another. The second concerns the character of these actants and their links, the extent to which they are able to reshape the object, and the various ways in which the object may be used.* [ibid.: 206]

These same two questions are to be asked in regard to the present research, not only because they are fundamental to better understand the ongoing socio-technical dynamics within Myspace and its users, but also because understanding what level of constraint Myspace and its technological (or better, socio-technical) features end up putting on the users, as well as the users' power to put into question and reshape the technology, is fundamental to answering my research question.

Indeed, since my aim is to understand whether and how the users actively participate in the creation of this actor-network, and whether and how the technology that is assembled is democratizing, I need to first answer the above-mentioned questions. I will start by investigating the first question, which deals with the constraint that the technological platform and its features impose on the relationships of the users among themselves, as well as with the technological object. To do this, the

101 Society and Technology are here considered continuously effecting and reconstructing each other, and not essentially separated, in line with what argued, among others, by Latour (1993).

role of the technological elements, which, in light of what seen so far, can be addressed as that of *intermediary* (Callon, 1991), must be more deeply investigated.

Myspace's technological platform, as well as the involved technological features, is the *intermediary* for the network of hybrid actors it both describes and helps to create. Therefore Myspace helps to shape the social interactions it mediates, and, at the same time, an analysis of the intermediaries helps to understand those social interactions:

> […] *intermediaries more or less explicitly and consensually describe their networks. That is, they describe a collection of human and non-human, individual and collective entities. These are defined by their roles, their identities and their programs – which all depend on the relationships into which they enter. My argument has two consequences. The first has to do with the crucial role played by intermediaries in giving shape, existence, and consistency to social links. I want to say that actors define one another by means of the intermediaries they put into circulation. The second is methodological. It is that the social can be read in the inscriptions that mark the intermediaries.* [Callon, 1991: 140]

In other words, by enrolling into the Myspace platform and connected practices, the users (I researched upon) become associated and aligned with them. Thus, the relationships between users and the technological object itself become mediated by platforms and practices. The *intermediary* into question, Myspace, its features, and associated practices, has then a fundamental role in "giving shape, existence, and consistency to social links." In order to understand what the shape of these social links is, as well as what the roles are of the involved actors in (re-)defining both themselve and the technology involved, I will hereby investigate the trajectories of the actors involved (users and technological features), focusing on *inscription* and *de-scription* (Akrich 1992, Akrich and Latour, 1992).

The starting point of this investigation deals with the standpoint[102], previously outlined, that whoever owns a technological platform will employ designers who envisage a possible use of technology, as well as roles that actors could fulfill in case they get *enrolled.* This phase of design of a technology that embeds and portrays the imagined actions and actors, is called *inscription* (Akrich, 1992, Akrich and Latour, 1992), meaning that a "script," a "framework of action together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act" (1992: 208), is defined by the technical object.

The definition of the *script*, which in our case came from Myspace owners and their employed designers, is thus a vision of the future actor-network which is embedded into technology. This vision includes tastes, motivations, competences of the actors to be *enrolled*, and it predicts ways in

102Traditionally shared within sociologists of technology, as Akrich states (1992: 207)

which technology and economy will evolve (1992: 208). Depending on whether the actors will be *enrolled*, the script will be played out, or it may not. And, in our case, being that the actors are *enrolled* and aligned, the script inscribed into Myspace gets played out, and the role prescribed to the actors get fulfilled.

But, once again, the process of *enrolment* and thus the play out of the script is not so straightforward: indeed, the assumption that the script designed and inscribed into technological artefacts gets straightforwardly played out would clash with my theoretical assumption that both technology and humans have agencies and contribute to mutual shaping. In order to be consistent with that starting point, and thus to avoid the technological determinism that a statement like the one mentioned would carry, I need to consider the role of the human actors involved in the script, going "back and forth continually between [...] the designer's projected user and the real user, between t*he world inscribed in the object* and the *world described by its displacement*" (1992: 209).

As pointed out by Akrich and Latour (1992: 259-260) *inscription* can be identified and investigated with its opposite process, that of *description*, that is usually put forward by the analyst, and that can only take place when an "extraordinary event" takes place and "modifies the direction of the translation from things back to words, and allows the analyst to trace the movement from words to things" (ibid.). An event that allowed "to go from things back to words" was constituted, in the case of my research, by my observation of the dynamics of Myspace and music, and it was made particularly visible with the emerging controversial points outlined in Chapter 5.

In light of what is revealed so far, and of what emerged from my data gathering[103], I hereby identify and further discuss those two above-mentioned moments: "*the world inscribed in the object* and the *world described by its displacement*" (Akrich, 1992: 209).

The world inscribed in the object is, as also mentioned in previous paragraphs, that of a community of friends that engage with a world-wide group of users that can become listed into one's profile as friends. The interactions these people engage in are based on reputation mechanisms, and draw upon an outline of the role of users as people that are willing to manage their profile, hence generating traffic on the website, to promote their band. Another element of *inscription* is that these users are defined as not very technologically savvy, which emerge from the accessible and easy-to-use platform provided by Myspace. Also, the script in question, as evident from the technological features, predicts the willingness of music-related users to align with the online reputation mechanisms carried on Myspace. This means that the script envisages music users as interested in aligning with the idea (and related practices) that the more friends, play counts, page views you

103 Presented in Chapter 5

have, the higher your reputation gets. Also, in order to gain reputation, the actors are expected to accept possible issues of privacy related to the acceptance of the terms of use, as well to the widespread and recommended practice of publishing as much information as possible on both a band's and (if they have one) a personal page. In other words, the *de-scription* of Myspace in regard to music could be summarized with the following sentence: *register on this platform and manage your profile: the more information you will publish, and most importantly, the more constantly updated this information is, the more people you will list as friends and keep in contact with, the more visibility your band will have, and the higher the reputation and acknowledgment of your band*. The respective *inscription* would be given by the features and practices more carefully examined in Chapter 5: visualization of number of friends and top friends, graphic display of comments and play counts, and so on.

But the present analysis, taking into account *inscriptions* and *de-scriptions*, allows me to highlight further aspects: let us consider the role of the considered users during the process of their translation from actors into Myspace users. How did they act in respect to the definition of themselves, which was inscribed into the technological features provided by Myspace? Since we said that these actors have agency and take part in the mutual shaping of technological and human elements, how did they behave? As we already saw, they got *enrolled*, but did the phase of *enrolment* undergo a previous negotiation or was it straightforward?

From the data I gathered, it is finally possible to answer this question: actors are free to decide whether to register on Myspace, and, once registered, they are free to align with the trajectory of the technological features, by choosing whether and to what degree to follow or contest the script. Nonetheless, the actors involved in my research all straightforwardly aligned with the technological features, and they followed the script, even when this ended up clashing with their privacy and with the reputation mechanisms and promotional activities they were used to.

Despite the users' chance to interpret of the script, it is not unlikely that the users will end up in behaving in accordance to the script, as also highlighted by Akrich:

> […] *although users add their own interpretations, so long as the circumstances in which the device is used do not diverge too radically from those predicted by the designer, it is likely that the script will become a major element for interpreting interaction between the object and the user*
> [1992: 216]

In the case I studied, indeed, besides the many controversial interpretations that my interviewees expressed, the use they make of Myspace is not only “not radically divergent” from that predicted by the designers, but rather it is perfectly consistent with it. This is due to two elements: first, to the

type of *enrolment* these actors underwent, which is, as previously discussed, partly based on "seduction" by Myspace, and -consequently- partially due to a consent without (evident) discussion by the users. The second element, which is crucial, but that becomes visible only in light of this analysis of *inscriptions* and *de-scriptions*, is that the analyzed process of translation moved close to "social control," that is, more or less directly punishing the ones who would have decided not to get *enrolled.* Let us consider this more in detail.

There are two main elements that highlight the mechanisms of social control that emerge as being operated by Myspace on the music-related users to be *enrolled.* The first has to deal with the above mentioned "excluded middle," which means that the actors that decided not to get *enrolled* would be both excluded by the alleged benefits achievable through the usage of Myspace, and also they would be excluded immediately from being acknowledged as an existing band which could be taken into consideration by individuals (possible and actual audience), other bands, and representatives of the music business.

The second element which highlights social control is quite different, and has to deal with how to behave on Myspace. The penalty for breaking down the rules of behavior and habits on Myspace is in part operated by the platform managers, in case the published material breaks the regulation revealed in the Terms of Use Agreement, such a publishing pornographic, racist or offensive material, as well as tracks protected by copyright, which lead to the deletion of either the material, or of the whole profile. For the remaining cases of actions and behaviors that are inconsistent with the habits or rules of well-behavior, the punishment is operated by "delegated humans," which are other members, who decrease these deviants' level of reputation.

So, we can conclude that the actors that Myspace owners aimed to get *interessed* and *enrolled* into the platform, whose technological features inscribe the Myspace business model, which is based on creating traffic and a community of regular "profile-goers," finally got *enrolled* and acted out the script set out by the designers in conformity with the owners' intentions, and they did that without any particular negotiation. This lack of negotiation is due to the social control operated by both delegated humans and non-humans (as seen a few lines earlier), which prevented the actors/users' controversial argumentations from turning turn into matters of negotiation during the process of translation.

Thus, by getting the users straightforwardly *enrolled* into Myspace, designers and builders successfully used technology "to obtain access to certain actors, whom they push[ed] into specific roles" (Akrich, 1992: 214) which fulfill their business objectives. A mode of consumption of music products, a mode of usage of the social networking platform in question, and a business model

emerge then as being imposed.

In the following paragraph I will look at the actor-network that, through the acting out of the script, got stabilized, in order to further clarify what kind of heterogeneous assemblage emerged from the process of translation examined in the previous paragraph and discussed in the present one.

All these further discussions and analytical investigation will help highlight how the Myspace business model was first delegated to both humans and non-humans, and then imposed on the users that got *enrolled.*

6.2.3. After translation: the resulting Actor-Network and its irreversibility

As we have seen, the phases of translation have successfully taken place in the case of Myspace and the music-related actors considered, and a new actor-network is stabilized. The stability of this new assemblage of heterogeneous elements relies on the "impossibility it creates of returning to a situation in which its [current form] was only one [of many] possible option among others" (Callon, 1992: 89).

Since the Myspace actor-network is an assemblage of users, technological features, and the business objective of the platform owners whose aim is to make business out of the traffic generated on the platform, the resulting assemblage is analogous to the one that Callon (1991) called Techno-Economic Networks (TEN), and defined as follows: "a coordinated set of heterogeneous actors which interact more or less successfully to develop, produce, distribute and diffuse methods for generating goods and services" (1991: 133).

This is exactly the case of Myspace, where the business model inscribed into the technological features and platform that, as we saw, straightforwardly *enrolled* and imposed itself on the actors (making "users" out of them), is based on offering a service: a service that networks people.

For this reason, the trajectory of Myspace owners was successful, and the actor-network that emerged out of the process of translation is a case of a coordinated set of heterogeneous actors who successfully interact to generate services and keep the business of offering and consuming those services alive.

This clearly emerges if we go back to reputation mechanisms on Myspace. Indeed, we saw how, in order to get a reputation, users are supposed to engage in Myspace-mediated social contacts and relationships, to constantly update their own profile and frequently publish information, and to get as many people as possible to visit their page (to make and keep "friends," to get page views and play counts). All these activities necessarily generate traffic on Myspace, and, at the same time, the

users of Myspace get to act like spokespersons, suggesting other people to become users. All these activities are perfectly consistent with the objective of Myspace owners, who need to have a lively platform where people spend time and visit profiles, in order to get revenue. At the same time, the possible new users, on the one hand, are "seduced" by the alleged benefits that they could get from having a profile, while, on the other hand, they are somehow forced to get one by the widespread perception of Myspace as being a "must-have" for music. Moreover, once they get a profile, reputation mechanisms strongly motivate (or, maybe more accurately, force) them to engage in frequent activities on the platform. This strong pressure on the users make them consent to technology without discussion, with no negotiation around the programs of actions inscribed onto the technological features, and the anti-programs of these users, which are made evident only during interviews, and that, anyways, are not translated into behaviors that put into question or discussion of the usage of Myspace. Why? Why do the users, even when they declare they are not completely satisfied with Myspace and the related changes (for example of traditional reputation mechanisms), choose not to put this technology into question?

The answer is retrievable in light of a more accurate analysis of the Techno-Economic Network that emerged with the "Myspace translation": this actor-network is characterized by *convergence* and *irreversibility* (Callon, 1991). For this reason it is very hard for the *enrolled* users to put into question the status quo and/or go back to a situation when the network had not yet stabilized. Let us see these aspects of convergence and irreversibility more in detail in regard to the case of Myspace.

As we have seen so far, the heterogeneous actors involved in the translation process, them being the Myspace owners, the technological features provided, and the users yet to enroll, ended up in alignment and co-ordination. Indeed, even if the users got *enrolled* without questioning the technology and its owners (for the above mentioned reasons), the result was that, once they got *enrolled*, they aligned with the role they were expected to play, and with the expected use of technology. Thus, the emerging network of actors is that of humans and non-humans which play specific roles and all contribute to act in line with the "script": Myspace owners provide accessible features to people to get them engaged in the platform-mediated social interactions, and the users aligned with the role (designed for them) of band members that act to get a presence and high level of reputation on Myspace. Hence, even if they engage in different types of activities, they all contribute to playing out the general script. So, since a convergent network is characterized by alignment and co-ordination (Callon, 1991: 148), and since in our case the level of alignment and co-ordination is very high, Myspace results in being a strongly *convergent* network.

Moreover, the translation of Myspace turns out to have a high degree of *irreversibility.* The degree

of irreversibility of a translation depends on: “the extent to which it is subsequently impossible to go back to a point where that translation was only one amongst the others, [...and on...] the extent to which it shapes and determines subsequent translations” (ibid.: 150).

In our case, there is no chance to go back to a point in which other translations would also be possible, because now that Myspace is perceived as a standard and so many users got *enrolled* and aligned, there is no going back. Also, all the possible future translations will have to deal with this standard, and it will not be possible for users and technological features to get associated regardless of Myspace: the only choice is whether to get “in” as well, or be excluded. There is no middle position, because despite the small technological adjustments that can be suggested by the users, or, more likely, that could be provided by the platform owners, the network that emerged from Myspace translation is stabilized.

For these reasons, Myspace hybrid network is characterized by a very high degree of both convergence and irreversibility.

This implies that it is very unlikely for the users to put the network into discussion, also because they get acted by the technology, as highlighted by Callon (1991):

> […] *in completely convergent and irreversibilised networks, the actors become agents with precise objectives and instruments for establishing hierarchies* […]. *The states of the world – that is to say, the states of the network – are known for each point at each instant. Information as delivered by the translation inscribed in the intermediaries is perfect (the network is known and predictable) but limited (it does not go beyond the network under consideration). Controversy and dis-interessement (to use the language of translation sociology) is highly unlikely. The paradox is that the actors have no choice, since they are “acted” by the network that holds them in place.* [ibid.: 154]

So, after having noticed and discussed (in previous paragraphs) that the actors got somehow “forced” by technology to enroll, now we also clarified that once the translation of Myspace was completed, the emerging actor-network turned out as convergent and irreversible, leaving the actors *enrolled* with no choice over technology, and the possible new users can only choose between aligning or being excluded.

