

PERSONALISING POPULAR CULTURE:  
THE USES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE MIX TAPE

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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MELANIE LOVATT



PERSONALISING POPULAR CULTURE: THE USES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE  
MIX TAPE

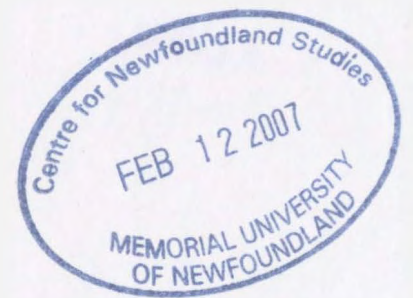
By

Melanie Lovatt

A thesis submitted to the  
School of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Department of Folklore  
Memorial University of Newfoundland

July 2005



St. John's

Newfoundland

## **Abstract**

Mix tapes consist of songs and other audio recordings which are arranged and sequenced according to the desires of their creators, and which are then often presented to a recipient in the form of a gift. This thesis researches the ways in which mix tapes are used in communication. Drawing on interviews with six principal informants, I consider the mix tape both from the point of view of the creator, as well as the recipient.

## **Acknowledgments**

This thesis reflects the support and generosity of many people. Firstly, I would like to thank Holly Everett, Hannah Godfrey, Richard Gunn, Helena Lukowska, Luke Power and Neil Rosenberg, not only for agreeing to be my informants, but also for their suggestions and encouragement throughout my research.

I thank Maria Enzensberger for her generosity in assisting me with my translation of German. I would also like to thank Jane Boxall, Melanie Maddison, Andrew Robinson and Jen Squires for their much appreciated contributions.

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Dr Peter Narváez for his constant encouragement and advice.

Finally I would like to thank my friends and family for their support.

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## Introduction

This thesis began its life in the Fall of 2003, when I was struggling with an assignment for Dr Diane Goldstein's Folklore Theory course at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). My task was to choose an item of material culture and analyse it using three different approaches. Having only arrived in St John's from England some weeks before, I did not as yet have many objects to choose from. As I scanned my room, my eyes came to rest on a compilation tape which had been sent to me by my friend Andy back in Britain. I duly wrote the paper on the tape, but after finishing the assignment, I was unable to shake the feeling that I 'was not yet done' with mix tapes, and so decided to make them the subject of my thesis.

Despite having made and received countless mix tapes over the past ten years, I had never previously given them any considered thought, and certainly not from the point of view of a folklorist. I am fortunate in that the discipline within which I write allows – *encourages* – me to include my own experiences and opinions as a user of mix tapes in my work, and it is from this perspective, as well as that of an academic folklorist, that I write.

My main purpose in this thesis is to explore the various ways in which mix tapes<sup>1</sup> are used by the people who make and receive them. My primary methodology consists of interviews with five informants who have been making mix tapes for several years, and one informant who I interviewed about his use of his iPod. I conducted the interviews between July 2004 and March 2005. In choosing my

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'mix tape' refers to a blank cassette which has been filled with recordings from various sources – most often commercially sold musical recordings. While some people prefer other terms such as 'compilation tape', 'mixed tape' or 'anthology', for the purposes of simplification I use 'mix tape' throughout this thesis.



informants I was looking for people who had been making mixes for several years, and I also wanted to try and find people from various backgrounds. The interviews were recorded onto minidisk, and before I submitted this thesis I sent each of my informants a copy and encouraged them to inform me if they wanted me to omit any passages, or just wanted to make general comments. I will now provide a brief introduction to each of my informants.

### Holly Everett

I met Holly through the Department of Folklore at MUN, as she was a PhD student in the programme when I began my Master's degree. Holly is also the wife of my supervisor, Dr Peter Narváez, and when he mentioned to me that Holly had been making mix tapes for several years, I asked her if she would mind being my informant. Originally from the US, Holly has now been living in St John's, Newfoundland for nine years and has recently completed her PhD thesis in folklore. She is thirty-seven years old.

### Hannah Godfrey

I was introduced to Hannah through a friend of mine in England, and when I learnt that she ran a society where members exchanged mix tapes – the Hollow Box Jockey Club – I asked her if she would be my informant. The basic premise of the Jockey Club is that each member makes a mix tape, which they send to Hannah, and then in return, Hannah sends them a mix tape made by another member. Each member is given two weeks to listen to the tape, before they are required to send the tape back, at which point Hannah then re-distributes the tapes, taking care to ensure that nobody

ever receives the same mix tape twice. The process is conducted by mail, and so the makers of the tapes are unaware of the identities and musical preferences of the people who receive them. While this is the main focus of the Jockey Club, Hannah also organises related social events where members can meet each other. Both sides of a flyer for one such event – the ‘steeplechase’ – can be seen on the following pages in Figures 1 and 2. Born in Billericay, Essex, Hannah has been living in Bristol since 2001. Hannah is twenty-seven.

## **Hollow Box Jockeys!**

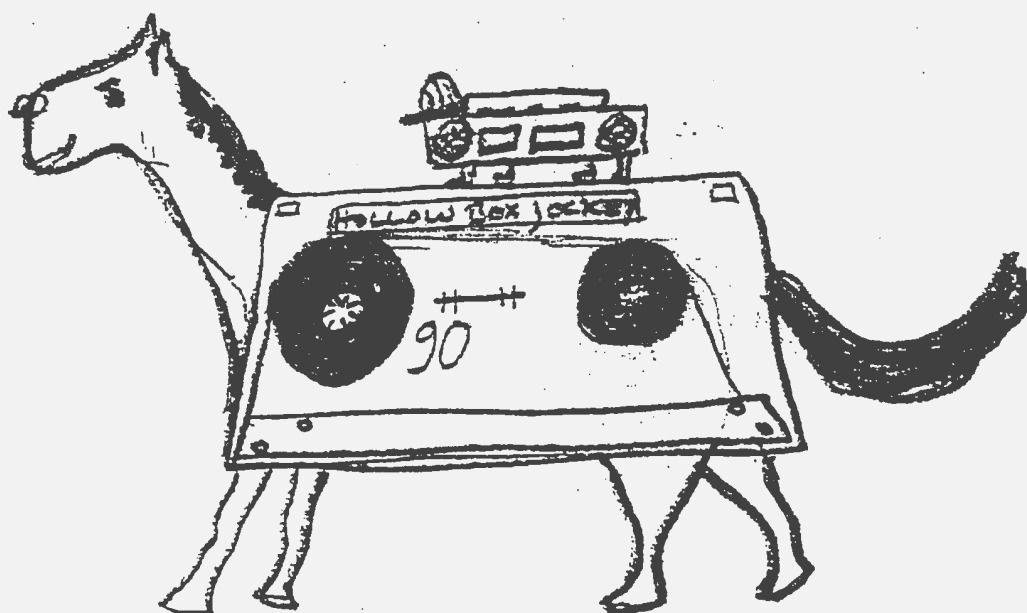
You are invited to a steeplechase! Canter to the Cube in Bristol and meet your fellow jockeys! There will be tape-making, horse racing, a film with live DJ and t-shirts for sale! Enjoy some stable talk, share a nosebag, swop tapes. Bring your favourite tunes/noises for an uber tape! Email with ideas! Bring a tape recorder! Bring a hobby horse! JUST COME!!! I'll put up any out of Bristol jockeys! HOORAY!

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2004 8 p.m.

[hollowboxjockey@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:hollowboxjockey@blueyonder.co.uk)

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**Figure 1.** Side one of a flyer for the Hollow Box Jockey Club



**Figure 2.** Side two of a flyer for the Hollow Box Jockey Club

### Richard Gunn

Richard Gunn has been a friend of mine for a few years, and having received several mix tapes from him during that time, his name came to mind when I was looking for suitable informants. The most recent tape which Richard made me is called 'This is Indie Rock', the tracklisting of which can be seen in Figure 3. Richard sent me the tape shortly before I left England for Canada in 2003. In the accompanying letter Richard describes the tape as, "the best comp. tape ever. I like to blow my own trumpet but these songs are so good....So take this to Canada and you

will be the coolest cat on the continent.”<sup>2</sup> Richard is twenty-five and currently lives in York, England, and is working on his PhD at the University of Leeds.

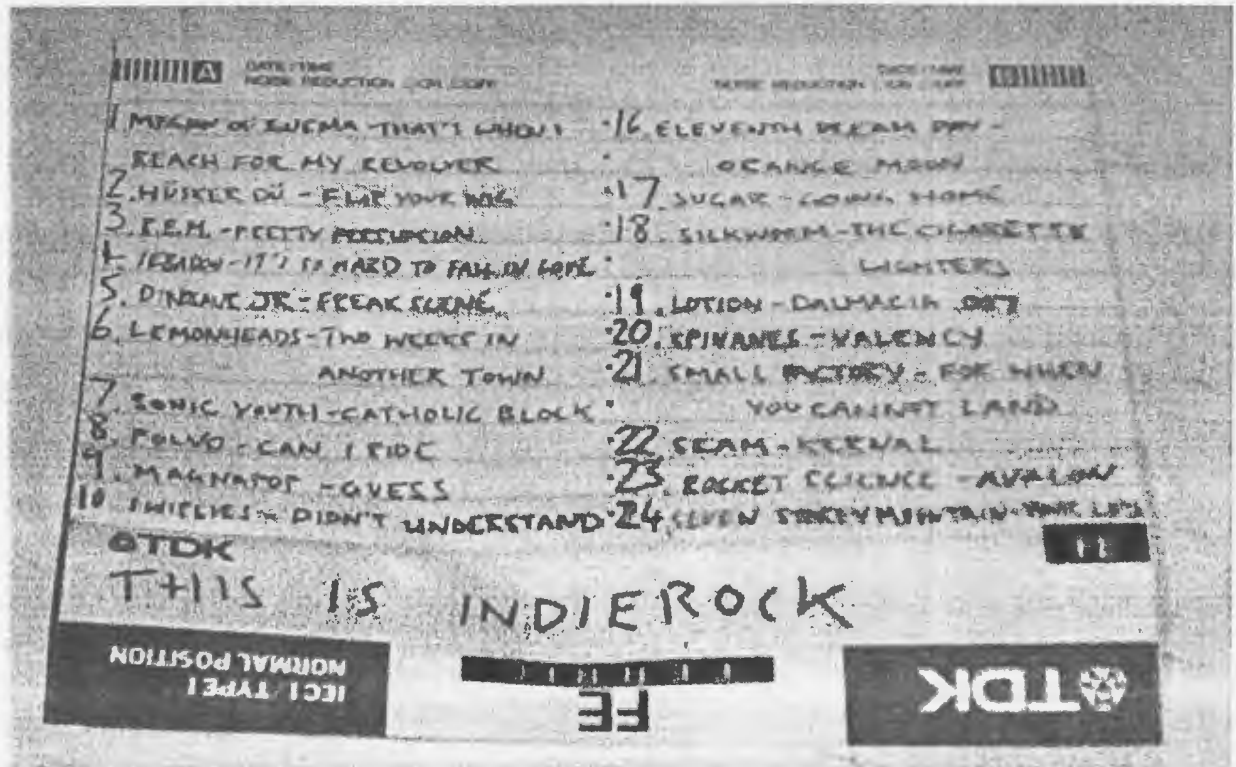


Figure 3. Tracklisting for 'This is Indie Rock'

### Helena Lukowska

Helena Lukowska is a friend of mine, and upon learning of her enthusiasm for making and receiving mix tapes, I asked her if she would be my informant. Born in Birmingham in 1983, Helena now lives in Leeds, England where she DJs at the club night Razzmatazz, and also plays in “a shoddy queer keyboard demo-based type band called ‘Jean Genet’”.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Gunn, letter to the author, August 2003.

### Luke Power

I met my friend Luke Power through his job at Fred's Records in downtown St. John's. I asked him to be my informant because he is a proud and devoted owner of an iPod and an enthusiastic downloader of music, and I was looking for someone who used recently developed technologies by which to access and listen to music. Luke is twenty-three years old and lives in St John's, Newfoundland.

### Neil Rosenberg

I met Neil Rosenberg when I began my Master's studies at the MUN Department of Folklore in 2003, when Neil was beginning his final year of teaching. Through my supervisor, Dr Narváez, I learned that Neil had been compiling anthologies since the 1950s, and I was happy that he agreed to be my informant. Born in Seattle in 1939, Neil moved to St John's in 1968. His primary research interests are music and song – particularly bluegrass, country and Newfoundland music. Neil plays banjo and frequently performs publicly in St John's.

## Literature Review

While mix tapes are an under-researched area in folklore studies, in this thesis I have situated my discussion of them in the context of research conducted by folklorists on other forms of collectanea. In her book So We Can Remember: Showing Family Photographs, folklorist Pauline Greenhill demonstrates how families use family photographs as a way of transmitting family folklore and narratives. Greenhill argues that the photographs are:

the focus for a large body of folklore and folkloric activity. The collection is a way in which individual family members can express themselves; in taking the photographs, arranging and displaying them, and discussing them. (2-3)

Like photographs, mix tapes can act as props for the telling of narratives, both in terms of the creator wishing to communicate a narrative through the songs, and also in terms of the recipient using the mix tape as a means of relaying the situation in which they received it. Serge Lacasse and Andy Bennett acknowledge this, writing that,

The mix tape is rarely a stand-alone object; rather, its intended meaning is often supplemented with a narrative, offered by the compiler in an attempt to render meaningful the chosen sequence of songs and/or pieces of music for the recipient of the mix tape. This narrative usually centres around an account of why a particular selection of songs were chosen, what they represent for the compiler of the mix tape, and the significance of the order in which they appear on the tape. (*Mix Tapes, Memory, and Nostalgia* 6-7)

Although the songs on a mix tape are usually taken from impersonal, commercially produced recordings, people incorporate elements of popular culture into their own life histories. This enables particular songs to have very personal meanings for individuals, where they are associated with specific events and people in a person's biography. In addition to this, the mix tape itself is a very unique object, consisting of songs which have been handpicked by the creator with the receiver in mind, and a cassette inlay card that is often decorated with cover art. From talking to my informants, it became clear that their mix tapes often carried associative memories, and in much the same way that photographs are carefully preserved within albums, my informants revealed a reluctance to record over or discard old mix tapes that reminded them of past events or people.

In an interesting parallel to the way in which mix tapes usually consist of songs drawn from popular culture, Neil Rosenberg's essay "It Was a Kind of Hobby":

a Manuscript Song Book and its Place in Tradition,” describes how one woman collated numerous lyrics from country songs during the course of her life, and compiled them in a scrapbook. While the ostensible reason for the collection was a functional one – in the event of her husband, a singer wanting to perform a certain song, the lyrics would be available to him – over the years the scrapbook came to be “a document of her life” (*It Was a Kind of Hobby* 326). I argue that this is similar to the way in which mix tapes, while often being created as a practical way of educating the receiver about certain music, often come to be valued for their representation and evocation of a person’s past. The scrapbook is also similar to mix tapes in that many of the lyrics were from popular country songs which the collector, Betty heard on the radio. While the songs were transmitted via a mass medium, the songs became personalised through Betty’s use and recording of them.

The most comprehensive academic work on the mix tape that I am aware of, is the edited anthology Kasset tengeschichten: Von Menschen und Ihren Mixtapes. Over the course of two semesters, students under the guidance of Gerrit Herlyn and Thomas Overdick at the Institute for Ethnology at the University of Hamburg conducted a research project which involved interviewing individuals about their use of mix tapes. The book serves as an accompaniment to an exhibition of the same name which was displayed in the Hamburg Museum for Communication in May, 2003. Students conducted eighty personal interviews, and also received approximately eight hundred and seventy letters and emails, providing them with a large collection of primary material from which to work. The results are included in the book under various chapters which relate to different aspects of their research. The first two chapters concern the students’ reflections on their own position within the research process,

with Caroline Kikisch discussing the role of the researcher in qualitative interviews, and Ove Sutter describing the transcribing process. Before publication, Sutter allowed her informants to check her transcription, and complied with their requests to omit certain passages.

Helle Meister, Silke Menzel and Ina Orbitz discuss the mix tape as ‘memory object’, and I examine this essay in greater detail in Chapter Three, where I consider the ways in which mix tapes are listened to. In their essay “‘My Favourite Chords’: Mixtapes und Musikgeschmack,” Armin Peiseler, Jörn Radzuweit and Alexander Tsitsigias discuss the notion of musical taste, and how a person’s taste in music can reflect their personality and lifestyle. I explore this, and also Rolf Hasbargen and Andrea Krämer’s research on the ways that mix tapes are used as a means of communication in Chapter Two of this thesis. Katrin Hesse and Laura Tiemann consider gender perspectives within the subject of mix tapes, discussing topics such as whether or not a person’s gender affects their use of technology and the relationship between a person’s musical taste and their gender. Finally, Hilde Ausserlechner, Vanessa Kossen and Birgit Staack look at the representation of mix tapes in popular literature, including Nick Hornby’s High Fidelity, a novel which I also discuss in some detail.

I am grateful to Maria Enzensberger for her assistance in the translation of the chapter “‘My Favourite Chords’: Mixtapes und Musikgeschmack”. All other quotations from Kassetten geschichten are my own translations; I am satisfied that my translations remain faithful to the original text, and if I have been uncertain about a particular quotation, then I have decided not to include it, rather than run the risk of misinterpreting or misrepresenting the author.



Mix tapes are also a subject which interest scholars of popular culture and cultural studies, and I make numerous references to research within these disciplines. I found Simon Frith's Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music particularly useful in his discussions of how issues of taste and value within popular music can be treated in an academic environment. As a folklorist, I welcome Frith's considerations of the meanings which fans find in popular songs. While mix tapes are for the most part composed of songs drawn from popular culture, it is the ways in which the songs, and the tapes themselves are personalised and treated in informal ways that are of most interest to me.

In their unpublished paper "Phonographic Anthologies: Mix Tapes, Memory, and Nostalgia", Serge Lacasse and Andy Bennett highlight the importance of sequencing in the creation of mix tapes, and they also usefully place the practice of making mix tapes within a particular area of intertextuality which they term 'polyphonography'. Lacasse and Bennett write that,

Polyphonography includes any practice whose main purpose is the construction of large diachronic structures through the assemblage of smaller, self-contained recordings. In addition to mix tapes...other practices, such as the album, or deejaying, also constitute types of polyphonograms: all present a number of specific recordings into a larger structure that is deployed diachronically. All these forms of polyphonography constitute a discourse made of pre-existing discourse. Contrary to albums, however, practices such as deejaying and phonographic anthologies manipulate and recycle material that has *become* available, and in that constitute a form of *re-writing*. (*Phonographic Anthologies* 10)

Lacasse and Bennett also point out that the taping of existing recordings onto a cassette, and the subsequent presentation of it, is an indication of how people claim ownership of songs and use them as a means of self-representation and as a way of communicating personal sentiments to the recipient. These are themes which I discuss in Chapter Two.

Writing in his essay “Mixed Feelings: Notes on the Romance of the Mixed Tape”, Kamal Fox discusses the romance of the mix tape as it relates both to how it is often used as a courtship gift, with the songs often being chosen to convey romantic intentions, and also how the cassette format lends itself to nostalgia and romance. Fox situates the use of the mix tape as courtship gift within older and more established traditions of courtship, such as the visiting card, or the presentation of flowers, but also emphasises the way in which “the romantic mixed tape is an apparatus for storytelling, the transmission of narrative” (6). Fox also discusses the format onto which mixes are recorded, and in Chapter Four I consider the ways in which the media by which we hear music affects our experience of it.

In his popular, beautifully produced book, Mix Tape: the Art of Cassette Culture, Thurston Moore of the experimental rock band Sonic Youth presents a collection of photographs of mix tapes which are paired with narratives concerning the reasons for which they were made and the meanings they hold for recipients. The obvious enthusiasm demonstrated by all of the contributors reminded me that, while the creation and presentation of a mix tape is a very personal practice, it is a practice which is used by individuals and groups of friends the world over.

### Chapter Breakdown

In Chapter One I discuss Harry Smith’s Anthology of American Folk Music and how it relates to the modern mix tape. While my previous paragraph indicates the spatial practice of mix tape creation, I also wanted to demonstrate that the mix tape also has historical antecedents. There are obvious differences between the

commercially released Anthology and the typical homemade mix tape, yet the similarities in the selection and sequencing of one individual's music collection and the attention which is devoted to the packaging, lead me to believe that the Anthology can be considered a precursor to the mix tape.

Chapter Two concerns the processes involved in the creation of the mix tape, and I analyse the creation in terms of how it could be interpreted as a performance, whereby the creator decides upon the structural content of the tape according to their own musical preferences, their knowledge of the musical preferences of the recipient, and their motivations for making the tape. I also situate the comments of my informants within the context of broader research concerning the ways in which music is used in communication, focusing in particular on the work of Tia DeNora and Simon Frith.

In Chapter Three I consider the ways in which the mix tape is received and listened to by the recipient, and suggest that, based on the experiences of my informants, the uses which the tapes' recipients make of them often differ from the original uses which the creators intended them to have. I also focus on how mix tapes are often used as memory objects, and in this respect I compare them to similar forms of collectanea such as photographs and letters.

Chapter Four is concerned with the practicalities and technologies related to the making of mix tapes. I begin by discussing the significance of the format on which a mix is recorded, focusing in particular on the debate surrounding analogue as opposed to digital formats. I continue by considering how the content of a mix is inevitably affected by the creator's access to both music and recording equipment, and I conclude by looking at how newer technologies such as the iPod and Internet

downloading relate to mix tapes, and how they affect the way in which music is experienced.

I conclude my thesis by offering some personal reflections on my research, as well as considering how my findings compared to that of other researchers of the mix tape, and suggesting future areas of research.

## Chapter 1

*“If God were a DJ he’d be Harry Smith”<sup>3</sup>*

One of the most important lines of inquiry in the discipline of folklore – indeed one of the aspects of the discipline that sets it apart from other academic fields – is the study of tradition, or cultural continuities. For folklorists, it is crucial to realise that artistic expressions and cultural products are never simply the new inventions of the current society, but have precedents and antecedents in previous societies and generations. Consequently, I think it is important to mention that, while the mix tapes which are discussed by my informants were not able to exist in that precise format until the invention of cassette tapes in the 1960s, there were nevertheless precedents to the mix tape. With this in mind, in this chapter I will discuss the mix tape as it relates to what I believe could be considered a precursor to the mix tape: The Anthology of American Folk Music.

In 1952, Folkways Records of New York issued a six LP collection of eighty-four songs under the name Anthology of American Folk Music. Divided into three sections, ‘Ballads’, ‘Social Music’, and ‘Songs’, the Anthology came to be an enormously influential recording. Its release in the 1950s was instrumental to the folk revivals of that and subsequent decades, with contemporary artists being inspired to turn to the music of their forebears, and its continued popularity is borne out by the reissue of the Anthology on six compact disks by Smithsonian Folkways Recordings in 1997.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Stampfel, “May 1997,” A Booklet of Essays, Appreciations, and Annotations Pertaining to the Anthology of American Folk Music, ed. Harry Smith (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1997) 25.

The Anthology was compiled by Harry Smith, who selected the tracks from his huge collection of 78s. Born in 1923, Harry Smith was an artist, filmmaker, anthropologist, self-proclaimed alchemist, collector of various objects, and lifelong consumer of numerous mind-altering substances. This last preoccupation, together with his eccentric manner, resulted in Smith often making unlikely claims about his life that may or may not have been true. In the foreword to his collection of interviews with Smith, Rani Singh writes that Smith's answers to his various interviewers, "depended on his mood, his drug intake, and his financial situation at the time" (ii). His unconventional lifestyle, however, cannot be denied, and is perhaps epitomised by his long-time acquaintance Allen Ginsberg's recollection that,

in [Smith's] bathroom he had a little birdie that he fed and talked to, and let out of his cage all the time. When his little birds died he put their bodies in the freezer. He'd keep them for various alchemical purposes, along with a bottle, which he said was several years' deposits of his semen, which he was also using for whatever magic structures. (8)

Not surprisingly, given his penchant for drink and drugs and his inability or lack of inclination to earn a steady income, Smith was rarely financially stable, and when he approached Moses (Moe) Asch, the founder of Folkways Records in what Smith believes to have been 1950, it was to ask Asch if he would buy some of Smith's records. Smith's account of the meeting is as follows, though it should be remembered that Smith's memory was eroded by decades of drink and drug use, and his anecdotes are frequently contradictory. The following recollection is taken from an interview Smith granted to Gary Kenton in March 1983. Smith relates:

Mr Asch is getting more and more puzzled, and he said something like, 'What are you doing this for?' Well, I need the money. I've got the records. I'm sleeping on somebody's sofa. He said, 'Why don't you bring out an album of these things?' He said, 'You'd make more money by bringing out this stuff,'

because he'd evidently shown it to someone – I don't know who – and they knew I was selling him the cream of the crop. (21)

Asch's foresight allowed Smith to keep his records, and select eighty-four tracks which would become not only, "an absolutely definitive and essential historical document," (Fahey 9) but also, "the first historical example of something that would become popular as a gift and provide solace on long journeys at a later date: the personal compilation tape" (Ward 143).

While the Anthology of American Folk Music differs from the compilation or mix tapes discussed elsewhere in this thesis, in that it was officially and commercially released by a record label, it is nevertheless the result of one person's selection and compilation of his record collection, and in this way, the Anthology bears more relation to the humble mix tape than it does to the average commercially sold compilation album.

In the following discussion, I will consider the factors involved in the creation of the Anthology, the 'effects' of the Anthology on its listeners, and will compare the Anthology to mix tapes as discussed by my informants. In particular I will analyse three main factors involved in the creation and subsequent consequences of the Anthology. These are the choices behind the selection and sequencing of songs on the Anthology; the influence which the Anthology had, and continues to have on its listeners; the packaging and accompanying liner notes to the Anthology.

### Selection and Sequencing

Before discussing the selection and sequencing of songs on the Anthology I think it is useful to cite the technological developments in sound recording which

made a compilation such as the Anthology possible. Developments and inventions in music technology not only provide the music listener with a new medium for listening to music, they also change the way we *listen to* and *use* music. I will discuss this in greater detail in my final chapter, but it is important to consider that the invention of the LP allowed for the possibility of recording many songs on one side. Writing in the introduction to the wonderful, Grammy award winning collection of essays which accompanied the 1997 reissue of the Anthology on CD, Anthony Seeger and Amy Horowitz of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings write that,

The LP (33 1/3 RPM 12" disc) made it possible to assemble a long, unbroken sequence of songs together: before this, a single song per side was the standard. Harry Smith used the new technology to great advantage. (3)

Echoing this, Geoff Ward describes Smith as, "a fan who was able to become an artist through the coupling of old music and new technology" (137).

The introduction of the tape recorder in the 1940s also allowed for the possibility of performers recording particular sequences of their repertoire. Frederic Ramsey Jr., whose recordings of the African American singer and guitarist Leadbelly (Huddie Ledbetter) were published by Folkways Records in 1954, documented Leadbelly's use of the tape recorder in his performances. Ramsey compares Leadbelly's performances to that of a record collector who whiles away an evening by playing a series of recordings to friends. The tape recorder enabled both the sequences of Leadbelly's live performances, and the record collectors' sequences drawn from their collection to be preserved.<sup>4</sup> Harry Smith himself also engaged in the practice of playing sequences of songs from his repertoire (record collection) to friends. Steve Gebhardt's vivid description of one such occasion clearly emphasises the event as

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Rosenberg, "Lead Belly Reissues as Sound Documentary: From Item to Event," Journal of American Folklore 116 (2003): 224.



performance, where the records were selected and sequenced so as to illustrate a narrative.<sup>5</sup> Gebhardt recalls that in the mid-1970s,

I began going over to Harry Smith's room at the Chelsea [Hotel] for what seemed to be a modern-day salon. Harry arose in the afternoon. I would arrive there in mid-afternoon. He would admit me then the process began. His room was filled with records, carefully arranged on metal racks. Thousands of records. Harry would sit at a table, I would sit on a chair a few feet away. That was the only furniture. His parakeet, Birdie, would fly periodically around the room. Harry drank vodka all day and periodically roll [sic] a joint which we would smoke as part of the sacrament. He would begin each day with a story on some arcane topic. He would play part of a record, digress to another subject, play another record, smoke and drink more, and continue his monologue. The thread was music...The records he played for me were from every part of the globe. What he did was to make connections for me in the musics from say the hills of North Carolina and some other peoples in Borneo as well as those in any other part of the world. Often, early on, I wondered where he was going with all of this. Would he ever get to the point? Then it clicked. His stories went along the circumference of a broad circular path. Starting at a random point but always many hours later ending up at full closure where he had intended, where he had started. (iv)

The sequencing of repertoire is clearly central to the performance, and it is significant that both Marcus and Ward allude to Smith's talent and artistry in his sequencing of songs. Writing in an online article, How to Make the Perfect Mix Tape, Jack Tripper emphasises the importance of sequencing, writing:

So what's a mix tape anyway? It's just a tape with a whole bunch of songs, right? Just scramble a few songs together and that's good enough, right? Wrong. Creating a mix tape is one thing, but creating a *perfect* mix tape is a whole other story. It takes enormous amounts of outlining and planning before executing a perfect mix tape.

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Neil Rosenberg for bringing this to my attention.

In making the Anthology, Smith had thousands of songs to choose from. The selection that he made is judged by many to be masterful, and the Anthology remains hugely popular. But would it have been so successful had Smith selected different songs for inclusion?

Any consideration of the selection and sequencing behind a compilation must necessarily involve an attempt to uncover the purpose, or motive behind its creation. As mentioned above, Smith's original aim behind approaching Moe Asch, was simply to make some money. However, Smith's record collection numbered well into the thousands, and once commissioned by Asch to compile the Anthology, Smith had to decide which songs to include. Smith spoke about this to Kenton, describing the process as, "the great soul-searching about what to put in and what to leave out" (22), a process familiar to any dedicated maker of the mix tape.

However, where the Anthology perhaps differs most from the 'typical' mix tape, is that Smith was largely unaware of his recipients, or audience. Where most mix tapes are made with the recipient in mind, and tailored accordingly, Smith had free rein to select whatever songs from his record collection he wanted. This is similar to the members of my informant Hannah Godfrey's "Hollow Box Jockey Club". A full description of the 'Jockey Club' can be found in my introduction, but to illustrate my point, I would like to reiterate here that the members of the Jockey Club are unaware of the identities and musical preferences of the recipient of their tape. In this situation, the mix tapes are much less of a meeting place between the creator's intentions and the creator's knowledge and assumptions of what the receiver will appreciate, and much more of a 'showpiece' made by the creator.