For these reasons, despite the declarations of many interviewees that discussed and argued against different aspects of Myspace and its usage, they did not explicitly question the technology and its owners: because there is no margin for negotiation or discussion, there is no middle position between aligning or deleting one's profile. And, since the deletion of one's profile is very risky for a band's reputation, they usually (always, in the cases considered in my research) decide to keep

managing the profile in line with the script regardless of their doubts or frustrations.

In light of what was discussed so far, I have been able to highlight the process of translation and the relative controversial issues. At this point, I will set out the issues of debate that arise from this whole analysis in order to highlight topics that need to be taken into account in light of the data and the respective analysis. Then, in the final part of the work (Chapter 7), I will go back to my research question about participation, and I will outline answers that emerge in light of the data analysis.

6.3. Issues of debate

All the outlined analysis and discussion set up the basis for asking further questions and put forward issues of debate rising from the observed phenomenon. First, the stabilization of the hybrid actor-network and its irreversibility give rise to the question of whether and how the controversial actors could have their voice be heard and set up another translation.

Secondly, one question is raised by the data expressed in Chapter 5: Myspace is portrayed as "a place for friends," and it is considered by the interviewed users, as well as in dominant rhetoric in the public opinion, as a "community." But is this definition coherent with literature about online communities and groups (also in regard to music)? If not, why should Myspace be called a "community"?

Finally, I will set forward the problems of structure ownership and setting in relation to privacy and degree of appropriation by the users in the current stabilized, and apparently irreversible, actor-network.

All these aspects are not only to be debated because they strongly emerge from what is discussed so far, but also because they will be relevant for answering my research question about participation.

6.3.1. Myspace as a black box: what next?

As extensively discussed, Myspace actor-network finally got stabilized and it has a high degree of irreversibility. What is going to happen next?

This question is tricky and provocative, since, drawing upon an anti-essentialist theoretical perspective such as that of Actor-Network Theory, no answer is possible. Indeed, it would not be possible to answer this question without assuming presumptions about the nature of things, and therefore I am not going to propose any straightforward and resolving answer. Still, it is possible, by further analyzing the present situation, to describe its characteristics with special regard to resisting change.

Drawing, once again, from the Actor-Network lexicon, I can define Myspace's stabilized actor-network as a closed "black box" (Latour, 1987). With this concept, Latour referred to those science theories that are taken for granted and unquestionably taken as a standpoint for putting forward new theories (ibid.). A black box is thus something that, unless it gets opened and investigated, as I did in the present work, making all the processes that lead to the translation visible, is taken for granted.

A stabilized network, such as that considered in the present work, is thus a set of heterogeneous actors that, after being stabilized, begins to be thought as one. And the socio-technical dynamics that both lead to its translation and are part of its mechanisms are not visible, but rather the whole network is seen only as an opaque box where inputs get in, and outputs come out.

Indeed, in public and academic discourses, we often see the depiction of linear and straightforward processes such as: "do this and that to become famous on Myspace,"[104] or, more in general "Myspace helps bands promote themselves." This "blacked box" vision of Myspace, graphically represented in figure 6.1. is what underlies the discourses about the "revolutionary impact" of technology on society that have been expressed in Chapter 1.

Fig. 6.1. - Myspace as a black box

So, even if the discussion I carried out so far draws upon different standpoints and was aimed at opening the black box to make visible all the processes that led to its assemblage, I hereby want to deal with the product of this black-boxing. The present situation forces the actors that could get *interessed* and *enrolled*, as well as the already aligned users, to face this "matter of fact" (Latour, 2005). Indeed, as we have seen, the above-mentioned actors necessarily have to decide between getting *enrolled* and aligning with the Myspace script, or being excluded and facing the consequences of this exclusion.

But, going back to the question posed at the beginning of the present paragraph, what are we to expect now? Actor-Network Theory allows me to answer in the following way: "Nothing. We have to expect nothing. Until breakdown."

104 This point is very evident in light of the huge amount of online guides like Youtube's videos "YouTube - Myspace Band Promotion - Be A Myspace Rockstar!" or "20 TIPS TO PROMOTE YOUR MYSPACE BAND PAGE," as well as journal articles (for example http://www.free-press-release.com/news/200812/1229222804.html), and books like "How to Promote Your Music Successfully on the Internet". This just to mention few examples.

Breakdown (Star, 1999; Ciborra, 2002) occurs when something is not working in the infrastructure or an extraordinary or unexpected event occurs and the technology/infrastructure gets questioned. Until that moment, given the convergence and irreversibility of the Myspace actor-network, it is very likely that the actor-network that got stabilized will influence future translations, that the black box of Myspace will be kept closed, and, maybe relied upon to divulge the rhetoric of its revolutionary impact on society, and on the world of music in particular.

Possible breakdowns in the case of Myspace could occur in a case where music-related users are not able to fulfill their need anymore, for example if some services, like song uploads or play counts were taken away. Since the platform owners would have no reason for removing those services, such a breakdown could only take place if specific issues, due to third parties, emerge. Still, as we have seen in the cases of Billy Bragg and in regard to the Snocap issue, these issues are limited and highly likely to be resolved without the users abandoning the website. This is also due to the lack of interoperability among platforms like SNS, which makes it very unlikely for users to switch from one service to the other (Geist, 2007).

6.3.2. Can we talk about community, a "place for friends"... or something else?

As seen in previous chapters (especially 4 and 5), Myspace is portrays itself as "a place for friends," and the interviewees usually address it as a "community." Such considerations of the socio-technical platform in question are related to the expected and suggested behaviors and attitudes which are inscribed in the technological features: be friendly, be "social," be polite, interact as much as you can. But, after an accurate analysis of the actor-network that emerged, can we call it a "community"? Or rather should we adopt some other concept to address this heterogeneous network? In order to answer these questions I need to go back to literature on communities and virtual communities.

Collectivities of people interacting in a computer-mediated way are usually addressed as digital communities that have alternatively been called "on line communities" (Baym, 1995, 1997; Jones, 1995, 1997), or "virtual communities" (Rheingold, 1993).

In sociological literature, the term community goes back to 1887, when Tonnies (1887) proposed this concept (gemeinshaft) as opposed to that of society (gesellshaft). In his opinion, the members of a community share norms and values, and the collective interest is more important than the personal ones (ibid.). Other classic sociological authors (I.e. Durkheim, 1893, and Weber, 1922) have considered the topic of community, which today is defined as follows: "A collectivity can be

defined as a community when its members act both towards other members and non-members as well, by giving priority to the norms, values and interests of the collectivity instead of personal or other collectivities' interests[...]" (Gallino, 2006: 266).

The term community has been so long discussed in literature, that its meaning has blurred. The fuzzy boundaries of the definition became even more blurred with the Internet, when scholars started to consider the development of communities on the web. The term was then revisited, and what scholars mainly underlined was that communities could exist online, with the only difference being a shared feeling or interest instead of a geographical space (Jankowski, 2006: 44).

The most important author who discussed a computer-mediated version of community was Rheingold (1993), who suggested the concept of *virtual community:*

> *The Net is an informal term for the loosely interconnected computer networks that use CMC technology to link people around the world into public discussions. Virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.* [ibid.: 5]

Rheingold has been criticized (Fernback and Thompson, 1995) for being too optimistic about the potentialities, mainly in the political sense, of these communities. In fact, the author himself takes a less utopian vision in other parts of his work where he considers some critical aspects (Jankowski, 2006). For example, he underlines that not every collectivity takes the shape of a community[105]. Also, despite addressing these as virtual communities, the author does not mean to consider them as opposed to real ones: on the contrary, he highlights how close and related online and offline ties are.

Besides *virtual*, collectivities on the Internet have been alternatively called *online communities*. As seen in Chapter 2, main authors that contributed to the debate about online communities are Jones (1995, 1997, 1998, 1999), Van Dijk (1999) and Baym (1995, 1997, 1998).

Online communities emerge as: not sharing a physical place; identified by a common interest (cultural, social, etc.); tied to offline relationships; having different structures, objectives, participants, relationship, norms, etc. (Jankowski, 2006: 49)

This definition is quite blurred in respect to the amount of literature about this topic, and still there is discussion about whether the original meaning of the term community could actually be

105"When you think of a title for a book, you are forced to think of something short and evocative, like, well, 'The Virtual Community,' even though a more accurate title might be: 'People who use computers to communicate, form friendships that sometimes form the basis of communities, but you have to be careful to not mistake the tool for the task and think that just writing words on a screen is the same thing as real community.'" - HLR (preface of the electronic version, http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/intro.html)

represented in its online version (Baym, 2006: 23).

Besides that, my concern is about the usefulness of the concept of online or virtual communities in order to address the music collectivities on Social Networking Sites. Can these collectivities reasonably be addressed as communities? Not straightforwardly.

Indeed, I could say that members of a social networking site are part of a community in a very broad sense, since they are necessarily registered to the website, and therefore they share a common platform with its structure and norms. But, if we refer to the community in its sense of strong sharing of feelings and values, it is difficult to take as a starting point the idea that millions of users go online for a common interest and not according to personal courses of action. This is due to the difficulty of not only highlighting the boundaries of all the members of different communities given the overlap of those members, but also because, as we have seen from data analysis, what mainly motivates the actors to enroll onto Myspace is an egoistic objective: to have one's own band acknowledged and promoted.

In some cases, collective action can take place on Myspace, for example when fans come together to ask a band to play a show in their town. But these are episodic and situated cases that cannot be taken as a general and shared trend on Myspace. Instead, from the data analysis, it is more reasonable to adopt the concept, put forward by boyd, of "egocentric networks" (2006a) that take place on Myspace through the practice of "friending." She explains this concept as follows:

> *Instead of slicing interest first and people second, the Friending process allows people to choose people first and interests second. People define their community egocentrically. Their list of Friends defines the context and this, in turn, defines the audience that they believe they are addressing whenever they modify their Profile or post a bulletin. Combined with Profile content, Friends serve as a signal to all visitors about the relevant context.*
> [ibid.: 16]

Thus, these networks are not based, like communities, on sharing interests or values and in fostering more communal objectives than individual ones. Instead, the groups of people that get connected are assembled under egocentric processes, and the objectives that bands (as well as individuals) aim at fulfilling through Myspace interactions are also egoistic.

In conclusion, I am hereby putting forward the idea that, on the one hand, virtual communities online must still be well defined, and, because of the vagueness of related literature, it would be tricky to assert that socio-technical assemblages on Myspace are virtual communities. On the other hand, and more importantly, the retrieved data do not allow us to speak about communities (unless in a very broad and slightly appropriate sense), but rather of "egocentric networks" where the

context of interactions is defined by one's own profile and friends, instead of being rooted in of by the roots of shared objectives and values. Also, behaviors on Myspace are aimed at fulfilling personal objectives, and collective actions are sporadic and based on contingency.

In other words, Myspace does not emerge as a virtual community, but rather as *virtually* (Levy, 1998) a community. Actually, it is more a population that organizes egocentrically and can, in some specific and limited cases, engage in collective action[106].

6.3.3. Panacea, panopticon, or "peephole"?

In a famous article entitled "Panacea or Panopticon? The Hidden Power in Computer-Mediated Communication," Spears and Lea (1994), the most famous scholars for the SIDE (Social Identity De-Identification) approach to computer-mediated communication (CMC), were discussing how CMC would lead to a re-enforcement of hierarchies of power. This would be due, in their opinion, to an alleged tendency of people to fill the gaps (constituted by the little number of social cues) by adopting tools like emoticons, that would make hierarchies visible anyways.

We are not interested here in their approach that has already been considered overturned in the chapter of this thesis dedicated to the literature review. But I think that the metaphoric question about CMC, "panacea or panopticon?" would be good ground on which to build one analytical problem. Indeed, people and scholars often ask whether the Internet, and more specifically SNS like Myspace, would either serve as something that frees the users, or if they rather work as a new tool for control over users. Once again, the question seems limited, especially in light of the data collected.

In fact, in analyzing these SNS-mediated interactions, we have seen (chapter 1, pgf. 1.4) that it is fundamental to consider (as also suggested by Beer, 2008a), the corporate aspect of the technological infrastructure: in particular, Myspace.com was sold to Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorp in 2005. The problem is that neither in the Myspace Terms of Use Agreement, nor anywhere else, is it declared what the platform owners and third parties would do with the data and the generated information[107].

For this reason, as Schäfer (2008) points out, users can be controlled in a way that is hardly visible

106 In regard to the way music fans organize online, on SNS and different platforms, and offline, see Baym, N. K., (2007) "The New Shape of Online Community: The Example of Swedish Independent Music Fandom" *First Monday* 12, (8).

107 As highlighted by Scholz (2008) "MySpace […] was bought by NewsCorp in 2005 for US$580M. In 2008, its projected value is US$15 billion. The problem is not that Web presence is monetized but that more often than not, the social contract between user and platform owner is breached through a lack of transparency such as privacy "agreements" in the small print. (Scholz, 2008: 6).

and acknowledgeable for them:

> *The inscribed regulations and control mechanisms of data streams and the stored content are hardly recognizable to the end users. They constitute an underlying protocol of control (Galloway). The user interactions with services gathering personal information in order to increase an alleged convenience has been already warningly acknowledged as "the proliferation of an increasingly invisible, automated, and autonomous network" (Andrejevic 2002:245).* [Schäfer, 2008: 270]

In this sense, going back to Spears and Lea's question, we could start by answering that, in "Web 2.0" advocates' opinion, these tools look like (or are meant to look like) a "panacea" for the users, that could be more free and active participants in the web.

Actually, from what we have seen so far, that these tools seem to work more as a "panopticon," where the users are being watched in everything they do. Indeed, in Jeremy Bentham's idea of the Panopticon, this would be a prison where one guardian is constantly watching the prisoners that do not know when they are actually watched, but they can feel the power pervading their social space. Actually, aside from the fact that me and Spears and Lea focus on slightly different topics, the main difference between what they where arguing, and what emerges from the data I collected, is that on Myspace.com, not only do the users not know whether they are being watched or not, they do not even know what corporations are looking at and why. Even more importantly, the view that these corporations could have of them would be partial, because they can only see some of their online behaviors. There is a big difference in looking at somebody's behavior in a purely offline situation, where the subject is being watched 24/7, and, instead to only limiting the observation to people's online behavior (on a specific platform). For this reason, another metaphor would seem more appropriate to describe my music-related users of Myspace.com: that of a *peephole*, a point of view which is unknown to the observed, who is unaware of whether and how he/she is being observed, by whom, and for what purposes.

Indeed, the SNS model of surveillance differs from the panopticon, since it aims at preventing/repressing though more hidden tools of control. The feeling of the users is (sometimes) that of being watched, but they do not know for sure. On the contrary, in the panopticon model, the observed people control themselves and are supposed to be well-behaved because they know that they can be watched and in order to avoid being punished, they have to conform with the dominant models of behavior. Some of the critical scholars and researchers introduced in Chapter 1 (pgf.1.4) also indeed focused on the issues of surveillance and privacy on Web 2.0, finding similar results. Among these, Acquisti and Gross (2006) also found that users concerned with privacy issues will

still join the SNS (they consider Facebook and Myspace), and they are highly likely to disclose a good amount of personal information. Also, the authors underlined how "misunderstanding or ignorance of the […] the Company's treatment of personal data are also very common." (2006: 15). So, while the disclosure of personal information on SNS and Web 2.0 is constantly taking place, what emerges is "a robust infrastructure of dataveillance that can quickly be internalized and become the basis for disciplinary and control" (Zimmer, 2008a: 2). While the idea of a panopticon has been applied to the world of the web (Katz and Rice, 2002), and it has also been taken into account to describe some Web 2.0 processes as, namely, having the companies use our data, (Formenti, 2008), what must be considered here is that, by interacting on Web 2.0 platforms like SNS, the awareness of being watched is, as we have seen, limited. This is the reason why I proposed the concept of the peephole, which refers to the unawareness (or partial awareness) of being observed.

This (at least) partial unawareness is retrievable in two elements: on the one side, as we have seen, users do not always know that they are being observed by the companies and for what purposes these companies might be collecting their data, but also, Web 2.0 users are also subject to a peer or "lateral" surveillance (Andrejevic, 2005). This peer surveillance would mainly consist in monitoring by "spouses, friends, and relatives" (ibid.: 481) and has been recognized as a characteristic of online social networking (Albrechtslund, 2008)[108]. This makes it even more difficult to identify who is watching us.

Moreover, besides watching the users without these knowing that, or how, they are being watched, it must be considered that the information retrieved by someone's online behavior cannot be separated from the offline side of it, and it would look quite dangerous and scary to know that this information is collected and used by major companies like NewsCorp for doing (some unclear) business. Quite relevant to this is that, as seen in Chapter 5, all the interviewees declared that they never read Myspace Terms of Use before registering to the site, and many of them do not even know about the corporate side of Myspace.

Together with the different levels of awareness of myspace users, the issue of a possible but not explicitly declared control raises lots of questions about the relationship of Myspace users and the technology considered, with specific reference to the rhetoric of participation and democratization. In particular: should we consider Myspace users as users, produsers (Bruns, 2008), or just as a new

108 Indeed, also Albrechtslund, who argued (2008) that this peer surveillance (renamed by the author "participatory surveillance") would be a horizontal, "mutual, empowering, and subjectivity building" practice of sharing that would lead to challenge the traditional vision of surveillance as hierarchical, has been considering mutual surveillance as corresponding to some of the characteristics of social networking, which is about "the act of sharing yourself […] with others" (ibid.: 7).

form of audience?

> *The aspect of implementation shows that the range of user activity largely surpasses the domain of explicit participation. One could even state that publishing media texts does not turn users into producers as long as they cannot participate in the revenues these produce, and as long as they have no influence or even insight into the technologies used. Rather, this raises the question to what extent users should actually be perceived as audiences instead.* [Schäfer, 2008: 271]

This goes straight back to the claims, widely considered in Chapter 1, about the alleged users' empowerment and participation and the supposed democratization brought by Web 2.0: can we talk about empowerment and democratization when participation is not aware and self-conscious? Can a tool that is partially unknown be considered democratic (or better, democratizing, in a sense of the tool as a vehicle for democratic socio-technical processes)? And, even more importantly, what do we mean, in light of all this, by "participation"? I will offer an answer to this, as well as to the main research question on present work, in chapter that follows.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions: The Industry Of Participation And The Missing Democratization

In light of the data revealed and of the theoretical discussion that I previously set out, I am hereby proposing an answer to the question of whether the considered Myspace users can be said to actively participate within this the socio-technical platform, and whether and how this technology can be finally considered to be more democratic than previous ones.

Consistent with the main assumptions of Actor-Network Theory, and especially with the first principle of this perspective, which is constituted by the "agnosticism of the observer," even in the realm of social sciences (1986), not only did I carry out my research, but I also tried to express it, in a way that made data and processes emerge. For this reason, I did not previously highlight specific definitions of participation and went on to somehow "test" whether the processes emerging from my data gathering could be considered to be "participatory" or not. Instead, I had the processes emerge, and now, in light of the processes highlighted, I will focus on users' empowerment, participation and alleged democratization of Myspace.

The first step will be that of realizing that not a single definition of participation is retrievable, and I will discuss this in the following paragraph. Later on, I will argue that, only if we take a limited definition of "participation" can we conclude that Myspace music-related users have an active and participatory role within the heterogeneous actor-network into question. Still, besides this definition being limited (in a sense that will soon be explained), it is not possible to conclude that Myspace gave rise to a more democratic actor-network, also because of the very little retrievable degree of empowerment of the users through technological tools that was especially visible in the process of translation analyzed. Instead, the participatory role of the actors is limited to an access and use that are compliant with the Myspace business model, and that had been inscribed into the technological features and platform provided.

7.1. Is this participation?

As we have extensively discussed in the opening Chapter of the present work, the alleged participation of users (or ex-users, that now also play other roles) in Web 2.0 is often taken for granted by the supporters of the dominant rhetoric of an empowering, participatory and democratizing web. At this point, in order to understand whether what I found can be classified as "participation," I need to better frame the concept in light of my data.

The first thing that immediately pops up to scholars facing the concept of participation is that, as

also pointed out by Orr (2007)[109], this word has lost its meaning, and became a sort of a "buzzword" itself. Indeed, "participation" has been applied to a huge variety of situations by different people (Orr, 2007: 4), and, as I noted in chapter 1, often without offering a clear definition of what they mean by participation[110]. This confusion and misconception of the concept of participation is also due to the different approaches that scholars have been drawing upon to discuss the web's (and Web 2.0's) alleged role in increasing participation and democracy[111]. In regard to my work, what is important to notice is that, given the ambiguity of the concept, I can try to retrieve a definition of participation and see whether the collected data support the idea of Web 2.0, or SNS, as enhancing participation.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, within the rhetoric of democratization and empowerment of the users that would allegedly be fostered by Web 2.0, this "participation" means more freedom and power of the users to produce information and cultural products, and this whole process would make them active parts of a more democratic environment:

> *It seems passe´ today to speak of "the Internet revolution". In some academic circle, it is positively naive. But it should not be. The change brought about by the networked information environment is deep. It is structural. It goes to the very foundations of how liberal markets and liberal democracies have coevolved for almost two centuries.[... in the new information environment...] individuals are free to take a more active role than was possible in the industrial information economy of the twentieth century. This new freedom holds great practical promise: as a dimension of individual freedom; as a platform for better democratic participation; as a medium to foster a more critical and self-reflective culture; and, in an increasingly information dependent global economy, as a mechanism to achieve improvements in human development everywhere.* [Benkler, 2006: 1-2]

For Benkler (2006), the new Networked Information Economy has led to a distributed architecture

109 The author is focusing on the relevance of the Internet for Political Participation, and, more specifically, on the alternative possibly represented by Web 2.0, for political engagement. So, her work is just partially overlapping with mine, because of the different backgrounds and approaches we are taking. Nonetheless, much of her conclusions are consistent with mine.

110 Very clear is Orr's definition: "Like other concepts associated with democracy, participation is a contested term. It is a term that has value in our political system, but is also vague. Participation can take many forms, from the most passive act of watching the TV news, through to voting, to civic involvement, to standing for political office. As Carole Pateman pointed out in the seventies, the widespread use of the term in the mass media has "tended to mean that any precise, meaningful content has almost disappeared" and that the term has come to be "used to refer to a wide variety of different situations by different people." (Pateman 1970, 1). JR Lucas agrees with this assessment, saying that participation "has come into vogue… but like many vogue words, it is vague". He goes on to say: "Everybody wants it, but is not at all clear what 'it' is." Lucas 1976, 136). The addition of online forms of participation can only further complicate this situation. Given this ambiguity, any attempt to define precisely what participation is, or further, what meaningful participation can consist of, is remarkably difficult." (2007: 4)

111 Similarly to Orr, many other scholars have been discussing the Internet's role in "reconciling participatory, direct democracy with large-scale "advanced" society" (Schicker, 1994: 177). For an overview and critique, see Schicker, 1994.

where connections are not unidirectional (like in old mass media), but multidirectional and where the costs for becoming speakers have been removed. This is also retrievable on Myspace, but just in part: indeed, the connections in this platform are multidirectional, but they can only be reciprocated among those who are Myspace users, and have thus been *enrolled* in the relative script. Moreover, the costs for "speaking" on Myspace (which I hereby intend as publishing content, comments, information) are nonexistent only if we consider costs as monetary. In fact, as previously seen, during the process of Myspace translation, the pressure applied to the users by the technology is very intense, so much so that the users are mostly left to chose whether to align or not. In other words, we can go back to the idea that Myspace is free as "free beer," and not as "free speech" (see pgf. 6.2.1.) and the costs for accessing actually exist, if we highlight that partially abandoning one's freedom is still a cost. Thus, if we intend "participation" as an empowerment of the users in gaining freedom of choice and of speech, Myspace music-related users did not emerge as active participants.

Another way of considering participation (as related to the contemporary era of the Internet), under the concept of "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006, Jenkins et alii, 2005, Bruns, 2008), defined as one:

> *1. With relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement*
>
> *2. With strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others*
>
> *3. With some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices*
>
> *4. Where members believe that their contributions matter*
>
> *5. Where members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).*
>
> *Not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued.* [Jenkins et alii, 2005]

The question whether, in light of this definition, the investigated actors take active part in a participatory culture appears tricky at first glance. Indeed, the data presented are coherent with the above mentioned points, in particular to points 2, 3 and 5: the sharing of content is highly fostered, participants learn from other users how to behave on Myspace, and they look forward to other users' appreciation of what they have created and published. Still, what makes it difficult to argue that Myspace is a platform where participatory culture takes place is that the will to be connected with other users, these latter' appreciation of the published content, as well as the belief that one's published content is relevant, are not "community-driven," but rather follow the earlier mentioned

(chapter 5) egoistic objectives of one's band. In other words, community is not situated at the end of the process of creating and publishing content, but it rather emerges as a step to go through for fulfilling egoistic objectives: content is not published *for* the community, but for one's own objective (which is to get promoted), that can more easily be reached *through* the Myspace "community."

Also, doubts about the possible inclusion of the case considered within the above definition of participatory culture has to deal with the degree of freedom of the users, which, as we saw, are offered quite accessible technologies (this not meaning that Myspace is "free" in the sense of "free speech"), and sharing of content is enhanced and fostered, but, only as long as users' behavior is compliant with Myspace's script.

Indeed, as we have seen, the role of the users to get *enrolled* in the Myspace platform (which inscribes its' owners' business trajectory, that is mainly based on generating traffic onto the platform), is very limited: users can appropriate the provided technologies by embedding them in their routine activities of music self-promotion, but the freedom of the users to re-appropriate these tools is very limited. Indeed, we saw how they are forced to chose whether to align or not with Myspace script, rather than having much agency to decide how to use these technologies.

Indeed, when, like in the case of Myspace, a socio-technical ecosystem gets black boxed, that is, it becomes irreversible, unquestionable, taken-for-granted, especially in regard to music self-promotion, this black box resists being "disassociated, dismantled, renegotiated, reappropriated" (Latour, 1987: 131). The actors can decide to creatively use a tool, like, for example, using Myspace to send e-mails more easily, or put on their profile jokes instead of serious information, but they can never get out of the script *access and manage your profile, and create traffic.* To be more precise, users can decide whether or not to be excluded by Myspace by not registering, or by deleting their profile, but if they instead decide to get *enrolled*, their choices are limited to the above mentioned script.

For these reasons, it is not possible to finally say that Myspace's observed interactions can be labeled as a form of participatory culture. In light of this, the alleged "participation" inscribed in the Web 2.0 "architecture of participation" (O'Reilly, 2005), which scholars have been drawing upon to argue in favor of an empowering and democratic web, should be (re-)defined as "taking part in".

Moreover, there is one more element that supports this "narrow" definition, and it prevents us from including Myspace observed interactions into a wider realm of "participation": it stands that "participatory culture" is usually taken as an alternative to "consumer culture." Indeed, as set out by

Bruns, Web 2.0 and the related technological features would set out a "participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge" (Bruns, 2008: 21). Participation (through UGC and produsage) would indeed allow the former "users" to take an active part in the creation of value from which everyone can benefit (Tapscott and Williams, 2006).

So, to answer the above set question, we should also discuss whether the case considered in present research can be said not to portray consumer culture, but rather one where the users are empowered against the traditional gatekeepers and creators of content, as also claimed by the supporters of the Pro/Am revolution (Leadbeater and Miller, 2004).

From the data I gathered, while an increased immediacy emerges for users to publish their content (namely, music tracks) and this means possible creation of value of all its users (that can listen the tracks and upload them onto their page), traditional gatekeepers turned out to be partially questioned (in regard to booking shows), but consumer culture did not. Indeed, if a band decides to release music online for free, this might have negative consequences in getting to sign a contract in the future, while, if they make the track available for purchase, the platform changes but the principles of consumer culture keep getting reproduced. Similarly, when it comes to promoting one's band, what my data outlined is that underground bands perceive Myspace both as an advantage (in that it allows to quickly inform a huge amount of people, most of which are possibly interested, about the band's activities) and as an additional challenge, since it requires them to add to "mere promotional skills" competences in online networking. Moreover, while everybody claimed that Myspace was very useful for contacting labels and venues, none of the interviewees declared to have his/her band actually advance within the music business, whose hierarchies do not emerge has having been challenged. Finally, a point about reputation should be made. Indeed, instead of reputation mechanisms allowing some users to become more important than others, and maybe then, allowing these to challenge hierarchies, reputation on Myspace ended up being more of a reinforcement of existing reputation mechanisms. With the difference that on Myspace, the gain of reputation can often cost the user in terms of privacy. For all these reasons, the exalted challenge of professional and market hierarchies did not emerge from my research, and it would be inconsistent with my data to claim that my case supports the arguments in favor of Pro/Am revolution and of the re-structuring of liberal markets.

How is participation, then? What does it emerge as meaning?

Within the rhetoric and discourses on Web 2.0 outlined in Chapter 1 it is seen as a new, active role of the users of technologies which would finally empower them. But it emerges as being less than

that. Indeed, as we saw, Myspace users take active roles in interacting and publishing content, and this process is helped by the accessibility of the technology into question. On the other side, this type of participation is mainly limited to access, but it has not much to do with the inclusion of nonexperts into science and technology decision making (outlined in pgf. 2.4.1.1.). Instead, the present case outlines Myspace as an agora in which the embedded power relations (Bonneuil, Joly and Marris, 2008) make it a biased setting (pgf. 2.4.1.2), that restrict active participation, clashing with the widespread discourses (see interpretivist approach, pgf. 2.4.1.2.) about its alleged empowering role.

The degree of participation in decision processes is very limited, since Myspace users can suggest improvements and decide which features to use, making these features more successful and thus making the owners and designers more willing to improve them, but they are not directly called by Myspace owners to decide together how to organize the whole platform. Moreover, we have seen that little degree of re-appropriation is left to the users, and this seriously limits the possibilities for them to give rise to actions of "bottom-up" participation.