The overriding purpose, commercial motives notwithstanding, behind Smith's compilation of the Anthology is therefore unclear, and as there is no detailed account of Smith explaining his intentions, the selection and sequencing of songs on the Anthology must partly be inferred by the Anthology itself, and indeed, many commentators have attempted an analysis of the Anthology's content – with various conclusions being drawn. Greil Marcus states that,

Very carefully, Smith constructed internal narratives and orchestrated continuities. He moved tunes about homicide into those about suicide. Or he placed a performance so that it would echo a line or a melody in a preceding number – so that the repeated line might deepen its powers of suggestion, or the doubled melody intensify the gestures of the actors on its stage. Linking one performance to another, he ultimately linked each to all. (104)

Robert Cantwell, however, is equally adamant in his assertion that the Anthology is, “a body of music that has no inherent sequence, chronological or otherwise” (199).

Smith's own explanations as to his selection of songs are, predictably, incomplete and contradictory. In an interview with Gary Kenton, Smith conceded that, “the first criterion [of inclusion on the Anthology] was excellence of performance, combined with excellence of words” (27). However, speaking to John Cohen, Smith offers a different explanation, saying rather that,

The *Anthology* was not an attempt to get all the best records (there are other collections where everything is beautiful), but a lot of these were selected because they were odd – an important version of the song, or one which came from some particular place. There was a Child ballad, “Henry Lee” [Child 68]. It's not a good record, but it was the lowest-numbered Child ballad. Then there were other things put in simply because they were good performances, like “Brilliance Medley” occurs to me. You couldn't get a representative cross-section of music into such a small number of records [six LPs]. Instead, they were selected to be ones that would be popular among musicologists, or possibly with people who would want to sing them and maybe improve the version. They were basically picked out from an epistemological, musicological selection of reasons. (68-69)

In the above explanation of his selection, Smith appears to suggest having to reach a certain balance between selecting songs which he judges to be worthy of inclusion, and songs which he feels his *audience* will deem to be worthy of inclusion, and will respond to positively. This balance is one which was mentioned by some of my informants when talking about the selection process involved in creating a mix tape. For instance, Richard Gunn explained to me:

I guess for myself there's certain things that I like and I think, "oh God, nobody else could possibly like this!" I guess when I make it for somebody else I'm less likely to put difficult, obscure things on that only I like, 'cause I'll be like, "that's not going to give them a very good impression of the band."

In addition to this, while never stating it, it is possible that Smith was also thinking of the sales potential of the Anthology. His lack of funds was, after all, the initial reason why he approached Moe Asch in the first place, and in selecting the songs, Smith's choice may well have been influenced by his prediction of whether or not the songs included would benefit or hinder the sales of the recording. However, given Smith's habitual eschewal of conformity in all areas of his life, I think it unlikely that he would have been unduly concerned with pleasing his audience with the intention of making a more financially successful recording at the expense of omitting obscure songs which he deemed worthy of inclusion.

The eighty-four songs which comprise the Anthology were taken from Smith's personal record collection, which he began in around 1940. The records include recordings of Child ballads, cowboy ballads, fiddle music, gospel and blues, and Smith categorised the recordings under the three headings of ballads, social music, and songs, for inclusion in the Anthology. However, as the full title of the Anthology indicates, all of the selected recordings were included in the category of folk music. Commenting on this, Greil Marcus writes:

Smith's definition of 'American folk music' would have satisfied no one else. He ignored all field recordings, Library of Congress archives, anything validated only by scholarship or carrying the must of the museum. He wanted music to which people really had responded; records put on sale that at least somebody thought were worth paying for. (102)

Marcus continues by pointing out that, while Smith was aware that commercially recorded folk songs existed from as early as the 1880s, he only included recordings made, "between 1927, when electronic recording made possible accurate music reproduction, and 1932 when the Depression halted folk music sales" (102-103). Again, it should be noted that developments in technology influenced the Anthology and the songs which were included on it.

The fact that Smith never really explained his selection and sequencing of songs on the Anthology seems fitting. After all, as with any mix tape, the songs on the Anthology are decontextualised; removed from their original context, whether that be on a 78, an LP, a CD or a live radio broadcast, the songs' original meanings become separated and confused. Recontextualised on a compilation, and placed in a new sequence next to other songs, the recordings take on a new life, and come to generate new meanings for the listener. Freeing them of any connotations, Smith allowed the songs to speak for themselves. Robert Cantwell discusses this, writing that:

By confounding the familiar racial, regional, and sexual categories, or by cutting them so finely that they are reduced to a heterogeneous new substance, or by juxtaposing them with such violence, or such subtlety, that they tend either to paralyze or to mimic one another, the Anthology robs us of the handy frames in which we transport our folksong and presents it nakedly – or, rather, greets us after we have been stripped naked, intellectually speaking, so that we can't really conceive at all. (221)

The lack of 'handy frames' by which to judge or place the songs and performers, and the decontextualisation has allowed Greil Marcus the freedom to construct his own version of what the Anthology 'really' represents. In his enjoyable, though

unabashedly self-indulgent paean to Bob Dylan and the context surrounding his famous 'Basement Tape' recordings, Marcus writes of the performers on the Anthology inhabiting 'Smithville', a town which offers an 'alternative America', one which consists of the values and ways of life as presented by the performers on the Anthology. Smithville, writes Marcus,

is a mystical body of the republic, a kind of public secret: a declaration of what sort of wishes and fears lie behind any public act, a declaration of a weird but clearly recognisable America within the America of the exercise of institutional majoritarian power....It is a democracy of manners – a democracy, finally, of how people carry themselves, of how they appear in public. The ruling question of public life is not that of the distribution of material goods or the governance of moral affairs, but that of how people plumb their souls and then present their discoveries, their true selves, to others – unless, as happens here often enough, the fear of not belonging, or the wish for true proof that one does belong, takes over, and people assume the mask that makes them indistinguishable from anyone else. But in Smithville that mask never stays on for long. (125)

The pleasure with which Marcus takes the Anthology and constructs a new America based on the performances contained therein is evident, and it is equally pleasurable to read Marcus's interpretation. However, Edmund O'Reilly offers a more detached analysis of the Anthology. While he too comments that, by being placed on the Anthology, the original 'living' performances have become texts, he resists the temptation to interpret the eighty-four performances as a new, single, comprehensible text. He writes that, "severed from its customary setting and conventions, the text is free to mitigate into new roles, as collectable, as looking-glass, as essayist's pretext, and as fuel for administrative heat" (87). He critiques Marcus's reductionism, arguing that, while the performances have been recontextualised, it is misleading and wrong to simply ignore the contexts in which they were originally performed and recorded. O'Reilly offers a more levelheaded interpretation of the Anthology, reacting to what he interprets as overly romantic and hyperbolic responses to it from other fans.

Interestingly, he also argues that the Anthology can no longer be seen as a cult text, and a collection of obscure oddities as a result of its dissemination and popularity via 'the mass media' (90). I do not agree with this. As a folklorist, I would argue that the only way to convincingly assess whether or not the Anthology was viewed as 'a collection of oddities' would be to conduct interviews with the people who own it. Regardless of whether or not they bought it from a multi-national chain store, to somebody listening to the Anthology for the first time in their bedroom, the recordings may well sound pretty unique and obscure.

To return to comments made by Cantwell and Marcus, it is significant that both refer to an aspect of the Anthology that many people have judged to be one of Smith's greatest triumphs: the disguising of the ethnic and racial backgrounds of the performers. Smith himself comments on this, saying to John Cohen that,

Before the *Anthology* there had been a tendency in which records were lumped into blues catalogs or hillbilly catalogs. That was one thing the *Anthology* was for...and everybody was having blindfold tests to prove they could tell which was which. That's why there's no such indications of that sort [color/racial] in the albums. I wanted to see how well certain jazz critics did on the blindfold test. They all did horribly. It took years before anybody discovered that Mississippi John Hurt wasn't a hillbilly. (83)

The recontextualisation of songs on compilations allows them to be heard in new ways, free of existing prejudices. One friend of mine informed me that she hardly ever writes down the tracklisting for the mix tapes she makes for other people, out of a fear that they will judge the song before they even hear it.



### Influence and Legacy of the Anthology

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Anthology was well received on its initial release in 1952, and its subsequent popularity is attested to by its reissue on CD in 1997. The Anthology was well received by different people for different reasons. As Smith had intended, the Anthology was popular among musicologists, musicians who wanted to learn the songs, and also among 'regular' music fans like Smith himself, who were delighted at being introduced to whole new worlds of music. Certainly these last two groups used the Anthology in much the same way as listeners often use mix tapes. For instance, in his introduction to Ravi Singh's collection of interviews with Harry Smith, Think of the Self Speaking, Allen Ginsberg writes of the enormous influence which the Anthology had on contemporary musicians:

This box-set was a historic bomb in American folk music. It turned on Peter, Paul and Mary, turned on the whole folk music world at that time, including Ramblin' Jack Elliott and everyone else. It was a treasure of American blues [and] mountain musics. Happy Traum, everybody, including Dylan [were] affected by it. Jerry Garcia learned blues from Harry Smith's records, according to Garcia. (4)

So, according to Ginsberg, the Anthology both influenced a whole musical generation, and also inspired and educated individual musicians. This second consequence, or function of the Anthology, puts me in mind of my informant Neil Rosenberg's self-made bluegrass anthologies, and how he would make and listen to them in an attempt to learn specific songs. He explained to me:

Sometimes I would put [them] on just to listen, or partly to learn the music, if I was trying to learn the repertoire of Bill Monroe, because I was playing with the house band of the park that he owned, and I needed to know what key things were in, or where the banjo player took a break. (*Personal interview*)



Not only musicians, but ordinary music fans were influenced by the Anthology in that they were introduced to new performers, new styles of music, and new sounds. One of the intentions behind the Anthology (as with many mix tapes, as my informants told me) was in effect to 'sell' certain performers or styles of music; a way of saying, "this is the music I'm listening to – you should know about this because it's important and good!" This echoes Roger Abrahams' "Rhetorical Theory of Folklore", where he discusses how an understanding of any item of folklore requires a consideration of the intentions of the creator, and her relationship to the item itself and her audience. He writes that:

Each item of expressive culture is an implement of argument, a tool of persuasion. A piece is enacted by a performer who tries to use it to affect an audience in some way. He embodies his argument in traditional form, and this makes his technique of argument traditional as well – but argue he does, even when he seems to be entertaining. (146)

Geoff Ward acknowledges Harry Smith's persuasive intentions, writing that, "one of the functions of the Anthology is precisely to send the listener out armed with the knowledge and the appetite that will open other doors" (142). Judging by the reactions of some consumers, this intention certainly seems to have been successful. John Cohen mentions the fact that, "it gave us contact with musicians and cultures we wouldn't have known existed," (5) and writing in the notes to the 1997 reissue of the Anthology, Jon Pankake mentions how the Anthology inspired him to make dubs of other country and blues songs on 7" reels and trade them, and also to research the performers themselves. He writes:

The Anthology led me not only into intellectual pursuits but also into a fellowship of rich personal contacts. As the Folk Song Revivalists of the 1960s began to search for and locate the surviving musicians who appear on the Anthology, I came in time to meet eleven of the musicians who appear on the Anthology. More importantly, through the Little Sandy Review, I began to meet other young people who had likewise come under the spell of the

Anthology, and these men and women – fellow ‘Anthologists’ all – became my lifetime friends and associates. (28)

In his book The Old, Weird America, Greil Marcus writes at length of how listening to the Anthology had an enormous influence on Bob Dylan, and was instrumental in Dylan’s recording of the legendary Basement Tapes. Not only did Dylan cover a song that appears on the Anthology – See That My Grave is Kept Clean (Traditional/Blind Lemon Jefferson) on the Basement Tapes, Marcus also implies that the whole set of recordings was somehow infused with the spirit and atmosphere of the Anthology, and continued the tradition of the weird, alternative America which Marcus saw as inherent in the Anthology. Illustrating the point, Marcus writes that:

In the basement tapes, an uncomfortable world was haphazardly constructed out of the past, out of Smith’s *Anthology* and its like, out of the responses people like Bob Dylan, Mike Seeger, and so many more brought to that music, its stories, and to the world – another country – implicit within it. (96)

Regardless of whether or not one shares Marcus’s opinion, or instead shares Edmund O’Reilly’s more reserved praise for the Anthology, its enormous influence cannot be denied, and its 1997 reissue has enabled a new generation of music fans to become acquainted with performers such as Dock Boggs and Clarence Ashley. Similarly, the Anthology also gave me the opportunity to listen to earlier and alternative recordings of songs such as “The House Carpenter” (Child 243, “James Harris (The Daemon Lover)”), a song which I had previously only known through Dylan’s version.

The way in which the Anthology influenced its fans to track down the featured performers, thereby introducing them to new music, is very similar to the way in which many mix tape creators intend their mix tapes to introduce friends to certain bands and performers. My informants spoke about this aspect, both in terms of tapes they had received which had introduced them to new music, and tapes which they had

made with the deliberate intention of influencing the musical taste of friends. With regards to being influenced by another person's mix tapes, my friend Andrew Robinson writes enthusiastically of three tapes he received which introduced him to musical styles which he might not otherwise have familiarised himself with. Writing of the tapes, which can be seen in Figure 4, Andrew comments:

More often than not, the most interesting mixtapes I get are from people I don't really know. Considering my taste for music verges on borderline obsessive, I have always tended to feel most comfortable around people like myself who share a somewhat sick interest in the glorious sounds that come from radios, tapes, cds, and records (8-tracks were before my time). Similarly, when creating a new friendship, music is 99 times out of 100 one of the first points of reference I build upon.

In 2002 I made an ambitious tape trade with a musician from Corner Brook who I began conversing with through a local music Internet mailing list. He had been raving about underground hip-hop and 60s Brazilian music, neither of which were things I'd heard much of. I sent him 2 cassettes of independent music from the Conception Bay/St. John's rock scenes, and he sent me 3 tapes covering Brazilian music, hip-hop, and free jazz. The hip-hop tape has some really neat songs on it, but it has never really turned my crank that much. The other two tapes were revelations. The free jazz tape really helped develop my interest in out-there jazz music, an interest that has really blossomed in the last year as I've fallen in love with the music of Miles Davis and Alice Coltrane (the Ray Russell, Sonny Sharrock, and Pharoah Sanders tracks are also quite savage). And the Brazilian tape is so joyful sounding, it is quite possibly my favorite summer driving cassette. The biggest find for me on that tape are the songs sung by Gal Costa, a wonderful singer who is equally adept at handling wild psychedelic rockers and syrupy ballads. I never kept in touch with the guy who made the tapes for me, but if I ever see his band play St. John's again, I should complement him on the years of pleasure these tapes have given me.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Robinson, e-mail to the author, 14 June 2005.



**Figure 4.** Andrew Robinson's jazz, Brazilian and hip hop mix tapes

Speaking from the opposite perspective – that of the mix tape maker, rather than receiver – Helena Lukowska states explicitly how she tried to influence the music taste of her friends by making them tapes. For example, when I asked her why she initially started making tapes, she answered,

I was probably about fourteen and I was just starting getting into really obscure indie bands that nobody else liked, and I really, really wanted my friends to like them so that they'd go to gigs with me and I'd have something to talk about.

Helena also explained that she made tapes for people who she thought 'needed help' with their musical taste! She illustrates the point by saying,

One of my friends likes The Levellers, and I want to make her a mix tape because I want to save her! She likes some good stuff, she likes Throwing

Muses too, but I'm wondering if I can get her away from The Levellers completely.

For Helena, then, the making and presenting of a mix tape can have an educational purpose, and she feels a *duty* to introduce friends to certain bands.

While I have discussed above how both the Anthology and mix tapes influence the people who listen to them, it is also interesting to consider and compare the way in which the Anthology has been equated with a historical document, and the longevity of mix tapes. I would argue that both the Anthology and mix tapes come to have functions and meanings outside of the actual songs on the compilation. Writing of the Anthology, Greil Marcus comments on its timeless quality, and suggests that it serves a social purpose by preserving and transmitting a body of knowledge that Marcus fears would otherwise have disappeared (20-24). The late musician John Fahey was also adamant in his assertion that the Anthology, "persists as an absolutely definitive and essential historical document." (9). It does seem likely that, given their obscurity, many of the recordings included on the Anthology would be hard to track down today, and as such, Smith's compilation could be justifiably regarded as an archive. However, it cannot be denied that part of the importance in which the Anthology is held, derives from its commercial release and professional packaging. The fact that the Anthology was commercially released, and through technology was able to be reproduced, thus ensuring that innumerable people own an identical copy of Harry Smith's historical document, has the effect of rendering the Anthology more well known and more likely to be lauded as an important text than an individual, handmade mix tape. However, I would argue that for some people, certain mix tapes are just as capable as serving as a personal 'historical document' than a professionally made,

mass-produced recording. Indeed, mix tapes are much more likely to possess a higher emotional value than their commercial counterparts.

Tia DeNora, a sociologist specialising in the uses people make of music in their lives has written that, “music has the capacity to reorient awareness, to direct consciousness back to past times and experiences” (62). People make associations between certain pieces of music and particular people, places and events in their lives, and hearing a song unexpectedly on the radio for instance, can trigger a chain of memories, whereby the listener recalls the first time they heard the song, who they were with, where they were, and what they were doing. A mix tape, therefore, which was made by a certain person, at a certain time, for a certain reason, is capable of evoking many memories in a person. Writing in Kassettengeschichten: Von Menschen und Ihren Mixtapes, a collection of essays resulting from interviews with people about the various ways they use mix tapes, German scholars Helle Meister, Silke Menzel and Ina Orbitz suggest that, “a mix tape can function as an archive in which memories are stored” (48).

With this in mind, I questioned my informants on the extent to which mix tapes could be considered to contain biographical or historical information. I asked Richard Gunn about the tapes that he had made and asked him whether, were they all to be lined up in front of him, they could be interpreted as a biography. He answered:

Kind of, yeah. There's a rock tape I made from 1997, and I thought, 'shit, I never listen to any of these bands anymore'. I probably sold a few of the records that the tracks were taken from, so I guess certain tapes you make for certain people at certain times, certain motives, and those motives no longer exist, they were something of the moment, so certain people I'll never see again or whatever. So I'll see the tapes and think they were a part of my life at that time or whatever, so I guess it is biographical to a point, but I wouldn't like to judge my mental state or anything by looking back to a mix tape. That would be a too scary thing, but they're a good indication of the people I knew at the time, and what music I was listening to.

Richard was speaking from the point of view of a mix tape creator, and so discussed the tapes in terms of the music that he was listening to at the time, and the reasons for making the tape. Inspired by the comments of one of Meister, Menzel and Orbitz's informants who drew comparisons between looking through a photograph album and listening to a mix tape, I asked my informant Hannah Godfrey whether or not she felt that the two mediums performed similar functions. She answered:

In a kind of abstract way, yes, because photo albums contain images and therefore kind of instances that are kind of like a temporal breeze block or brick. Like photo albums are like 'time bricks' and I suppose that visually they're more easy to interpret because you can see the people in them and you know where it was blah blah blah. With mix tapes it's different because most of the time you haven't made the music, and so all of those songs, they create particular chemical reactions in you and you have particular memories, which are unfathomable to anyone else. So they are like a photo album, but a photo album that only you understand. Because you're the only one who's got the pictures in your head for those particular songs.

For example if I listen to Sting's "Englishman in New York" and a couple of songs on this tape I made the first time I went to America a few years ago, even now I can still see being on the plane and I can see myself listening to it as I was walking round Chicago, but no-one else has that. So yes, there is a correlation I think, but I think it's very different. You can't know it unless someone tells you what a song means to them.

Here Hannah was describing mix tapes which she had either made for herself or which had been given to her by other people. In this way, like Richard, she mentioned the personal nature of the memories and how they would make little sense to other people, acting in effect like personal archives and storage containers of biographical information.

Both of the above examples are different from the Anthology of American Folk Music in that the tapes made were unique objects, made for a certain person, or a certain occasion, and therefore one would have needed to have been involved in that situation in order for personal memories to later be evoked. However, as I mentioned



earlier, the mix tapes that are made in Hannah Godfrey's Hollow Box Jockey Club differ from the other mix tapes discussed in this paper, as the mix tape creators are unaware of the identity of the people who will listen to them. The tapes are not made with one person in mind, nor are they made for an occasion such as a party, so I would argue that they are less personal, and therefore that their function and attributes are different. Hannah commented on this, saying of the average tape made for the Hollow Box Jockey Club that:

You're not making it for a particular person. In some ways you're making it for, I think, it's almost, it *can* be a showpiece, because you can be like now, "hey, I don't care if you think this is shit," or, "I think you're going to love this," because you're putting down your music collection and putting it on a tape, your knowledge of a particular genre on a tape, so it's almost like you're creating an archive. You're creating a means of recording a particular movement in music, or your particular perspective on music, and so you don't have the intimacy of creating it for a particular person.

Her comments that the tape can be, "a knowledge of a particular genre," or "a means of recording a particular movement in music, or...particular perspective on music," are reminiscent of Greil Marcus' comments on the Anthology as representing Harry Smith's own interpretations and opinions of contemporary American folk music.

#### Harry Smith's Handbook to the Anthology of American Folk Music and Mix Tape

##### Cover Art

While I have mentioned that the Anthology differs from the mix tapes discussed elsewhere in this thesis, in that it is mass reproduced and not a unique text, I have attempted to demonstrate the similarities that nevertheless exist between them. The most obvious similarity, as I have already stated, is in the fact that the Anthology was compiled from Harry Smith's own record collection. I would argue that another



similarity exists in the handbook which Smith wrote to accompany the recordings. Smith's handbook, which is included in the 1997 reissue package, as well as the original 1952 release, is – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the author's eccentricities – a curious document. Like the liner notes which accompany many compilations and albums, Smith has methodically detailed information for each track, including performer, instrumentation, date of original recording, a list of related records, and a list of relevant books. However, as well as including this information, Smith also manages to imprint his own quirky touch, most notably in his headline-like summaries of the ballads. Smith condenses the lyrics of each of the ballads to a few pithy, laconic lines, most often to humorous effect. For instance, in describing the song “King Kong Kitchie Kitchie Ki-Me-O”, “Chubby” Parker's take on an old British tale of romance between a frog and a mouse, Smith neatly reduces the lyrics to the lines, “Zoologic miscegny achieved in mouse frog nuptuals [sic], relatives approve,” thus encapsulating the lyrical content in just nine words. Similarly, The Masked Marvel's “Mississippi Boveavil Blues” becomes, “Bollweevil survives physical attack after cleverly answering farmers questions.” And then there is my personal favourite: straight-faced, Smith takes William and Versey Smith's account of the sinking of the Titanic, “When That Great Ship Went Down”, and delivers his own deadpan interpretation of the song in the headline, “Manufacturers proud dream destroyed at shipwreck. Segregated poor die first.”<sup>7</sup>

As Geoff Ward quite rightly points out, when reading Smith's handbook, one is struck by, “an anti-scholarly, presentational Surrealism that informs only to cast a spell of doubt over the outlines of fact” (139). As well as containing information on

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<sup>7</sup> Harry Smith, “Handbook,” *Anthology of American Folk Music*, ed. Harry Smith (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1997).

the recordings and idiosyncratic reductions of the lyrics of the ballads, the handbook also includes pictures of some of the performers, snippets of musical notation, and pictures of instruments. It is, as Robert Cantwell suggests,

A discography, a manual, a scrapbook, a sort of stamp or coupon book, a sort of official document, like a passport, as well as a tabloid newspaper: a bricolage of printed ephemera that like junk sculpture incorporates many alien forms, each set off in its own character against all others and against the whole. (194)

In this respect, I would argue that the handbook resembles many of the covers which accompany contemporary mix tapes. Many of the mix tapes which were either made or received by my informants listed basic information on performers and song titles, but the information was often presented in a quirky, individual manner, and the cassette covers were more often than not decorated with hand-drawn pictures, pictures cut out from magazines, or anything else that came to the mind of the creator.

For instance, a tape which was made for me by my British friend and informant Helena Lukowska, is decorated with information on “how to escape from a bear,” (in the letter which accompanies the tape, Helena writes of these instructions that, “obviously you will more than likely need to refer to them on a daily basis living in Canada and all....”)<sup>8</sup>. On the inside cover, Helena has listed the performers and song titles, and has drawn tiny pictures next to each song which summarise the song’s lyrical content, in much the same way that Smith’s ‘headlines’ summarise the performances on the Anthology. Pictures of the cover and inlay can be seen in the following pages in figures 5 and 6.

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<sup>8</sup> Helena Lukowska, personal letter, 2004.



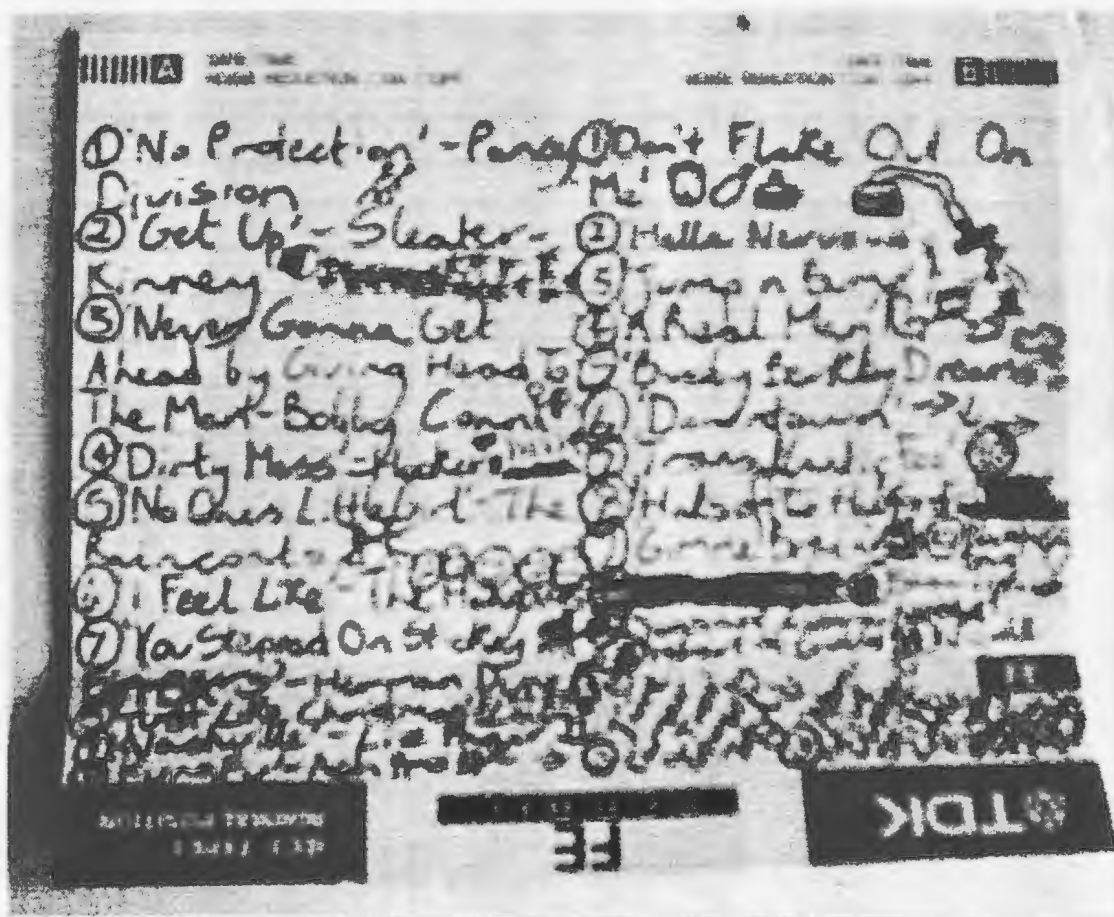


Figure 6. Tracklisting of a mix tape sent to me by Helena Lukowska

When I asked Helena about why she tended to decorate the cassette covers and why she preferred to receive tapes with decorated covers, she replied that,

It's just so much more pleasing to get a tape with cover art....there's no point in making cover art for yourself, but tapes I make for other people, I always, always decorate them now....[receiving a tape with cover art] feels more personal, it feels like it's a gift. It makes it more pleasing.

In a similar way, I would argue that the quirky, individual handbook made by Harry Smith makes a more satisfying and *pleasing* accompaniment to the Anthology than a standard set of liner notes including only the basic information could provide. It reminds the listener, or consumer, of the person behind the commodity, and the fact

that, while the records may have been bought from a stranger at a checkout in an impersonal chainstore, they were once created by a real individual who hoped to communicate personally with the people who would buy the records.

The intention to communicate, and to be understood or acknowledged, is a key concept in the making and presentation of mix tapes, and is one which was mentioned by my informants as being very important to them. The role of communication with respect to mix tapes is a subject to which I will now turn in my next chapter.

## Chapter 2

*“Today I Made You a Mix Tape to Say Exactly How I Feel Inside and Make You Feel it Too”<sup>9</sup>*

“Folklore,” as Dan Ben-Amos writes, “is artistic communication in small groups” (13). He also states that,

For a folklore communication to exist as such, the participants in the small group situation have to belong to the same reference group, one composed of people of the same age or of the same professional, local, religious, or ethnic affiliation. In theory and in practice tales can be narrated and music can be played to foreigners. Sometimes this accounts for diffusion. But folklore is true to its own nature when it takes place within the group itself. (13)

From the uses that I make of mix tapes, and my observations of their usage by other people, I would argue that through their creation, presentation, and reception mix tapes are a clear example of folkloric communication. I find it interesting to consider Ben-Amos’s comments on the communication of folklore both within, and without the same reference group in the light of my research on the uses people make of mix tapes. Writing in Gerrit Herlyn and Thomas Overdick’s edited collection of research on mix tapes, Rolf Hasbargen and Andrea Krämer discuss the uses made of mix tapes in communication. They write that,

Through the mix tape, you can transmit messages and statements that you can hide in songs, which the receiver must decipher....Out of the rational, technical, lifeless and shop-bought audio-cassette, a mix tape maker can express in creative ways their own emotional life, as well as proofs of friendship and love. (77-78)

However, they also point out that mix tapes are a tricky way of communicating:

Mix tapes offer no guarantee of a successful communication. So it can happen that the receiver will arrive at a different message than the recorder of the mix tape intended” (77).

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<sup>9</sup> The Ataris, “Song for a Mix Tape,” End is Forever, Kung Fu Records, 2001.