Participation is then a concept that needs to be defined. While wishing for a future trend of scholars in outlining emerging definitions of participation, in the case I considered, this concept can be interpreted as a "taking part," which in particular is a "taking part" in a script in a pre-defined script rather than creating new culture. This does not mean that users are merely "exploited" by technology, an assumption which would go back to that determinism I have extensively been criticizing in previous chapters, but rather that, in the process of translation observed, which finally ended with a black-boxing of Myspace, the space left for users' re-appropriation is very restricted, and does not support the rhetoric of empowerment of the users which is so popular in academic and public discourses.

7.2. From the "architecture of exploitation" to "the industry of participation"

While it has been argued that in the new economic landscape set out by Web 2.0 (namely, the "Wikinomics"), users would be benefiting from the new business models that would "drive new innovation, create jobs and wealth, and add tremendous value for customers" (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 234), this argument underlies and proposes an "idealistic and unrealistic vision of capitalism," which is not based on co-operation, but rather a particularistic system based on the dialectic of "ownership and non ownership" (Fuchs, 2008: 5) which is instead still retrievable from the data I collected, as well as consistent with my analysis expressed in the previous chapter.

Indeed, as we have seen, what lies behind the script of Myspace features is a business model based on personalized advertisement (Lovink, 2007) that aims at getting traffic to the platform, by offering a seductive tool to people and band members who, to get an immediate connection to a world-wide virtual audience, engage in computer-mediated communications and interactions. Indeed, as clearly outlined by O'Reilly's (2005) original, and explicitly market-oriented definition, what Web 2.0 proposed to face the burst of the .com bubble (meaning by that the failure of selling products online) was an economic business model based on the offer of services (instead of products), provided with an "architecture of participation" that was aimed to "harness collective intelligence" (ibid.). In other words, participation of the users is hereby considered a fulfillment of the business objectives of the platform owners, who, by providing an accessible environment where the users can interact, make money from their participation and generation of traffic, which fulfills the objective of having the provided services consumed. The participation of the users is indeed useful to the platform owners because it sets out those "Network effects from user contributions [that] are the key to market dominance in the Web 2.0 era" (ibid.: 2). In regard to this, it becomes very difficult to agree with Bruns (2008) on the takeover of consumer culture by a new "participatory culture." Some more discussion needs to be developed. Indeed, it is not possible to say that users do not participate, since they somehow participate, as long as they take part in the processes of creating, publishing, and sharing content, but, at the same time, it is totally impossible to argue that these processes lead to a takeover of consumer culture.

What Bruns (as well as Jenkins, 2006; Benkler, 2006; Tapscott and Williams, 2006 and many others) forget to underline is that what they call "participatory" culture, media, and processes in Web 2.0 could be just another form, as it is in regard to the case I examined, of consumerism. Confusion about this point rises when we do not clearly highlight that what has changed is the type of consumer good provided: instead of being a product which we buy and consume, it is now a service, which can both foster participation and force us to participate in this service-mediated interactions and practices.

This point is instead crucial and needs to be further investigated: so far, we concluded that users "participate" in the sense that they "take part in" the interactions and communication inscribed into the business model[112] that characterizes Myspace's architecture (of participation). This emerged from my data as a process of translation that has the users aligned with Myspace's *programs of action*, and subsequently turned in a stabilized and irreversible actor-network that made it durable and difficult to question.

112 For an overview of Web 2.0 Business models see Lietsala and Sirkunnen, 2008: 86-99

So, the liberal and capitalistic market models emerge as not being overtaken both because of the reproduction of the ownership/non-ownership dialectic, and because of an ongoing process of commodification that partially changed but remained untouched in its core mechanism. That "partial change" relies on what gets commodified now.

In regard to this point, many critical scholars have been putting forward claims about the exploitation of user-generated content by Web 2.0 companies (Scholz, 2008; Zimmer, 2008a; Petersen, 2008), and it has also been discussed in special regard to the world of music (Baym and Burnett, 2009). While the Internet infrastructure could actually foster democratization and participation, Web 2.0 services often result, in some of those scholars' opinions, in representing an "architecture of exploitation that capitalism can benefit from" (Petersen 2008: 6). In other words, the user-generated content that so much has been drawn upon by Web 2.0 advocates for claiming in favor of a participatory and democratizing web has been seen by other scholars as rather a "loser-generated" content (ibid.), that could become a source of exploitation of the users by the corporations. More specifically, this UCG has been proposed to be interpreted as "immaterial free labour" which would be exploited by the companies, driven by the market ideology underlying Web 2.0, of which users would not be aware or do not mind (Scholz, 2008)[113].

Similar claims are that Web 2.0 companies would also be exploiting the users by commodifying the prosumers' leisure time, which would get "saturated with commercial urgency [because] the Internet transvalues all experience into commercial experience." (Siegel, 2008: 60). Today, leisure time and personal qualities would be self-promoted online in order to get popular, and users would be performing privacy for public consumption in order to gain reputation, often disregarding the issues of surveillance and risks for privacy (Solove, 2007) inscribed in Web 2.0 business models (outlined in pgf. 6.3.3., recalled in the previous paragraph).

The processes highlighted by those critical scholars are partially overlapping to what emerged from my data. Indeed, issues of privacy (mainly dealing with the coexistence of personal and artistic profiles on the same platform) and the unawareness of Myspace observed users about being watched, have been retrieved. At the same time, the subjects of my research have been perceiving benefits from using Myspace, like the ability to easily promote one's shows or music tracks, as well the immediateness in getting in touch with some other band for putting up a show. Even if the liberal market structures and consumer culture do not emerge as being overtaken, if would be unfair to say that my interviewees are being exploited by Myspace: while the actor-network that stabilized

113 "Presence does not produce objects but life as such that is put to work and monetary value is created through the affective labor of users who are either not aware of this fact or do not mind it (yet)" (Scholz, 2008: 6)

could look quite similar to an "architecture of exploitation" (Petersen, 2008), I believe that concluding that such an architecture is what I retrieved from my research would not account for the complexity of the observed phenomena. In other words, if I had to locate the results of my research on a line that goes from "participation and democratization" to "exploitation", I limit myself to go for somewhere slightly closer to the latter than to the first.

In regard to this, I share Baym and Burnett's point, explained by in their analysis of fan labour in the context of Swedish underground music (Baym and Burnett, 2009)[114], that the binary of users (or, in their case, fans) are either empowered or exploited "proves too simplistic when looking closely" (ibid.: 22). And, as they themselves point out, we need to look closely and take into account specific cases, which is also, together with the critique to the dichotomy set out by advocates and critics of Web 2.0, one of the standpoints of my work (Chapter 1, pgf. 1.4.).

By "looking closely", what emerged from my specific case of music bands dealing with a proprietary platform that embeds business models[115] was a process of translation where the users mostly aligned with the script, rather than actively influencing the stabilization of the actor-network. On the one side, the users I observed perceive some benefits, but, on the other side, their participation is not completely voluntarily and they are little aware of market and business aspects. Their interactions, free time, and personal information are commodified. But is this exploitation? In part, it is. Especially if we consider the little clarity of myspace business and the limited user's choice we retrieved during translation process involving Myspace, a process that has the users forced to limit their agency to either get *enrolled* or be excluded, that is, to appropriate or refuse the technology and its script. Very little space for re-appropriation is left to the users, with Myspace being irreversibly black-boxed. Basically it is retrievable what Bigge (2006) expressed in regard to users' need to have a profile on SNS like Facebook or Myspace: "either the constant [...] surveillance [...] or the self-negation ("You don't exist") that social network avoidance entails" (2006, 5). To this, I would add "either the alignment with technology, or the negation of your existence in the landscape of music."

In face of this limited choice, all the music-related users decided to go for the registration, also enhanced by Myspace's "puppylike accessibility" (Boutin, 2006). Still, this accessibility has been argued (Bigge, 2006) to obscure the Myspace Terms of Service/User Agreement. While we already saw how accessibility fostered users' adoption of Myspace, my claim is that it would be too

114 While I already made clear in Chapter 1 that the my study is not located within the realm of Fandom Studies, this work from Baym and Burnett (2009) is hereby quoted for the authors' critical approach to the alleged exploitation of labour in underground music.

115 And not, as in their case, that of music fans dealing with different platforms.

simplistic to argue that this hides the underlying "architecture of exploitation." Indeed, while it is Myspace accessibility, together with the social pressure to get a profile, which mainly motivate the users I considered in getting a profile (Chapter 5). Also, we must keep in mind that the dominant rhetorics in popular and academic discourses and the perception of myspace as "friendly" environment contribute to obscure the corporate aspects of this platform. Nonetheless, users themselves would have many instruments for becoming aware of the context, and might need to make themselves aware of the corporate setting of Myspace. In the few cases in which they were aware of this context, the corporate aspects would have not been "hidden" by the website's accessibility, and in case they are unaware (as it mainly happened in my cases), it would be too deterministic to affirm that their unawareness is due to that accessibility, as well as to the dominant rhetorics and perception of myspace as a harmless environment.

The solution I suggest, which could account for the emerging data while avoiding that determinism is that we dismiss the label of "architecture of exploitation", and adopt, instead one that would recall the market aspects without setting a dichotomy of exploited vs. exploiters: that of "industry of participation".

Indeed, I am convinced that a label such "the industry of participation" would better address and raise awareness on the design of participation by corporations that, as we saw, might (and often do) aim at capitalizing on users and their information and content. Indeed, this label would address that process of capitalization (making money out of the users) but without referring in any way to *a priori* victims or executioners, and rather limiting to highlight how owners and non-owners are embedded in economic-driven processes, analogously to what happens in traditional capitalism.

While the architecture of some platforms like Myspace *could* turn into exploiting the users and their content, there are many elements that should be considered to understand whether this is exploitation or not: were the users put into the proper condition to be aware of the corporations' setting and objectives? Was that a deliberate choice to register and communicate on the SNS anyways? What is the user's responsibility in all this?

Nonetheless, in this "industry of participation," the accessibility and ease-of-use are part of the design of an architecture that aims at getting the users involved, and, while being celebrated as interactive, emerges as being disciplinary and (emerges) as offering merely a "contingent freedom" to the users (Jarrett, 2008).

I could summarize my suggestions in the invitation to reconsider participation as "taking part in" the "industry of participation", and to do this while refusing the *a priori* dichotomy

exploitation/empowerment, and taking these suggestions as inputs for approaching "grounded" (Baym, 2009) and specific analyses (Beer, 2008a) of Web 2.0.

It is not that more active participation does not exist on Myspace or Web 2.0: it *can* exist, in the sense that platforms like Myspace provide an environment where collective actions and community-oriented behavior can (but do not necessarily) take place among users that interact and communicate under a spontaneous, free and aware basis. Still, in the case I considered, participation can be inscribed into the technological platform provided by the owners, who already designed this participation to have their business model work[116]. If users had been more aware of and motivated in challenging the architecture, maybe the actor-network could have assembled differently, but this, we are not able to ascertain.

Here, going back to my question on participation, I am not arguing that Web 2.0 business models force and design users' participation in a way that is necessarily limiting the users: the platforms provided, the trajectories inscribed in this can vary and allow different degrees of re-appropriation of technology by the users, social pressure and individual awareness can effect the whole process in different ways. Still, from the data gathered, it is not possible to argue, in regard to Myspace and music-involved actors, that "participatory media enable broad participation in the production of culture, power, community, and wealth" (Jenkins, 2008). I would rather correct the previous quote by proposing that "participatory media could provide platforms, which, in the undergoing of a co-costruction of technological features and users trajectories, *might* enable broad participation in the production of culture, power, community, and wealth." But in the case considered, participation is then, again, to be seen as "taking part in" the Web 2.0 infrastructure and technological affordances, which in cases like this can be considered as part of "the industry of participation." Now, this "taking part in" should be framed in light of an alleged process of democratization.

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116 A further step in line with what was just argued, is taken by Schäfer (2008) about participatory culture and Web 2.0 business models. He puts forward a concept that fits my research case: that of "extended culture industry." In regard to that, Schäfer argues that, besides the above argument that Web 2.0 business models inscribe users' participations into the technological features provided, in order to get their service consumed (through interactions and participation), also the culture industry has changed since its original definition by the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947). This change has not much to deal with overcoming the hegemonic practices enacted by the creation of "false needs" and commodification of culture. But rather, what mainly changed in culture (and media) industry, was that powerful company networks working in the field of culture, have included into their economic models and hegemonic processes the users' actions and, more in general their participation. This change is described by Schäfer as "[…] the ability of culture industry enterprises to employ users activities in a way that clearly questions the acclaimed status of users as producers, and it does not treat technology as a mere enabling factor, but considers its affordances and design. Using a term such extended culture industry […] refuses the hasty enthusiasm about user participation, and thus questions the power structures unfolding in an interdependence of business and politics (ibid.: 217)."

While an accurate debate of the culture industry and Web 2.0 is beyond the scope of the present work, Schäfer's analysis is interesting in pointing out how also culture and media industries would have included users' participation into their business models, which are inscribed onto the technological features provided.

7.3. The missing democratization

One final point must be set out in regard to the alleged democratization of Web 2.0 tools such as the one that is the object of this research. To discuss this point, I will hereby argue that, in light of what is said so far about participation being mainly limited to the users "taking part in the script," emerging as egoistically-oriented rather than community-driven, little aware of the context of action (I am referring to the economic aspect of Myspace ownership), the alleged democratizing power of Web 2.0 technologies must be thoroughly questioned.

In my case, the alleged participation of the users into these processes emerged as a new, extended, business environment where the same previous economic rules and hierarchies got re-presented.

These remarks about the research presented, do not aim at merely setting out an *a-posteriori* argument in favor of an inherent political power of technology (Winner, 1980), or that these are intrinsically carrying "social structures" (Sclove, 1995) that are imposed on the users. Instead, I am still drawing upon a co-constructive theoretical standpoint, acknowledging that, also in the case studied, the shaping between technology and society is mutual, or better yet, they are both heterogeneous networks of hybrid actors that get defined in their mutual relationship. Still, these relationships and processes emerged, by the data I gathered, as being very asymmetric: the users are *enrolled* into a Techno-Economic Network (Callon, 1991) where the market rules of an "industry of participation," which included the users participation into the new business models, emerged to strongly influence the users' actions and choices. This does not mean that in answering the question of participation of the users in Myspace, and of the alleged democratization brought by Web 2.0, I am setting forward a yes/no dichotomy and positioning myself on the "no."

Rather, I am hereby arguing that, considering Myspace in light of the assumption that technology can be taken as an "arena for debating socio-political issues" (Feenberg, 1999: 17; Latour, 2005: 26), and especially drawing upon a co-production framework of science, technology, politics and society (Jasanoff, 2004), the observed case emerges as an alignment of the actors that get *enrolled* as Myspace users, with the trajectory of this artefact that has been "deliberately designed to both replace human action and constrain and shape the actions of other humans" (Latour, 1991: 151).

This, together with political aspects of technological artefacts (Winner, 1986; Rogers, 2004), has to do with users' participation being inscribed into the technological artefacts that have been designed to fulfill the new business models of Web 2.0 industry of participation, which pivots on enrolling users to have them consume the service provided. And when it comes to whether this can be considered democratization, it becomes impossible to answer positively, at least in the case

observed. This is mainly due to two reasons: first, because "code is law" (Lessig, 1999 and 2006)[117], second because no actual challenge of hierarchies was retrievable.