The problem lies in the nature of the communication. Rather than speaking face to face, the communication is conducted in a coded manner through selecting and recording certain songs onto a tape. The creator chooses the songs in order to communicate a certain message, but as Hasbargen and Krämer point out, there is no guarantee that the receiver will arrive at the intended message once she is playing the tape. Writing of the agency of an item of expressive culture, Abrahams suggests that:

Our clearest insight into affect is achieved by studying the relation between the performer and his audience. For the strategy of a piece to succeed, the sympathy of the audience must be elicited. In the performance, the performer and the item must come together congruently. The item must exist and the performer must know how to use it – each is equally important if the audience's interest and sympathy are to be aroused. (147)

Communication through mix tapes, as with any other form of communication, involves the communicator or speaker, and the person who is being communicated to – the listener. In effect, there are two processes of communication involved within the act of mix tape exchange – the process by which the tape is made, and the process by which the tape is listened to. I believe that it is possible to consider both of these processes as 'performances'. Richard Bauman suggests that 'performance' is,

A mode of communicative behaviour and a type of communicative event. While the term may be employed in an aesthetically neutral sense to designate the actual conduct of communication (as opposed to the potential for communicative action), performance usually suggests an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience. (41)

In this chapter I hope to demonstrate, primarily through information learned from my informants, how the creation of a mix tape involves “an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience.” While this chapter will focus on the performance of the mix tape in relation to the artist, or creator who made it, I will also consider the creation of the tape in



relation to the anticipated reaction of the recipient, as this is a vital component in the tape's structure. This will then lead me to my next chapter, where I will conduct a performance analysis on the mix tape in the context of how it is listened to by the recipient.

### A Performance Analysis of the Creation of a Mix Tape

In order to conduct a performance analysis of the creation of a mix tape, I think it is necessary to consider the following factors: the way in which people use music in communication; the actual process involved in making the mix tape; the way in which the tape is constructed according to the intentions of the mix tape maker. I will begin by taking a general look at how people use music as a means of communication in everyday life, before considering the specific cases of my informants.

Music is a passionate sequencing of thoughts and feelings that expresses meaning in a manner that has no parallel in human life. It is a universally recognized synthesis of the substance and style of our existence – a blending of personal, social, and cultural signification that is confused with no other variety of communication. (Lull 1)

In their everyday lives, people use music as a way of communicating emotions, meanings and intentions in a manner which is often much more succinct than spoken or written language could ever be.

In her book Music in Everyday Life, sociologist Tia DeNora explores how people use music to regulate themselves and organise their personal and social lives through a series of interviews. DeNora stresses that music is not a stimulus. Music is not simply an outside, independent agency that when played, causes its listeners to



behave in certain ways or influences their mood. Rather, people treat music as a resource, which they can utilise to help control themselves, and their interaction with their environment and other people. People respond to music according to what they already know of it, themselves, and the effect which they believe the music will have on them. DeNora writes that,

Music's 'effects' come from the ways in which individuals orient to it, how they interpret it and how they place it within their personal musical maps, within the semiotic web of music and extra-musical associations. (61)

This helps to explain why different people respond to different songs in different ways. Or how the same song can elicit different reactions from the same person depending on the context in which it is played.

The meaning which music has for a person can be influenced by any number of factors – for instance who you are with, where you are, and what you are doing. Songs can often influence particular emotions in people based on the previous occasion on which the person heard it. DeNora comments on this, in relation to information provided by her informants, who related accounts of how they associated certain songs with certain experiences and certain emotions. The songs had become part of their own biography, had become a soundtrack to their lives, and as such, a subsequent playing of the song could provoke in them a heightened emotional response. DeNora writes,

But the creation of that 'moment' as a heightened moment was due in part to the alchemy of respondents' perceived or sensed 'rightness' or resonance between the situation, the social relationship, the setting, the music, and themselves as emerging aesthetic agents with feelings, desires, moods such that the music *was* the mood, and the mood, the music. (67)

This relationship between and merging of the mood and the music is echoed by many of my informants as they described to me how subsequent playings of a mix tape

provoked an emotional response in them which was at least in part a result of the existing connotations which the song had for them, and I will discuss this in greater depth in my next chapter when I consider the performance of listening to a mix tape. However, I first wish to consider the actual making of the tape. When discussing the making of a tape with my informants, several factors were mentioned which were deemed to be of importance: the technical process involved; the structuring of the tape according to the context in, and purpose for which it was being made; the balance between the ego of the creator and their anticipation of what the intended receiver would appreciate. What was also evident, and which I believe shines through the comments made by my informants, is the sheer *fun* they have making mix tapes, and I believe that this enthusiasm is demonstrated at every stage of the mix tape creative process.

### The Technical Process Involved in Making a Tape

Writing on Art of the Mix – a website dedicated to the mix tape, David Zukowski has written “A Beginner’s Guide to Engineering the Perfect Mixed Tape”. Listing the factors involved, “in descending order of indispensability,” Zukowski suggests that the mix tape creator consider the following in order to make the ‘perfect’ mix tape: record level; non-logic pause button two separate single-cassette decks; graphic equalizer; mixer; something on which to take out your frustrations (“in the process of making a good tape, things will go wrong....If too many things go wrong, keep something to hand that is both breakable and throwable....Styrofoam packing material works pretty well”); comfortable set of isolating headphones; turntable pitch

control; a third cassette deck, this time dual-cassette, preferably full-logic.<sup>10</sup> While helpful, Zukowski's guidelines are by no means standard among mix tapers, both for reasons of varying access to equipment, and also simply because some people – regardless of their devotion to making mix tapes – do not pay as much attention to the technical process involved. Indeed a prime example of this type of person would be my elder brother, Steven. Despite having made numerous compilation tapes for countless people over the course of many years, Steven's tapes have, for the most part, been identifiable as 'Steven creations' by virtue of the poor sound quality and editing. Steven is the first to acknowledge this. In a note which accompanies a tape he sent to me in April, 2004, Steven writes that, "the quality of sound on the tape is (as ever) crap."<sup>11</sup>

While none of my informants paid as much attention to the technical aspects of recording a tape as Zukowski advocates, it is something that they are all aware of.

Richard Gunn states that,

as for sound quality, all the levels are set right on my tape machine, it's very precise on the volume. I try not to do too much tape to tape stuff, 'cause it's a faff. So I guess that's important. I don't like it when it goes quiet – loud – quiet – loud. It annoys the hell out of me.

Similarly, when I asked Holly Everett how much attention she pays to the sound quality, she replied:

I think about that a lot, and if I listen to it later and I find that something's off, like I accidentally cut a song off too early, or I somehow cut off the beginning of a song, I'll do the whole thing over, 'cause it really upsets me to have screw-ups. And I really try as best I can to have everything at the same level. 'Cause when I was first making tapes I would find that for whatever reason, one song is really, really loud, and then you'd have to turn it down, and then the next song would come on and you could hardly hear it, and then you'd have to turn it up and back and forth and that drove me *nuts*! So after that I

<sup>10</sup> "A Beginner's Guide to Engineering the Perfect Mixed Tape," *Art of the Mix*, ed. Jim Januszewski, 1997, 10 January 2005 <<http://www.artofthemix.org/writings/guide.asp>>.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Lovatt, letter to the author, April 2004.

tried to have everything at the same level. And I listen to it a lot as I'm going along, to avoid having to do the whole thing over.

The increasing tendency for people to make mix CDs, rather than tapes, has changed the technical process, and many people switched from making tapes to CDs primarily for practical reasons involved in the mix's creation. Speaking of making tapes, for instance, Neil Rosenberg told me that,

The downside of all that is it's very laboured, time intensive, and I found that basically when I was making tapes, and I guess I did a lot with C-90s, it would take two or three hours to do one side, and given that this was when I was in full time teaching and raising a family and so on, it was hard to find that time all the time...and I just don't have the patience, or interest in doing that now....So now I've gotten sort of existential about it and I think I really prefer the CD thing. (*Personal interview*)

While the changes in music technology and how they relate to making compilations is a subject to which I will devote more attention in Chapter 4, I think it is relevant at this point to mention that, from a technical point of view, CD mixes are much more easily made than cassette mixes, and allow for less variation in sound quality.

For the most part, it seems that my informants considered good sound quality to be a necessary prerequisite for the creation of a good mix tape. However, while the sound quality is important, the real artistry comes with the selection and sequencing of the songs – processes which are inextricably linked to the purpose or person for which the tape is intended. It is to this process that I will now turn my attention.

#### The structuring of the song according to context

From talking to my informants, it seems that the songs on a mix tape are almost always chosen with a particular purpose in mind. Whether the tape is being made as a birthday gift, as a courtship gift, for a party, for a roadtrip, or is simply

intended to reflect a certain theme, once the purpose of the tape has been chosen, the songs are then carefully selected and sequenced so as to make the most 'successful' tape for that purpose. The Art of the Mix actually lists a taxonomy of possible mixes, ranging from the more conventional: the romantic mix, the break-up mix, the road trip mix, the workout mix; to the less obvious: the scare your neighbours mix, lost my damn job mix, before I had formulated any musical tastes mix. Of all the topics pertaining to mix tapes which I discussed with my informants, perhaps the one about which they spoke with the most enthusiasm was the initial conceiving of an idea for a mix tape, and then the fun which they had whilst selecting and recording songs to go on it.

What was also clear was the importance which sequencing holds. Interestingly, two of my informants actually distinguished between the first mix tapes which they made when they were still 'learning the art', and the later 'proper' mix tapes which they made. The fact that they make this distinction is significant. At its basic level, a mix tape is a compilation of songs recorded onto one cassette. However, the fact that dedicated mix tape makers emphasise the fact that a *proper* or a *good* mix tape is not only this, but is also the result of a great deal of thought which has been put into the selection and sequencing of songs, demonstrates the emic qualities involved in making mix tapes. I would suggest that non-mix tape makers would be much less likely to see the distinction, or recognise the artistry involved in making tapes.

This distinction between tapes was explained to me by Richard Gunn, when I asked him when and how he made his first mixes. He answered:

I'm not sure. I remember having mix tapes from about five or six – things put together from the pop charts....But I'm not sure if I actually made the tapes or if my brother did for me. I have no recollection if he did the technical bits while I went, "I want that song"....And then I guess what I did to start with

was, I don't know if anyone could afford much music when they were young, I know I couldn't, so I'd just make compilations of my favourite bands, I'd just put however many songs of theirs onto a tape or my favourite ones, and then I would have a 'Best Of' tape. I guess I didn't start making proper mix tapes with different songs with every song by a different band until quite later on, probably when I was about fifteen or sixteen, when I had lots of bands to choose from and lots of favourite songs.

Similarly, Holly Everett downplayed the first mix tapes which she made, saying:

I think I first started making mix tapes in grade six – that would be when I was ten. I had a friend who introduced me to disco, and she really loved to listen to this station out of San Antonio....She would make tapes off the radio, and that was before boom boxes, where you had the radio and the tape deck in the same thing; so what we would do was get our little Radio Shack tape recorders and put it up to the radio, and then when a song came on we liked we pressed 'record'. And we would just make whole tapes that way. And I learnt that off her. So I guess those would be my very first mix tapes, but those would have been pretty rough!

As we got older we got more sophisticated, and they came out with the thing with the radio and the tape player in the same thing, which made it easier....And then when I got to university, I started working for the student radio station and so from watching other, more experienced DJs, I saw how they would blend things together and set the record so the song would start right away, and I thought, "that's fantastic! I can use that!" So I got very creative with my turntable at home in making mix tapes.

While part of Holly's account of the way her mix tapes have improved is concerned with having access to more sophisticated technology – a subject to which I will return in my final chapter – she also suggests that she learned the *skills* of how to make a good mix from her fellow DJs.

While Holly and Richard may have made their first mix tapes in a somewhat haphazard way, spontaneously recording songs from the radio, their later tapes, as was the case for my other informants were based on a certain idea or theme. When I asked Holly why she would make tapes for certain people, she answered:

To introduce them to new music, and I used them a lot in a romantic way, and I would give them to boys that I liked, to say, "this is me. This is what I like," and I got mix tapes from people for that same reason.

I have a friend who goes tree planting every summer, so I give her mix tapes...so for a couple of summers in a row, I made her a May mix, to take with her tree planting.

And then also I've made them for people's birthdays, or for other significant occasions, like graduation or something like that.

Neil Rosenberg described to me how he would make tapes in the 1960s which were used as background music at parties, and how he would also record songs from live bluegrass performances, compile them onto a tape, and trade them with other bluegrass fans. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, he would also make tapes with the specific intention of learning certain songs. As well as compiling tape anthologies for himself in order to learn new songs, he would also make tapes for other purposes. He says,

I made for example, the first Christmas we were here [St John's, NL], we'd borrowed Christmas records from a whole bunch of people in the neighbourhood and made a tape, an anthology to play at Christmas, and subsequently it's migrated to cassettes – both my daughters have copies – it became a family icon! (*Personal interview*)

Again, the pride with which Neil talks about certain cassettes is evident. This tape is no longer a mere collection of songs – it is an icon!

Helena Lukowska stated that the first mix tapes she made for other people were designed to introduce them to new music, and said that more recently she has begun to make tapes for people's birthdays. Helena also DJs at 'Razzmatazz' – a club night in Leeds, England, and she says,

When me and my friends started a club night called Razzmatazz, I ended up thinking, "what songs could I play? This is so exciting!" and then I ended up being really sad and made a tape of songs I thought would be good to play on the night....So I just made this tape of songs I thought would be really, really good to play at Razzmatazz 'cause I'd never had the chance to DJ properly before, or anything. I thought, "wow, this is so exciting – I can inflict all this



on people!” and so I was just trying to think of songs and put them down and see if they’d work.

In this way, Helena used the mix tape as a kind of testing ground on which to try out the songs before she would play them at Razzmatazz.

Hannah Godfrey told me that she makes tapes for friends’ birthdays, for people she has a romantic interest in, and also for traveling or going away presents.

I guess I realised that it was important for me to make mix tapes when I was travelling, whenever I go away anywhere new, because I have a very bad memory, and because I know that when I’m travelling I’ll be listening to one tape, it’s a way of triggering memory.... And also when my sister goes away I always make her a tape up, or for her birthday. Birthdays, Christmas as well.

Once the initial idea for a mix tape has been conceived, the next task is to select songs that will fit the theme, and that will work well juxtaposed to other songs on the tape. As I mentioned previously, this part of the tape-making process is the one which generates the most enthusiasm from mix tape makers, and the selection and recording is perhaps the aspect of the creation process that could best be interpreted as a performance. The importance and ritualistic process of compiling a mix tape is convincingly conveyed in Nick Hornby’s novel High Fidelity. In the voice of his protagonist, Rob, Hornby writes:

I spent hours putting that cassette together. To me, making a tape is like writing a letter – there’s a lot of erasing and rethinking and starting again, and I wanted it to be a good one, because...to be honest, I hadn’t met anyone as promising as Laura since I’d started the DJ-ing, and meeting promising women was what the DJ-ing thing was supposed to be about. A good compilation tape, like breaking up, is hard to do. You’ve got to kick off with a corker, to hold the attention...and then you’ve got to up it a notch, or cool it a notch, and you can’t have white music and black music together, unless the white music sounds like black music, and you can’t have two tracks by the same artist side by side, unless you’ve done the whole thing in pairs and...oh, there are loads of rules. (88-89)

Similarly, Jack Tripper is equally serious and earnest in his instructions:



After picking a sufficient title and theme, you can begin choosing songs. Choosing songs pertaining to the theme is not too difficult. Just make sure you don't throw on a song because you love it – it has to fit the theme. And more importantly, don't throw on any shitty songs. I don't think they will appreciate listening to shit. Which leads us to the next step: tracklisting. Tracklisting is the single most crucial aspect of mix taping. After choosing a batch of songs, you must narrow them down to which songs will fit the best, and which are most compatible with one another. Try pairing up songs and working around them. You should create test lists and go through each song making sure they all fit with each other. I cannot stress how important tracklisting is...

The most important song is the first song. It can't be too obvious, cheesy, or predictable. And it can't be too obscure that the person will be too worried about wondering who it is, or whether they will like it or not. The song has to ease the listener in slowly, but confidently. Some people prefer coming up with the first song, then working from there. That's a good approach, too, and can often be more effective than the "pairing up songs" approach for the tracklisting....

Transitions between songs play a vital role in mix taping. It depends on your theme, but if the theme calls for variety, making smooth transitions between songs is highly important. Variety is good, but you can't expect to leap from genre to genre without having any linking songs.... You can't just go straight from pop rock to detached, experimental post-rock. You need a link. Come up with songs that may fit in between, and if you can't find any, then one of those songs has to take a hike.

While Tripper instructs the creator not to "throw on a song because you love it – it has to fit the theme", musician Jim O'Rourke also cautions against including songs simply because the recipient will like them. Writing in Thurston Moore's edited collection of narratives surrounding mix tapes, he recalls,

There was a mix tape I made when I was 15, I believe in order to get a girl to like me, because that is generally why you make mix tapes when you're 15.... While the tape was a minor success I had an itching feeling I had made a grave error. Later, I realized I had compromised myself by putting a The The track on there, because she liked them. I did not, and to this day, I wish I could go back and replace that track. I still remember this misstep vividly. I wasn't true to myself, and as much as the tape was filled with my chattering, my enthusiasm, my soda-fueled [sic] proselytising, it still rang as hollow as the empty cans beside me.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jim O'Rourke, *Mix Tape: the Art of Cassette Culture*, ed. Thurston Moore (New York: Universe, 2004) 44.

My informants were just as anxious to convey to me the importance of tracklisting, and again their enthusiasm is evident.

When I asked Neil Rosenberg about his approach to sequencing and recording, he replied, "Sequencing was an art, and it is, it's a lot of fun. It's a form of oral editing and you impose your aesthetics and all of that into the sequence". I asked him whether he worked out the tracklisting in advance, before beginning recording, and he replied:

No, the only time I would ever work out a sequence in advance was when I was putting together a tape for some sort of specific reason, like a tape that was examples of something that someone had asked for, that sort of thing.

No, I enjoyed coming to the end of a cut and thinking, "now what would go next?" Juxtaposition, intensification and different kind of senses. It's more like cooking than anything else, I suppose. (*Personal interview*)

The notion of 'imposing your own aesthetics' is key in making mix tapes. While you are primarily dealing with material that is not your own, that has been created by somebody else, by recontextualising and reordering the songs according to your own preferences, you *are* imprinting the tape with your own 'mark'.

Interestingly, Neil Rosenberg's cooking analogy is also used by Hannah Godfrey. It is also interesting to see the way in which she compares her own tapes to those made by other members of the Hollow Box Jockey Club, indicating that, while she loves making tapes, she does not necessarily spend as much time in compiling them as other people she knows. She told me:

When you are making a tape, you have tracks that you definitely want to put on it, and maybe have an order. One Jockey took 3 months to compile a tape, just because he kept swapping the songs around and wanted to get the ideal order.

But with Jockey tapes, I really respect people spending a long time on their track listing, but I've never really had the patience for that, and I just put stuff on that I like – I really like having juxtapositions, I like having unexpected songs together, like having things that clash, because I think it's a way of re-alerting your ears, and just having bizarre associations I think is really

interesting and exciting. I'm very easy going with my compilations. It's more of a barbecue than cordon bleu! I just shove everything on it and I'll check making sure it's all alright, but it doesn't matter if it's a bit burnt.

In contrast to Jack Tripper's preferences, Hannah likes to juxtapose songs that 'clash' and do not necessarily blend together.

While Holly Everett is happy to mix genres on a tape, like Jack Tripper, she agrees that, "there has to be a kind of a flow to it". When I asked her if she plans her tracklisting before she begins recording, she replied,

When I actually go to the machine to do it, I usually have in mind, say, several songs that I want to put on it. And by that time I usually have an idea for the first song, but I don't have it all planned out when I start. And then also when I'm doing it, I'll go, "oh, such and such a song would be *great* after this one."... Like I remember with certain tapes, and I remembered when I listened to this one today, that I just really loved the combination of the songs and the feel of the tape. And the flow. I loved the flow.

For Holly, despite the fact that the tape has often been inspired by a particular person, once the recording process begins, her thoughts are less with the person, than with the songs themselves. While the songs may have been selected with a person in mind, the sequencing is all down to the songs. She explained this to me when I asked her whether, during the actual process of making the tape, she actively thought about the recipient:

No. I think that when I'm actually doing it, I think more about the songs themselves, and I'm thinking a lot about the order. You know, like, "what should go next? What should go after that and what should go after that and what should go after that and, oh no, if I put that on *that* side then I can't use it with that *other* song and it's too long and it's not going to fit, so I've got to put it on the *other* side, and then what should go before it and what should go after it and oh no, I can't end with that." It's all about the music and the flow.

Holly also explained to me the thought process whereby she would attempt to match the songs with the theme of the tape:

I would think of how musically the songs would go together. Like did I want a happy tape? Or a sexy tape? Or a melancholy tape? Or, would there be emotional contours within the tape?

The tape I made for my friend after this one, so I guess that would have been in 2000, she and her partner were seriously considering breaking up. So on the tape, I put some sad songs, 'cause she was feeling kind of sad. But I didn't want them to be *too* sad. I didn't want them to be *throw yourself off the tallest building* kind of sad, but I was just thinking of the state of mind you're in when something like that is happening.

I really enjoy thinking about all of it, and sometimes I think, "am I crazy? Putting this much thought into it?" But screw it, I'm having fun! So I started it happily, and then let it kind of get sad in the middle, and then end on an up. So that it wouldn't just be a completely depressing tape.

Holly's mention of a 'flow' is echoed by Helena Lukowska. She told me,

I don't really plan tracklisting beforehand, usually I just do it as I go along....But while I'm listening to one song I'll probably think of another song, then another song so I'll start writing them down, but I don't plan tracklisting before....I'm not really that mad on order. Usually because I think of one song as I'm listening to another, so it probably leads on a bit naturally anyway.

In common with the rest of my informants, Richard Gunn, while stressing the importance of song selection and sequencing, does not usually plan an exact tracklisting before he begins recording. He says,

There are times when a tape is very important, and you really will go through everything, thinking, "shit, I've got to get this absolutely perfect," but most of the time I just can't be bothered with that kind of process, it's far too involved.

Again, the different emphasis which Richard puts on different tapes is notable. Some tapes are simply more important than others, and are consequently more deserving of greater attention to order. However, while he does not necessarily plan the exact order, he is clear about the importance of sequence. Like Holly, Richard speaks of a 'flow':

Sometimes I do prefer it to flow. Every song flowing into another; sometimes it's nice to have some breaks or something that totally changes the direction of the tape. I guess I do put a lot of thought into it, but very rarely will I sit down and write the order that I think it should be. Unless you time every song beforehand, which is an incredible faff, and work out how you're going to fit

on everything onto each side, then you don't know where things are going to go.

Richard raises an interesting point here: with tapes, unlike CDs, if you were to plan the tracklisting before beginning recording, you would have to time each song to make sure they would all fit on one side. This led me to ask Richard about the process of making a mix tape, as opposed to a mix CD. He explained:

There's something incredible about making tapes. There's so much fun making them, because you hear every track as you're doing it, you're actually getting a feel of what's going to be on there. You know exactly how it's going to sound, and when you're actually making the tape you realise if there's something wrong with it, you know, "shit, that track didn't go after the last track," and you wouldn't get that making them on any other format.

While I will return to the differences and differing opinions regarding mix CDs as opposed to mix tapes in Chapter 4, I think it worth mentioning here how the difference in format affects the difference in performance when making the mix. Perhaps the most obvious difference lies in the fact that making a tape is so much more time-consuming, yet Richard's point about actually being able to listen to the tape as you are recording it is interesting. In an email to me of November, 2003, in response to my question as to how he felt about CD mixes, he replied,

Actually, I feel quite strongly on CD-R mixes – like I say, fine for compiling releases by one band, but to replace the traditional mixtape – never ever – no soul – no fun.....the whole point of making the tape is listening as you do it.<sup>13</sup>

While I think most makers of mix CDs listen to the CD to ensure that the sound quality is satisfactory before presenting it to someone, Richard is talking about being able to listen to the songs *as they are in the process of being recorded*, and this is where he sees a significant difference between the creation of a mix tape as opposed to a mix CD.

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Gunn, email to the author, 11 November 2003.

It is clear that the selection, sequencing and 'flow' of songs on a mix tape is very important to my informants, and is something that could be compared to the setlists of artists' live performances.<sup>14</sup> Like a mix tape, the songs in a live performance have to be carefully chosen and sequenced so as to hold the audience's attention throughout, and many artists will often open their set with a rousing, popular song in an effort to please the crowd from the beginning, a point which is made by the band Evanescence's singer Amy, when she says, "you just want to set up a setlist with the best impact, drawing you in at the beginning and keeping your interest until the end." However, she also mentions that the setlist is often organised for very practical reasons, stating that:

Actually, picking the order takes a lot of thought. The key of the songs is a big part of it, because different songs have different guitar tunings, and if you play a few in a row in the same key, you don't have to stop to change guitars. Also, the piano songs are side by side because otherwise we'd have to pause the show to set up the piano more than once. And yeah, the middle of the set is the best place to sit down and catch my breath. Its a sauna in those lights!<sup>15</sup>

Performers also have to strike the right balance between playing songs which the audience already knows and appreciates, and new songs which, while often politely applauded and cautiously welcomed, are not so guaranteed to win over the crowd. Eyolf Østrem earnestly discusses the composition of Bob Dylan's typical setlists, going so far as to suggest similarities between them and medieval rituals. He writes:

A common – far too common – phrase in reviews of Dylan shows is that he's so unpredictable. A brief look at his setlists will reveal the opposite. A Dylan concert always involves fixed and variable elements. During most of the 90s he always played All Along the Watchtower as song #3, and other songs have had similarly fixed positions in the ceremony over shorter or longer stretches of time. Then there is a group of songs that are chosen among the songs that an "average listener" – the ones who have three or four Dylan albums at home –

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to Jane Boxall for this insight.

<sup>15</sup> Amy Lee, online posting, 13 Oct. 2004, 27 May, 2005  
<http://www.evboard.com/showthread.php?t=19129>.



would want to hear: Like A Rolling Stone, Blowin' in the Wind, Mr Tambourine Man etc. Finally, there is almost always one or two songs for the die-hard fans: a rarely heard song from an obscure 80s album, an old hillbilly standard or an unlikely cover song. All in all: a sequence of songs that could very well be described in terms of the *ordinarium* and *proprium* of the medieval mass: some songs that will be heard every night, like a Kyrie or a Credo, and others that belong to the specific feast day, and which will make *that* particular show unique.<sup>16</sup>

This is also reminiscent of John Cawelti's assertion that,

All cultural products contain a mixture of two elements: conventions and inventions. Conventions are elements which are known to both the creator and his audience beforehand – they consist of things like favorite plots, stereotyped characters, accepted ideas, commonly known metaphors and other linguistic devices, etc. Inventions, on the other hand, are elements which are uniquely imagined by the creator such as new kinds of characters, ideas, or linguistic forms. Of course it is difficult to distinguish in every case between conventions and inventions because many elements lie somewhere along a continuum between the two poles. (27)

In much the same way, mix tape creators must include sufficient songs, or elements, which they are reasonably confident that, based on their knowledge of the receiver's musical taste, the receiver will like. On the other hand, the creator will most likely include songs with which they know the receiver to be unfamiliar, as the tape is often intended to reflect the musical tastes of the creator, and to introduce the recipient to new music.

### The Mix Tape as Courtship Gift

*"What's the message? What's the message of the tape? Is there a message? Does this tape mean that he loves me?"<sup>17</sup>*

As I mentioned previously, many people use mix tapes as a medium by which to communicate romantic sentiments to potential partners. Mix tapes have long been a

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<sup>16</sup> Eyolf Østrem, "'Going Through These Things Twice': The Ritual of a Bob Dylan Concert," 2005, 15 May 2005 <[http://www.dylanchords.com/professors/ritual\\_text.htm](http://www.dylanchords.com/professors/ritual_text.htm)>.

<sup>17</sup> Holly Everett, personal interview, 26 Aug. 2004.

traditional courtship tool used by shy teenagers who are unwilling or unable to speak directly to their intended. Hasbargen and Krämer write that, “the mix tape as a present can also be a way of overcoming your shyness, and so be an unobtrusive way of getting closer to the other sex” (72). It is a useful way of protecting fragile egos which do not cope well with rejection. After all, even though the presentation of a mix tape – with or without coded messages – is understood by many people as a courtship gift, if the tape is not well received and does not lead to a romantic relationship, the creator can always attempt to retain some dignity from the situation by claiming that, “well, it was only a tape full of songs. What did you think I meant?”

The mix tape’s ‘built-in safeguard’ to protect the sender is discussed by Kamal Fox in his essay, “Mixed Feelings: Notes on the Romance of the Mixed Tape”. He writes:

If the signifying powers of mixed tapes are so precarious, why not write a love letter instead? This is where the non-committal nature of mixes is paramount. As demonstrated by *High Fidelity*, creating a mix is a deeply personal and arduous experience – the mix-maker is putting him – or herself on the line. Hence, it is easy to see that while narrators want their mixed tapes to be expressive, revealing etc. – they also employ them as a sort of mask, self-constructive guise or ‘persona’. This persona reveals without being personal, it’s a buffer that protects the narrator’s ego. Therefore, it is always possible to say, “They’re just songs, I didn’t mean anything by it.” Presumably, it’s much safer to quote from cultural products than to speak for oneself or, as one music enthusiast reported to me, “someone has always said it better.” (8-9)

Of course, one of the problems of communicating romantic sentiments via the mix tape – besides outright rejection – is a simple misinterpretation of meaning on the part of the receiver. Richard Gunn provided a perfect example of this scenario. He related an anecdote to me, saying,

There’s a funny story involving a friend of mine who will remain nameless. He put a song on, trying to express a message to a girl, which he put on a mix tape and gave it to her, and she was like, “yeah, I really liked that one song,” and then quoted a lyric back at him – which was not the lyric he wanted to hear! So



they almost had this conversation of, “oh, I really quite like you,” and she’s kind of saying, “nah!” just within reference to this one song!

Hannah Godfrey also mentioned how songs could be selected for their lyrical content, telling me that she made,

Mix tapes...for people you really fancy – with all those meaningful songs on there! And you’re like, “they’ll never guess,” and it’s so obvious! Songs like, “I love you but I can’t have you, la la!”

Sometimes, as Helena Lukowska recounted to me, the message *does* get through, in a way that can be interpreted by the recipient as quite blatant. Helena told me of an incident where she was actually too embarrassed to play a tape made for her by her ex-girlfriend because of a ‘coded message’ which had been put on there, which Helena felt that the mutual friends who were also present would understand. Talking of the tape and the incident, she said:

This one is one that my friend, who was my girlfriend at the time, made me when I was quite depressed....And at the end of the tape, she didn’t put [it] on the track list, but she put “Into My Arms” by Nick Cave, which is really great. But then I was listening to it quite recently, I think when I was in Manchester, and my friend Anna was driving me back, and she was also driving my ex-girlfriend back and a couple of my other friends. I’d been listening to this tape on the way to Manchester and I said, “can I put a tape on?” and then I realised that it was this tape, and realised at the end that it was going to be Nick Cave, and I thought, “No! I really, really can’t!” So all of a sudden I went, “no, I’m bored of this tape!” and everyone went, “no, put it on, Helena,” and I was just, “no, no, I can’t put it on!” So I got away with it in the end, but they must have just thought that I was really weird....Because *she* was going to be sat in the car as well, and all my friends were going to be sat in the car, and she knew even if they didn’t, and they’d probably realise that she’d made the tape for me, and then at the end it’s going to be like Nick Cave with “Into My Arms”, and it would just be a bit embarrassing!

When I asked Helena if she had interpreted the Nick Cave song as a coded message, she replied,

Yeah, well it was, because she didn’t write on the track listing. It was a surprise because she introduced the song to me on Valentine’s Day, actually, and I thought it was such a great song and I kept going on and on about how

good it was, and I didn't expect her to put it on, so I think she put it on to surprise me. It does have a lot of sentimental value. It was kind of a message, yeah.

As well as including messages in the actual content of the songs, Neil Rosenberg also said that when used in courtship, the actual titles of the songs could be sequenced so as to convey a certain message.

The balance between the ego of the creator and their anticipation of what the intended recipient will appreciate

My informants spoke with obvious pride about the mix tapes which they made, and were often enthusiastic about certain tapes to a degree that would probably frighten non-mix tape makers. Richard Gunn's evident satisfaction at making one particular tape, for example, is demonstrated in his following declaration:

My all time favourite mix tape I've ever made – 'Hits From the Indie Rock Canon' is often played to people. I've even copied it for someone, and it's just so fucking great! The king of all mix tapes. I just listen to it because it's incredible!

Richard was describing a tape which he had made for himself, but it seems to me that his gratification at making the tape is suggestive of an interesting point. In making a tape for another person, the creator is aware that the songs which are placed on the tape will, to some extent, reflect the creator's personality and taste. The creator will, in effect, be judged by her selection of songs. This is particularly true if the tape is being made for a potential romantic interest. To this end, the creator must choose songs which they feel will portray them in a good light. However, at the same time, the creator must be aware of the tastes and likely reactions of the receiver, and so must not only select songs that will demonstrate their own impeccable tastes, but will also

be well received by the recipient. In effect, a balance must be struck between the ego of the creator, and their knowledge of what the recipient will appreciate.

I put this point to Richard in response to his description of a tape which he had made for someone. In describing the inspiration for the tape, he said,

I was talking to this person about music, and he just hadn't heard of so many things I thought he should have heard of. I just couldn't believe it, so I just wrote a few things down on a piece of paper and said, "look, I'm going to make you a tape with bands on and I'll just put my favourite songs on, or things I think you'll like".

I find it interesting that Richard wanted to make the tape because he felt that the potential recipient 'should have heard of' certain bands; this is somewhat indicative of an assumption on Richard's part that his musical taste is 'better' than that of other people. However, at the same time, Richard is aware of the need to record songs that he thinks the recipient will like. The following are extracts taken from a conversation I had with Richard on the subject. I began by saying,

When you're making a tape like that for somebody else, it's interesting, because ostensibly you're making it for that person, but at the same time, you're doing it because *you* think they should know these songs that you know. So there's a kind of egoism involved as well?

Richard replied:

Oh yeah! He said that he felt touched, that he felt part of my inner circle because I was making him a tape, and I just giggled and said, "well I guess I've made tapes for most people, you know." I wouldn't call it an egoism as such. A public service, perhaps!

I continued by suggesting that there is a sense that, 'the music you're listening to isn't as good as mine, so I need to give you these songs'. Richard countered by saying,

No, I wouldn't say that particularly. I guess that is the case to a point, but I think for instance, he said, "I need to know about good female singers because I can't find any". Now I just said to him, "there are lots out there, it's just a case of hearing them." Now you're not going to hear them on Top of the Pops or in your local record shop or whatever, you have to dig a bit deeper, and if you don't know where to start, then someone needs to point you in the right

direction....And I guess he said he'd heard a few things, and I thought, "wait a minute! If you like that, then surely you'd like X, Y and Z." if someone says they like a certain band you think they're just a poor imitation of some prior band, then you'll go and make a tape of the prior band, so you can say, "look, this is where it all started, this is where they got all of their ideas from." So yeah, I think there is egoism! Yeah, whatever!

The notion of musical taste and how one determines who has 'better' musical taste than others, is an interesting one, and as I have suggested above, is closely related to the making of mix tapes. Simon Frith discusses the notion of taste with respect to popular culture in his book Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music. He writes that people judge, and are judged by their personal tastes and opinions on popular culture:

Pop judgment is a double process: our critical task, as fans, is first to get people to listen to the right things (hence all these references to other groups and sounds), and only then to persuade them to like them. Our everyday arguments about music are concentrated on the first process: getting people to listen the right way. Only when we can accept that someone is hearing what we're hearing but just doesn't value it will we cede to subjective taste and agree that there's no point to further argument. (*Performing Rites* 8)

Frith's point about 'first getting people to listen to the right things' is reminiscent of a couple of my informants' motivations for making mix tapes. Both Helena and Richard talk about, not only wanting to share their music with other people, but suggest that they sometimes make tapes for other people because they believe that the recipient should be listening to particular, 'better' types of music.

I mentioned previously how Richard Gunn sometimes considers the mix tapes which he makes for other people as a form of 'service'. When I asked him how people arrive at knowing whether or not they have 'good' taste, he replied:

I don't know. I don't know whether it's to do with taste. I always get concerned that people don't really *listen* to music, or don't really want much out of it. They have such low standards. You ask them a question about what

they listen to, and why they like it...and people just say things like, "oh, it just sounds kind of nice!" You just think, well that's fine, maybe it does sound nice, but surely there's got to be more to music than that. I wouldn't go and spend more than fifteen pounds on a CD from HMV just because it sounded nice background music. You know, it seems that people don't really listen to things...

I think people are just told what to buy and they buy it. I don't think they're actually listening to it really, they're just buying it and putting it on. Dido and David Gray or whatever. Music for people who don't like music! There's just nothing there. Just bland. *Deliberately* bland. I want a lot more. I want to get something out of it that most people *don't* want to get out of music.

It occurred to me that perhaps there was a correlation between how fanatical a person is about music, and the likelihood of them making mix tapes, and when I asked Holly Everett if she felt that there was some truth in this, she replied,

I would say 'yes', because making these tapes is a time intensive process, and the people I know who make tapes were all really, really into music and thought about it a lot. And *enjoyed* the process of making the tape, even though it took so long.

In some ways then, the claim to having better music taste which is exhibited by some of my informants, could almost be justified by the greater attention and time which they devote to it. Simon Frith addresses this point when considering the problems of value judgments in popular culture, and how to discuss them in academic settings. Frith argues that the issue is not so much one of value, but of *authority*. Who has the authority to determine what is good, and what is not. One could argue that when discussing popular culture, everybody's opinion is equal, but

in practice, though, there clearly are people – loosely defined as 'fans' – who do claim precisely that their superior knowledge, experience, and commitment give their judgments a particular weight. (*Performing Rites* 9)

While I interpret Frith's comments as referring more to people who use their confidence in their musical taste as giving them license to influence the taste of others, having more experience of music and artists can also defend you in the event of

people questioning your musical taste. For instance, speaking to me of value judgments and musical taste, Hannah Godfrey told me that,

With the Jockey Club being in Bristol, where there's such a vibrant music scene, and meeting people who are into music – before you know the kids at school, they know the bands, they know the cool bands, but then the obscure bands you've never heard of – they're so intimidating and so cool, and I just didn't feel very cool. Whereas now, issues of coolness don't concern me anymore, and I don't know whether that's because I'm a bit older or because I feel more confident about music because I've just listened to a bit more. I think it's to do with speaking to the people and realising that they're twits, just the same as I am! They know a lot, but I can benefit from that knowledge, if I can let myself and get over my own insecurities, which I don't feel I have a problem with anymore.

I also find Hannah's comments on the gender differences within the Hollow Box Jockey Club interesting. I asked her why she thought there were more male members of the club than female, and she replied,

I think what it is actually, is that men are more confident about their musical taste, and I think that women – the majority of women are always really nervous about it. I have to almost persuade them to join the club, because they're all like, "oh God, no-one's going to want to listen to my music because my music's really shit," and it's like, well that's not really what it's really all about – it's about listening to it. Be anonymous. But yeah, there's definitely a lack of confidence among the women mix tapers, which is strange.

The difficulties of resolving differences in taste are also portrayed, albeit less eloquently, in the following exchange between Rob and Barry, two of the main protagonists in Nick Hornby's High Fidelity: "'How can it be bollocks to state a preference?' I ask. 'If it's the wrong preference, it's bollocks'" (44). I am also reminded of my friend Gayle, who was always reluctant to enter Tempest – my favourite record store in Birmingham, England, because she admitted to feeling somewhat intimidated by the obsessive music fans who would frequent it, and the equally obsessive and knowledgeable staff. Although she was aware of how unlikely

the scenario would be, she always confessed to being scared that, on buying a record, her music credentials would be brought into question by the sales staff, and she would be quizzed on trivia surrounding the band in order to demonstrate a sufficient level of fandom.

In an essay concerning the relationship between mix tapes and musical taste, Armin Peiseler, Alexander Tsitsigias and Jörn Radzuweit discuss the notion of the mix tape as a reflection of personality:

“Show me your music and I’ll tell you who you are.” It is obvious that music taste is not only intrinsic to the topic of mix tapes, but is also always brought up explicitly. A mix tape will always portray something or somebody....A person’s music taste is an important expression of his or her personality. (56)

This aspect of the mix tape is succinctly described by Holly Everett when she says that giving mix tapes to people is a way of saying, “this is me. This is what I like”. And in presenting ‘yourself’ through music, the implication is that the music must be, and necessarily is, ‘good’.

Representing yourself through your musical taste can be a tricky business, as I have shown that there will always be people who believe their musical taste to be superior to that of your own. However, while the musical tastes of ‘ordinary’ people are always open to scrutiny, the risks involved for a person in the public eye are even greater. Take, for example, the publication of President George W. Bush’s iPod playlist. The release of the playlist provoked an instant wave of interest from media all over the world, who were anxious to scrutinise the songs in an attempt to discern what their selection revealed about the President of the United States of America. CNN journalist Peter Wilkinson, for example, pointed out that the playlist included artists such as John Fogerty, who had campaigned against Bush, and also artist George Jones



who, like Bush, was a recovering alcoholic.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most universal observation was that Bush's choice was for the most part limited to white, male, heterosexual artists from the 1960s and 1970s – a selection which journalists took as proof if ever there was of Bush's inherent conservatism.

The interest surrounding Bush's iPod playlist mirrors the extensive comments made by the British media whenever a leading politician appears on the long-standing British radio programme Desert Island Discs. Established in 1942 and now the world's third most long-running radio show, Desert Island Discs's format remains as fixed as it is popular. Each week, a 'castaway' – usually a well-known personality – is invited by the host, currently Sue Lawley, to select their eight favourite records which they would take with them to a desert island. In much the same way as opinions about new friends or partners are formed after a quick rifle through their record collection, the music selections made by guests appearing on Desert Island Discs inform their audience as to what they are *really* like. In some instances – particularly in the case of some politicians – it is quite clear to many listeners that the music has been chosen in a blatant attempt to portray them in a favourable light. Politicians, for example, often seem to mix classical music – a choice which demonstrates their respectability, capability and ability to govern the country in a suitably responsible and serious manner – with the odd rock or pop song, which sends a clear message to their younger voters that, while they may be boring old politicians, they are still in touch with youth culture and know how to have fun! It is widely believed that the eight chosen records are not always the choice of the individual. Writing in the English newspaper *The Observer*, Euan Ferguson compares the *Desert Island Discs* chosen by then

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Wilkinson, "Bush Bares Soul With 'iPod One'", *CNN* 13 April 2005, 14 April 2005 <<http://www.cnn.com/2005/SHOWBIZ/Music/04/12/bush/ipod/>>.



Conservative party leader Michael Howard, with those of Prime Minister Tony Blair.

Ferguson writes of Howard that,

What he's done well is, of all things, shown honesty in his choice of music for his appearance this morning on Desert Island Discs. Do you remember Blair's list, drawn up by his pollster friends and 18 focus groups?... Howard, at least, in choosing 'Everything I Do, I Do it for You' by Bryan Adams... has shown that execrable taste and commendable honesty do not mutually exclude; and he almost won, for a second, if not my vote, then at least a grudging little doff of the hat.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, an article in *The London Review* of July 2004 asks readers, "If you had to pick the next Prime Minister on the basis of their Desert Island Discs, who would you elect?" Points are awarded for 'quality music' and 'convincing individual choices' but lost for 'philistinism' and 'mawkishness'.<sup>20</sup> Politicians, in common with everybody else must often be judged by not only what they are like, but what they like.

Following interviews with a number of different informants, Peiseler, Tsitsigias and Radzuweit identify four main categories of mix tape maker. Though they stress that there are possible intermediate stages between, and overlaps within these categories, they suggest that mix tape creators can generally be described as belonging to one of the following four groups:

1. The 'communicator', who makes and exchanges tapes not so much for the sake of the music, but for the ritual of reciprocal exchange itself, and the bonds of friendship which are formed through such an exchange.
2. The 'provider', who passes on tapes for the sheer love of the music itself. As an example of a provider, Peiseler, Tsitsigias and Radzuweit quote one informant's explanation as to why he makes tapes: "you have to know that this song is great. It

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<sup>19</sup> Euan Ferguson, "Only a Politician Would Try to Explain Pop Lyrics," *The Observer* 4 July 2004, 3 May 2005 <<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1253533,00.html>>.

<sup>20</sup> "Desert Island Discs," *London Review* 4 July 2004, 3 May 2005 <<http://www.lnreview.co.uk/music/002479.php>>.

shouldn't be an 'insider-thing' anymore, which I and three other people in Hamburg know" (66).

3. The 'missionary', who Peiseler, Tsitsigias and Radzuweit see epitomised in the character of Rob Fleming in Nick Hornby's High Fidelity. Whereas the provider does not seek to convert other people to her musical taste, this is the main motive behind the missionary's making and gifting of mix tapes; the aim is to lead the recipient to the 'right' music. A key aspect to the category of missionary, therefore, is anticipation and hope of an enthusiastic – and obedient – response from the receiver. Only then will the creator know that they have been successful.

4. The 'egoist', in contrast to the missionary, cares little for the reactions of the recipient. The egoist makes no attempt to cater to the tastes of the recipient, and indeed cares little as to whether or not they appreciate the tape.

Although these distinctions are interesting, based on my own research, I think that Peiseler, Tsitsigias and Radzuweit are right to point out that there are many overlaps and grey areas within the four categories. While at times my informants expressed opinions that may have been akin to those of a particular category, I would suggest that, over the course of the interview, each of my informants tended to make comments that could have placed them within any of the categories identified by Peiseler, Tsitsigias and Radzuweit. If there was a common theme that could be identified among the opinions of my informants with regards to the relationships between their own taste and personality and their intended recipients, it was that a successful tape must somehow strike the right balance between the tastes of the creator, and their knowledge of what the recipient would appreciate.

The mix tape, as with any other form of gift, is most successful when it is chosen with the recipient in mind. Whether the function of the tape as gift is a romantic one, a reaffirmation of friendship, or a desire to educate the recipient, the tape stands a better chance of being well received and therefore successful, if the creator has at least made token efforts to make the tape according to what they think the recipient will like. The mix tape can therefore be seen as a negotiated space where the appropriate balance must be struck between the motives and desires of the creator, and the expected tastes and reactions of the receiver. It seems an obvious point to make, but the creator gains more satisfaction if the tape is well received, irrespective of their motives. Helena Lukowska, for example, spoke of her annoyance at having her tapes go unacknowledged. She told me,

The most gutting thing is, is that my first girlfriend, Jess. I made her loads and loads of tapes and she never made me a tape in return, and I don't think she listened to any of the tapes. And I really want them back and I'm so pissed off! I just think that's so rude! And she actually said to me, "yeah, I never actually listened to any of your tapes," and I was just like, "how can you do that?"....I thought that something might be getting through, but I don't think it was, to be honest.

While I did not ask Helena why she felt that Jess didn't even listen to the tapes – whether it was through her disinclination to listen based on the included artists, or just general apathy – the point is that having made the considerable effort to make the tape, you want to make sure that the tape will be appreciated. The importance of feedback is also stressed by Rolf Habargen and Andrea Krämer, when they write that, “positive feedback is desirable, because it rewards the mix tape maker for their efforts, and is probably for many the main motivation for making the tape” (77).

All of my informants seemed to acknowledge the importance of thinking of the recipient, regardless of whether or not I raised the issue. For instance, in response to my question, "do you ever mix the genres on one tape?" Neil Rosenberg replied,

Oh yes. I either had tapes that were all bluegrass which was kind of an indulgence for me. My kids and my first wife weren't up for listening to all of that stuff all the time, as I was, and so the tapes I made tended to be multi-generic, and to include stuff like - I have a couple of LPs from The Muppet Show, so every once in a while you'd get 'The Muppaphones' [Marvin Suggs and his Amazing Muppaphone] doing "Lady of Spain", and stuff like that.  
(*Personal interview*)

The implication is clear. For Neil's tapes to be well received by his family, he had to make certain concessions, based on his knowledge of what his family would appreciate. Speaking generally of the tapes he makes for other people, Neil told me that,

If I was making a tape that I thought I would give to someone, I would certainly think of it in terms of, "oh, I bet so-and-so would like that," and if I was making a tape just for myself, then I wouldn't be so prone to stop and say, "well, maybe this is not a good choice for some reason or another. (*Personal interview*)

Similarly, Holly Everett would try and keep in mind the musical tastes of her intended recipient. She told me:

When I made these tapes for my friend Catherine for tree-planting camp, I have kind of an idea of the music that she likes and the kind of music that she doesn't like, so I probably wouldn't put on a song of the type of music I know she probably wouldn't like, unless I thought that there was something about it that she might respond to, even though she doesn't listen to heavy metal or something like that. But yeah, usually I try and keep in mind what they like as well. Or at least tolerate for three minutes!

In her words, "something about it that she might respond to," Holly hints at the subtlety of the process. Even though Holly might put on a song of a genre that her friend would not normally listen to, if there was something about the song that Holly felt her friend would react positively to, then it would be worth a try. Insights such as

these demonstrate the personal level involved, and the way in which the relationship between the creator and the receiver is reflected in the tape's structural content. While it may require more thought to select songs that you think your intended recipient will like, as opposed to putting on songs that you already *know* you like, my informants indicated that it was ultimately more satisfying. Hannah Godfrey's description of one particular tape which she made for her sister is revealing in that it indicates her satisfaction after having *finally* made 'the perfect' tape for her sister. She told me,

I recently feel like I've had a bit of a breakthrough! 'Cause my sister, whenever I made her a tape, I had like the A-side, like "this is rocking!", and then the B-side would be like, "well, I've put this on because *I* think it's a really interesting piece of music," and Marisa would be like, "I *hate* that song! I have to fast forward it!" But when she went to – she traveled to China and Cambodia and lots of Eastern places, I was like, "right, it's a tape for her, I'm not going to be self-indulgent with this," so that was when I was finally like, I was *really* pleased with this tape and every song was a good song on it...every song is good and I know I haven't indulged myself in any of them and I know my sister would love every song and so I feel like I've reached a point now where I don't feel I have to put a signature in, like a peculiar song or a peculiar tune that I may like but I know not many other people are going to be into.

When I asked Helena if she felt that there was an ego involved in making a tape, she replied,

I suppose it is partly an ego thing, but I find that music is quite an important topic in what I talk about, so I think it's more of a way of communicating, though it does seem like a personal thing when someone says they really don't like certain songs that you tape for them, because you think, "no! They should like this!" So I think it partly is an ego thing, but it is more a way of communicating.

I continued by suggesting that a 'good' tape was necessarily complimentary to the receiver, as it demonstrated that the creator had thought about the kind of music that the receiver would like. Helena responded,

Yeah, and you do have to. Because you have to think about that person, even if it's something that they wouldn't obviously like, or haven't heard before.

You've got to think about the kinds of thing they *do* like and take that into account and shove the song on in relation to the stuff that you already *know* they like. I mean occasionally I'll put songs on that I don't think there's a chance in hell that the person I tape them for will like, 'cause I think it's worth a try. But usually I do try and think about that person, and do try and think what they'll like. Especially people at school who weren't into obscure indie of any sort, and I just thought, "well what kind of music *do* they like," and see how the kind of stuff that I was listening to might sound similar in any way to any of that.

This attempt to select songs that had similarities to, but which were presumably deemed by the creator to be better than songs already liked by the receiver was similar to one of the 'compromises' used by Richard Gunn. He told me:

I guess for myself there's certain things that I like and I think, "oh God, nobody else could possibly like this!" I guess when I make it for somebody else I'm less likely to put difficult, obscure things on that only I like, 'cause I'll be like, "that's not going to give them a very good impression of the band." Whereas I might pick up a song which doesn't characterise – I mean it depends. If you're trying to educate you'll try and pick the most characteristic song of the band, but if you're making it for yourself then there's not that obligation.

The point which Richard makes regarding the compromises the creator makes when recording a tape for another person, and the total lack of compromise involved when making a tape for personal use is reminiscent of Hannah Godfrey's comments regarding the tapes made by members of her Hollow Box Jockey Club. While the tapes are made for other people, the creators are unaware of the identities and musical preferences of the recipient, and so are unable to tailor the tapes accordingly.

Interestingly, Hannah also mentioned selecting music or making tapes based on her impressions of people she did not really know, and from whom she would not expect to receive feedback. For instance, Hannah described to me her experiences of working in a shop. She said,

There were certain people who used to come into the shop that I had soft spots for or that I really fancied, and when I saw them – 'cause there was a big

window – whenever I saw them I had, I'd made different tapes which I'd play when they came into the shop, but they never knew this. So there's one woman and she always used to come in and I was really into Music To Watch Girls Go By at the time, so whenever she came in that tape would always go in, and then whenever another friend would come in I used to stick in a mix that had like, The Cardigans, that sort of music on, and then when there was someone I really wanted to impress came in I put on a jazz tape. So yeah, I had different mixes for different customers, and they didn't know. But it was for my own thing.... it's definitely to do with showing off and trying to make them be like, "oh, this is good music," and you'd be like, "yes! Actually I put this music on, and I am as good as this music!"

Not only does this reaffirm the point that people use music as a way of communicating their own personality and of saying 'who they are', but it also shows, as Tia DeNora argues, how people treat music as a resource, choosing particular songs to serve a particular purpose at any given moment. As DeNora writes, "building and deploying musical montages is part of a repertory of strategies for coping and for generating pleasure, creating occasion, and affirming self – and group identity" (16). DeNora actually studied the way music is used in retail outlets to organise people and influence their interaction with the materials and resources within their environment – in other words, to make them buy things. Following her survey of eleven stores in a small English city in 1998, DeNora found, through interviews with shop managers and personal observation, that music is used to influence the environment of the store, and therefore the emotional conduct of both customers and store employees.

There is, of course, a long history of music being used as background music in public spaces. However, as Joseph Lanza notes in his engaging book Elevator Music: A Surreal History of Muzak®, Easy-Listening, and Other Moodsong®, in recent years retailers seem to have switched from unobtrusive music designed to appeal to everybody, to an attempt to match specific music to certain consumer demographics. Lanza writes:



Yesterday's supermarket ceiling serenades offered the musical equivalent of a parallel world, a temporary reprieve from the ordinary fare that people listened to in their cars or at home. While the originals were too specific, carried too much baggage, or made for a cluttered audio perspective, the elevator version provided audio depth of field, an appropriately vague contour for transient surroundings.

This situation began to change when Muzak and other piped-in music companies introduced terms such as *business music* to alter their public images. This change reflects a now widespread belief that *all* kinds of music have comparable benefits in business establishments by reflecting a specific client's environmental aspirations....

From the mid-1990s on, Muzak's ownership has changed again and again. During these corporate permutations, the company has put the emphasis much less on its background music tradition than on the fact that *all* music has been commodified for use as an environmental enhancer – whether it be “smooth jazz” for bars seeking a “hip” image, classic rock for baby boomer mall shoppers, or the robotic throb of current dance music for chic boutiques. (218-219)

While I find the deployment of music in commercial settings in order to influence the consumer's choice slightly sinister, I confess that I find Hannah's use of music to try and please her customers and hopefully persuade them to notice her more endearing.

### Mix Tape Cover Art

*“Today I made you a mix tape and I decorated it with lots of stars”<sup>21</sup>*

As well as the actual songs being part of the performance of making a mix tape, I would also suggest that the decoration of mix tapes is an important part of the gift. I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter how people often decorate their mix tapes with cover art, and I wish to go into more detail here. While my informants

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<sup>21</sup> The Ataris, “Song for a Mix Tape,” End is Forever, Kung Fu Records, 2001.

tended not to bother with cover art if they were making the tape for themselves, they often decorated the tape if they were presenting the tape to somebody else. As well as serving as another way of personalising the tape by imprinting the package with their own artwork, the decoration of mix tapes with pictures and other items cut out from magazines emphasises the notion of the mix tape as bricolage. The very concept of the mix tape, that of a blank cassette which is filled with a variety of different recordings drawn from various sources according to the tastes and desires of the creator, is reminiscent of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's concept of bricolage, where "products are combined or transformed in ways not intended by their producers; commodities are rearticulated to produce 'oppositional' meanings" (Storey 105). The use of visual images taken from various sources adds to the concept of the mix tape as being the result of a person's inventive and creative use of various commercial products which were originally intended for a purpose different to that of being used for a mix tape. Julia Grösch, Susanne Hüners and Andrea Rützel make this point in relation to mix tapes when they write that,

Self-made tapes are not only simply media which have been randomly filled with sound and music. They can rather be seen as a document made by an anonymous creator, who is acting in opposition to the mass industries despite using their products. A taper has collected sufficient material to make a new product possible. The existing material is reordered, and through an individual process the tapers use and rework the different resources. (28)

While most mix tape makers probably do not spend a great deal of time dwelling on the thought of how their tapes act 'in opposition to the mass industries', the mix tapes can nevertheless be seen as one example of how consumers of popular culture are not merely slaves to the consumer industry, but have a significant degree of agency in what they choose to buy, and how they choose to use it. In his essay, "The Mix Tape as a Form of American Folk", Matias Viegner makes a similar point:

The mix tape as a form of American folk art: predigested cultural artifacts combined with homespun technology and magic markers turn the mix tape [in]to a message in a bottle. I am no mere consumer of pop culture, it says, but also a producer of it. Mix tapes mark the moment of consumer culture in which listeners attained control over what they heard, in what order and at what cost. It liberated us from music stores and radios in the same way radios and recordings liberated generations earlier from the need to be present at the performance of live music. (35)

While I have already stressed how the actual process of recording songs for a mix tape is time consuming, and therefore appreciated by the receiver, the attention to cover art is even more demonstrative of care and thought. Hannah Godfrey's usual approach to decorating her mix tapes is a perfect example of bricolage. She says,

I tend to use collage, I guess. I'm a bit of a magpie, I'm always cutting up pieces of magazines. I've got folders and folders just full of scrap paper, bits of coloured photos..... But yeah, mainly collage, and I just tend to stick things together as I go along.

Helena Lukowska told me how she definitely prefers to receive mix tapes which have cover art, saying,

It feels more personal, it feels like it's a gift. It makes it more pleasing. And you know that somebody's put a lot of effort and time into it, and they've really put something into it, rather than just taping a load of songs. I mean I know that just taping a lot of songs still does involve a lot of time and effort and it still means a lot, but it just seems to be an extra bit of effort.

When I asked Holly Everett if she used cover art, she replied,

Yes. My most creative ones I don't have anymore, like the ones I gave to Catherine, the cassettes I gave to her I would decorate. I would take the regular tape box that comes with it and then decorate it. The ones I used to make in high school, I would make a collage on the tape box insert, so it would be a little tiny collage. That's what I used to do, when I had more time! The ones I used for Catherine's CDs, I just used postcards and cut them down to the size of the tape box.

Interestingly, my three female informants tended to be more enthusiastic about cover art than my two male informants. Neil Rosenberg informed me that, while he would give the tapes that he compiled titles, and would maybe write them in special

lettering, he would not bother with decorating the tape box. Similarly, Richard Gunn told me,

Cover art's one of those things I don't usually bother with unless I can come up with a good idea. I don't think, "ooh, I must have a fancy cover," but if I see something I'll think, "I can make this into the cover of a tape....I guess the main thing when you make a tape for someone else, the information has to be clear. You have to be clear who the bands are and what the songs are.

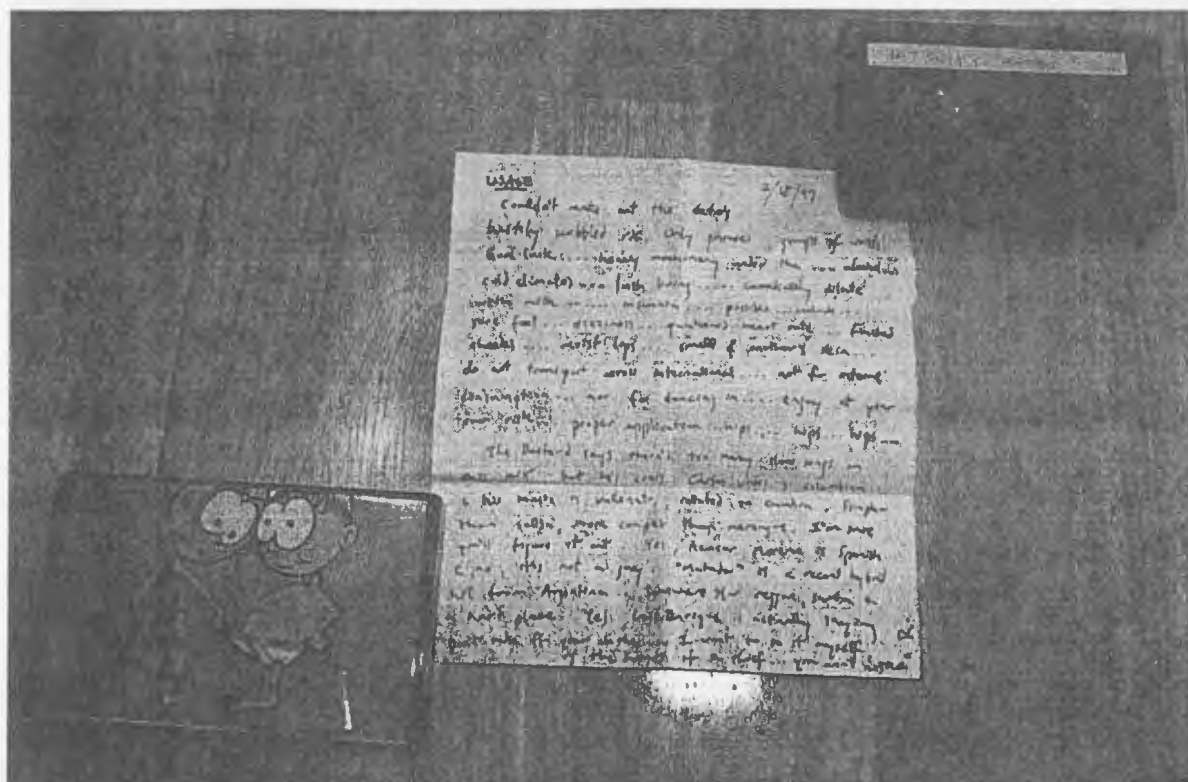
Although I noticed the differences between my male and female informants with regard to cover art, I would need to conduct research among a much wider selection of people before I could draw any real conclusions.