The first element summarizes and explains not only the profound effects on interaction that design choices have in social networking (Solove, 2007)[118], but more specifically the political and economic affordances inscribed in the design of the architecture of what I proposed to call the industry of participation. In regard to this, my claim is that, since participation is designed and the freedom left to the user is "contingent" (Jarrett, 2008), in my case no room for that "deliberative democracy" which has been argued to be fostered by Web 2.0 tools like blogs (Maynor, 2007: 3), has been retrieved. Users' collective intelligence (Levy, 1994) is being harnessed (O'Reilly, 2005) but the ability for that intelligence to influence the platform is limited in a way that fits the owners' needs. While Myspace users can express their opinions, these are not given a place from the owners to take part in decision making on an equal level[119]. These limitations are designed in what we could call, adopting Lessig's vocabulary, the "code," which can be changed by commerce (Myspace's business) and government (law enforcing the Myspace Terms of Use Agreement and Privacy policies), which gets imposed on the users once they register. This makes of Myspace something very close to Zittrain's (2008) concept of "tethered appliances,"[120] which are easily changeable only by vendors or selected partners.

This results in the inability, designed within the system architecture, of users to actually challenge the ownership and power hierarchies:

> *[...]as Lessig has put it, code is law, and commerce and government can work together to change the code. There is a hierarchy of dogs, cats, and mice:[...]Tethered appliances change the equation's results by making life far easier for the dogs and cats.* [Zittrain, 2008: 197]

The data gathered about the lack of challenge to hierarchies is consistent with these limitations that

117 The author is drawing upon Joel Reidenberg's initial conception, in Joel R. Reidenberg (1998), *Lex Informatica: The Formulation of Information Policy Rules Through Technology,* 76, 553.

118 "The technological design of the websites has an enormous impact on people's privacy. Lawrence Lessig and Joel Reidenberg emphasize the importance of Internet "architecture"—the code used to structure our choices on the Web. Architecture can shape people's behavior. Physical architecture, such as buildings, can affect the way we live and interact with our peers. Spaces can be designed to encourage people to be more open, to communicate with each other more frequently. Or spaces can be designed to encourage solitude. Like physical spaces, virtual spaces on the Internet are also designed environments. Social network websites are a structured form ofinteraction, created according to rules set up by those who create the site. The design choices social network websites make will have profound effects on the way their users interact with each other." (Solove, 2007: 200).

119 This is made evident in the ad, posted on Myspace founders profile, saying: "feel free to tell me what features you want to see on MySpace and *if I think it's cool*, we'll do it!" (from http://www.myspace.com/tom, retrieved on November 30, 2009, my italics).

120 An example of tethered appliance in regard to Myspace has been proposed by Zittrain himself: "Sites may also limit functionality that the user expects or assumes will be available. In 2007, for example, MySpace asked one of its most popular users to remove from her page a piece of music promotion software that was developed by an outside company. She was using it instead of MySpace's own code." (2008: 124).

prevent users from engaging in democratic processes of decision-making.. Two points must be underlined in regard to this: on the one side, there is often a misconception of what hierarchy should or could be challenged by using Web 2.0 tools, while on the other side, similar to what happened with the meaning of "participation," we have been seeing a transvaluation of the concept of "access."

Indeed, what has been discussed in Chapter 1 about the alleged "Pro/Am" revolution and the related challenge to hierarchies has been often straightforwardly applied to address "organizational" (Shirky, 2008), cultural (Keen, 2007; Bruns, 2008), and professional business (Tapscott and Williams, 2006) power structures. This has lead to easy claims of a poorly defined "democratic web" (Tapscott and Williams, 2006). But there are differences among these hierarchies, and consequently different possible levels of democratization of users' communications and interactions through Web 2.0 tools. Indeed, at a cultural level, Myspace users could have challenged the music business hierarchies[121]. On the other side, what makes the platform not democratic or democratizing, is that another hierarchy, that of platform ownership (to which data and economic revenues are strongly tied, as seen before), which relies on a "tethered" (Zittrain, 2008) architecture that prevents its challenge. So, while Myspace could represent a site of democratization of the music world and its business, it is not open to a challenge of its hierarchies that underlie structures of domination. The lack of this element, which is a core requirement for a democratizing technology (Shickler, 1994: 198) makes me argue in favor of a "missing democratization."

This "missing democratization", which is embedded into the design[122], leads me to discuss how the same term "access" has too easily been adopted for addressing an alleged process of democratization.

What does "access" mean? In our case Myspace's accessibility is configured as an ease-of-use of the platform even for non-technologically savvy users. So, in this case, "accessing" this technology means "using" it, in the way it has been designed for. Thus, access in this case can also mean becoming users of the platform that allow the production, publishing and commenting and filtering of content and other users. Nonetheless, the concept of "access" in a more democratic sense would be that of knowing, as mentioned above, the context of ownership, scrutinizing and questioning the power relationships, and entering the processes of decision-making.

121 Even if this has not been retrieved in my data, and has been argued to not be likely to happen within the "extended culture industry" (Schäfer, 2008).

122"Corporations, governments, and individuals largely shape the politics surrounding a given technology through decisions about its design, distribution, and implementation. These decisions, in turn, determine whether the technology will preserve or challenge present power relations." (Shickler, 1994: 177)

Instead, what emerged from my data is that access and the maintenance of ownership and power relationships go together. In my case, access means using a service whose owners preclude both access to decision making and to the "code," that would mean accessing the level of questioning the technological affordances and the underlying hierarchies. These types of access are what Myspace users are excluded from. In other words, we should highlight that access to a service is not necessarily either access to the code or to the scrutinization of hierarchies. And when both these latter are are denied, it is very difficult to argue that democratization will take place.

In regard to this, it is necessary, indeed, to point out that even if the users could have been said to have an active participatory role in the decision processes related to Myspace, this would not have meant that they had a representation and an actual increased power in decision making, since "making nonexpert actors participate does not equip them automatically with the means necessary for bringing their concerns" (Lengwiler, 2008: 196). This point is well-expressed by Callon and Rabeharisoa (2008), who, concluding their study on the engagement of emergent concerned groups in medical research, claim that "despite the increasing role of concerned groups, a romantic view of direct democracy and the historical revenge of laypersons on experts would be a serious misinterpretation" (ibid.: 257): indeed, involving users or nonexperts in processes such as online interactions or scientific researches does not necessarily lead to a reconfiguration of the underlying power structures (Schäfer, 2008: 17). Instead, it is only the starting point for a struggle aimed at having the users get the same (or, at least more) rights then the representatives of economic and political power. In in regard to my case not even this "starting point" was retrievable.

One final note should be made to recall a process that we saw in regard to different elements considered: the re-semantization of concepts such as "community," "participation," and "access" (which would lead to "democratization"). Labels such as the above-mentioned have been applied to processes that did not exactly match the original meaning associated with the word, as Siegel points out in regard to "access" and "community," adding that a mere "rhetoric of community" served as an "ideological cover" for hiding market aspects (Siegel, 2008: 41-42). Both he (ibid.: 132) and Orr (2007) claim that concepts such as "participation" and "democracy" have lost their meaning and became "twisted" for addressing very different, market-lead, processes (Siegel, 2008), or for misleadingly re-naming communication: "while the debate[123] had led to discussions of participatory democracy, much of it fails to take into account the nature of participation, and what is advocated is often merely more communication" (Orr, 2007: 1)[124].

123 Orr refers to the debate about participation -in polical science- more specifically dealing with Web 2.0's role in fostering political engagement.

124 A similar and more critical argument dealing with re-sematization is put forward by Silver (2008): "Don't believe corporate hype. Corporations exist to make profits, not public goods. Usually, when they say "community" they

Similarly to what was argued earlier about access, I am not going as far as Siegel in claiming that this re-semantization has been hiding other processes, also because, again, this would victimize the user without acknowledging any users' responsibility for becoming aware of the context. Nonetheless, this semantic impoverishment and re-semantization argued by Siegel (2008) and Orr (2007) was retrievable for all the above-mentioned terms. In line with this, in place of the concepts proposed to address Web 2.0, such "producer democracy" (Rosen, 2006: 109) or "collaboration economy" (Tapscott and Williams, 2006: 32), I would rather propose, again, that of the "industry of participation" does not carry any underlying assumptions of processes of democratizaion (which I did not retrieve) and, also, underlines how participation is designed and embedded into market.

Focusing on the meaning of the words we use is focal: as calling something a community does not make a community out of something else; calling Web 2.0 democratizing, empowering and participatory does not remove the underlying market and professional hierarchies and power relations. Still, as we have seen at the beginning of the present work, it can help hide them, and lead scholars and journalists to build dominant "rhetorics" that fail to properly account for them.

7.4. Chapter summary

Thanks to the discussion presented so far in this Chapter, I can summarize my main findings as follows. First, participation must be better defined; if intended as mere "taking part," we can say that Myspace users are actively participating within this platform, but, if we consider participation as taking part in decision processes, the observed users only emerge as being involved in "suggesting" features to improve and decide whether or not to get a feature popular, but they held no actual power on decision making.

Then, since participation in my case can be framed as a mere "taking part in" the industry of participation, where access is limited to the use of a service but does not allow a user to challenge and scrutinize hierarchies, this can not be considered "effective participation" (Dahl, 1989: 129). It is important to notice that "effective participation," which was not retrievable, would be only one of the minimum requirements for democratic processes (Dahl, 1989). And even if Myspace users had emerged as taking part in the decision processes, this would not straightforwardly mean that an ongoing process of democratization is taking place, since participation would be just the first step of a struggle to gaining rights with the representatives of the economic and political power (Callon and Rabeharisoa, 2008).

Instead, since there is no active participation when this is not "voluntarily" (Sartori, 2008) and when

mean "commerce," and when they say "aggregation" they mean "advertising (ibid.:2).

the “participants” are not aware of the political and economic context in which they are acting (rather, “enlightened understanding” would be necessary to have a democratic process [Dahl,1989: 129]), democratization is hard to get when the black-boxing of a technology, like in the case considered, is strongly setting an asymmetric relation between technology and society, thus strongly influencing the co-production of the two (Jasanoff, 2004).

For all these reasons, Myspace and the observed music-related actors are not configured as a more “symmetric,” democratic and participative actor-network, but rather as a Techno-Economic Network (Callon, 1991) where the “industry of participation” and its business model still emerge as constraining and shaping the users' actions, by also designing their participation.

All these findings must be interpreted not as general rules applying to Web 2.0 in general, and able to be drawn upon for arguing in favor of deterministic claims about the role of technology in society. Rather, they must be seen as emerging from this situated and empirically grounded study which I proposed as an example of a “theoretically remediated” work that, supported by the discussions of literature reviews on both Web 2.0 and CMC studies, has been employing an Actor-Network Perspective and a methodology based on cyberethnography for questioning users' empowerment, participation, and democratization on Myspace in relationship to underground music-related actors. Thanks to the theoretical perspective and methodology adopted, I have been answering my research questions by closely looking at the relationship of mutual construction of technology and users, which, in particular, means to consider human and non-human actors symmetrically (Callon, 1986a, Latour, 2005), and the online and offline dimensions as merging into a cyberepistemology. I finally conclude that in the relationship between Myspace and its underground music-related users, these latter can be considered actively participating by mainly following a script set out by Myspace owners and, thus, they do not end up being significantly empowered. This is also due to a lack of involvement of these users in a process of democratization linked to the ability to challenge business and market hierarchies.

7.5. Further thoughts and scenarios for future research

Since I attempted in the present work to help fill the gaps retrieved in literature (Chapters 1 and 2) with a situated and empirically-grounded study, I limited my above mentioned conclusions to answering my research questions in light of the data analysis, trying not to fall in the same error of quick juxtaposition and generalization of not better defined and empirically grounded concepts and reasoning that I criticized many scholars for. Still, my results open up the research to further considerations, which I called “further thoughts,” since they are slightly less rooted in my data

analysis, as well as possible scenarios for future research related to them.

My further thoughts directly draw upon a more general conclusion that could be made in light of my work: as we have seen for both the concepts of participation and access (which are strongly related to that of "democratization"), we saw a transvaluation of meanings: the same words have been applied to address completely different processes. My thought is that this undefined, and hence often improper, usage of such words could have lead (and still may lead) to argue in favor of deceitful rhetorics of participation and democratization, or to misleading claims about Web 2.0 democratization (driven by access). While I already expressed my wish that scholars better define these terms when applied (Chapter 1), now I think that further studies could fruitfully start from this final point and go back, investigating whether and how those "dominant rhetorics," as well as some critical studies, have been constructed upon re-sematicized concepts.

Similarly, I have noticed during the last three years of readings that the examples that are mainly drawn upon by scholars might be misleading. In particular, the cases which are mainly drawn upon for arguing in favor of a more participatory web, are Wikipedia and FLOSS (see Shirky, 2008, and Tapscott and Williams, 2006 as meaningful examples). These platforms and movements have specific characteristics that are often disregarded in favor of more simplistic juxtapositions of them with the alleged collaborative and participatory processes of Web 2.0. Both the re-semantization and the employment of examples for building arguments in favor of or (less often) against alleged users' empowerment should be carefully considered and further studied[125].

Other more specific topics emerged from my data as possible fields of future research. Some of these are more related to music, while others more general. Among the first, possible research questions would be: how do music artists deal with the presence, on the same platform, of an individual and artistic profile?; what kind of relationships emerge from Web 2.0 and SNS between bands and fans (and attention to this topic has also been suggested by Beer, 2008a); what of the music scene when interactions get mediated by Web 2.0 tools: can we talk about "virtual music scenes" (Bennett and Peterson, 2004), "egocentric networks" (boyd, 2006a), "networked

125 O'Reilly (2005) goes back to the origins of the web, and to FLOSS for fostering the idea that an architecture designed for participation is able to actually bring the users to share knowledge and create collective value, even when they are acting under egoistic motivations. One year after, when proposing and articulating his definition of Web 2.0, he applies this concept to the new "era" of the web, focusing on how the architecture of participation can lead to users participation and to the creation of collective value by "harnessing" the collective intelligence". What must be considered here is the peculiarities of FLOSS, as well as of produsage. Indeed, as Bruns underlines when comparing the Open Source Software movement to that of produsage, he focuses on the principle, which he claims to be underlying both phenomena, of "open participation, communal evaluation" (Bruns, 2008: 42). What he more specifically claims, is that both draw upon the principle of equipotentiality (a concept borrowed by Bauwens) and a probabilistic approach (many eyes: the developers are also testers, this brings to a better software). But, are Myspace users free to join as developers in FLOSS?, how can we talk about equipotentiality in projects that are not "open" (but proprietary)?

collectivism" (Baym, 2007) or does it turn into something different that needs to be configured and named differently?; and so on.

More in general, further research on the level of awareness and effort in information retrieval by the users about the ownership of the infrastructure is needed, and also in regard to what the media coverage of this information is. One more very important topic concerns the spread of Open Source or non-proprietary social networking platforms, which is above all desirable. More research in regard to the possible development and adoption of such platforms is what I most hope for.

Also, I hope that the four bridges highlighted between CMC and STS literature may work as a possible guide for other researchers to investigate interactions on the web by providing empirically-grounded accounts focused on the relationship between technology and users. Similarly, I wish for an increased involvement of scholars from various disciplines with studies of Web 2.0 that account for technologies as an actor that co-creates social dynamics.