As I mentioned earlier, my informants tended to only decorate the mix tapes which they had given away as gifts, and as a result they did not have any examples of mix tape cover art which they had made for other people. However, they did have some examples of covers which they had received from other people, and I have included a selection of these and tapes which I have received from friends in the next following pages (see Figures 7-10).



**Figure 7.** 'Play when the sun's out and you're feeling sunny'.

This is the inlay of a tape which was made for Hannah Godfrey and features a jockey's shirt, in reference to the Hollow Box Jockey Club. The words/instructions read, 'Play when the sun's out and you're feeling sunny'.



**Figure 8.** Mix tape for Holly Everett

Figure 8 shows a tape which was sent to Holly Everett by a friend of hers. As well as showing the cover art to the tape and the cassette itself, the photograph also shows the accompanying letter which includes instructions as to the tape's intended usage. Holly writes of the tape:

A friend of mine sent me that tape, a friend I've known since grade 10. We both play the violin, and met through our high school's orchestra. Right before I moved to Newfoundland, we had been going out dancing on occasion and he had been teaching me various kinds of latin dances. The tape was meant for me to use to practice my new moves. The tape was also meant to kind of cheer me up and encourage me to go out and meet people (especially guys!). I had been through a very bad break-up just before moving here, and my heart was quite broken.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Holly Everett, e-mail to the author, 11 June 2005.



**Figure 9.** My first mix tape from the Hollow Box Jockey Club

Figure 9 shows the first tape which I received from Hannah Godfrey after joining the Hollow Box Jockey Club. The tape was made by the second member of the club, Marie Weinel in 2004. Side A is mainly composed of French easy-listening songs, and Side B contains many songs by the Trio Los Paraguayos, Léo Clarens and his Orchestra, and Bob Azzam and his Orchestra. Not being familiar with the artists, the tape has introduced me to music which I would not otherwise have heard.





**Figure 10.** Mix tape sent to me by Humey Saeed

Figure 10 shows the cover of a tape which my friend Humey Saeed sent me from England in 2004. When I asked her if there was any significance behind the artwork on the cover, she replied no, she cut out the design from a promotional flier she received for International Women's Day, and just thought that I would appreciate the design and the colours.

The use of a random flier shown in Figure 10 is typical of the kind of material which is often used in mix tape cover art. Julia Grösch, Susanne Hüners and Andrea Rützel discuss the often haphazard use of material in making covers, writing that,

The inlay which the industry provides for the title index is most often enriched with varying methods. Printed products from everyday life are popular, such as newspaper cuttings, fliers, postcards or photos. The selection certainly appears to be accidental. (28)

The effort which goes into making the cover is another indication of the personal aspect involved in making a mix tape and heightens the value of the tape as a gift. In the next chapter I shall consider the ways in which the mix tape is received, is used, and in particular how it is listened to.

### Chapter 3

*“Make me a mix tape, something old and something new; something I forget that we did, that reminds me of you”<sup>23</sup>*

In the previous chapter I analysed the mix tape in terms of the process by which it was created, the motives behind its creation, and the functions which the mix tapes' creators hoped that it would serve. In this chapter I intend to consider the mix tape in terms of its reception, and how it is used and regarded by its recipients. Several issues arose from the conversations I had with my informants concerning the uses they made of mix tapes. Firstly, it is clear that the mix tape is regarded as an item of value for various reasons. Not only is it valuable in terms of its basic function - that of a medium through which to store and listen to songs, but it is inherently valuable by virtue of the time, effort, and personal thought which has gone into its creation. Mix tapes are consequently capable of provoking the same level of sentimental attachment as other gifts, and for some of my informants, to record over a mix tape which had been given as a gift would amount to a breach of 'mix tape etiquette'. Secondly, I will consider the relationship between the ways in which the mix tape is valued, and the reasons for which it is played, interpreting each playing as a performance. I will focus in particular on the relationship between mix tapes and memory. Finally, some of my informants spoke of the way in which listening to old mix tapes could be comparable to reading old letters, or looking through old photograph albums, and so I will conclude this chapter by considering the mix tape in relation to other forms of folkloric collectanea.

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<sup>23</sup> The Promise Ring, “Make me a Mix Tape,” Electric Pink EP, Jade Tree, 2000.

### The Mix Tape as Gift

*"You can't tape over mix tapes! It's a present!"<sup>24</sup>*

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the time, effort and thought which is involved in the creation of a mix tape, and detailed how many mix tapes are made with the intention of being presented as gifts. The opinions of my informants differed as to how they expected the recipients to react to, and treat the mix tape, once it had been presented. However, there was a general consensus that, due to the personal sentiments, as well as the time and effort involved, mix tapes ought to be regarded as 'something special' and even if they were not listened to, they should not be taped over or discarded. Of my informants, Helena Lukowska felt most strongly about 'mix tape etiquette', and when I asked her if she would ever record over a mix tape which she had received, she replied,

No....Because that's horrible! It's not nice to do that to people, you can't tape over mix tapes! It's a present. Somebody's spent a lot of time and effort on it. It's just mean, like somebody gives you a photo and you paint over it....It's not right. Especially if they've decorated it.

Helena continued to say that she would never record over mix tapes even if she never listened to them, and the function and value of the mix tape outside of its being a device which will play music, is a subject to which I will return later in the chapter.

The different intended uses of the tape seem to be significant to the way in which it is regarded. For instance, while both Helena and Richard told me that they would not hesitate to record over mix tapes which they had made for themselves, if the tape had been presented to them as a gift, then it had sentimental value, and therefore became 'untouchable'. However, unlike Helena, Richard expressed

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<sup>24</sup> Helena Lukowska, personal interview, 16 Aug. 2004.

ambivalence at the way in which he expected his mix tapes to be received. While Helena had confessed to being “pissed off” that her ex-girlfriend had never listened to the tapes which Helena had made for her, Richard told me,

As for tapes I’ve made for other people, I don’t know. I guess I’d rather they [not record over them]. I don’t know. People tape over them or throw them out or whatever, I don’t care. I’ll never know, that’s the thing.

Helle Meister, Silke Menzel and Ina Orbitz elicited similar responses from their informants, and found a general opinion that,

‘out of principle, every song is great’. This shows that the meaning does not lie solely in the contents of the song, but in the context, the situation in which the song is communicated. (49)

Some people clearly believe that, regardless of whether or not they appreciate the songs, they appreciate the effort involved and the gesture, and so the overall function of the tape can often have little to do with it being a device which can play music.

The predominant reason why many people are uncomfortable with recording over mix tapes that other people have given them, seems to be that the tape is inextricably linked with the person who presented it, and therefore to treat it disrespectfully would be akin to snubbing the creator. This is a similar situation to that which many people find themselves in, in the days following Christmas, when they wonder what exactly they should do with the numerous unwanted presents bestowed on them by well meaning friends and relatives. However, to simply discard the gift often provokes feelings of guilt, for fear that you are not simply rejecting the present, but also rejecting the kindness of the person who gave it to you. As Dean Wareham of the band Luna, and former member of the band Galaxie 500 puts it, “the act of giving the tape puts the recipient in our debt somewhat. Like all gifts, the mix tape comes with strings attached” (28). This is a key concept which Marcel Mauss raises in his

classic study The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies. The gift itself is not as significant as the implications which it has for the relationship between the gift-giver and the gift-receiver. Mauss writes that,

What imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him. Through it the giver has a hold over the beneficiary.... (11-12)

In this instance Mauss was referring specifically to a Maori exchange system, and explains that,

In Maori law, the legal tie, a tie occurring through things, is one between souls, because the thing itself possesses a soul, is of the soul. Hence it follows that to make a gift of something to someone is to make a present of some part of oneself. (12)

I would suggest that the concept of the 'spirit of the thing' is applicable to the presentation of gifts in any society. With regards to the mix tape, it is clear from the attitudes of my informants that the tape retains a quality which is directly related to the person who created it and gave it to them. This is suggested by my informant Helena. Having told me how she would never record over other peoples' mix tapes, I asked her, "so even if you didn't listen to the music, or didn't like it, you would keep the tape?" Helena answered in the affirmative, and so I asked her what function the tape now performed. Helena replied, "well it wouldn't be performing much of a function, but it's just the fact that it's been given to you by someone, and they want you to listen to it, and at least you know you've tried!" For many people then, the tape – and the songs on it – remain forever identified with the person who created it and selected the music.



This point is illustrated by two of my informants when they discuss mix tapes which they cannot throw away, but which they know they will probably never listen to again, out of a personal association which they make between the songs and the tapes' creators. After stating how he would tape over 'crappy' tapes that he had made for himself, Richard went on to say that,

As for other people, there are tapes from, let's just say a certain person who I've never listened to, I haven't even listened to for a long time, and I even just came across them now while rooting out mix tapes. And I have a wry smile every time I see them, but I know probably they'll never get listened to in my entire life, but I couldn't bear to throw them out or whatever. They'll probably go with me to my grave! I couldn't bear to ever tape over them or throw them out, you can never do that.

Hannah echoes this sentiment, telling me that,

I've had mix tapes that I haven't been able to listen to. An ex, ex-boyfriend made me a tape, it was meant to be for the Jockey Club, but it had so many songs on it which were quite personal, and every time I listened to it I just felt wretched....There are certain tapes it's taken me years to be able to listen to, and they're mainly to do with ex-boyfriends or ex-partners, but I don't think I'd ever throw them away. I'm too nostalgic.

It is interesting that while Richard mentions not being able to listen to the tapes, he does not mention specific songs. This reflects Meister, Menzel and Orbitz's point, that the meaning of the tape does not lie solely within the songs, but within the context in which they are brought to the receiver. This contrasts with Hannah's reflections on how the songs themselves are forever associated with certain people. However, it is interesting that she does not mention how hearing the same songs on the radio will make her sad. Perhaps the sadness is only provoked through their being played off the mix tape.



Mauss's notion of reciprocity is also important within groups who create mix tapes for each other. In discussing the potlatch – a native North American event where food and goods are exchanged, Mauss writes that,

By accepting [a gift] one knows that one is committing oneself. A gift is received 'with a burden attached'. One does more than derive benefit from a thing or a festival: one has accepted a challenge, and has been able to do so because of being certain to be able to reciprocate, to prove one is not unequal. (41)

I am not suggesting that the makers and receivers of mix tapes are always thinking of the exchange of mix tapes in such a lofty manner, but I would argue that the nature of reciprocity is one which is acknowledged by many mix tape fans. Of course, as Armin Peiseler, Alexander Tsitsigias and Jörn Radzuweit note, of the four main categories of mix tape creator which they identify, only one, the 'communicator' 'makes and exchanges tapes not so much for the sake of the music, but for the ritual of reciprocal exchange itself, and the bonds of friendship which are formed through such an exchange'. However, I think that when many people present a mix tape to somebody, it is expected that they will receive one in return, an expectation which Helena indignantly expresses in her words, "the most gutting thing, is that my first girlfriend, Jess; I made her loads and loads of tapes and she never made me a tape in return." In addition to individual exchanges, it is also clear that the Hollow Box Jockey Club operates on the basis of reciprocity. A 'jockey' makes a tape and is then sent one in return.

### Reasons for Playing Mix Tapes

The differences between the reasons my informants had for making mix tapes, and the reasons which they had for playing them are noticeable. While it seems that my informants often made tapes with the intention of 'educating' the recipient or with the hope of initiating a romantic relationship, the reasons why my informants listened to tapes made for them by other people do not seem to mirror these motives. While my informants told me how they would sometimes listen to mix tapes simply because the songs were good, they also told me how listening to the tapes evoked memories in them, and while a tape may have been originally made with the intention of introducing them to certain bands, the tape's main effect was now one of reminding the listener of the person who had made it, and the occasion on which it was presented to them. While the performance involved in *making* a mix tape remains fixed, in that the actual recording of the songs and structure of the tape cannot be changed, the performance involved in *listening* to the tape varies each time it is played, according to the context in which it is listened to.

The concept of the mix tape's function and effect altering according to the context in which it is played is a significant one, and reflects Kenneth Goldstein's comments on Carl von Sydow's notions of 'active' and 'passive' bearers of folklore. As Goldstein stresses, von Sydow does not suggest that people can be categorised in terms of being 'active' or 'passive'. The emphasis, Goldstein writes,

Is not on the kinds of tradition bearers but on the status of specific items of folklore in the repertoires of their bearers. That is, certain items in the repertoires of specific folklore carriers are being performed or are not being performed, and we express this by saying that these carriers are active or passive concerning those items in their repertoires. (63)

This suggests that both the creators and recipients of mix tapes can be active or passive bearers of tradition. I would argue that by both creating and playing a mix tape, a person can be an active bearer of expressive culture. Goldstein continues by suggesting that any genre of folklore can assume a particular status according to the degree to which it could be classified as being active or inactive. While Goldstein uses the example of folksongs to clarify his point, I would argue that mix tapes could be categorised in a similar way. For instance, Goldstein identifies four main states which a genre could be said to hold: *permanence* – where mix tapes are listened to immediately after having been received, and are thereafter listened to fairly constantly; *transience* – the mix tapes are listened to immediately after having been received but then become part of the ‘inactive repertory’, or in other words are added to a music collection but are never listened to again; *intermittence* – the mix tapes are played immediately after having been received, are then not listened to for a long time but are later played on certain occasions to become part of the active repertory; *postponement* – mix tapes are not played on their immediate reception but may be played sometime afterwards, at which point any of the other three patterns can apply to them.

I would also suggest that some of Goldstein’s factors which affect the status of folklore items could be applied to mix tapes. The factors which Goldstein identifies are ownership and identity, where songs may not be played for fear of insulting the person who is commonly accepted to be their ‘owner’; topicality, where songs are played only for as long as they remain topical; taste and esthetics, where a song may be played because it is a favourite of the performer; social roles and identity, where the songs performed by a singer are influenced by a certain identity group; change or

loss of audience, where songs are chosen according to the tastes of the audience for which they are intended. Of these, I would suggest that the factors of topicality and taste and esthetics are most relevant to the circumstances which may alter the status of a mix tape. Goldstein writes of topicality that,

Certain songs have meaning to a singer and his audience only so long as their message is of topical importance. As soon as the subject matter is dated, such songs will probably pass from active to inactive status in a singer's repertory....It must be noted, however, that should the same or a similar inequity arise later, the song may once again become topical and can be restored to its place in the active repertory of the singer. (64)

I would suggest that this factor could be applied to mix tapes. A tape which a person presents as a courtship gift – and which is accepted as such by the receiver – is likely to be played by the receiver for as long as the relationship remains important to them. Should the relationship end, the tape would probably not be played as often, if at all, unless the listener wished to remind herself of the relationship.

The factor of taste and esthetics can clearly be applied to the subject of mix tapes. Goldstein writes that,

Taste and esthetic patterns adopted at an early age may remain relatively unchanged during a singer's life. Songs learned during such a socialization process may remain as favourites of the singer and be actively performed until the singer dies. (64)

Similarly, mix tapes will be played by both their creators and receivers for as long as they continue to enjoy the songs on them.

### Mix tapes and memory

In this next section, I will consider the relationship between memory and mix tapes, and how both the hearing of certain songs associated with certain mix tapes, as

well as the actual mix tapes themselves, can evoke particular memories. I will begin by considering the relationship between music and memory.

The basic relationship between music and memory is comprehensively described by Tia DeNora in the following passage:

At the most general and most basic level, music is a medium that can be and often is simply paired or associated with aspects of past experience. It was part of the past and so becomes an emblem of a larger interactional, emotional complex. A good deal of music's affective powers come from its co-presence with other things – people, events, scenes. In some cases, music's semiotic power – here, its emblematic capacity – comes from its conditional presence; it was simply 'there at the time'. In such cases, music's specific meanings and its link to circumstances simply emerge from its association with the context in which it is heard. In such cases, the link, or articulation, that is made – and which is so often biographically indelible – is initially arbitrary but is rendered symbolic (and hence evocatory) from its relation to the wider retinue of the experience, to the moment in question....

Music moves through time, it is a temporal medium. This is the first reason why it is a powerful *aide-mémoire*. Like an article of clothing or an aroma, music is part of the material and aesthetic environment in which it was once playing, in which the past, now an artifact of memory and its constitution, was once a present....And when it is music that is associated with a particular moment and a particular space...music reheard and recalled provides a device for unfolding, for replaying, the temporal structure of that moment, its dynamism as emerging experience. (66-67)

This relationship between song and past event is reflected in Hannah Godfrey's statement that,

If I listen to Sting's "Englishman in New York" and a couple of songs on this tape I made the first time I went to America a few years ago, even now I can still see being on the plane and I can see myself listening to it as I was walking round Chicago, but no-one else has that.

While Hannah's recollection reinforces DeNora's basic point, her words, "but no-one else has that," is also suggestive of DeNora's second point, that of the agency of the individual in the creation of associations between music and past events. DeNora continues by referencing the accounts of her informants, where they describe the powerful memories evoked by certain pieces of music:

[For my informants], the soundtrack of their action was not mere accompaniment. It did not merely follow their experience, was not merely overlaid upon it. True, the particular music may have been arbitrarily paired with the experiential moment...but the creation of that 'moment' as a heightened moment was due in part to the alchemy of respondents' perceived or sensed 'rightness' or resonance between the situation, the social relationship, the setting, the music, and themselves as emerging aesthetic agents with feelings, desires, moods such that the music *was* the mood, and the mood, the music. To the extent that music comes to penetrate experience in this way, it is informative of that experience. Music thus provides parameters – or potential parameters because it has to be meaningfully attended to – for experience constituted in real time....This environmental appropriation, which is a reflexive constitution of music's affordances within a context, scene or setting, is how experience comes to be made, felt and known to self. It consists of an interlacing of experience (feeling, action) and the materials that are accessed as the referents for experience, its metaphoric and temporal parameters. It is no wonder, then, that on rehearing music that helped to structure, to inform experience, respondents describe how they are able to relive that experience; the study of human-music interaction thus reveals the subject, memory and, with it, self-identity, as being constituted on a fundamentally socio-cultural plane where the dichotomy between 'subjects' and 'objects' is, for all practical purposes, null and void. (67)

As the above paragraph helps to demonstrate, many people are familiar with Sting's song "Englishman in New York", and yet clearly the song does not evoke in everybody such a powerful memory as that evoked in Hannah. The occasions on which many people hear the song are simply not considered by the listener as being all that important or significant, and consequently the song has not sufficiently 'penetrated their experience' to have become part of their autobiography. The personal agency involved in the relationship between song and memory is further exemplified in Hannah's suggestion that mix tapes "are like a photo album, but a photo album that only you understand. Because you're the only one who's got the pictures in your head for those particular songs".

While hearing music in any context has the ability to remind a person of past moments, I would argue that the playing of songs from an old mix tape is perhaps even more likely to evoke memories. The particular sequence of songs, the cover art,

the whole package and structure of the tape is likely to induce in the listener memories associated with the person who gave them the tape, and the occasion for which it was presented to them. Meister, Menzel and Orbitz suggest this, writing that,

Former situations can suddenly be recalled by rediscovering particular songs on a tape and remembering the first time in which you heard them. They awaken memories of a particular time, or particular associations with the music. (48)

They also state how one of their informants recalled that, "I have a chest where I keep many of my photos, and if I look at them, or listen to a mix tape, then it's like a journey into the past" (48). Neil Rosenberg told me that some of his anthologies, "do provoke memories of a time in some way, but there are only one or two that have that deep kind of connection for me that way. I don't put them on as much as I used to" (*Personal interview*).

As my informants suggest, music and mix tapes have the ability to manipulate time. By playing an old mix tape, you can transport yourself back to a past time in your life, and relive old memories. While this suggests that it is possible to deliberately evoke memories by purposefully listening to old mix tapes, my informants tend not to do this, and instead told me how they would more usually play an old tape because they liked the songs on it, and only while listening to it would they realise that they were being reminded of past events. When I asked Helena on what occasions she would play the tape made for her by her ex-girlfriend which featured the 'coded' Nick Cave song, she replied,

Well it's a really good tape, and it's just stuff you'd listen to anyway because they're really good songs, and I might just play it whenever, listening to it in my Walkman when I'm walking to work. At a time when I'd play any tape, really...I just sometimes forget there's the Nick Cave song on the end, so that's why I can't play it in public!



I continued by asking her, "so you've now separated the tape from its original function, which was to cheer you up at a particular time, and now you've just got a tape full of music?" Helena replied, "yeah, but I can still think back on the time when it was originally made whenever I listen to it, but I can separate it. I don't just listen to it on one occasion". When I asked Holly if she would ever play old tapes with the intention of evoking certain memories, or provoking particular moods, she replied,

No. Except for this one, which is a compilation CD that [my husband] made with my suggestions. And this one just makes me happy. So I will go for this one specifically because it makes me happy.

However, in a similar way to Helena, while Holly may choose tapes to play primarily for the musical content, she often ends up being reminded of certain people and times. She mentions one tape in particular, saying,

And this one says "Wedding Tape", but it's a tape that a friend of mine, who was a DJ, made for the occasion of his own wedding. But I liked it so much that I asked if he could make me a copy. And that has – it's got great music on it, but also I guess it's the sentimental value of my friend, who married my best friend from high school.

Of my informants, only Hannah Godfrey told me how she would use tapes to 'exorcise' herself of certain moods. In answer to my question, "what kind of mood provokes you to play an old mix tape?" she answered,

I'm quite a melancholy person, and I do get quite sentimental in a way and nostalgic, so listening to old tapes, in a way, if old tapes that other people have made for me, then I've probably been thinking about them and feeling a bit sad about it, and I'll listen to the tape and feel even sadder about it! So it's almost like exorcising. Listening to old tapes can often make me feel a bit sad, actually. Which defeats the purpose. I went strawberry picking in Denmark a few years ago, and obviously made a tape to go there with, and I had *such* a good time there. It really did change my life. It sounds ridiculous, but it did. And that tape was very much a part of it. And I made a tape of a girl who I made friends with, I went through her music collection and made a tape out of her music, and listening to that now, it's a very sweet sort of melancholy. But I can't listen to it all the time. I find it quite difficult to listen to mix tapes.

The “sweet sort of melancholy” which Hannah feels when listening to certain tapes is typical of the feelings of nostalgia felt by many people when listening to certain songs. In their paper, “Phonographic Anthologies: Mix Tapes, Memory, and Nostalgia”, Serge Lacasse and Andy Bennett note that many popular music theorists have, “identified a strong nostalgic appeal in the way that music works for individuals in contemporary society” ( *Phonographic Anthologies* 3). As they point out, Simon Frith neatly summarises this, writing that:

Songs and tunes are often key to our remembrance of things past...providing a...vivid experience of time passing. Music focuses our attention on the feeling of time; songs are organized (it is part of their pleasure) around anticipation and echo, around endings to which we look forward, choruses that build regret into their fading. ( *Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music* 142)

While the songs lend themselves to nostalgic associations, Lacasse and Bennett correctly point out that the format of cassette also carries with it a certain nostalgia. While the format on which a mix is recorded is a subject to which I shall return in more detail in the following chapter, I think it pertinent to mention here that the whole structure of the mix tape, and not just the musical content, carries nostalgic qualities.

### Nostalgia

Folklore has often been used to incite feelings of nostalgia in people, and indeed lends itself to nostalgia through its highlighting of tradition. The concept of tradition invokes the past, and to many people, ‘the past’ equates to a more authentic, more wholesome time – a golden age. The deployment of folklore, therefore, is often calculated to provoke a nostalgic reaction in people. Folklorist Peter Narváez recognises this, writing that, “the materials of folklore may be strategically employed by producers of popular culture in order to prompt specific kinds of audience

responses" (*"The Newfie Bullet"* 65). Narváez elaborates on this by discussing the popular Newfoundland radio programme, "The Newfie Bullet", which aired between the years 1979 and 1981. Narváez writes how the show would employ traditional Newfoundland folk songs and expressions, as well as folkloric genres such as storytelling to evoke in the audience memories of a bygone time. The nostalgic or bittersweet element is evoked in the implication that, while the years during which the railway operated were hard, they were also 'good old times', and the audience is to some extent manipulated into a feeling that they have lost something which can never be replaced.

When discussing the relationship between mix tapes and nostalgia, I am tempted to invert Narváez's sentence, "the materials of folklore may be strategically employed by producers of popular culture in order to prompt specific kinds of audience responses" so that it instead reads, 'the materials of popular culture may be strategically employed by producers of folklore in order to prompt specific kinds of audience responses.' I would argue that this was certainly the case of a compilation tape which my brother sent to me in April 2004. He was in the process of helping our father clear the attic, in preparation for moving house, when he came across boxes of old music which we had not listened to in years. As a birthday present, Steven made me a mix tape of this music and sent it to me in Canada. In the note which accompanied the tape, Steven wrote, "I've left it all unlabelled in the hope that unexpected tunes will prompt you to big grins and squeaks of delight".<sup>25</sup> As I explained in a paper which I presented at the annual conference of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada in Winnipeg in May, 2004,

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<sup>25</sup> Steven Lovatt, letter to the author, April 2004.

this type of mix tape depends upon a shared past between the creator and recipient, and a knowledge on the part of the creator as to what the likely reaction of the recipient would be to specific songs, based on the associative memories which they carry. (M. Lovatt 2004)

In making this tape, Steven took songs drawn from popular culture and recontextualised them onto a single tape intended for personal use, and as I suggest above, the reaction which Steven intends the tape to provoke is entirely based upon a personal knowledge about my feelings towards the songs, and a knowledge that it had been many years since I had last heard them.

My friend Jen Squires also indicated to me the importance of referencing shared past experiences in mix tapes as a way of reaffirming friendships. In an email to me she described how for many years she and her friend Maggie from high school would make each other tapes for their birthdays. Jen writes that,

We put on songs that meant something to us, songs by bands we both loved, or bands that we would go watch downtown, or songs that reminded us of each other, such as "Our Frank" by Morrissey (because we were both in love with a boy named Frank), and each birthday tape from me began with "Unhappy Birthday" [The Smiths] and would have "Birthday Pony" by Fugazi for obvious reasons. When she moved away this year, we each made tapes filled with our favorite songs from old birthday tapes, and whenever I miss her, I just listen to that, and it reminds me of all the fun we used to have together.<sup>26</sup>

Not only were the original tapes made with the deliberate intention of reminding each other of shared moments, but Jen now listens to a tape made for her by Maggie whenever she misses her, in a conscious effort to remember the experiences they shared.

While Steven's intention to prompt me, "to big grins and squeaks of delight" was successful, as I have mentioned, listening to songs which you associate with past

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<sup>26</sup> Jen Squires, e-mail to the author, 17 Apr. 2005.

events can also be a sad experience. My informant Hannah Godfrey spoke of this, saying that listening to old tapes,

Is kind of tied up with death as well. These songs that are on the mix tape – as I said before, only you know what they mean to you, and you can play them to someone else – and if I gave you this tape...that I made when I went to Denmark, you would know that it had a lot of emotional significance for me and importance, but the images, the photo album for that tape will die with me, and so I guess that's what makes me feel sad. It emphasises the futility. It emphasises a fundamental aloneness. You make tapes for people, you give songs to people that you think they'll like, and that you hope will remind them of you, but at the end of the day it's all kind of, it's all nothing.

It seems to me that Hannah's thoughts are related to the idea of the ephemerality of popular culture. In some ways, it could be argued that products of popular culture are becoming less ephemeral, now that digital technology allows us to hear perfect, scratch-free recordings of songs which were made decades ago on formats which inevitably become damaged with every use. However, Hannah's point suggests that, regardless of the lifespan of the song or the format on which it has been recorded, the song's ultimate and most poignant meaning lies with a person, and feelings of sadness are necessarily excited when the person realises that, one day, the song will be played and yet no-one will remember or have ever known the meaning which it once had for them.

#### Mix Tapes and Other Forms of Collectanea

The inherent nostalgic quality in mix tapes, and their capturing of an event or a time which can be remembered but never re-lived, can also be found in any item of material culture which has meaning for an individual. In her essay "Tradition and the Individual Memory: The Case of Christian C. Sanderson", Teresa Barnett explores the

material objects collected by one man, and the way in which he used them to commemorate the past. Born in Pennsylvania in 1882, Christian Sanderson was a dedicated hoarder of both items which could be considered to be of general historical and national interest, such as strands of George Washington's hair, as well as objects of personal significance, such as a string from the violin which he played at his mother's funeral. The most intriguing items in his collection combine elements of both the personal and public interest, such as the flowers he wore on the day Thomas Edison was buried, or the shoelaces which he wore at the inauguration of President Truman. As Barnett writes, although Sanderson collected literally thousands of objects – indeed following his death in 1966 his friends transformed his house into a museum – “he did not preserve his many objects merely because he could not bear to throw anything away” (223). Rather, argues Barnett, Sanderson regarded his collections as ‘secular relics’. Barnett writes:

By designating their finds “relics,” nineteenth-century collectors and amateur historians sought to appropriate some of the power of the religious relic. Within a secular framework, they asserted that the power of an object's pastness, its metonymic association with events that were over and done, could somehow preserve the past into the present. The simple perdurance of the object could in some sense transcend the passage of time itself. (226)

As with old mix tapes, Sanderson's ‘relics’ can not recreate the past, but they can represent it and instill in their owners a feeling of the emotions they may have been experiencing in past moments.

The relationship between physical objects and past experience, and the bittersweet, nostalgic emotions which it excites, is perhaps best described by Barnett when she discusses Sanderson's commemoration of the string from a violin which he played at his mother's funeral. Barnett writes:

Obviously the violin string's associations made it particularly appropriate for commemorative purposes. Even a contemporary sensibility can recognize the implicit equation between violin music and the soul's longing and also between heartstrings and violin strings – especially here, where the string has been snapped out of its bridge, rendered mute and useless. At the same time, however, that a violin string has conventional associations, this string also refers back to a very specific moment of loss and longing. And like so many of Sanderson's artifacts, its power lies in the tension between its inert thingness and the memory of the process it carries within it – that one particular song played at a particular unrepeatable moment and then silenced, held within the string and never to be released again. (233)

I would argue that this is similar to the emotions with which many of my informants regard old mix tapes given to them by friends or ex-partners. The reasons why they were given the tape, and the moment at which they first received the tape or first listened to it can never be repeated and belong to the past. The tape itself, however, is a bridge between the present and the past, and its 'inert thingness' contrasts with the present and vivid memories which it evokes.