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Appendix A – Myspace Terms of Use Agreement

As of June 15, 2006. Source http://www.tosback.org/version.php?vid=386

MySpace.com is a social networking service that allows Members to create unique personal profiles online in order to find and communicate with old and new friends. The services offered by MySpace.com ("Myspace.com" or "we") include the MySpace.com website (the "MySpace Website"), the MySpace.com Internet messaging service, and any other features, content, or applications offered from time to time by MySpace.com in connection with the MySpace Website (collectively, the "MySpace Services"). The MySpace Services are hosted in the U.S.

This Terms of Use Agreement ("Agreement") sets forth the legally binding terms for your use of the MySpace Services. By using the MySpace Services, you agree to be bound by this Agreement, whether you are a "Visitor" (which means that you simply browse the MySpace Website) or you are a "Member" (which means that you have registered with Myspace.com). The term "User" refers to a Visitor or a Member. You are only authorized to use the MySpace Services (regardless of whether your access or use is intended) if you agree to abide by all applicable laws and to this Agreement. Please read this Agreement carefully and save it. If you do not agree with it, you should leave the MySpace Website and discontinue use of the MySpace Services immediately. If you wish to become a Member, communicate with other Members and make use of the MySpace Services, you must read this Agreement and indicate your acceptance during the Registration process.

This Agreement includes MySpace.com's policy for acceptable use of the MySpace Services and Content posted on the MySpace Website, your rights, obligations and restrictions regarding your use of the MySpace Services and MySpace.com's Privacy Policy. In order to participate in certain MySpace Services, you may be notified that you are required to download software or content and/or agree to additional terms and conditions. Unless otherwise provided by the additional terms and conditions applicable to the MySpace Services in which you choose to participate, those additional terms are hereby incorporated into this Agreement. You may receive a copy of this Agreement by emailing us at: privacy@MySpace.com, Subject: Terms of Use Agreement.

MySpace.com may modify this Agreement from time to time and such modification shall be effective upon posting by MySpace.com on the MySpace Website. You agree to be bound to any

changes to this Agreement when you use the MySpace Services after any such modification is posted. It is therefore important that you review this Agreement regularly to ensure you are updated as to any changes.

Please choose carefully the information you post on MySpace.com and that you provide to other Users. Your MySpace.com profile may not include the following items: telephone numbers, street addresses, last names, and any photographs containing nudity, or obscene, lewd, excessively violent, harassing, sexually explicit or otherwise objectionable subject matter. Despite this prohibition, information provided by other MySpace.com Members (for instance, in their Profile) may contain inaccurate, inappropriate, offensive or sexually explicit material, products or services, and MySpace.com assumes no responsibility or liability for this material. If you become aware of misuse of the MySpace Services by any person, please contact MySpace or click on the "Report Inappropriate Content" link at the bottom of any MySpace.com page.

MySpace.com reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to reject, refuse to post or remove any posting (including private messages) by you, or to restrict, suspend, or terminate your access to all or any part of the MySpace Services at any time, for any or no reason, with or without prior notice, and without liability.

1. Eligibility. Use of and Membership in the MySpace Services is void where prohibited. By using the MySpace Services, you represent and warrant that (a) all registration information you submit is truthful and accurate; (b) you will maintain the accuracy of such information; (c) you are 14 years of age or older; and (d) your use of the MySpace Services does not violate any applicable law or regulation. Your profile may be deleted and your Membership may be terminated without warning, if we believe that you are under 14 years of age.

2. Term. This Agreement shall remain in full force and effect while you use the MySpace Services or are a Member. You may terminate your Membership at any time, for any reason, by following the instructions on the Member's Account Settings page. MySpace.com may terminate your Membership at any time, without warning. Even after Membership is terminated, this Agreement will remain in effect, including sections 5-17.

3. Fees. You acknowledge that MySpace.com reserves the right to charge for the MySpace

Services and to change its fees from time to time in its discretion. If MySpace.com terminates your Membership because you have breached the Agreement, you shall not be entitled to the refund of any unused portion of subscription fees.

4. Password. When you sign up to become a Member, you will also be asked to choose a password. You are entirely responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of your password. You agree not to use the account, username, or password of another Member at any time or to disclose your password to any third party. You agree to notify MySpace.com immediately if you suspect any unauthorized use of your account or access to your password. You are solely responsible for any and all use of your account.

5. Non-commercial Use by Members. The MySpace Services are for the personal use of Members only and may not be used in connection with any commercial endeavors except those that are specifically endorsed or approved by MySpace.com. Illegal and/or unauthorized use of the MySpace Services, including collecting usernames and/or email addresses of Members by electronic or other means for the purpose of sending unsolicited email or unauthorized framing of or linking to the MySpace Website is prohibited. Commercial advertisements, affiliate links, and other forms of solicitation may be removed from Member profiles without notice and may result in termination of Membership privileges. Appropriate legal action will be taken for any illegal or unauthorized use of the MySpace Services.

6. Proprietary Rights in Content on MySpace.com.

1. MySpace.com does not claim any ownership rights in the text, files, images, photos, video, sounds, musical works, works of authorship, or any other materials (collectively, "Content") that you post to the MySpace Services. After posting your Content to the MySpace Services, you continue to retain all ownership rights in such Content, and you continue to have the right to use your Content in any way you choose. By displaying or publishing ("posting") any Content on or through the MySpace Services, you hereby grant to MySpace.com a limited license to use, modify, publicly perform, publicly display, reproduce, and distribute such Content solely on and through the MySpace Services.

Without this license, MySpace.com would be unable to provide the MySpace Services. For example, without the right to modify Member Content, MySpace.com would not be able to digitally compress music files that Members submit or otherwise format Content to satisfy technical requirements, and without the right to publicly perform Member Content, MySpace.com could not

allow Users to listen to music posted by Members. The license you grant to MySpace.com is non-exclusive (meaning you are free to license your Content to anyone else in addition to MySpace.com), fully-paid and royalty-free (meaning that MySpace.com is not required to pay you for the use on the MySpace Services of the Content that you post), sublicensable (so that MySpace.com is able to use its affiliates and subcontractors such as Internet content delivery networks to provide the MySpace Services), and worldwide (because the Internet and the MySpace Services are global in reach). This license will terminate at the time you remove your Content from the MySpace Services. The license does not grant MySpace.com the right to sell your Content, nor does the license grant MySpace.com the right to distribute your Content outside of the MySpace Services.

2. You represent and warrant that: (i) you own the Content posted by you on or through the MySpace Services or otherwise have the right to grant the license set forth in this section, and (ii) the posting of your Content on or through the MySpace Services does not violate the privacy rights, publicity rights, copyrights, contract rights or any other rights of any person. You agree to pay for all royalties, fees, and any other monies owing any person by reason of any Content posted by you to or through the MySpace Services.

3. The MySpace Services contain Content of MySpace.com ("MySpace.com Content"). MySpace.com Content is protected by copyright, trademark, patent, trade secret and other laws, and MySpace.com owns and retains all rights in the MySpace.com Content and the MySpace Services. MySpace.com hereby grants you a limited, revocable, nonsublicensable license to reproduce and display the MySpace.com Content (excluding any software code) solely for your personal use in connection with viewing the MySpace Website and using the MySpace Services.

4. The MySpace Services contain Content of Users and other MySpace.com licensors. Except for Content posted by you, you may not copy, modify, translate, publish, broadcast, transmit, distribute, perform, display, or sell any Content appearing on or through the MySpace Services.

7. Content Posted.

1. MySpace.com may delete any Content that in the sole judgment of MySpace.com violates this Agreement or which may be offensive, illegal or violate the rights, harm, or threaten the safety of any person. MySpace.com assumes no responsibility for monitoring the MySpace Services for inappropriate Content or conduct. If at any time MySpace.com chooses, in its sole discretion, to monitor the MySpace Services, MySpace.com nonetheless assumes no responsibility for the Content, no obligation to modify or remove any inappropriate Content, and no responsibility for the

conduct of the User submitting any such Content.

2. You are solely responsible for the Content that you post on or through any of the MySpace Services, and any material or information that you transmit to other Members and for your interactions with other Users. MySpace.com does not endorse and has no control over the Content. Content is not necessarily reviewed by MySpace.com prior to posting and does not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of MySpace.com. MySpace.com makes no warranties, express or implied, as to the Content or to the accuracy and reliability of the Content or any material or information that you transmit to other Members.

8. Content/Activity Prohibited. The following is a partial list of the kind of Content that is illegal or prohibited to post on or through the MySpace Services. MySpace.com reserves the right to investigate and take appropriate legal action against anyone who, in MySpace.com's sole discretion, violates this provision, including without limitation, removing the offending communication from the MySpace Services and terminating the Membership of such violators. Prohibited Content includes, but is not limited to Content that, in the sole discretion of MySpace.com:

1. is patently offensive and promotes racism, bigotry, hatred or physical harm of any kind against any group or individual;

2. harasses or advocates harassment of another person;

3. exploits people in a sexual or violent manner;

4. contains nudity, violence, or offensive subject matter or contains a link to an adult website;

5. solicits personal information from anyone under 18;

6. provides any telephone numbers, street addresses, last names, URLs or email addresses;

7. promotes information that you know is false or misleading or promotes illegal activities or conduct that is abusive, threatening, obscene, defamatory or libelous;

8. promotes an illegal or unauthorized copy of another person's copyrighted work, such as providing pirated computer programs or links to them, providing information to circumvent manufacture-installed copy-protect devices, or providing pirated music or links to pirated music files;

9. involves the transmission of "junk mail," "chain letters," or unsolicited mass mailing, instant messaging, "spimming," or "spamming";

10. contains restricted or password only access pages or hidden pages or images (those not

linked to or from another accessible page);

11. furthers or promotes any criminal activity or enterprise or provides instructional information about illegal activities including, but not limited to making or buying illegal weapons, violating someone's privacy, or providing or creating computer viruses;

12. solicits passwords or personal identifying information for commercial or unlawful purposes from other Users;

13. involves commercial activities and/or sales without our prior written consent such as contests, sweepstakes, barter, advertising, or pyramid schemes;

14. includes a photograph of another person that you have posted without that person's consent; or

15. for band and filmmaker profiles, uses sexually suggestive imagery or any other unfair, misleading or deceptive Content intended to draw traffic to the profile.

The following is a partial list of the kind of activity that is illegal or prohibited on the MySpace Website and through your use of the MySpace Services. MySpace.com reserves the right to investigate and take appropriate legal action against anyone who, in MySpace.com's sole discretion, violates this provision, including without limitation, reporting you to law enforcement authorities. Prohibited activity includes, but is not limited to:

1. criminal or tortious activity, including child pornography, fraud, trafficking in obscene material, drug dealing, gambling, harassment, stalking, spamming, spimming, sending of viruses or other harmful files, copyright infringement, patent infringement, or theft of trade secrets;

2. advertising to, or solicitation of, any Member to buy or sell any products or services through the MySpace Services. You may not transmit any chain letters or junk email to other Members. It is also a violation of these rules to use any information obtained from the MySpace Services in order to contact, advertise to, solicit, or sell to any Member without their prior explicit consent. In order to protect our Members from such advertising or solicitation, MySpace.com reserves the right to restrict the number of emails which a Member may send to other Members in any 24-hour period to a number which MySpace.com deems appropriate in its sole discretion. If you breach this Agreement and send unsolicited bulk email, instant messages or other unsolicited communications of any kind through the MySpace Services, you acknowledge that you will have caused substantial harm to MySpace.com, but that the amount of such harm would be extremely

difficult to ascertain. As a reasonable estimation of such harm, you agree to pay MySpace.com $50 for each such unsolicited email or other unsolicited communication you send through the MySpace Services;

3. covering or obscuring the banner advertisements on your personal profile page, or any MySpace.com page via HTML/CSS or any other means;

4. any automated use of the system, such as using scripts to add friends or send comments or messages;

5. interfering with, disrupting, or creating an undue burden on the MySpace Services or the networks or services connected to the MySpace Services;

6. attempting to impersonate another Member or person;

7. for band profiles, copying the code for your MySpace Player and embedding it into other profiles or asking other Members to embed it into their profiles;

8. using the account, username, or password of another Member at any time or disclosing your password to any third party or permitting any third party to access your account;

9. selling or otherwise transferring your profile;

10. using any information obtained from the MySpace Services in order to harass, abuse, or harm another person;

11. displaying an advertisement on your profile, or accepting payment or anything of value from a third person in exchange for your performing any commercial activity on or through the MySpace Services on behalf of that person, such as placing commercial content on your profile, posting blogs or bulletins with a commercial purpose, selecting a profile with a commercial purpose as one of your "Top 8" friends, or sending private messages with a commercial purpose; or

12. using the MySpace Services in a manner inconsistent with any and all applicable laws and regulations.

9. Copyright Policy. You may not post, modify, distribute, or reproduce in any way any copyrighted material, trademarks, or other proprietary information belonging to others without obtaining the prior written consent of the owner of such proprietary rights. It is the policy of MySpace.com to terminate Membership privileges of any Member who repeatedly infringes the copyright rights of others upon receipt of prompt notification to MySpace.com by the copyright owner or the copyright owner's legal agent. Without limiting the foregoing, if you believe that your

work has been copied and posted on the MySpace Services in a way that constitutes copyright infringement, please provide our Copyright Agent with the following information: (i) an electronic or physical signature of the person authorized to act on behalf of the owner of the copyright interest; (ii) a description of the copyrighted work that you claim has been infringed; (iii) a description of where the material that you claim is infringing is located on the MySpace Services; (iv) your address, telephone number, and email address; (v) a written statement by you that you have a good faith belief that the disputed use is not authorized by the copyright owner, its agent, or the law; (vi) a statement by you, made under penalty of perjury, that the above information in your notice is accurate and that you are the copyright owner or authorized to act on the copyright owner's behalf. MySpace.com's Copyright Agent for notice of claims of copyright infringement can be reached as follows: Copyright Agent, MySpace, Inc., 8391 Beverly Blvd., #349, Los Angeles, CA 90048; Facsimile: (310) 969-7394; Attn: Copyright Agent; Email: copyrightagent@myspace.com.

10. Member Disputes. You are solely responsible for your interactions with other MySpace.com Members. MySpace.com reserves the right, but has no obligation, to monitor disputes between you and other Members.

11. Privacy. Use of the MySpace Services is also governed by our Privacy Policy, which is incorporated into this Agreement by this reference.