A comparable feeling of nostalgia can be experienced when looking at old photographs. Both Marianne Hirsch in her book Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory and Pauline Greenhill in So We Can Remember: Showing Family Photographs discuss the relationship between memory and family photographs. Both writers make the point that, while a photograph may record a moment, you can only view the photograph *after* the moment has occurred and that moment can never be relived. Hirsch discusses the feelings of death which surround the taking of photographs. The very act of taking a photograph implies a knowledge that that moment will never be repeated, and that the photographic image of the human subject will survive them. Hirsch illustrates this by describing the photographs which mothers take of their children, writing that,



The maternal photographer 'picturing' her child initiates just such a process of mourning: the pictures she takes are pictures of a time lost, measuring change, separation, and reconnection. But in capturing a single moment of her child's life she places that life into a nostalgic and elegiac discourse that can never find consolation. (177)

Hannah's comment that "only you know what [the songs] mean to you" stresses the importance of context and personal experience in the relationship between memory and mix tapes. This point is also suggested by Hirsch when she writes of the emotions she feels when looking at old photographs of her ancestors. She writes:

When I look through my family's albums, I enter a network of looks that dictate affiliative feelings, positive or negative feelings of recognition that can span miles and generations: I 'recognize' my great-grandmother because I am told that she is an ancestor, not because she is otherwise in any way similar or identifiable to me. It is the context of the album that creates the relationship, not necessarily any preexistent sign. (53)

I think that there are differences in the way that Hannah listens to her old mix tapes and the way that Marianne Hirsch looks at the photograph of her great-grandmother. For instance, while Hannah did actually go to America and had the experiences which she later nostalgically remembers by listening to her mix tape, Hirsch never met her great-grandmother and only feels like she *should* feel a connection with her because she has been told that she is related to her, and so feels almost obligated to feel a bond with her. Also and more obviously, the songs on a mix tape are mass-produced items of popular culture, whereas family photographs are more unique and inherently personal objects. However, I also think that there are significant similarities. Both the songs on Hannah's mix tape, and the photograph of Hirsch's great-grandmother have no direct connection with either of them. Both existed, and still exist, entirely independently of and oblivious to Hannah and Hirsch. But both have now come to be part of the life narratives of Hannah and Hirsch. In Hannah's case, her listening to

songs drawn from popular culture during a particularly memorable time of her life now makes *them* part of her life too. For Hirsch, the fact that she never met her great-grandmother matters not as much as the knowledge that, were it not for her, Hirsch would not exist, and so her great-grandmother is also inevitably a component of her autobiography.

Both photographs and mix tapes, in common with many other items of material culture, invite narratives to be built within and around them. They can act as a reminder of a past event, but there is an inevitable element of reductionism involved, in that neither mix tapes nor photographs can successfully portray past events as they 'really' happened. Pauline Greenhill makes this point, writing that,

the ambiguous nature of photographs is such that they usually suggest more than they actually tell. The event, the moment itself is recorded, but the photograph alone cannot indicate what happened before or after. (3)

In this way, photographs come to encapsulate or represent past actions in a way that often mythologises the actual experience. Hirsch writes:

The existence of a familial mythology, of an image to live up to, an image shaping the desire of the individual living in a social group...survives by means of its narrative and imaginary power, a power that photographs have a particular capacity to tap. I would like to suggest that photographs locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life. (8)

I have previously mentioned how some of my informants agreed that, were all of the mix tapes that they had ever made to be assembled, they could be seen as an autobiography, but an autobiography that would only be recognised as such by themselves. Unlike family photographs, songs on a mix tape, are for the most part recorded from mass-produced recordings of popular culture, and are therefore not uniquely associated with any one individual.

A good example of how personal and popular culture can be combined, can be found in Neil Rosenberg's essay "'It Was a Kind of a Hobby': A Manuscript Song Book and its Place in Tradition". Rosenberg describes how one woman from New Brunswick compiles song lyrics both from songs which are part of her family's oral tradition, as well as popular songs from the radio. As Rosenberg writes, Betty would write the words down in 'scribblers' – lined school notebooks – and Betty explained why she did this, saying that,

'With the older songs of my dad's I guess it was because that I knew that someday he would be gone and the old songs would go too with the old people and that's the reason I wanted...and then I kept thinking, well, the newer songs that you're hearing on the radio, well, some day there'll be somebody who will remember an old song and, well, you may have the words to it'. (*It Was a Kind of Hobby* 320-321)

Rosenberg writes that the songbook reflects aspects of Betty's life in terms of what it includes, and also what it leaves out. For instance, Rosenberg notes that, "the greatest number of country music songs were added when Betty was a teenager, with leisure time and a strong interest in the music she heard on the radio" (*It Was a Kind of Hobby* 324). When Betty got married, however, she found that she did not have as much leisure time as before, and so fewer songs were added. To an outsider, the songbook would merely seem to be a collection of different song lyrics. To Betty, however, the songs are reminders of different stages of her life, and this leads to Neil Rosenberg's assertion that Betty's songbook is "a document of her life" (*It Was a Kind of Hobby* 326).

In much the same way, the relationship and experiences which one 'shares' with songs on a mix tape allows for them to be incorporated into a person's personal narrative. This point is made by Lacasse and Bennett when they write that,

Through the creation and dissemination of mix tapes to significant others in their lives, individuals reassert such ownership of musical texts, the physical object of the mix tape often being accompanied, as we've seen, by a verbal communicated personal account of the contained music selection's personal value for the compiler. (*Phonographic Anthologies* 11)

This appropriation of popular culture text into a person's own life narrative is demonstrated in High Fidelity when the main character, Rob reorganises his record collection from alphabetical into autobiographical order. Hornby, using the voice of his protagonist Rob, writes,

Tuesday night I reorganize my record collection....This is my life, and it's nice to be able to wade in it, immerse your arms in it, touch it....When Laura was here I had the records arranged alphabetically...tonight, though, I fancy something different, so I try to remember the order I bought them in: that way I hope to write my own autobiography, without having to do anything like pick up a pen. I pull the records off the shelves, put them in piles all over the sitting room floor, look for *Revolver*, and go on from there; and when I've finished, I'm flushed with a sense of self, because this, after all, is who I am.

The relationship between impersonal item of popular culture and personal item of autobiography is further illustrated as Hornby continues:

I have made myself more complicated than I really am. I have a couple of thousand records, and you have to be me – or at the very least, a doctor of Flemingology [Fleming is the surname of the protagonist] – to know how to find any of them. If I want to play, say, *Blue* by Joni Mitchell, I have to remember that I bought it for someone in the autumn of 1983, and thought better of giving it to her, for reasons I don't really want to go into. Well, you don't know any of that, so you're knackered, really, aren't you? You'd have to ask me to dig it out for you, and for some reason I find this enormously comforting. (55)

The care with which Rob organises his records betrays his love for them, outside of the actual songs which they contain, and I would suggest that this is similar to the fondness with which some people regard their old mix tapes. In an interview with Hank Stuever, a writer for the Washington Post, Professor Rob Jaczko of the Berklee College of Music in Boston articulates this, saying that "I find old mix tapes

in drawers now, and they're like a personal record, like finding an old letter."

Similarly, while the actual songs on the mix tape evoke memories, the mix tape itself is capable of evoking memories without even having to be played. While the tape may have originally been intended to serve as an introduction to certain artists, several years later it may serve an entirely different function. Folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses the ways in which material objects are used by people to maintain links with the past. Citing one example of what she categorises as 'material companions', she writes that,

A wooden spoon stirred to a stub is still used despite the fact that almost nothing is left but the handle; with a chuckle, Lina Auckett, now in her eighties, will talk of the years of use the spoon has seen. Such objects are not "saved"; they are allowed to grow old and, however humble, they accumulate meaning and value by sheer dint of their constancy in a life. (330)

This demonstrates how, regardless of its original purpose, an object can acquire meaning according to the function which it performs in the life of its owner.

Photograph albums do not have to be opened, and mix tapes do not have to be played – their simple physical presence can provide a satisfactory comfort to their owners.

They can be treated as a resource through which the past can be accessed and remembered, should an individual find themselves in a nostalgic frame of mind.

Photographs and mix tapes also share similarities in the way that they are used.

I mentioned earlier how Jen Squires and her friend Maggie made each other tapes including songs which had meaning for both of them as a way of reaffirming their friendship. Pauline Greenhill makes the same point about photographs. Writing of the purposes for which photographs are shown, she suggests that,

They can be a confirmation of ties which already exist between the shower of the photograph and his audience, as seen in their presence together in the photograph. People seem to like seeing photographs of themselves, so pictures of common experiences are frequently shown. (120)

Similarly, while my informants suggest that they listen to mix tapes because they enjoy the music, or because they want to be reminded of past times, Greenhill writes that her informants “use their photographs within the family primarily when evoking family memories, and as entertainment. One of my informants uses her albums to ‘introduce’ her sons who have moved away, to her new friends” (121). This ‘introduction’ purpose is similar to the way in which mix tapes are often made with the intention of introducing friends to new music. In this way, both photographs and mix tapes share an educational value.

While some mix tapes end up being objects of memory by “sheer dint of their constancy in a life”, some mix tapes are created with the specific intention of evoking memories of past times or people, and these mix tapes would be included in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s definition of ‘souvenirs and mementoes’. Of these, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes:

Souvenirs and mementoes, as the terms themselves imply, are from the outset intended to serve as a reminder of an ephemeral experience or absent person. Because mementoes tend to signify particular events, people, and experiences, they are more highly focused stimuli for reminiscence. They too are rooted in the history of a life and are generally valued more for what they signify, for the larger biographical whole of which they are a part, than in themselves; they are of “sentimental value.”...the objects are fragments awaiting the autobiographer to repair the damage of time. (331)

Mix tapes which act as souvenirs and mementoes may have been made by a person for their own use, or as a present for another person. Hannah Godfrey told me how she sometimes makes tapes with the deliberate intention of evoking memories. She stated that,

I realised that it was important for me to make mix tapes when I was traveling, whenever I go away anywhere new, because I have a very bad memory, and because I know that when I’m traveling I’ll be listening to one tape; it’s a way



of triggering memory....And then when I come back, those songs always conjure memories for me, which is really important to me.

While Hannah sometimes makes tapes with the deliberate intention of triggering her memory, tapes such as those made for roadtrips or holidays have a slightly different relationship to memory. While a mix tape made for a specific roadtrip is originally created for the purpose of providing songs to listen to whilst driving,

subsequent replayings of the tape, which may occur months or years later, could remind the listener of the road trip, where they were, and who they were with. In this way, the creator of the mix tape could be said to have intentionally or otherwise influenced the music/memory relationship by creating future associations between certain songs, and certain people, places and events. (Lovatt 2004)

The creation of a mix tape as an accompaniment to a roadtrip is not as blatant an attempt to capture a moment in time as the taking of a photograph, but will nevertheless forever be associated with a particular past event by the people who were present at the time.

As I briefly mentioned earlier, it is not only the songs and the whole structure of the tape itself which can provide meaning for a person. For some of my informants, the format on which the compilation was recorded was also meaningful, and as Lacasse and Bennett point out, the increasing demise of the cassette has lent it a certain air of nostalgia for some people. In my next chapter I will discuss the differing opinions of my informants towards mix tapes and mix CDs, and will then consider the impact and effect of more recent technologies which enable the juxtaposition of songs, such as the iPod.



## Chapter 4

*“I’m a sentimental old fool and there’s something special about tapes”<sup>27</sup>*

In this chapter I will consider the technologies and practicalities involved in making mix tapes, and the opinions of my informants with regard to the ways in which these influence the creation of mix tapes. I will focus on the following areas: firstly, I will consider the attitudes of my informants with respect to the media which they use to make their compilations, in particular the different attitudes towards mix tapes and mix CDs. Secondly, I will explore how the creation of mixes or compilations is inevitably related to the access which the creator has both to music, and to recording technologies. I will end by looking at recent developments in music technology, focusing on the iPod – and through an examination of the ways in which one person uses his iPod, I will explore the extent to which *how* a person listens to music changes the way in which they experience it.

### The Format of the Mix

*“Somebody was trying to tell me that CDs are better than vinyl because they don’t have any surface noise. I said, ‘Listen, mate, Life has surface noise’”<sup>28</sup>*

Throughout the year and a half I have spent researching and writing about mix tapes, I have lost track of the number of conversations I have had with strangers at bus stops, pubs and parties who have said to me, “your thesis is on mix tapes! That’s so cool!” In most cases, this exclamation was followed up with the question, “so, are you

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Gunn, personal interview, 6 July 2004.

<sup>28</sup> “Favourite John Peel Quotes,” John Peel, I Love Music, Palomino, 26 Oct. 2004, Oct. 2004 <<http://ilx.p3r.net/thread.php?msgid=5178927>>.

looking into the whole tapes versus CDs thing?” With growing numbers of people now having access to CD burning equipment, many people who used to make mix tapes have now made the change to making mix CDs. However, from my research and casual conversations, there are clearly many people who, despite having the ability to make CDs, prefer to continue making mix tapes, and in this section of the chapter I will explore the various issues involved in the choice of format on which to record a compilation. In their discussion of Herlyn and Overdick’s work on the mix tape, Serge Lacasse and Andy Bennett write that the study suggests that the cassette tape,

Is considered a “true” medium by many compilers, who seem to impart cassette-tapes with a nostalgic quality and a corresponding higher “authentic” value than digital counterparts, such as CDs and MP3s. Clearly, however, this could be a simple demographic issue, in that...many of those who currently compile mix tapes grew up in the pre-digital age and associate the cassette medium, like much of the music they compile, with the time of their youth. Indeed, according to Simon Frith (1987), youth is often a period of life in which music has its most wide reaching effect as a soundtrack for everyday life. This view is supported by a preliminary survey conducted by Serge Lacasse and Mélanie Carrier between August and September 2003 in Quebec City. Out of the 16 respondents, only five declared using cassette tapes exclusively when making compilations. However, those five were the oldest of the respondents: two aged 27, one aged 28, one 43 and another 51. Out of the remaining 11, all aged between 19 and 27, eight declared using either CDs or MP3s only, while the other three sometimes used cassette tapes in addition to CDs or MP3s. It is then entirely possible that future generations will attach equally nostalgic properties to CDs, MP3s, minidisks and other formats that may subsequently become available. (*Mix Tapes, Memory and Nostalgia* 3-4)

Interestingly, of my five principal informants, it is the three youngest who feel most strongly about using cassettes. Hannah, Helena and Richard were all born in the late 1970s and early 1980s – the heyday of the cassette tape. Holly Everett and Neil Rosenberg, meanwhile, feel less of a nostalgic or romantic attachment to any particular format, and are more concerned with the speed and quality of recording.

When I asked Richard Gunn if he only ever made tapes, he replied,

Yes. There's something incredible about making tapes. There's so much fun making them, because you hear every track as you're doing it, you're actually getting a feel of what's going to be on there, you know exactly how it's going to sound, and when you're actually making the tape you realise if there's something wrong with it, you know, "shit, that track didn't go after the last track," and you wouldn't get that making them on any other format.

He spoke of his fondness for the cassette both for personal practical reasons, and also for more sentimental reasons. Of the practical reasons he told me,

There's also obviously the traditional thing of playing it in the car, not that I drive, but everybody seems to have a tape player, or they used to. Though I guess everyone has a CD player now, but that wasn't the case when I started making tapes.

Plus, even people who burn CDs etc, very few people can transfer off vinyl. On tape you can easily copy CD to tape, tape to tape, vinyl to tape without any problem, so tapes are always just the easiest, most convenient format. Plus it's pretty long as well, ninety minutes on average, that's your normal length, so pretty much all the mix tapes are ninety minutes, which you don't get with a CD. You've got the two sides thing as well, different themes on each side. Everything about them is good!

Having outlined the practical reasons, I asked him if he had any sentimental attachment to tapes, and he replied,

Yes, definitely. I mean, even if it was impractical, I'd still do it, 'cause I'm a sentimental old fool, and there's something special about tapes. Maybe it's growing up as a kid in the '80s, and that's the format music seemed to be going towards. So maybe that's it, I don't know.

Hannah Godfrey started the Hollow Box Jockey Club as a club for swapping mix tapes rather than CDs ostensibly for practical reasons, as she couldn't play burned CDs on her Hi-Fi, but she also revealed that she had "always loved making tapes," and she spoke about the nostalgia which cassettes seemed to have for some Jockey Club members, telling me that,

You're using analogue, you're using cassettes, and that's very much I think from our generation – we made a lot of tapes when we were kids because that's the equipment we had, and now, people who are like sixteen now are making compilations with minidisk players or MP3s, and so for the younger

members of the club, it's like going back to old school, so it's got that kind of kudos for them, in some ways.

The majority of the members of the club are in their twenties and thirties – people who grew up using analogue. Hannah also spoke about how in her experience, people tended not to decorate mix CDs like they did tapes:

A lot of the CDs that I've received – I'd say that the majority of them didn't really have – they had kind of computer graphic-ed sleeves, if they'd bothered doing a sleeve – not everyone does. But with tapes there's more of an ethos of making a cassette cover, a cassette sleeve. I don't know why that is – I don't know if it's because you've spent so long hands on with it that there's more of a desire to ornament it, to display. Whereas with a CD, because everything's so contained within the computer, you're just, "well, I can go into that file in the computer, print it and that's done."

The implication is that the harder it is to make the mix, the more value it has, and the more 'authentic' it is. The nature of authenticity and the way in which value judgments are formed on the basis of something's perceived authenticity is a central issue in the discipline of folklore, and is a subject to which I will return later in this section.

The equation of tapes with labour and value is reflected in comments made by Helena Lukowska. I asked her if she would rather receive a mix tape or CD, and she replied:

It depends what I wanted it for. If I want to play songs at a club night or whatever, I'd rather obviously get a CD, 'cause a tape's not much good for that, but just as a thing to receive, then I'd rather a tape....Maybe it's just me being set in my ways, maybe it's just that I've always had mix tapes. Whenever I've had a mix tape, it's always been more pleasing than a mix CD, it's always looked more pleasing.

I wouldn't buy tapes, but with mix tapes it's different. Tapes at the moment, to me, are purely a medium for people to make things to make for each other; they're more of a DIY<sup>29</sup> thing. Unless in very unusual circumstances, I

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<sup>29</sup> Within music, the term 'DIY' or 'Do-It-Yourself' refers to an independent agency on the part of people to make and be involved in music. Emphasis is on creativity and community, rather than commercial profit.

wouldn't normally buy a tape by a band from a shop. They're purely as a means of swapping songs with other people.

While Helena does not have the means to make mix CDs, if she had, she told me that she would continue to make tapes. She told me that "I might make CDs for people if they specifically requested them, but I tend to make mix tapes for people as a surprise for them." Similarly, Holly informed me that she has specifically asked her friend Catherine, who attends the tree-planting camp, which format she would prefer the mix to be on. As Catherine informed her that there was not a CD player at the camp, Holly made her a mix tape.

This is similar to my own position. While I now have the technology to make mix CDs, I much prefer to make tapes. If I am making a compilation for somebody and either know that they don't have a tape deck or would probably not listen to it if it was on cassette then I will give them the option of having a CD, but as most of the friends for whom I make mixes are also fans of the tape, this rarely happens. It is hard for me to identify the reasons why I prefer mix tapes as opposed to mix CDs, but I think that I appreciate the extra time it takes to compile a mix on cassette. Whenever I receive a mix tape I like the image that forms in my head of the person who gave it to me crouched down next to the cassette deck, surrounded by albums, rewinding and recording over a song because they realised that it didn't 'go' after the previous song – all for me!

Helena's reasons for preferring tapes to CDs seem to reflect the tradition involved in making mix tapes for other people. She suggests that she is maybe just 'set in her ways' and resistant to change for reasons of personal tradition, but she also implies a wider sense of tradition involved in the mix tape-making community. Tapes,

for Helena, “are purely a medium for people to make things to make for each other; they’re more of a DIY thing.” While mix tapes are often designed to introduce people to new music, they are clearly much more than this, otherwise the question of format would not be the source of such impassioned debate.

As I mentioned previously, two of my informants did not express any particular attachment to the cassette format. Although Holly Everett still makes tapes, when I asked her why she had not switched to CDs she replied,

I think it’s mostly because I don’t know how to do it! I was thinking about whether I had some kind of ‘special feeling’ for the cassette, and I think at first I was resistant because [my husband] tried to, he said, “you know I can show you really easily how to do that on CD if you want,” and I said “no, I don’t want to, I want to do it this way,” so I think I was resistant at first, but I think it was more just resistant to having to learn how to do something new, than resistant to the form itself.

Neil Rosenberg also expressed no particular fondness for the cassette. Neil first started making anthologies in the 1950s, before the availability of cassettes for home recording, and he recorded his first anthologies on reel-to-reel tapes. Neil bought his first cassette-tape deck in about 1976, which he says made dubbing easier, and then in 2003 he bought a CD burner. Rather than stubbornly sticking to any particular format, Neil updated his recording equipment as the technology developed, and his choice of format is influenced by the ease and speed of recording, as opposed to sentimental attachment. He told me,

I found that basically when I was making tapes, and I guess I did a lot with C90s, it would take two or three hours to do one side, and given that this was when I was in full time teaching and raising a family and so on, it was hard to find that time all the time. It was a kind of escape – you put on your earphones, went to wherever the music room was – the set-up I still have here reflects all of that, it’s all set up so you can pull stuff out and put it on quickly. And I’m very good at moving quickly from one thing to another, but it still takes a lot of time, and I just don’t have the patience or interest in doing that now, and I think there’s a real shift. Sound recording has been developing over the last

century, the way in which we perceive and process sound has, in my own lifetime, changed so much, from 78s to CDs and beyond.

So now I've gotten sort of existential about it and I think I really prefer the CD thing, because you know, first of all, if you don't like the sequence, you can put it all on shuffle, and you can be surprised by the juxtapositions, and I like that kind of kaleidoscope of possibility, and it's a lot easier to do sequencing on a CD. I mean, you can fool around if you don't like it and go back and do a different version. (*Personal interview*)

For Neil, as opposed to Hannah, Helena and Richard, the ease and speed of making a compilation, as well as the sound quality, are more important than a nostalgic or sentimental attachment to a particular format.

For some, the attachment to a particular format is not necessarily the result of nostalgic memories of the past, but has more to do with the aesthetics and attributes of the format itself. Hannah told me that,

The thing about tapes which is nice is the clunkiness. You press start and stop, and every so often you'll pick that up, and I love that, and the same with vinyl. You get the whole scratchy thing, but that's another good reason for compilation tapes, because you can *hear* processes of it being made.

Kamal Fox also comments on this, writing that,

As stated earlier, "Mixed tapes are a kind of creative act as well as a record of a series of decisions at a particular moment in time." Tapes are often 'marked' by unclean cuts, overlaps of songs, etc. (CDs are 'clean' in this respect and are not as revealing of process). (8)

Rather than the absence of background noise being a good thing, some people are clearly drawn to the *sounds* of the musical process. It is possible that whether people acknowledge it or not, the hiss of the cassette or the crackle of the vinyl record are romanticised and tied up with nostalgia. Personally speaking, I am aware that there is an inconsistency between fondly listening to my records rotate on a turntable, and finding the incessant electronic whirring of my cheap Walmart-purchased CD player intolerable. Are vinyl records allowed to get away with producing background noise



simply because they are older and more 'authentic'? Or are vinyl records appreciated more for their aesthetic value?

### How the Medium by which You Hear Music Affects Your Experience of it

While I discuss the case of my informant Luke Power and his use of his iPod more in depth towards the end of this chapter, I think it is pertinent to mention here Luke's opinions regarding his iPod and other musical media. Luke's main access to music is now through downloading songs from the Internet onto the iTunes programme on his AppleMac computer, and then uploading them onto his iPod. I am interested in the ways in which the media by which you listen to music affects the way you experience and value the music. For instance, through downloading, you avoid the 'package' of the album – whether it be on cassette, CD or vinyl, and so to a certain extent, these mediums and the qualities associated with them become irrelevant, and the focus is on the music itself, rather than the marketable product. Luke owns both CDs and vinyl recordings, but he states that, "the only things I really, actually listen to in their own format is vinyl." What is noticeable is the way that, despite his separation of the actual music from the material object through which the music is played, Luke still has a greater affection for some media over others. For instance, he says that,

But the iPod more than anything has like, changed the way I look at buying CDs and stuff. I value buying vinyl more, because it's a little bit more – I guess like CDs as a medium has depreciated a little bit for me, because it's like almost impractical or something. But at the same time, I'm leaning more towards actually owning vinyl, because it's, I don't know, more the experience I guess, when I'm at home.... Well there's a whole bunch of reasons why I'm probably into vinyl, but maybe not all of them are genuine. Some of them are probably like, you know, it's trendy or whatever.

Luke says that he is not so appreciative of CDs because of their impracticality (uploading CDs to an iPod is much easier than taking a number of CDs around with you) and yet still professes a fondness for vinyl because of the *aesthetics* of it and the signification of trendiness which vinyl carries. I would suggest that, as well as the practicalities of the iPod, the iPod is also appealing for aesthetic reasons. While there are now many models of iPod, they are instantly recognisable, and I would argue that the iPod has a very *modern* look to it, which contrasts notably with the personal stereo. This point is made by Michael Bull in an interview with the website Wired News. He argues that,

One of the interesting things is that with vinyl, the aesthetic was in the cover of the record. You had the sleeve, the artwork, the liner notes. With the rise of digital, the aesthetic has left the object – the record sleeve – and now the aesthetic is in the artefact: the iPod, not the music. The aesthetic has moved from the disc to what you play it on.<sup>30</sup>

The iPod appears to follow a recent trend in music media: that of hiding or disguising the actual process by which the music is made. Certainly, there now seems to be a tendency for modern home entertainment systems to be shut away in cupboards, with the sound being projected from speakers which are carefully positioned in corners so as not to attract attention. It seems that the overall effect is designed to imply that the music is a natural component of the room's atmosphere. This can be contrasted with older methods of playing music: the invisible process by which sound is made on an MP3 player is very different from the almost ritualistic process of placing a vinyl LP on a turntable and watching it rotate as the music plays. With cassettes too, the medium is inextricably linked with the sound as you can observe the tape unwinding as the sounds are emitted, but clicking on a sound file on a computer does not allow

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Bull, interview, *Wired News*, 2004, 24 Feb. 2005  
<<http://www.wired.com/news/print/0,1294,62396.00.html>>.

the listener the opportunity to 'see' the sounds being made. It seems that digital technology is silencing the crackle of the vinyl, or the whirring of the cassette tape, and that music is becoming increasingly divorced from the process by which it is projected.

In an interview with Washington Post journalist Hank Stuever, Jim Januszewski, founder of website Art of the Mix stated that,

I'm one of the defectors...I just like MP3 better, it's so much easier....With the tapes you could screw it up. Now you just move it around, when this song doesn't work with this song.

This practical and unromantic stance is echoed by Kamal Fox. Writing in his article "Mixed Feelings: Notes on the Romance of the Mixed Tape", he comments on the deterioration of cassettes:

Everyone knows that the more you play cassettes, the more worn out they become – the more garbled the content – the more likely it is that the magnetic tape will tear on the next playing. It's ironic that the old worn-out tape is more loved than the one that has never been heard and will always sound pristine....

At first glance, the audio practices that we have witnessed post Napster, seem of a different order of counter-cultural plundering practice. Romantic mixed-tapers hardly seem on par with these web-savvy, aural pirates and pundits. As well, the new generations of portable mp3 pods and the emerging taste cultures surrounding them don't particularly resemble persnickety tape recorders and home-tapers. But, contrary to the rhetoric, the "concept" of mixing is not medium-specific. The record was set straight for me by a digital mixer (and former 'tape-head'): "What makes a mix 'work' is the consideration put into the content, not the medium it's recorded on. As long as there is obvious love and time put into the final result, that's what's going to have an impact." (11)

The opinion that the medium is irrelevant to the meaning and value of the compilation is not one that is shared by everyone, and researchers Julia Grösch, Susanne Hüners and Andrea Rützel found that the majority of their informants believed cassettes to be the 'true' medium on which to record a mix. Acknowledging that CDs are increasingly ousting cassettes as a preferred recording medium, they write,

Nevertheless, most of our informants gave a preference for cassettes over newer media. Tapes are 'old school', 'cultish', the 'good old', 'nostalgic', 'a good shape' and 'not so cold as CDs', lie 'well in the hand', are 'flexible', have more 'magic' and 'intensity' in the recording process and have an 'earthiness' similar to the way in which letters can be compared to emails; for some, tapes are 'holy'. (37)

I find the comparison with letters and emails useful in understanding and explaining the strong preference which some people have for tapes over CDs. I think it is commonly accepted that, while both letters and emails serve a similar function in communication, most people prefer to receive letters than emails. Unlike emails, letters are tangible, more personal in that they are handwritten, and appreciated more because of the greater amount of time they take to write.

There is also a quality of uniqueness about letters which is not associated with emails. Even if the same letter were to be copied out verbatim, there would always be subtle differences in handwriting and in spacing. No matter how much care was taken, an exact copy could never be replicated by hand. With emails however, the standardisation of computer typeset and formatting means that it would be possible to make an exact replica. It is also possible to send the same email to several people at the same time. This can be compared to the digitalisation of music. Digitalisation has ensured that exact copies of recordings can be made, with nothing to differentiate between one recording and another. As one informant of Grösch, Hüners and Rützel puts it, "the thing I don't like about CDs is how reproducible they are. Somehow a mix tape should not be reproducible. A mix tape should be a unique object" (38). In his explanation of his preference for tapes over CDs, Thurston Moore of the band Sonic Youth offers an interesting combination of science and emotion. He writes,

If you really need to transfer it to CDR, go for it, but remember: you're turning it into a digital format and therefore your ear-heart will tire. Huh? Yeh, you're

[sic] ear-heart. Dig it: normal bias cassettes rule. (Next to vinyl of course). And it's not a fetish either (well, not entirely...). Vinyl is analog – not a definitive sound wave like digital, which is numeric and perfect transcription. With digital, your brain hears all the information in its numeric perfection. Analog has the mystery arc where cosmos exists, which digital has not reined in. We used to listen to records over and over and each time they would offer something new because the ear-heart would respond to new resonations not previously detected. It was like each kiss had a new sensation. Digital format offers one cold kiss. A mere peck. (*Mixellaneous* 68)

It seems that opinion will remain divided on the issue of whether or not compilation tapes are 'better' than CDs. One thing is certain, however: whether it be for reasons of nostalgia, for preferring the A-side/B-side dichotomy, or for believing that the more effort and time required to make a mix, the more meaningful and valuable it becomes, people will continue to make mix tapes for as long as the available technology allows them to do so.

### Authenticity

As I mentioned earlier, mix tapes are considered by some people to be more authentic than mix CDs, mainly by virtue of the fact that they are an older format, and the practice of making and swapping compilations of music between and within small groups of people first became widespread using cassettes. They also appear to be more 'handmade'. While recording technology is obviously required, when recording a tape a person needs to actively press 'play', 'record' and 'pause' numerous times, while when burning a CD, having selected the songs, they can then be transferred to a CD-R with one click. The equation of 'older' with 'authentic' and 'better' is common, and is a subject which is of interest to folklorists. In his article "Unplugged: Blues Guitarists and the Myth of Acousticity", Peter Narváez explores how certain blues musicians



and fans have tended to equate acoustic performances with authenticity, while electric performances have sometimes been interpreted as a form of betrayal. As Narváez writes, during the blues revivals of the 1950s and early 1960s in North America and Europe,

A commitment to what will be referred to here as the ‘myth of acousticity’ developed. This myth pits the supposedly superior, authentic, ‘natural’ sound of the traditional wooden guitar as perceived by sensory media (ears and eyes), against the inferior amplified sounds of guitars employing electronic magnetic pick-ups, sound processors, and amplifiers. In part, the ‘tonal-purity-of-the-acoustic-guitar’ argument may be understood as a legacy of cultural hierarchy, a well-worn High Culture aesthetic for instruments used in the performance of cultivated art music, the guitar now being ‘firmly established as a respectable classical instrument’ (Evans 1977:167). In addition, however, the myth of acousticity, which was embraced during the folk boom, attaches ideological significs to the acoustic guitar, making it a democratic vehicle vis-à-vis the sonic authoritarianism of electric instruments. (29)

Nowhere was the equation of acoustic with authentic, and electric with betrayal more succinctly and vehemently demonstrated than at the 1966 Bob Dylan concert in Manchester, England, when one fan, angry at Dylan’s new electric sound shouted ‘Judas!’ (Marcus 36).

Determining what is and what is not authentic is an impossible task, as the answer is inevitably a subjective one. “The issue is therefore” as Edward Bruner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett write, “less one of authenticity and more one of authentication: who has the power to represent whom and determine which representation is authoritative?” (304). This issue is addressed by Andrew Theodore Mall in his essay “Community, Authenticity, and Independent Music. Or Why Community Matters to Authenticity in Independent Music”. Discussing independent music scenes and their need to be perceived as authentic, Mall argues that “authenticity is ascribed and not inscribed, and that the audience acts as a vehicle for

ascription" (1). This was certainly the case in the 'Judas' moment, where Dylan's perception of his own authenticity was irrelevant compared to that of his audience.

Mall continues:

Participants in the independent music community – both virtual and actual – understand and adhere to their roles implicitly or explicitly, relying on various media distribution formats to spread the codes that define the authenticity of the producers of music. (1)

Mall quotes Allan Moore, saying that "authenticity is ascribed to, rather than inscribed in, a performance" (209-23) and continues his summary of Moore's argument, writing that,

His exploration of ideas and notions of authenticity revolves around three commonly associated senses of authenticity: "[1] that artists speak the truth of their own situation; [2] that they speak the truth of the situation of (absent) others; and [3] that they speak the truth of their own culture, thereby representing (present) others". (Moore 209)

Mall continues:

He suggests that these three distinct senses can be synthesized for analysis by recognizing that authenticity, as a quality, does not exist inherently within a specific musical performance (or recording), and therefore it must be a "construction made on the act of listening" (Moore 210). This argument doesn't remove the artists from the equation – on the contrary, the artists then become extremely important to this construction process: when the artists in question can no longer express these truths to the audience, they have succeeded in deconstructing their authenticity. Nor does it remove the artists' recordings from the picture, as this construction process cannot occur without a referent – it simply removes authenticity from the recording as an inherent quality....The audience must be able to judge the artist's adherence to the three senses described above, and what better way to make this judgment call than through a shared set of common experiences and values? Therefore, within the scene, the more an audience is able to identify with the artist, the more authenticity the artist gains – hence participation in the indie community is then of utmost importance to this process of authentication, both for the artist and the audience. (12-13)

I believe that this argument can be applicable to the issue of determining the respective authenticities of mix tapes and mix CDs. The authenticity does not lie in the object itself, but in the understanding that exists or does not exist between the



mix's creator and the recipient. The nature of authenticity does not even appear to be an issue for those people who make and receive mix CDs – as I have documented, the belief is that the meaning lies in the music, and not in the media through which it is communicated. For those who continue to make and circulate mix cassettes, the perceived authenticity of the tape format is important, but is only important to the artists or creators, and their audience or recipients. As Mall implies, the rhetorical question of which medium is the more authentic is ultimately less important and less interesting than the reasons people have for ascribing authenticity.

The perceived authenticity of the cassette format is a reason why some people, despite having the means to make mix CDs, still choose to use tapes. The availability of technology and music, and the choices which people make about their usage of it is relevant to the creation and playing of mix tapes, and it is to this access that I will now turn my attention.

### Access to Music and Technology

It seems an obvious point to make, but the creation of a mix tape or mix CD depends on the creator having access to certain recording technologies, and the musical content of the tape is dependent upon the music to which the creator has access. In this section I will begin by discussing how the available recording technology affects the resultant mix, before looking at how people's mix tapes reflects the access which they have to music.

Today's mix tape makers are most likely to record their tapes using two cassette deck stereo systems, allowing them to record music from other tapes, CDs,

vinyl recordings, and radio. Makers of mix CDs can also very easily record songs which they have downloaded from the Internet. Contemporary creators of mixes have much more choice of and access to recording equipment than people did even a couple of decades ago. I have already reported, for instance, how Holly Everett would make her first mix tapes by holding up her "little recorders" up to the radio and pressing record. Clearly that technique is now unnecessary with today's hi-fi systems which have built-in radios, cassette decks, CD players and turntables.

As my oldest informant, Neil Rosenberg was able to give me a useful personal account of how music technology has changed in his lifetime, and how it has affected his experience of music. I think it is worth quoting at length:

During the Sixties, tape recorder technology changed in this way. The monaural tapes that had been the format were gradually superseded by stereo formats. Now, stereo as it was on open reel was not compatible with monaural, because the monaural tracks were generally half tracks. The stereo had quarter tracks and one of the quarter tracks ran on the bottom and then on the middle, and you'd get half a track backwards.

I went through that first Wollensak tape recorder. I must have had it a good four or five years before it just got crapped out and I bought another one, very similar model. Then I started using the Sony four-track stereo. I resisted buying stereo in buying LPs, and of course mono and stereo were available – you could get LPs in either format up until about 1967 – and there came a time when all you could get was stereo....

But then when I came [to St John's] in 1968, I finally made the switch to stereo. You really *had* to in fact. I think I had already bought a stereo amp because I had to buy stereo recordings before then, but I made the switch and bought a tape deck, which I still have, a Sony reel-to-reel TC350. It's a stereo, open reel tape deck, and it's the only one I've ever owned....

So then it must have been about 1973, '74, cassettes started to come on the market and cassette recorders, and the first ones I used actually belonged to MUNFLA [Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archives], and then I bought my own deck in about 1976 – that made dubbing a lot easier, actually. And I started making my anthologies right away. I had a stereo deck installed in my car in 1978 or 1979, I think. Before that I was already taking the portable cassette player and just putting it in between the seats in the car on long trips, so that was a big use of these tapes....

And that continued until about a year or two ago. Last year I got a CD burner, and I have a CD player in the car – as well as a tape player, but you can make anthologies from CDs very quickly. And I've just bought a new machine that will allow me, that has the software so I can dub records down here and tapes and so on. (*Personal interview*)

As I mentioned earlier, having witnessed and used many different methods of recording technology, Neil does not seem attached to any particular method for sentimental reasons, but simply uses whichever one he finds easiest to use. Neil also mentioned how more recent developments in music technology have influenced the way he experiences music. For instance, speaking of the 'random' feature on modern CD players, he says,

There's one box set I have of Don Reno and Red Smiley, a bluegrass band with four CDs, and gosh, the first time I put that on random, on shuffle, and I did it while I was doing some housework, I was just amazed at how it didn't matter what came up in the shuffles. It was all great stuff, and that was a liberating feeling. I like that. (*Personal interview*)

At the same time, however, Neil does not use new devices in music technology simply for the sake of it. He will only use them if they enhance his experience of music. He told me,

I've come to feel that, I don't think I listen to music as much as I used to, because I find that, as a musician, it's important to not be listening to music all the time. I've seen over my lifetime, the possibility of listening to music has become greater and greater, so that people now are walking around in the street with their earphones on, and they're listening to music all the time. And to me, there's a diminution of the impact and the meaningfulness, if it's being listened to all the time. And that's a high-flown philosophical position in some ways, but at the same time, I just find for myself, I don't want to be listening to music all the time. I want to listen to it when it's meaningful to me. (*Personal interview*)

Similarly, when I raised the notion of iPods and the possible effect which these might have on the creation of mix tapes, Neil replied,

I haven't gone into MP3s, I don't have an iPod. It's hard for me to imagine having something like that, or bothering – I can, I've got the capability of it,

and I've been thinking about getting an iPod because you can use it as a hard drive, and it could be really useful for moving files around. But I've never downloaded off the Internet, I've never done any of that sort of thing, and even though I'm very interested in making dubs of my sound recordings and so on, maybe that will change now that I start to have a little more time, and I'm also on modem right now, I'm not on broadband, so I'm thinking about changing that, so maybe this'll all change, but at this point I don't use music in my life that way. (*Personal interview*)

Neil's stance is similar to that of mix tape creators who have the means to make mix CDs, but who prefer to make tapes out of personal preference for the different dynamics of the A-side and B-side, or because they prefer the extra recording time they have on tapes. Rather than being slaves to the latest inventions of music technology, people are very selective and discerning. This is not to say that changing music technologies do not affect the way that people experience music. When I discuss my informant Luke Power's use of iTunes and Internet downloading it will become clear that the media by which you listen to music *does* affect your experience of it. However, I argue that the relationship between music technology and how a person chooses to use it is a continuum, whereby individuals utilise only the technologies or parts of technologies that they feel comfortable with or which they feel will enhance their experience of music.

The access which Neil had to recording technologies was not just governed by the latest innovations, but was also influenced by personal circumstance. For instance, through his work as a graduate assistant in the Archives of Traditional Music, he was able to dub tapes. He told me,

Back there in the Sixties I was very much into this technology and I had a fairly large record collection for the time – I was a graduate student and I couldn't afford a lot, but I had a lot of stuff and I had a lot more on tape, and what I was able to do, was borrow tape recorders from the Archives of Traditional Music, where I worked as a graduate assistant after 1964, I guess. So I got very adept at dubbing, in various ways. I did a lot of dubbing, and it became part of my research technique, copying people's collections....So by

1962 I was dubbing other people's tape collections and making my own copies of these shows, and so I was building up this tape collection, and the boundaries between personal entertainment and research were murky.

I had the ability to go into the lab. at the Archives of Traditional Music, as it's now called – it was then called the Archive of Folk and Primitive Music – and borrow portable equipment. Occasionally I would make dubs in there, and give them copies and keep a copy for myself. Once in a while I even used the machine to correct tape speed, so while I don't think I was the only one who was doing this, I did think that I had access to technology that not everybody had access to. And I was interested in doing it, and I used to listen to those tapes a lot. (*Personal interview*)

As Neil's comments demonstrate, his work in the archives not only gave him the opportunity to access recording equipment which he would not otherwise have been able to afford, but it also allowed him to record and listen to music which he would not otherwise have been able to hear. Similarly, Holly Everett's work at the radio station at her university allowed her the opportunity to observe how other DJs would blend and mix songs together, which then inspired her to do this with her own mix tapes at home. It should also be noted that people's ability to listen to certain music and access certain equipment is not always a case of not being able to afford the latest in expensive music technology. It is becoming increasingly difficult to access the means by which to listen to older formats, such as vinyl recordings or cassettes. When speaking of the mixes which she still listens to today, Holly told me,

These ones I listen to because they're on CD. I don't have a Walkman anymore, I mean that plays cassettes, I just have one that plays CDs, and we don't have a cassette player in the car anymore, we have a CD player.

This is a point which is also made by Kamal Fox when he quotes an article in the online newspaper Nebulae: New Media News as saying,

As CDs and digital media become prevalent, the art of the mix tape became lost as fewer and fewer people had the ability or the inclination to make mixes. Many folks have only CD players and no tape player – or even any means by which to record music. Or people simply decided to buy CDs and did not

bother buying tapes to make mixes. Many people listen to music mainly in their cars, and cars began to come with CD players only.<sup>31</sup>

### Access to Music

The structure of a mix tape is not only affected by the creator's access to recording equipment, but is also clearly affected by their access to music. The most obvious musical resource used by mix tape makers is their own music collection, and the larger the collection, the more choice of music you have to record onto mixes. In explaining to me some of the reasons why he likes making mix tapes, Richard told me that, "it's something that I've always done. Probably 'cause I buy more records than other people, so I can make a better choice of tapes." Similarly, the record collections of friends or partners can also provide a rich resource of mix tape material. Holly mentioned her husband's record collection, telling me that,

There's also Peter's record collection, which is really interesting in its variety and time depth. Which I would love to get at, but I just haven't had a good chance, or haven't felt like I really had the time to get into it like that.

As well as recorded music, some of my informants also told me how they would sometimes use other recorded sound, for instance spoken word, on their mix tapes.

Holly told me,

I used to have you know records of children's stories on record, and I used to use those sometimes in the mix tapes, like take a little snippet from Little Red Riding Hood or something like that and put it on the tape.

When I asked Hannah about the different media which she would use for her tapes, she replied,

I tend to use CDs and vinyl to go onto tapes, generally, but usually it's just music. I really want to change that and I'm getting more interested in oral

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<sup>31</sup> "Resurrecting the Art of Mix Tapes in the Digital Realm," *Nebulae: New Media News* 1 July 2001, 16 Nov. 2003 <[http://www.nebulus.com/news/0107\\_mixtape.php](http://www.nebulus.com/news/0107_mixtape.php)>.



history and soundscapes....However, I made this one tape for the Jockey Club called 'Insane', which I was just playing the whole time. My housemate Jane had a Dictaphone and I loved it, it was wicked. I used to take it round with me and just record like the pelican crossing noise and that kind of thing and I thought, "hey, I should put this on a tape." So I put a few bits and pieces on the tape on the Dictaphone and Jane and I had this banjos tape, Banjos Aplenty, like Chas and Dave basically, and we'd always really sing to them. So there's bits of us singing on there. Someone lent me a birdsong tape so there's bits of birdsong on there, and you know, leaving the phone off the hook and having that woman's voice saying, "please put down the receiver." And then Jane went over to Paris and I couldn't go with her, so she took the Dictaphone and she just asked random people in bars, "oh, my friend can't be here, would you mind just saying hello to her?" So I've got these things on it, so yeah, I'm really pleased with that tape, and just taking I think the first eleven seconds from the seventh track on random CDs, and just playing the introductory eleven seconds and then snapping it off, and put that on as well. So I'm interested in hearing complete songs, obviously, but I'm more interested in how people can subvert that, in a way, and how they can mix it.

Clearly, by treating the mix tape as more of a soundscape, the intention is not to introduce the recipient to new artists and new music, but is intended more as an experiment in juxtaposing different sounds in unexpected and unusual ways.

As well as recorded music, some of my informants spoke about the influence of radio on the development of their musical taste, and how songs which they had originally heard on the radio would sometimes end up on mix tapes. When I asked Hannah how influential radio had been to the development of her musical taste, she replied,

To the development of my musical taste, radio has been important in terms of that it gives me access to an unpredictable range of music. Having said that, I can't be bothered listening to commercial radio, Radio One or even sometimes Radio Two, because they're so boring and it's all about presenters and their ego, and the playlists on those, they're the playlists that *everyone* should have, because that's what's 'cool' now, and I really object to that. I think a lot of it's just bollocks. That's a technical word! But listening to things like Late Junction on Radio Three and listening to different bits and pieces on Radio Three has provided me with real insight into different sorts of music.

A brief description of the BBC's (British Broadcasting Corporation) radio stations would perhaps be useful here. Radio One predominantly plays the latest music which



is in the British music charts. There are speciality shows in the evening, but the daytime shows tend to play rock, pop and dance music. All of the shows are music based. Radio Two plays a wide variety of music, covering easy listening, world, folk, rock and it also airs documentaries. Like Radio One, Radio Two has a weekly playlist, but Radio Two DJs are given more free rein to play music reflecting their personal preferences. Radio Three predominantly plays classical, jazz and world music, and also airs drama and discussion programmes. The show Late Junction, which Hannah refers to, plays new music from all over the world.

Hannah's comments again reflect the agency of the listener and music fan. Rather than simply allowing themselves to be spoon-fed whatever music radio stations play, many listeners are much more discerning, and will take the trouble to find the radio programmes which they find most stimulating. Similarly, Richard told me that,

radio helps trying to find bands to go out and buy....[the] John Peel radio show played a big part. And I guess he's also made it acceptable to like this and like that. He can play a show of completely different things one after the other.

Richard was not alone in recognising the enormous influence of the British DJ John Peel, who died in October 2004. A DJ for BBC Radio One for nearly forty years, Peel was a refreshingly down to earth and self-deprecating DJ in a world of egos and self-serving personalities. Ignoring the Radio One playlists, Peel would play whatever music he thought interesting and worthy of wider broadcast. The sheer diversity of the records which he played inevitably meant that within every show much of the music was not to everybody's taste, and indeed was sometimes virtually unlistenable, but the point was that he was airing records which would not otherwise have been listened to by more than a handful of people, and most importantly, it was evident that he genuinely cared about the music he was playing. His influence on the musical taste of

his listeners cannot be underestimated. Writing in the online magazine Siglamag, Sinéad Gleeson reflected,

Like most people who are borderline obsessive/compulsive about music, I owe a huge debt to the size and shape of my music collection to John Peel....One minute he'd play a Djembe-pounding group from West Africa and follow it up with the staccato pneumatics of Extreme Noise Terror or Napalm Death....

When you've got a tiny amount to spend (all on records) in any given week, John Peel's show was a cornucopia of new music to my young ears. I spent many nights listening to his sometimes clear, sometimes crackly show, depending on the signal. On the clear night, I'd sit there poised with my finger hovering over the pause button of the tape deck, which already had play and record pressed down, waiting to glean what I could for my own homemade compilation tapes.

Within hours of his death, online forums were filling up with similar reminiscences such as one from Paul Webster who wrote, "I've got old compilation tapes somewhere – I used to record his show while studying at university. Every now and then I hear something on the radio and I remember what comes next on my old tape."<sup>32</sup> Peel himself was well aware of the legions of home tapers, once saying, "and there I go talking over the end of the song, ruining it for those of you taping it at home."<sup>33</sup> John Peel made full use of his position to bring scores of records to the attention of his listeners, and this, together with his humour and good nature ensure that he will be sorely missed.

As well as radio, live performances were also mentioned by my informants as a way of influencing musical taste. I have already related how Neil Rosenberg would attend live bluegrass performances and record them on equipment which he borrowed from the archives where he worked, and Hannah Godfrey also explained how her job at one particular venue has influenced her musical taste. She told me,

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Webster, "Topic 14007", DigiGuide Forums, 26 Oct. 2004, 30 Oct. 2004, <<http://digiguide.com/topic.asp?id=14007>> .

<sup>33</sup> "Favourite John Peel Quotes," I Love Music, Rhys, 26 Oct. 2004, 30 Oct. 2004, <<http://ilx.p3r.net/thread.php?msgid=5178027>> .

My musical taste has been gained through working. I had a job as a house manager at a venue called St George's in Bristol, which is one of the best acoustic venues in Britain, and it's only got five hundred seats. It's an amazing little place, and they have an eclectic range of music there, which is mainly classical, jazz and world, but I wouldn't be able to listen to it if I was paying for it all. But when I was working there, maybe three or four nights a week, I would be listening to The Brodsky Quartet performing Schubert one night, and then you'd have Juan Martin and these flamenco dancers another night, and then you'd be having the Andy Shepard Quartet the next night, so that's been more important to me, seeing it live. And working at The Cube [an independent cinema and arts centre in Bristol, England] as well. I don't know half the bands that have played The Cube 'cause they're very underground, they're indie and I have no access to this music otherwise. That's how I got to know about Herman Düne, just randomly popping along, working on the night.

But that was always something I found very difficult, finding new music. For a few months I used to look in Dazed and Confused<sup>34</sup> and look in their music reviews and purposefully go out and seek it out, but in somewhere like Essex it's actually quite difficult to find the album sometimes that they're reviewing. But then you've got a record shop in Bristol called Imperial which is shutting in September, which I think is a terrible, terrible shame because it's one of the only independent music stores in Bristol and they've got listening posts, and so few places have that now. So being able to just pop into places and listen to music. So radio, yeah, in some cases has been important, but live music, not having to pay for live music has been more important, really.

Picking up on what Hannah had told me about how she sometimes found it difficult to find albums which she wanted in rural Essex, I questioned her as to the extent to which she thought it would be possible to tell where a person came from, based on the content of their mix tape. She replied,

Well you can buy all the music, but you're not going to buy a band that you've not heard before, and that's the problem, and not many people do have Broadband connections now. I think if you're living in a city you are more exposed because you've got all the posters up, you just can't help but run into new music because it's played in shops – there's this whole thing about how music played in shops has got to be cool. In a sense they're creating their mix tapes of what they want to portray, and if you're living in a rural village, you haven't got that metropolitan atmosphere.

So I'd be surprised if you had a lot of contemporary music in villages, well underground contemporary music, not mainstream bollocks. But then again, I

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<sup>34</sup> Dazed and Confused is a UK magazine covering music and film.

think that you'd probably find pockets of collections in villages, like say jazz perhaps, or sorts of classical music. I don't know, but I do suppose having access to seeing the music is important.

Hannah raises relevant points here about the effect which your locality has on your access to and taste in music. She mentions that living in a city inevitably exposes you to more music, and while I think this is true, I think that the increase in music downloading from the Internet is reducing this difference. This is an issue which I explored in my interview with Luke Power. In the next section I will consider his particular situation and access to music. I will focus on Luke's use of modern musical media such as iPods and iTunes and how his use of these has influenced his access to music and the way in which he experiences it.

### iPods and Music Downloading

Luke was born in 1981 in Chapel Arm, a small community with a population of approximately six hundred people, situated on the northeast coast of the Avalon Peninsula in Newfoundland. One of the main themes which arose from the two interviews that I conducted with Luke concerned the contrast between the relative isolation and lack of opportunities through which music could be accessed in Chapel Arm in the 1980s and early 1990s, compared to the access to music which Luke now has through living in the city of St John's and being close to record shops, and also through being able to download songs from the Internet.

Luke mentioned to me that, growing up in rural Newfoundland, his access to music that he liked was limited, and his ability to actually buy recordings was even more difficult. His main musical influences in Chapel Arm came from listening to the

CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio show Brave New Waves, the TV channel Much Music, and his older sister and one or two friends who introduced him to certain bands. For the most part, his musical tastes lay outside the mainstream, and the only local stores which sold records – K-Mart and Walmart, did not stock the kind of music which Luke preferred. In addition to the records that he *did* buy, Luke and his friends also made and swapped mix tapes. Luke makes the point that, compared to the volume of music he now has access to through downloading, in Chapel Arm he was more focused on certain bands. He says:

See when I was growing up as a teenager in rural Newfoundland, mix tapes were like a common thing. Like me and my small group of friends made mix tapes for each other, and it just seems like everybody was so focused, on small narrow sets of music, and just, you know, “Oh, Belle and Sebastian are so good,” or “Mogwai are so good,” just whatever, you know, we had ample access to all of a sudden became the thing, right?... When you don’t have as many choices, it’s easier to direct your attention towards particular artists or groups.

Were Luke growing up in rural Newfoundland today, with the technologies such as Internet access and downloading capabilities which he now has, his access to music would not be so limited. Recent innovations such as downloading have had the effect of reducing the differences in accessing music which previously existed from living in rural or urban areas. Before downloading music became as widespread as it is today, a person’s access to music depended, to some extent, on where they lived, whether it be in a rural or an urban setting, and Luke’s account of the practical differences between living in Chapel Arm and living in St John’s bears witness to this. Now, however, a person’s access to music seems to be affected, not so much by geography, but more by economics. With the necessary financial means, it is now possible to access music from the most remote locations.

When describing his experiences of music as he grew up in Chapel Arm, Luke spoke in terms of certain bands of which he was a fan, for instance Nirvana, Nine Inch Nails, and later Pavement, and mentioned how he would demonstrate his fandom of these bands by displaying posters. However, he continues by saying that, now he has access to more music, he is not so attached to specific bands so much, saying,

But I think like in general, too, to anybody who's like a really, really diehard music fan, it's kind of hard to direct that much attention, affection to a particular group or artist in general, you know? When I think about it now it seems kind of juvenile, you know what I mean?... Now it's like, I don't even care about putting up band posters. I feel like maybe it's an issue of maturity too, I don't feel like I need to be a flag-bearer and say, 'I listen to this', I don't feel like it defines me as much to identify with a particular group or set of albums. It defines me more to be able to experience music as myself, just in my own space and time.

I also questioned him as to whether his access to more music has, in a sense, devalued his relationship with certain bands. He replied:

I think it maybe has, because I mean like, certain things that I really liked before, I'm hearing the precursors to now. Or just even hearing somebody that I wouldn't have heard before, that really makes me think, "well they're doing a better job of *this* type of music than the band I originally thought were awesome," you know? But just in general, relating that to the type of music I'm most directed to these days, like electronic music, there's like little fandom in that genre anyway. It's kind of like, you say you like things, but it's not like, you're not going to see people walking around with like Autechre shirts on. It's not the same type of fan. So maybe that's another thing that's changing it, too.

I find it interesting that, as well as stating how a knowledge of more bands has made him 'less of a fan' of particular bands, Luke also suggests that fans of different musical genres behave in different ways. Luke mentions that he does not believe fans of electronic music to be particularly demonstrative of their fandom, and it is interesting to consider how the musical genre to which your favourite bands could be said to belong, affects the way in which you act as a fan of those bands. While not wishing to oversimplify the relationship, I think it is fair to say that fans of musical



genres such as rock or pop are more likely to display posters, or wear t-shirts of their favourite bands, compared to, say, fans of classical or electronic music. In addition to this, Luke mentions how his distancing himself from particular bands is also a result of his having matured.

Another interesting point arising from Luke's now having greater access to music through iTunes, and more opportunities to listen to them through his iPod, is his assertion that he has come to appreciate genres of music to which he had previously not paid much attention. I asked him whether using iTunes had given him a greater musical knowledge, and he answered:

Yeah, definitely. Because like, just in general, like I said, it's not a reasonable explanation as to why my taste has changed, but it really has changed my tastes, because lately I find that I'm going even further and further outside of what I normally would have listened to and stuff that I just brushed off before. And when you are engaged in trading online or downloading, or just even ripping from friends, you get to hear more and more, and it probably fosters more, not energy, but you just wanna keep getting more and more. It's kind of like an addiction, you just wanna have lots and lots of stuff, and if you hear something that triggers you off, you'll go like, "Ok, I've gotta get all these albums now in this genre, or this period or whatever." That's sort of the way it worked for me with electronic music, because before I got the computer I sort of listened to just the very stereotypical, just below the surface electronic music. And now I'm going even further and further and further, the more albums I get.

I find Luke's comments on how his iPod has introduced him to new musical genres interesting when compared to the attitudes of my informants about the genres of music which they would or would not record onto a mix tape. Some of my informants found that some musical genres would not work well on a mix tape for purely practical reasons. Neil Rosenberg, for instance, told me that,

Well certainly when you're playing a tape in the car, certain kinds of music don't work as well. Classical, for example. And I did copy off a lot of classical music onto tape, the records that we borrowed from the public library, but I found that those didn't work so well in the car because of the dynamic



variation. You just don't hear it, you'd have to turn it up just to hear the low parts and it's too loud for the high parts, and so that was a discovery that that stuff didn't work. (*Personal interview*)

Similarly, when I asked Holly Everett if she felt that some genres worked better than others on a mix tape she replied,

I guess I never have received a mix tape of classical music, and I don't know that I'd ever put any classical tunes on. I mean, I worked at a classical radio station for a long, long time so I had plenty of access to classical tunes, and I had a good friend – this friend of mine really liked classical music, but I don't really think I ever had a tape from him that ever had classical music on it. I'm just wondering if maybe the form of classical music, where a movement would be more like ten minutes or something, doesn't lend itself to the – I don't know. I never thought about it before.

It occurs to me that there is also the possibility that fans of certain genres are more likely to make mix tapes than others, and so some genres are more represented on mix tapes than others. While I am by no means sure about this hypothesis, it is another explanation as to why there appear to be relatively few classical mix tapes, as opposed to say rock or pop. I do not wish to simplify or stereotype the relationship between a person's demographic and the style of music of which they are a fan, but I think it reasonable to say that more young people are fans of rock than they are of classical music. Having heard some of my informants mention that they originally made mix tapes because they could not afford to buy many new records, it could be the case that people do not tend to make classical mixes because the average fan of classical music tends to be older, more financially secure, and therefore does not have to resort to making mixes as a way of hearing new music.

I asked Hannah if there tended to be similarities in the type of music that members of the Hollow Box Jockey Club put on tapes, and she replied,

Yes, to some extent. I remember when a Sesame Street track came out, [sings] "one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten," that got re-released,

and that got onto three Jockey tapes at the same time! Certain songs like that. A couple of Vince Gallo songs, which I was a bit surprised about. People try and put on tracks that they don't think other people have heard, but that itself leads to, you hear similar tracks because everybody thinks that nobody's heard that track. I mean it doesn't happen all the time, and the majority of tracks don't get repeated, so there's not that much similarity.

You don't get many classic mixes, and you don't get much spoken word stuff, which is something that I really want. It's not as various as what I'd like it to be....There's very little reggae....I made [a classical mix] for the club and I made a jazz one for the club and got a couple of jazz ones back. It's hard to assess, because I don't know the reggae scene or anything, and the people I know don't really know it either, so it's really hard to assess different music scenes without actually being in them yourself. And figuring out the ways of communicating that music. 'Cause I know with a lot of reggae and dub it's quite live music centred. But then again, what do I know?