12. Disclaimers. MySpace.com is not responsible for any incorrect or inaccurate Content posted on the MySpace Website or in connection with the MySpace Services, whether caused by Users of the MySpace Services or by any of the equipment or programming associated with or utilized in the MySpace Services. Profiles created and posted by Members on the MySpace Website may contain links to other websites. MySpace.com is not responsible for the Content, accuracy or opinions expressed on such websites, and such websites are in no way investigated, monitored or checked for accuracy or completeness by MySpace.com. Inclusion of any linked website on the MySpace Services does not imply approval or endorsement of the linked website by MySpace.com. When you access these third-party sites, you do so at your own risk. MySpace.com takes no responsibility for third party advertisements which are posted on this MySpace Website or through the MySpace Services, nor does it take any responsibility for the goods or services provided by its advertisers. MySpace.com is not responsible for the conduct, whether online or offline, of any User of the MySpace Services. MySpace.com assumes no responsibility for any error, omission, interruption, deletion, defect, delay in operation or transmission, communications line failure, theft or destruction or unauthorized access to, or alteration of, any User or Member communication. MySpace.com is not responsible for any problems or technical malfunction of any telephone network or lines,

computer online systems, servers or providers, computer equipment, software, failure of any email or players due to technical problems or traffic congestion on the Internet or on any of the MySpace Services or combination thereof, including any injury or damage to Users or to any person's computer related to or resulting from participation or downloading materials in connection with the MySpace Services. Under no circumstances shall MySpace.com be responsible for any loss or damage, including personal injury or death, resulting from use of the MySpace Services, attendance at a MySpace.com event, from any Content posted on or through the MySpace Services, or from the conduct of any Users of the MySpace Services, whether online or offline. The MySpace Services are provided "AS-IS" and as available and MySpace.com expressly disclaims any warranty of fitness for a particular purpose or non-infringement. MySpace.com cannot guarantee and does not promise any specific results from use of the MySpace Services.

13. Limitation on Liability. IN NO EVENT SHALL MYSPACE.COM BE LIABLE TO YOU OR ANY THIRD PARTY FOR ANY INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, EXEMPLARY, INCIDENTAL, SPECIAL OR PUNITIVE DAMAGES, INCLUDING LOST PROFIT DAMAGES ARISING FROM YOUR USE OF THE SERVICES, EVEN IF MYSPACE.COM HAS BEEN ADVISED OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGES. NOTWITHSTANDING ANYTHING TO THE CONTRARY CONTAINED HEREIN, MYSPACE.COM'S LIABILITY TO YOU FOR ANY CAUSE WHATSOEVER AND REGARDLESS OF THE FORM OF THE ACTION, WILL AT ALL TIMES BE LIMITED TO THE AMOUNT PAID, IF ANY, BY YOU TO MYSPACE.COM FOR THE MYSPACE SERVICES DURING THE TERM OF MEMBERSHIP.

14. U.S. Export Controls. Software available in connection with the MySpace Services (the "Software") is further subject to United States export controls. No Software may be downloaded from the MySpace Services or otherwise exported or re-exported in violation of U.S. export laws. Downloading or using the Software is at your sole risk.

15. Disputes. If there is any dispute about or involving the MySpace Services, you agree that the dispute shall be governed by the laws of the State of California, USA, without regard to conflict of law provisions and you agree to exclusive personal jurisdiction and venue in the state and federal courts of the United States located in the State of California, City of Los Angeles. Either MySpace.com or you may demand that any dispute between MySpace.com and you about or involving the MySpace Services must be settled by arbitration utilizing the dispute resolution procedures of the American Arbitration Association (AAA) in Los Angeles, California, USA, provided that the foregoing shall not prevent MySpace.com from seeking injunctive relief in a court of competent jurisdiction.

16. Indemnity. You agree to indemnify and hold MySpace.com, its subsidiaries, and affiliates, and their respective officers, agents, partners and employees, harmless from any loss, liability, claim, or demand, including reasonable attorneys' fees, made by any third party due to or arising out of your use of the MySpace Services in violation of this Agreement and/or arising from a breach of this Agreement and/or any breach of your representations and warranties set forth above and/or if any Content that you post on the MySpace Website or through the MySpace Services causes MySpace.com to be liable to another.

17. Other. This Agreement is accepted upon your use of the MySpace Website or any of the MySpace Services and is further affirmed by you becoming a Member. This Agreement constitutes the entire agreement between you and MySpace.com regarding the use of the MySpace Services. The failure of MySpace.com to exercise or enforce any right or provision of this Agreement shall not operate as a waiver of such right or provision. The section titles in this Agreement are for convenience only and have no legal or contractual effect. MySpace.com is a trademark of MySpace, Inc. This Agreement operates to the fullest extent permissible by law. If any provision of this Agreement is unlawful, void or unenforceable, that provision is deemed severable from this Agreement and does not affect the validity and enforceability of any remaining provisions.

Please contact us at: Contact MySpace with any questions regarding this Agreement.

I HAVE READ THIS AGREEMENT AND AGREE TO ALL OF THE PROVISIONS CONTAINED ABOVE.

A new version of the Terms of Use Agreement, as of June 25, 2009 is available at http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=misc.terms

Appendix B – Myspace Privacy Policy

Source http://www.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=misc.privacy

Effective February 28, 2008:

MySpace, Inc. ("MySpace" or "we") operates MySpace.com. This Privacy Policy describes MySpace's use and sharing of personally identifiable information ("PII"-- your full name, email address, mailing address, telephone number, or credit card number) that Members voluntarily provide to MySpace when they register (also known as "Registration PII"). The Term "User" refers to a Visitor or a Member. This Privacy Policy applies to the services offered by MySpace, including any MySpace-branded URL (the "MySpace Website"), the MySpace instant messaging service, the MySpace application developer service and other features (for example, music and video embedded players), MySpace mobile services, and any other features, content, or applications offered from time to time by MySpace in connection with the MySpace Website (collectively, the "MySpace Services"). The MySpace Services are hosted in the United States.

The MySpace Website is a general audience site and does not knowingly collect PII from children under 13 years of age.

From time to time MySpace may modify this Privacy Policy to reflect industry initiatives or changes in the law, our PII collection and use practices, the features of the MySpace Services, or technology, and such modifications shall be effective upon posting by MySpace on the MySpace Website. Your continued use of the MySpace Services after MySpace posts a revised Privacy Policy signifies your acceptance of the revised Privacy Policy. It is therefore important that you review this Privacy Policy regularly to ensure you are updated as to any changes. If MySpace materially changes its practices regarding collection or use of your PII, your PII will continue to be governed by the Policy under which it was collected unless you have been provided notice of, and have not objected to, the change.

COLLECTION AND SUBMISSION OF PII AND NON-PII ON MYSPACE

General. When MySpace collects PII from you it is because you are voluntarily submitting Registration PII to us in order to register as a Member of MySpace. MySpace may also collect PII from you if you choose to participate in MySpace Services activities like sweepstakes, contests, and surveys, because you want us to furnish you with products, services, newsletters, or information, or in connection with content or suggestions you submit to MySpace for review.

In addition, MySpace collects other non-PII including IP address, aggregate user data, and browser type. This data is used to manage and improve the MySpace Services, track usage, and for security purposes.

MySpace Members may also choose to provide or store non-PII information in their profiles, including but not limited to date of birth, interests, hobbies, lifestyle choices, groups with whom they are affiliated (schools, companies), videos and/or pictures, private messages, bulletins or personal statements (collectively "Profile Information"). The Profile Information in a Member's profile is provided at his or her sole discretion.

MySpace Members can change their Registration PII and Profile Information at any time and can control how Visitors, other Members and MySpace communicate with them by controlling their account settings, available within the "Edit Profile" portion of their MySpace profile. Link to Privacy Settings.

Cookies. Cookies are small bits of information that MySpace places on your computer. MySpace uses cookies to identify your Internet browser, store Users' preferences, and determine whether you have installed the enabling software needed to access certain material on the MySpace Services. Data in cookies may be read to authenticate user sessions or provide services.

Third party advertisements displayed on MySpace Services may also contain cookies set by Internet advertising companies or advertisers (known as "third party cookies"). MySpace does not control these third party cookies and Users of the MySpace Services should check the Privacy Policy of the Internet advertising company or advertiser to see whether and how it uses cookies. See the "Notice" section below for more information on customized advertising on MySpace. A pixel tag is a tiny

image inserted in a webpage and used to record the number and types of views for that page. MySpace may allow third party pixel tags to be present on MySpace Services for purposes of advertising, providing services or data and statistics collection.

You can program your computer to warn you each time a cookie is being sent, block third party cookies or block all cookies. However, by blocking all cookies you may not have access to certain features on the MySpace Services.

NOTICE: MYSPACE WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH NOTICE ABOUT ITS PII COLLECTION PRACTICES

When you voluntarily provide PII to MySpace, we will make sure you are informed about who is collecting the information, how and why the information is being collected and the types of uses MySpace will make of the information to the extent it is being used in a manner that differs from what is allowed pursuant to this Privacy Policy.

At the time you provide your PII, MySpace will notify you of your options regarding our use of your PII (See "Choice" below). Except as described in this Privacy Policy, MySpace will not share your PII with third parties unless you have given MySpace permission to do so (See "Use" below).

MySpace Services may be linked to Internet sites operated by other companies. MySpace Services may also carry advertisements from other companies. MySpace is not responsible for the privacy practices of websites or other services operated by third parties that are linked to or integrated with the MySpace Services or for the privacy practices of third party Internet advertising companies. Once you leave MySpace Services via such a link, access a third party application (such as widgets) or click on an advertisement, you should check the applicable Privacy Policy of the third party or advertiser site to determine, among other things, how they will handle any PII they collect from you.

MySpace Services may also be linked to sites operated by companies affiliated with MySpace (i.e.,

that are part of the News America Group: "Affiliated Companies"). Although all Affiliated Companies adhere to the News America corporate Privacy Principles, Users who visit those Affiliated Company sites should still refer to their separate privacy policies and practices, which may differ in some respects from this Privacy Policy.

MySpace may use cookies and similar tools to customize the content and advertising you receive based on the Profile Information you have provided. Profile Information you provide in structured profile fields or questions (multiple choice questions like "Marital Status," "Education" and "Children") ("Structured Profile Information"), information you add to open-ended profile fields and questions (essay questions like "About Me," "Interests" and "Movies") ("Non-Structured Profile Information") and other non-PII about you may also be used to customize the online ads you encounter to those we believe are aligned with your interests. For example, based on your music interests we might display an advertisement to make sure you are advised when your favorite band is coming to town. The information used for this feature does not provide your PII or identify you as an individual to third parties. If you would like to disable advertising customization for Non-Structured Profile Information, please log in and click here.

Some of the advertisements that appear on MySpace Services may also be delivered to you by third party Internet advertising companies. These companies utilize certain technologies to deliver advertisements and marketing messages and to collect non-PII about your visit to or use of MySpace Services, including information about the ads they display, via a cookie placed on your computer that reads your IP address. To opt out of information collection by these companies, or to obtain information about the technologies they use or their own privacy policies, please click here.

Third party applications (such as widgets) created by third party developers may also be available on the MySpace Services. Third party applications are small bits of software, often with interactivity, that can be installed into Members' profiles or shared with other Users. However, MySpace does not control the third party developers, and cannot dictate their actions. When a Member engages with a third party application, that Member is interacting with the third party

developer, not with MySpace. MySpace encourages Members not to provide PII to the third party's application unless the Member knows the party with whom it is interacting.

CHOICE: MYSPACE WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH CHOICES ABOUT THE USE OF YOUR PII

Except as described in this Privacy Policy, MySpace will get your permission before we use the PII you provide to us in a way that is inconsistent with the purpose for which it was submitted or share your PII with third parties that are not affiliated with MySpace.

USE: MYSPACE'S USE OF PII

MySpace will only use the PII you provide under this Privacy Policy in a manner that is consistent with this Privacy Policy. If MySpace obtains PII from a third party, such as a business partner, our use of that information is also governed by this Privacy Policy.

In order to locate other MySpace Members that you may already know in the physical world, MySpace allows Users to search for Members using Registration PII (i.e., full name or email address). MySpace also allows Users to browse for certain Profile Information in order to help connect with Members (i.e., schools and/or companies where Users may have attended or worked). MySpace may also enable Members to publicly display some Registration PII as an element of their Profile Information if they choose to do so via a profile setting under "Edit Profile." Search engines may index the portion of a Member's profile (including the Profile Information it contains) that is publicly displayed.

If you have consented to receive promotional materials (e.g., newsletters) or notifications from MySpace, MySpace may periodically use your email address to send you such materials related to the MySpace Services, as applicable. If you want to stop receiving such materials from MySpace, you can change your profile settings under "Account Settings," or follow the unsubscribe instructions at the bottom of each email.

MySpace employees, agents and contractors must have a business reason to obtain access to your PII. MySpace may share your PII with those who help us manage or provide MySpace Services' information activities (for example, message board administration, order fulfillment, statistical analyses, data processing), or with outside contractors, agents or sponsors who help us with the administration, judging and prize fulfillment aspects of contests, promotions and sweepstakes.

These outside contractors, agents or sponsors may temporarily store some information on their servers, but they may only use your PII to provide MySpace with a specific service and not for any other purpose. MySpace may also provide your PII to a third party in those instances where you have chosen to receive certain information and have been notified that the fulfillment of such a request requires the sharing of your PII. MySpace also may share your PII with Affiliated Companies if it has a business reason to do so.

As described in "Notice" above, MySpace may customize the advertising and marketing messages you receive on the MySpace Website, or may work with outside companies to do so. Your non-PII and/or Profile Information may be shared with these companies so this customization can be accomplished. MySpace prohibits these companies from sharing your non-PII and/or Profile Information with any third party or from using it for any other purpose. Anonymous click stream, number of page views calculated by pixel tags, and aggregated demographic information may also be shared with MySpace's advertisers and business partners.

There may be instances when MySpace may access or disclose PII, Profile Information or non-PII without providing you a choice in order to: (i) protect or defend the legal rights or property of MySpace, our Affiliated Companies or their employees, agents and contractors (including enforcement of our agreements); (ii) protect the safety and security of Users of the MySpace Services or members of the public including acting in urgent circumstances; (iii) protect against fraud or for risk management purposes; or (iv) comply with the law or legal process. In addition, if MySpace sells all or part of its business or makes a sale or transfer of all or a material part of its assets or is otherwise involved in a merger or transfer of all or a material part of its business, MySpace may transfer your PII to the party or parties involved in the transaction as part of that transaction.

When a Member who is located in the European Union chooses to post Profile Information that will be publicly disclosed, that Member is responsible for ensuring that such information conforms to all local data protection laws. MySpace is not responsible under the EU local data protection laws for Member-posted information.

SECURITY: MYSPACE PROTECTS THE SECURITY OF PII

MySpace uses commercially reasonable administrative, technical, personnel and physical measures to safeguard PII and credit card information in its possession against loss, theft and unauthorized use, disclosure or modification. In addition, MySpace uses reasonable methods to make sure that PII is accurate, up-to-date and appropriately complete.

ACCESS, REMEDIES AND COMPLIANCE: HOW TO ACCESS, CORRECT OR CHANGE YOUR PREFERENCES REGARDING YOUR PII AND HOW TO CONTACT MYSPACE ABOUT PRIVACY CONCERNS

Whenever possible, MySpace Members may review the Registration PII we maintain about them in our records. We will take reasonable steps to correct any PII a Member informs us is incorrect. If you are a Member, you can view and change your Registration PII, Member preferences and Profile Information by logging into your account and accessing features such as “Edit Profile” and “Account Settings.”

If you ask MySpace to stop using your PII, MySpace will honor that request while retaining any record of your PII that is necessary to comply with applicable federal, state or local law.

If you would like to communicate with us about this Privacy Policy or MySpace’s collection and use of your PII please contact MySpace at:

Email: privacy@myspace.com Mail: 8391 Beverly Blvd. #349 Los Angeles, California 90048

Appendix C – Excerpts from Interviews in Italian

Paragraph 5.1.1.

“Noi abbiamo cominciato ad usarlo ad Aprile/Maggio del 2006, abbastanza tardi forse 2005 non ricordo. L'abbiamo conosciuto mi sembra per passaparola di altri gruppi, che ci han detto che si potevano contattare altri gruppi. La cosa bella infatti è che prima per suonare dovevi andare a bussare alle porte dei locali, mentre adesso ti puoi mettere in contatto in maniera diretta anche con gli stessi locali.” [I. M., 36]

“L'abbiamo conosciuto tipo nel 2006- 2007 abbiamo visto qualche gruppo che l'aveva perchè allora mi sembra che ci fossero molto meno persone singole, c'erano tutti gran gruppi mi sa tipo ma adesso è diventato proprio un blog anche tra persone, prima era pieno di gruppi tutti i nostri amici dai fallo dai fallo ovviamente non lo fai mai, poi a settembre l'abbiamo fatto a settembre del 2007.” [L. B., 25]

Paragraph 5.1.2.

“Più che altro bisogna considerare che ora, se si ha una band, la questione non è avere o non avere il profilo myspace, il profilo myspace è una necessità, è diventato quasi un obbligo, perché comunque se non sei lì, non sei nessuno. Cioè sei tagliato fuori, nessuno ti contatta, nessuno ti cerca, perché non hai la possibilità di promuovere ciò che crei.” [R. T., 29]

“Se hai una band e non hai il profilo su Myspace, non esisti. Cioè... chiunque ti verrà a cercare lì, e se non ti trova è come se tu una band non ce l'hai.” [A.F., 19]

“Beh innanzi tutto fino al Mei credavamo che fosse l'unico esistente e poi no alla fine è perchè dai è quello più frequentato dove c'è la maggioranza della persone che conosciamo poi li trovi proprio tutto cioè senti un gruppo sgrauso come te come me insomma americano e lo trovi veramente quindi c'è tutto tutto tutto.” [L. B., 25]

“[Le caratteristiche di Myspace sono...] di uploadare i tuoi pezzi di mettere le tue foto, è una comunità grande per cui adesso so che sono usciti altri siti simili tipo Bebo e Facebook però per me... io non so, non hanno sicuramente preso piede come Myspace per la musica.” [N. S., 24]

“Adesso ormai è come se Myspace non ci fosse. Cioè dai, all'inizio, che c'erano solo alcune band che avevano il Myspace... adesso ce l'hanno tutte, cioè hai come la sensazione che Myspace non esista più” [M. C., 32]

“Si ma proprio gruppi appena formati che sono precari che non sanno neanche se continueranno oppure molto molto molto piccoli nel senso che hanno, sono appena agli inizi, hanno 15 anni fanno le loro prime band fanno le cover punk rock così no cose che fai sempre all'inizio.” [L. B., 25]

Paragraph 5.1.3.

“[Non abbiamo un nostro sito perché... siamo] sfaticati... completamente... così, per sfatica, anche perché poi non abbiamo una dimestichezza eccezionale. Capito? Nonostante che siamo nel 2008 e abbiamo 20 anni non abbiamo una gran dimestichezza.” [L. B., 25]

“Prima di Myspace si poteva comunque spedire il materiale... ma prima di tutto bisognava vedere se questo demo o cassetta veniva veramente ascoltata, e comunque è meno immediata. Da parte del gestore di un locale prendeva più tempo ascoltare tutto il materiale. Penso al caso di qualcuno che magari lavora in ufficio e doveva ritagliarsi del tempo extra per ascoltare il materiale, invece adesso col fatto che si lavora col computer, intanto si aprono pagine di gruppi e si ascolta, e nel caso il materiale interessi si ricontatta il gruppo, sempre tramite Myspace” [I. M., 36]

“Io ho visto qualche blog vecchio di un diverso sito e cioè questo qui è molto più accessibile, trovi le pagine subito hai tutto li non devi stare a digitare mille password per vedere delle cose, se uno se la sente di metter le sue cose personali, vuoi una foto un po' più che ti tocca dentro, vuoi una non so quelli che scrivono gli interventi no, spesso sono anche cose forti personali però se uno se la sente di mettersela li è immediata è li tac, uno vuole dire i suoi gusti tac, uno vuole far finta di avere certi gusti poi non li ha mette quelli, uno vede subito tutto poi è importante anche perché per una band è importante l'altro lato nel senso che comunque che ci siano persone singole non solo altre band che comunque non ci si conosca solo tra chi suona ma anche che ti conosca il pubblico tra virgolette, la gente che va poi a sentire o che magari non sarebbe neanche abituata poi alla fine no sentiamo però questa band no gira di qua gira di là, ci vanno i miei amici ho sentito che li conoscono, quindi è importante per una band, è importante anche per i singoli in generale.” [L. B., 25]

“Perché Myspace è più facile perché tu tipo se io sono su Google ad esempio son li che sto navigando non mi verrebbe mai in mente di scrivere magari non ahh scrivi a sta brava gente un gruppo di un mio amico lo vado a vedere non mi verrebbe mai in mente invece magari su Myspace cazzeggi vai in giro vai nella pagina di un gruppo e dell'altro e capiti comunque nelle pagine dei gruppi.” [N. S., 24]

Paragraph 5.1.4.

“si molti gruppi, anche noi ce l'avevamo, ma non lo usano più... il sito. Secondo me Myspace è una catena di santantonio, un passaparola... tipo tu sei amico di un gruppo, che è amico di un altro gruppo... dopo succede che ci si incontra, cosa che non succedeva coi siti” [I. M., 36]

“Per me adesso come adesso no, Per me no. Ora come ora no. Indubbiamente cioè tu quando hai il disco devi comunque spedirlo alle case discografiche proprio spedirlo proprio il CD reale però per me quello lì ti da una mano incredibile almeno a livello live […] però è strana questa cosa qui se ci pensi, perché per dirti... tu prima potevi avere il tuo sito e lo stesso dal tuo sito potevi mandare una mail da un indirizzo di posta del gruppo alla casa discografica poteva sentire lo stesso i pezzi che avevi perché magari c'era la sezione musica... è che è più facile [con Myspace].” [N.S., 24]

“[Prima di Myspace] eravamo presenti su S., su R.B. [due portali musicali]....quelle cose lì non proprio siti o blog, […] pero tipo S. non l'aggiornano più, […] invece R. B. … non ho mai capito

cos'è. Mi sono messo lì ma nessuno mi ha mai detto niente... e adesso non l'aggiornano, oh, anzi non si apre neanche delle volte" [L.B., 25]

Paragraph 5.2.1.

"So che Myspace può prendere i miei dati e tutto... Non so, ma qualunque sia quello che prende, quello che so è che io ricevo un servizio. É qualcosa che mi è utile per me e per il lavoro, quindi se in cambio devo dare i miei dati... è un buon servizio... a me va bene" [I. L., 28]

Paragraph 5.3.1.

"E' una comunità che non si ritrova in un luogo, ma su Internet, sì, sta comunità che ci si ritrova su internet e ci si scambiano delle informazioni più che altro riguardo ai propri gusti o se sai qualcuno che produce qualcosa la usi per farlo sentire, ad esempio io produco delle canzoni nel senso che ho una band e voglio farle sentire a della gente che non conosco oltre a quelli che conosco e non hanno la possibilità di venire live o di avere il CD glieli faccio sentire lì [su Myspace]." [L. B., 25]

"[...] cioè, sono più cercato diciamo nel senso che non sono abituato andare nelle pagine di un altro guardare in giro gli amici... poi... aggiungere, certe volte lo faccio, però soprattutto guardo io la richiesta e dico "approvo" intanto approvo quasi sempre a meno che non ci sia un nazista approvo quasi sempre." [L.B., 25]

"Una cosa che io veramente non concepisco è questa: la gente che si fa il profilo personale […], e poi ti addano solo se hai dei requisiti specifici o comunque se gli vai bene... Io quello proprio non lo concepisco" [N.S., 24]

"[...] oppure non capisco quelli che mettono magari il profilo privato. A me come cosa non piace! Nel senso, che cazzo fai una pagina su Myspace, appunto uno dei siti più visitati del mondo e non ti vuoi fare vedere o te la vuoi tirare? ... cioè non ha senso... allora non lo fai, questo è quello che penso io. [Non vogliono semplicemente un sito gratis], perchè comunque l'impostazione già te la dà sul pubblico non sul privato […] A me danno proprio fastidio come cosa! E io dò l'add a tutti, cioè proprio a tutti come gruppi [anche gente che suona o ascolta un altro genere, perché] alla fine è una comunità, oltre ad essere una moda, e tutti devono bene o male convivere... [percui] noi diamo l'amicizia a tutti però quelli che magari te vai a cercare la pagina privata cioè a me piglia molto male." [N.S., 24]

"In un forum si può essere più pesanti, un po' perché ci si può nascondere dietro ad un nome, e un po' perché la discussione si limita a quel frangente, chi scrive sul forum potrebbe anche non aver mai nulla a che fare con gli altri, mentre invece su Myspace ci sono le richieste di amicizia, che è stata richiesta ed accettata. C'è più rispetto, amicizia, comunità... sarebbe illogico dire cose poco carine perché se tu hai qualcosa contro di me non mi stai neanche a chiedere l'amicizia. Se mi arriva la richiesta di amicizia di qualcuno io penso che sia perché questa persona vuole o a livello

personale, o anche solo a livello musicale, esserti amico tra virgolette." [I. M., 36]

"Ovviamente delle infamate non ce n'è sono, cioè almeno ci sono magari 2 cazzate, tipo, una volta il nostro chitarrista aveva scritto "Dio bo", cioè, neanche il finale, e uno di un altro gruppo fa: "sei pregato di non bestemmiare sul nostro space e fa ti devono insegnare sicuramente l'educazione", noi l'abbiamo lasciato lì, si comunque diciamo dopo se uno vuole va a vedere cosa era scritto di là va a vedere se tanto saranno boiate. Dopo però l'hanno cancellato." [N.S., 24]

Paragraph 5.3.3.1.

"Sai, ci sono dei softwarini che puoi scaricare gratis su Internet, e con questi te praticamente puoi farti un sacco di amici perché ti fa mandare automaticamente centinaia di richieste di amicizia al giorno... io per dire lo uso... e funziona un sacco! Però, per dire, anche un sacco di altre bamd penso che lo usino, quindi, dai... in generale penso comunque che una band che ha un mucchio di amici ha successo ed è popolare, però sai, devi poi sempre tenere in conto che potrebbero anche aver usato 'sti programmini automatici... non puoi saperlo" [F. L., 31]

Paragraph 5.3.3.2.

"Devi essere in qualche modo stabile come band per farti un profilo Myspace, perché se lo fai e poi non ci stai dietro, alla fine sembra deludente […]. Se non lo aggiorni costantemente e non ci stai dietro o lo aggiorni... se un gruppo non sta dietro al suo profilo […] dopo non ci va più nessuno... ho fatto caso che tipo, all'inizio ci stavamo dietro molto meno di adesso e avevamo due o tre ascolti al giorno, due o tre visite al giorno, invece adesso ne abbiamo... non so dirti esattamente... però ne abbiamo molte di più" [L.B., 25]

"[Per capire quanto successo ha una band] guardi quanti commenti scrivono in una giornata, guardi quanti ascolti […] Faccio anche un paragone tra gruppi Italiani e Americani, perché loro hanno più visite e ascolti, ma penso che questo sia anche dovuto al livello di popolazione degli Stati Uniti... quindi... […] … faccio una proporzione Stato a Stato dai" [L.B., 25]

" [Non guardo molto al numero degli amici di una band]Gli amici beh alla fine non vuol dire delle volte perché uno non ha un cavolo da fare tutto il giorno sta su Myspace a guardare della gente da addare, quindi si, cioè, spesso c'è anche una corrispondenza degli amici con il livello di successo di un gruppo, ma la corrispondenza maggiore magari è proprio negli ascolti." [L.B., 25]

Paragraph 5.4.1.

"R. Magazine ci ha sentito per caso su Myspace, non so in che maniera, magari arrivandoci dal profilo di qualcuno nostro "amico" e ci ha contattato su Myspace, poi gli ho lasciato il cellulare e ci hanno fatto un'intervista, così, senza che io neanche li avessi cercati." [I. M., 36]

Paragraph 5.4.2.

“Quello che dico sempre ai gruppi nuovi [che non hanno provato l'epoca pre-Myspace] è che loro non si rendono conto... tra virgolette era anche più soddisfacente una volta perché “te la guadagnavi”: dovevi proprio telefonare, poi magari ti volevano vedere, dovevi spedire il demo, c'era tutto un iter... e per suonare fuori dalla tua città era proprio difficile, vuol dire che dovevi mandare un demo, poi ci si risentiva, e la cosa andava avanti per una vita, e quasi non esisteva neanche la -tra virgolette- collaborazione tra gruppi, nel senso che il gruppo faceva riferimento al locale, ed erano poi quelli del locale ad organizzare la serata ed associare più gruppi, quindi il contatto era da gruppo a locale. Adesso invece, ed è proprio quello il positivo di Myspace, che ci si contatta tra gruppi, e magari un gruppo ha contatti con un locale, si organizza, poi si fa il “cambio data”” [I. M., 36]

“[il cambio data] vuol dire che, se, per esempio, ci contatta un gruppo di Milano e organizziamo una data con loro, allora poi ci aspettiamo che loro dopo cerchino una data a noi nella loro città... cioè funziona così” [A. F., 19, IT.]

“Tra gruppi e gruppi, si cerca di organizzare magari date insieme, si cerca per esempio di chiamare gruppi stranieri o di altre regioni a suonare nella tua zona, e quindi di conseguenza poi l'altra band cerca di fare lo stesso con te, quindi... si cerca di esportare la musica live fuori da myspace, e quindi non solo nella tua zona, ma anche in altre zone d'Italia o del mondo. Questo sempre chiaramente appoggiandoti ad una band che in quella zona “c'è”, quindi ha il suo giro, come tu ce l'hai nel tuo. Tramite myspace ti contatti, ti piaci ti “prendi” come genere musicale... poi metti in piedi dei concerti assieme” [R. T., 29]

“Le scene musicali sono morte. Non esistono più, […] e questo c'entra con Myspace, perché la gente appassionata di musica si trova lì, e quelle robe che sono importanti per la scena vengono messe da parte... [voglio dire]... come, ai vecchi tempi, quanto io uscivo con gli amici, potevo sapere se loro appartenevano o no alla mia scena, è l'attitudine [e l'attitudine si capisce] da come si comportano quotidianamente... non ha molto a che fare con, anche se anche questo è importante, col fatto che su Myspace non sai veramente se una persona veramente ha passione per la stessa musica che piace a te, ha la tua stessa attitudine, ma... anche se ti vedi ai concerti oltre a interagire su Myspace... non è abbastanza.... io so se una persona fa parte della mia scena non solo perché si mette una maglietta e va a un concerto... è come vive la sua vita quotidiana, che birra beve, dove gira eccetera” [A. C., 34, IT.]