I am interested in Hannah's comment about the way in which artists, and fans of different musical genres communicate their music. As a personal example, for the most part, myself and my friends have predominantly been fans of indie and alternative rock music, and to us, swapping mix tapes, or taping whole albums for each other was a common practice. The most obvious example I can think of with respect to recording albums is when the Scottish indie band Belle and Sebastian suddenly became popular in the mid 1990s – a popularity which, incidentally, had a lot to do with their debut album Tigermilk being championed on the Radio One programme hosted by DJ Mark Radcliffe<sup>35</sup> – another example of the influence of radio and the musical tastes of particular personalities. The only problem was that, not anticipating much interest or commercial success, only one thousand copies of the record were originally released in 1996, and until the album's re-release in 1999, thousands of fans had to settle for cassette copies of the original. Of course, only a relatively small number of people were fortunate enough to own even a tape which

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<sup>35</sup> Mark Radcliffe is a British DJ. Now hosting a show on BBC Radio Two, I first became aware of him in the mid to late 1990s when he and his sidekick 'Lard' (Marc Riley) played alternative music on a late night show on BBC Radio One.

had been copied straight from the original copy. I have no idea just how far removed my own cassette copy of the album was, but judging by some of the warped noises which I did my best to ignore, it must have been several generations removed from the original record.

Luke's use of iTunes has also changed his listening habits in the way that he rarely listens to whole albums anymore. He says:

The thing is, I find when I get a new album uploaded, I listen to the majority of the album, the full way through, but I've also got really picky.... Even just so much as I just know what I want to listen to, like most of the time there's never a full album that ever really captures my attention. It's mostly like parts of albums. There's only like a handful of albums I can think of that I would listen to the whole way through.

I find this comment interesting, as the tracks on albums are often carefully sequenced by their composers. Kitty Empire, the pop music critic for the British weekly newspaper The Observer reflects,

And what of the notion of the album itself? To some, it seems in grave danger. The pastime of downloading seems to lend itself to single tracks or a few songs at a time, rather than entire albums. Now, too, the iPod's genuinely momentous shuffle function has turned every journey out of doors into a sonic free-for-all, as your own personal jukebox throws its contents around willy-nilly. Artists put a great deal of thought into sequencing the tracks on their albums, apparently. They put the singles first (if they are pop artists) and the most 'experimental' ones last (rock). The shuffle messes with this finely nuanced logic.

To my informant Richard, the idea of even taking one song from what he considers to be a great album in its own right, and putting it on a mix tape, seems wrong. He told me,

I often think that, oh God, this is going to sound pretentious, but there are some really good albums that have been made, that you can't just take a track off. You can't take a track off Spiderland by Slint, it just doesn't really sound right. Sure, it might sound good on a spooky, 'this is scary' kind of mix tape, but it ain't as good as the record itself, so you need all the tracks on the album to create the experience, and bands don't sound that good taken out of context.

Luke's comments that he now rarely listens to whole albums makes me realise that, for many people, the music which a band records is becoming increasingly divorced from the actual material package in which it is commercially sold, and is, to some extent, undermining the whole album format. This is reinforced by the actions of many artists themselves who now sidestep the process of releasing songs on CD or other 'tangible' formats, and merely make their songs available on the Internet, allowing their fans to access the music more quickly, directly, and for less money. The artist Kristin Hersh, for example, has created a 'Works in Progress' feature on her website. Fans can subscribe and hear songs, "in the formative stage – as they are being created".<sup>36</sup> While the Works in Progress series are active, a new song is made available each month, which subscribers can then download. These songs are not available anywhere else, and are less expensive than it would cost to buy the songs on a store-bought record. While Kristin Hersh continues to release albums on CD, she also increasingly makes available individual songs which can be downloaded for free from her website, as well as recordings from live shows.

Luke also mentions the fact that, through trading online or downloading from friends, he has access to a much wider selection of music than he would have done previously, and I will now consider the attitudes of Luke and the music industry towards downloading and file-sharing.

### The Moralities and Legalities of Downloading Music

*"Trying to control sharing through music is like trying to control an affair of the heart – nothing will stop it"*<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Throwing Music, ed. Throwing Music, Ltd., 2004, March 2005 <[http:// www.throwingmusic.com](http://www.throwingmusic.com)>.

<sup>37</sup> Thurston Moore, Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture (New York: Universe, 2004) 13.

I have previously mentioned how Luke found that, making and swapping mix tapes for and between friends in Chapel Arm had the effect of focusing them on certain bands, and in a way narrowed his musical taste. In contrast to this, Luke states that trading online or downloading from friends gives him unprecedented access to music, and hence broadens his musical preferences. This suggests that the medium by which a person listens to music is not merely a practical device to transmit sound, but is also able to influence a person's listening experience and indeed musical tastes.

With regards to issues of legality and morality with respect to downloading, Luke's attitude is positive, and he sees no problems in downloading. He states:

Yeah, see that's another thing right, people who contend that downloading and sharing and changing the media and stuff like that is gonna affect the way music sells and stuff. It *is* gonna affect, but I think if anything it's having a positive influence, whether people want to admit it or not. You know, instead of people having limited access and knowledge, it's broadening their knowledge, and that's the problem I have with people who speak out against downloading, pirating and stuff, cos in actual fact, you know, the type of people who are being hurt by that aren't the type of people out there who are making real music, in my opinion. Somebody like Metallica or somebody like that, going on crazy rampages against people downloading music, they don't need to do that. And it doesn't make any sense, right, because when I was a kid, if I wanted to listen to something and I couldn't buy it, I'd tape it off the radio. Why didn't people make as big a fuss about that? There's been times when they've played whole albums on air, like I remember when Pearl Jam played one of their albums when I was in early high school, I taped the whole thing off the radio.

Luke's attitude as a regular and committed music fan who embraces the greater opportunities to listen to music which downloading has afforded him, is contrasted with the negative, somewhat petulant and knee-jerk reaction to downloading which has been displayed by many record companies and bands. The efforts made by record companies and bands (most famously Metallica) to curb Internet downloading and



file-sharing have been succinctly documented by Reebee Garofalo in his article, "I Want My MP3: Who Owns Internet Music?". As Garofalo writes,

Rather than embracing the potential of the internet and taking the lead in developing convenient, affordable, easy-to-use methods of downloading music, the music industry has concentrated instead on protecting a business model whose core business revolves around the manufacture, sale, ownership, and possession of physical property. (30)

Martin Laba echoes this sentiment in his essay " 'Pirates', Peers and Popular Music", arguing that,

Among the many problems with the music industry's approach to surveillance, containment, and ultimately, the eradication of piratical Internet file sharing, most glaring is the failure to recognize that the ground upon which the industry traditionally operates is shifting constantly and dramatically. (21)

As Laba points out, by attempting to eradicate file-sharing and downloading, the music industry is attempting to eradicate what have essentially become cultural practices, regardless of their legality, "and the constraining of cultural practices is a daunting and problematic task in the best of conditions."<sup>38</sup>

Garofalo describes the (often successful) attempts made by the music industry to lobby the American judicial system to discourage home taping and downloading. However, as Garofalo, and indeed my informant Luke Power point out, the very people who download and file-share are the really committed music fans who continue to buy records. Luke explained to me that, even though he considers himself to be a devoted music fan, his fandom does not even compare to that of other people he knows, who have folders upon folders of MP3 files. However, he points out that, "Despite what most people would think, they would hear that and go, 'these are the people who are not buying music,' but these are the people who *are* buying music, for

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<sup>38</sup> Martin Laba, " 'Pirates', Peers and Popular Music," Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communication, ed. Paul Attallah and Leslie R. Shade, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson, 2005). In print.

the most part.” It seems that many committed music fans treat downloading in much the same way as they would use a listening post in a record store: it merely gives them the opportunity to listen to more music, and while they will not bother buying the records they are not so keen on, they will continue to buy the records which are most appealing. In this way, it appears that downloading actually causes people to buy *more*, and not fewer records.

This view is echoed by Hannah Godfrey. Thinking of the legal implications of running a club which centred on taping commercial recordings, I asked her where she stood on copyright. She replied,

It really concerned me actually when I first began the club. I delayed properly starting it while I thought about it, but I think that – I really don’t know, I really don’t know. I know that I started the club so I could listen to new music, therefore you’re not going to get a whole album on a tape. It’s introducing you to new bands and new sounds, so in a way I think that it would be very mean spirited of someone to assert a copyright infringement on the club, because I think that people probably buy more music that they hear on the tape than they would otherwise, so I don’t see it as a problem in the context of this club. And as far as personal mix tapes, no, I don’t think there’s a problem. I think it would be a very uptight person who had a problem.

This opinion appears to be borne out by research. As Garofalo documents, a study conducted by the Office of Technology Assessment in 1989 revealed that people who taped music actually bought more music than non-tapers (40). It seems that the music industry is always instinctively scared of the latest development in music technology for fear that it will damage sales. Once the fears are seen to be unfounded the industry relaxes and makes belated attempts to embrace the new technologies to its own advantage, only to get scared again when the *next* development occurs.



Having outlined Luke's opinions concerning downloading and file sharing, I will now consider the effects which these activities have had on his relationship with other music fans.

### How Luke's iPod and iTunes have affected his relationship with music fans

As well as giving him greater access to music, Luke's iTunes has also partly affected the way he socialises with other music fans. He says:

There's a guy who I know just based strictly on exchanging music, and we hang out, and we don't do anything besides talk about music, or exchange music, and then that's it, he's gone and I won't see him again for like 2 months....And also like, the whole Mac culture, and the iPod thing, sort of brings like minded people, like there's a group of 4 of us who met up here over Christmas, and we wouldn't normally hang out, but we did for this one day, and we all sat here with our nerdy little iBooks and power books and iPods, and just swapped music and had supper and stuff.

I find the contrast interesting between how Luke describes his interactions with people based around his iTunes, compared with his interactions with people based on the exchange of mix tapes. Perhaps the most striking thing is his description of his fellow music fans. When discussing the exchange of mix tapes in Chapel Arm, Luke mentioned that the tapes were exchanged between himself and his "small group of friends". When discussing the music fans who he socially interacts with in relation to iTunes, however, the word 'friend' is not mentioned, and Luke explicitly states that they, "would not normally hang out".

When Luke described the meeting with the four people over Christmas, I found it noticeable that the meeting was not organised around the four of them having

a shared love of the same band, or a same genre, but a shared appreciation of their Apple Mac computers and iTunes. This exclusive community centered on owning Apple Mac computers is similar to the ownership of iPods. Joseph P. Kahn documents this theory of shared appreciation and identification among iPod owners. Drawing on research conducted by J.D. Biersdorfer, the author of "iPod & iTunes", Kahn writes that in Manhattan, "there is now a 'white headphone club' made up of iPodlings who glance at one another across a crowded bus or subway car, tacitly acknowledging their private listening space."<sup>39</sup>

I think it is significant that, while discussing his upbringing in Chapel Arm, Luke discussed music in terms of the bands which he and his friends listened to, he now talks about the roles which music plays in his social life in terms of the technology which he and his friends have access to.

While the music technology which Luke owns has brought him into personal contact with people who he would not necessarily otherwise meet, or who may not even share a similar music taste, Internet technologies such as downloading and online journals have allowed for the formation of para-social communities, where people may interact through having shared interests, without necessarily ever meeting each other. One user of the 'personal publishing tool' Live Journal, for instance (a website which allows users to create their own, free online journal) maintains a journal which is purely concerned with tracking mix tapes and mix CDs which he has made for people, received from people, and is in the process of creating. The journal is accessible to anybody, and readers comment on the posted

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<sup>39</sup> Joseph P. Kahn, "All Shook Up: Our Listening Habits Are Being Revolutionized by the iPod Shuffle," The Boston Globe 5 April 2004, 30 April 2004  
<[http://www.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2004/04/05/all\\_shook\\_up?mode=PF2005](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2004/04/05/all_shook_up?mode=PF2005)>.

mixes, giving their opinions and making suggestions as to songs which they feel would complement the mix.<sup>40</sup>

Interestingly, iTunes publish consumers' 'iMixes' on their website. People can publish their favourite playlists or iMixes, which are then rated by other iTunes music store users. In fact, iTunes even has a celebrity mix feature, where famous music artists publish their mixes. These playlists can also be rated, and as Dan Kois writes, the artists run the risk of having their playlists being unfavourably received.

Comparing the iTunes playlist to the mix tape, he writes:

It's a distinct and painful memory shared by music lovers of a certain age. You spend a couple hours recording a wicked awesome mix tape for a friend, or a lover, or (most often) someone in the uncertain terrain between... You nervously hand it over – "Yeah, no big deal, but *I made you this*." Two weeks later, you ask how much she loved it, and when she shrugs, you feel a hot flush of shame. Face it: Your mix tape sucks.... Now celebrities and musicians – from Beyoncé Knowles to Avril Lavigne to Sting – can feel that same hot flush of shame, on a much grander scale. Since October [2003] Apple has been collecting playlists from musicians and celebrities at its iTunes music store. For Apple, of course, these celebrity playlists are another way to package their 99-cent songs... But for musicians, iTunes celebrity playlists offer a unique form of public humiliation.<sup>41</sup>

While it might seem strange that people are inspired to make comments on the music taste of people who they may never meet, I would argue that part of the enjoyment of listening to certain bands and music, is discovering what meaning they have for other people. As Simon Frith writes in Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music, a significant part of experiencing popular culture is discussing the things you like, and the things you don't like. He writes that, "part of the pleasure is talking about it; part of its meaning is this talk. talk which is run through with value judgments." (4).

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<sup>40</sup> Spit\_and\_Fire. Live Journal, 2003, 14 March 2005  
<[http://www.livejournal.com/userinfo.bml?user=spit\\_and\\_fire](http://www.livejournal.com/userinfo.bml?user=spit_and_fire)>.

<sup>41</sup> Dan Kois, "Beyoncé, Your Mix Tape Sucks: the perils of iTunes celebrity playlists, Slate, 26 May 2004, 28 January 2005 <<http://www.slate.msn.com/id/2101245>>.

In Chapter Two I also mentioned how Frith suggests that some fans consider themselves to have a greater authority in discussing music based on their “knowledge, experience and commitment”. This is another explanation as to why people would go to the trouble of viewing the musical opinions of a complete stranger: a wide variety of songs by different bands on a mix might suggest to someone that the creator of the mix was knowledgeable, and might therefore have something to *offer* them, particularly if some of the bands are already known to, and liked by the ‘virtual observer’. Luke works in Fred’s Records – a record shop in downtown St John’s, and in our conversations he indicated to me that he now feels he has more authority to make recommendations and offer suggestions to customers, because as a result of downloading, he has come to know more bands.

Frith was discussing conversation about popular culture as it arises in personal, face-to-face communication, and Martin Laba also discusses this, writing that,

In discussion the character of particular forms of popular culture may be crystallized through the verbal exchanges of the audience, and at the same time, the views and feelings of the audience members are formulated. (*Popular Culture and Folklore* 10-11)

However, the act of ‘virtual conversation’ in online para-social communities performs the same function. It validates musical taste, acts as a means of introducing the participants to new music, and helps people come to an understanding of why it is that they like certain artists, and dislike others.

#### How Luke manipulates his iPod and iTunes to suit his own needs

While the products iPod and iTunes are commercially produced and marketed items, and are therefore inevitably somewhat standardised, with certain features such

as automatically organising songs into genres, and suggesting certain playlists, iTunes allows the consumer to reorganise songs into new genres, and create individual playlists. It seems that iTunes recognises the personal uses people make of music. For instance, the website reads,

Chances are your answer to the question “what’s your favorite music?” would depend on your mood, where you are, who you’re with and what you’re doing. iTunes lets you create playlists that match your musical whims and fancies, by hand or automatically with Smart Playlists.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, while iTunes makes suggestions on how to create a good musical atmosphere at a party, the freedom always rests with the consumer:

The new Party Shuffle feature creates a dynamic playlist, similar to shuffle play, from either your entire library or a designated playlist. You can review upcoming songs to reorder or delete on the fly, taking charge like the DJ you always wanted to be. You or a guest can add songs to the mix at any time. If you like the random picks, you can always save them in a personal playlist.<sup>43</sup>

I asked Luke how he decided what music to play when he had guests round, and he replied:

It’s a matter of going to controls in the toolbar, and going to ‘shuffle’, and then hitting ‘play’. I don’t do anything. Unless I have a playlist that I really want to listen to, or an album or song, I normally just put it on shuffle and whatever happens will come up, and if I don’t want to hear it, I’ll go over and skip to the next song, or skip through the next ten songs or whatever is necessary to get to the song I wanna hear.

In this way, while Luke is generally content to listen to whatever songs are played at random, he is still free to change the music, or skip a song at will.

When I asked Luke how he organises the vast number of songs at his disposal, he replied:

Well, by default, iPod and iTunes together makes a really good self-organising thing. Like, it does a really good job of organising the music, in terms of a bunch of different things. But for me myself, I create playlists which means within iTunes you create a playlist and you drag and drop songs to it, so you essentially create like a mix. And you can plug in your iPod into your

<sup>42</sup> Apple Computer, Inc., 2005, February 2005 <<http://www.apple.com/itunes/playlists.html>>.

<sup>43</sup> Apple Computer, Inc., 2005, February 2005 <<http://www.apple.com/itunes/playlists.html>>.

computer and then that mix gets uploaded. So what I'll do is I'll make a variety of mixes, like probably at the beginning of a week, make a bunch of different mixes just based on either moods or genres, and I have those with me, or I'll just browse through by artist. And I also have the ability to create a smart playlist that self-refreshes to include only the new music I've uploaded in the past week. So that when I'm out with my iPod and if I know I don't want to listen to it but I know I want to listen to something new, I'll just put it on shuffle and then go into the smart playlist, which is called 'New Music' or something, I have it titled, it keeps refreshing itself, so that only the things I've added in the past seven days make it to that playlist.

And another thing I do too with iTunes, is I, it's kind of stupid, but I just make up my own kind of genre names, based on how like, how I think the music should be classified.

I asked him to give an example of a genre which he had created on iTunes:

Well, I find electronic music, in general, is really poorly defined. And I listen to a fair bit of electronic music, and I don't even like calling it electronic music, so I'll call things like 'Glitch Pop', or like 'Minimalist Experimental' type stuff. Anything that would better indicate to me what type of music it is I'm listening to. 'Cause sometimes I'll just browse by genre, which is another thing you can do with iPod and iTunes, you can browse by specific genres you have set for the music. Or it's updated on its own.

Through using the smart playlist, which includes only music which Luke has uploaded in the previous week, Luke is able to quickly process the new songs on his iPod as he walks around, or works. The portability of the iPod gives him the ability to listen to more music, both in terms of more songs, but also more chance to hear them, as he is not restricted to hearing them on a home stereo. The ability to process new music quickly is important, as he says that he gets approximately two to three gigabytes of new music a month, but then, after listening to it, discards about two to three gigabytes, as he only dedicates approximately ten gigabytes to music on his computer, which amounts to approximately two hundred albums.

Drawing on Tia DeNora's research into the way people use music to regulate their moods, and Michael Bull's research into how people use personal stereos (and now iPods) to organise their daily lives, I questioned Luke about the choices involved

in the mixes that he makes, and how the iPod has changed his relationship to his environment. Picking up on what he said about creating playlists, I asked him whether he created playlists at the start of the week, based on his anticipation of how the week was going to go. He answered:

Well, for myself for playlists, I pretty much just group them by genre, because usually when I listen to music, I wanna listen to the same type of genre. I don't wanna jump all over the place, or I wanna listen to something that blends a little bit better.... So, yeah, I guess it's sort of like compiling a mix in terms of wanting to capture a mood or an essence, or a genre, that type of thing.

This demonstrates that, while downloading iTunes gives Luke access to thousands of songs, he organises them according to his own established preferences and knowledge of what he enjoys listening to at certain times. Luke's comment of using music, "to capture a mood," echoes Tia DeNora's research findings that, rather than music acting as an independent, outside stimulus on people, people rather use music as a resource, based on their existing knowledge of the music, their current emotional state, and the emotional state which they would like to be experiencing. This is what Luke does when he creates his playlists at the start of each week. He organises and sequences his music according to his own, individual preferences and knowledge of his own lifestyle and habits. Journalist Beth Macey of the online newspaper The Roanoke Times compares the playlists of the iPod to the tracklisting of the mix tape. She describes iPod owner William Alexander as having,

gone from a 90-minute recorded mix of favourites to a 14-and-a-half-day soundtrack for his life....The iPod also allows him to rotate his favourite playlist to fit his current state of mind, he adds, 'rather than capturing a point in your life' – like all those old mixed tapes in the basement.

Of course, while it is possible to sequence your own playlist on your iPod, many people enjoy the unexpected musical juxtapositions which are provided by the 'iPod shuffle'. The random order of songs which is generated by the iPod shuffle is a



complete contrast to the painstaking process by which songs on a mix tape are sequenced in an attempt to achieve the ‘perfect flow’. The iPod shuffle is no respecter of ‘flow’, and a listener may hear two songs together which they would never have dreamt of placing side by side on a mix tape. Kitty Empire writes:

Shuffling is actually ace. Without it, I would never have felt the unique tingle when Fairport Convention suddenly turned into Kanye West, or been delighted at the segue of AC/DC into MIA. Shuffling makes the old sound new. The unexpected contrasts make you think about music in different ways. My iPod will mine a rich vein of folk, then swerve off into hysterical R&B, pointing up some subtle texture of the female voice or making you ponder the nature of melody (if you're into that kind of thing). If you stick loads of quirky, esoteric, non-song stuff on your iPod – such as snippets of Ivor Cutler, foreign language courses or CDs of street sounds from Lhasa (one of a series on the Sublime Frequencies label) – these can pounce on your consciousness in between the more conventional tunes. Sometimes, it's been laugh-out-loud pleasurable (well, Cutler does that) or delightfully disorienting.

I was also interested in the use Luke made of his iPod in terms of its portability.

DeNora writes that, “a given individual may turn to a wide gamut of recorded music for any task and at any hour of the day and, if using a Walkman, may listen to music nearly anywhere.” (156). In his research into how people use personal stereos to organise their everyday lives, Michael Bull relates how some of his informants choose particular tapes to take with them on their journey to work, based on their mood and the mood they would like to be in. Based on his ethnographic research, Bull argues that,

The use of personal stereos changes the nature of the user’s cognition and facilitates the effective management of these states together with a range of strategies (technologies) enabling the successful everyday management of space, place and interpersonal experience...The use of personal stereos provides users with a vastly expanded range of management strategies as they go about their everyday life. (9)

People use iPods in essentially the same way as they use personal stereos, but obviously, with an iPod the user is able to access a much wider selection of music. As

Bull says, “with the iPod, you have your music when you want it. It controls your interaction with people and places on your terms.”<sup>44</sup> The simple practicalities of the iPod, i.e. its small size yet large storage capacity, assists Luke in trying to match his mood with his music, and in this way also changes the way he interacts with his environment. In answer to my question, “When you’re using your iPod outside, how do you think it alters your relationship to your environment?” Luke answered:

To me, music really alters everything anyway. And the thing with the iPod that I enjoy the best, is that, based on my mood or what I’m leaning towards wanting to hear, I have access to it. And that’s how it’s changed. Because, I mean, if you’re going to school, if you’re going to work or whatever, and you wanna have a nice variety of music with you, it’s really difficult to pull that off and have a discman, because an iPod is even like half, or a third of the size of a discman. And then to have all these CDs everywhere, getting scratched up in your book bag, ruffling around, when I can have something that’s the size of a cassette tape, which is funny, an iPod’s essentially the size of a cassette tape. But just have something like that and shove it in my pocket and have an entire library on me. If I’m pissed off I can listen to this, if I’m happy I can listen to this, and it’ll change the way I – not change, but it will maybe enhance or alter the way I’m feeling.

The iPod allows Luke to listen to whatever he wants, whenever he wants.

While some people could interpret the iPod as being superior to the mix tape in that instead of being restricted to just ninety minutes of music and having access to a cassette player, you can choose songs from your entire music collection wherever you happen to be and at whatever time, I would argue that the mix tape has qualities which the iPod cannot emulate. Firstly, while the average mix tape can only hold ninety minutes of music, as I have already demonstrated in chapter two, one of the fundamental – and most enjoyable – aspects to making a mix tape is in the selection of songs. Of course, you can select songs for an iPod playlist, but the greater storage capacity and ability to shuffle detracts from the artistry of selecting and sequencing

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Bull, “Bull Session With Professor Ipod,” *Wired News* 25 February 2004, 28 February 2005 <<http://www.wired.com/news/print/0,1294,62396,00.html>>.

songs. There is also the point which Neil Rosenberg raised, of not necessarily *wanting* to be able to hear all of your music all of the time.

The second and most important way in which the mix tape will always have an advantage over the iPod is through its creation, presentation and use as a personal gift. The iPod is primarily used as a personal means of listening to music, and while iPod users let friends listen to the music they have, there is no physical exchange. Mix tapes, however, are primarily made for other people, and to give somebody a mix tape is to give them a tangible gift by which the creator can be remembered, and which the receiver can accept happily in the knowledge that this gift took a significant amount of time to create, and was custom-made with them in mind. This point is echoed by Beth Macy, who writes,

You can't give your entire iPod away on a disc to all your friends, one reason why the mixed tape is still alive and thriving in the digital age....I worry...about corrupted files, fried hard-drives and lake parties that end in accidental iPod drownings. If these kids don't back up their tunes with a mixed tape or disc, they won't be able to retreat to their basements to relive the old beaus and bad decisions, and head-banging good times.

Throughout this thesis I, and my informants, have demonstrated how the mix tape is so much more than a means of listening to music. They are a means of communication, and if the message is sometimes confused or misinterpreted, well, that just seems to add to their charm. As Macy suggests, they also act as an archive of memories. To look at or play an old mix tape can be a powerful experience, reminding you of times, people, places and emotions which can never be recovered. Above all, the appreciation of receiving a mix tape cannot be underestimated. Imagine somebody spending an afternoon with their record collection, painstakingly compiling and sequencing songs, cutting out pictures from magazines and decorating a cassette box –

all for you! As my friend Jen Squires neatly puts it, “a tape meant more than some crumby present like a shirt”. Far from being a dying art, the practice of making and presenting mix tapes is very much alive, and while downloading, MP3s and iPods have been remarkably successful at making music infinitely more accessible to people all over the world, the mix tape remains an important and well-loved method for introducing people you care about to music you think matters.

## Conclusion

When I began researching and writing this thesis, one of my main worries was that, in studying mix tapes in such depth from the viewpoint of a scholar, I would 'kill' the enjoyment which I had hitherto derived from them and by the end of my research I would never want to make or listen to another mix tape in my life. I am happy to say that this fear was never realised, and during the course of this study my interest in mix tapes increased, rather than waned. This was due in no small part to the enthusiasm of my informants, friends and any number of random strangers who were all excited by my research.

As it became apparent to me that mix tapes were a subject of importance and fervour for a great many people, I was visited by a second worry: that of 'not getting it right'. I was anxious not to take the art of mix-taping, discuss it in deeply theoretical folkloric language that had neither meaning nor relevance for the people who practiced it, and then present it back to them with a patronising, "here! *This* is what you do!". Thankfully, judging by the comments of my informants, friends, and my supervisor, Dr Narváez, it seems that I have avoided this. As I write in my introduction, the discipline of folklore encourages me to place myself very visibly within my work, and I believe that this, coupled with my experience of making and receiving mix tapes, helped ensure that I did my informants justice, and wrote a thesis which will hopefully be just as interesting to fans of the mix tape as it will be to folklore scholars.

While I hope that this thesis contributes to an under-researched area in folklore, I am aware that there are many aspects to mix tapes which I was not able to

document in detail, and I would encourage other researchers to engage with these topics. In particular, I believe that there is room for much more research on the ways in which changing music technologies affect our understanding, experience, and use of music. Continuing his work on the personal stereo (2003) Dr Michael Bull is currently researching the ways in which people use iPods to organise their daily lives. While this research is welcome and timely, I think there are many more areas within the study of recently developed technologies which are worthy of investigation. For instance, while Bull has hitherto concentrated on the experiences of urban iPod users, I am also interested in the ways that iPods and Internet downloading have changed the experiences of people in rural communities, both in terms of how they experience music personally, as well as how it has affected their social interaction with other music fans, both of their locality, and also in online virtual communities.

I also find it interesting how the Internet and music downloading, rather than inevitably replacing the practice of making and circulating mix tapes, have instead contributed to the art. In Chapter Four I mentioned how the authors of online journals record the mix tapes which they make and invite comments from readers, and as Lacasse and Bennett write, “since the mid-1990s, the increasing domestic use of the Internet has enhanced both the creative potential of mix tape communities and their capacity for trans-local communication” (*Mix Tapes, Memory and Nostalgia* 8). I think that there is more scope for research into the ways that the Internet has contributed to, rather than undermined not only the practice of making mix tapes, but other comparable traditions.

On a similar note, I would also welcome further research into the factors which affect a person’s taste in music. In Chapter Four I mentioned how my informant Luke



had become more open to new musical genres as a result of having access to more music through downloading, and Hannah and Richard also revealed how their musical tastes had been developed through attending live performances and listening to the radio. In their discussion of mix tapes and musical taste, Armin Peiseler, Alexander Tsitsigias and Jörn Radzuweit discuss how a person's musical taste is influenced by their social environment. In writing of the work of Andreas Kunz, they state that the immediate social environment, in particular family and friends, is more influential to the development of musical taste than the media (57). While I suggest that both family and friends, and the media are instrumental in affecting the musical preferences of individuals, it will be interesting to see how much more influential music downloading and online communities will become in the formation of a person's musical taste.

I was unable to devote more than a mention to the differences I found in the attitudes of men and women towards mix tapes. I learned from Hannah that female members of the Hollow Box Jockey Club tended to be less confident than men about their taste in music and the subsequent 'quality' of their mix tapes. I also found in my own research that my female informants were much more likely to decorate their mix tapes with cover art than their male counterparts. As I mentioned previously, my study did not include a sufficient number of informants to draw any conclusions about this, but gendered attitudes towards mix tapes are another aspect which deserve greater attention.

While I mentioned that mix tapes have thus far been a neglected area of research, there are indications of a growing interest in them. Serge Lacasse and Andy Bennett are currently continuing their study of mix tapes, focusing in particular on the



mix tape as just one example of polyphonographic practice, where sound recordings from various sources are sequenced in order to convey a particular message. Lacasse and Bennett also draw attention to the narratives which often accompany a mix tape, where the creator explains the choice of songs, and in particular the importance of the sequence. Drawing on Emmanuel Fraise's work on literary anthologies, Lacasse and Bennett suggest that mix tapes can be interpreted as falling into the category of *phonographic anthologies*, which can be defined as "any collection of recordings whose assemblage is dictated by an arranging principal" (*Mix Tapes, Memory and Nostalgia* 11).

Lacasse and Bennett write that,

The practice of compiling mix tapes...conflates the act of consumption and composition, and thus consists in the simultaneous act of reading/writing: writing about ourselves by re-reading others' music. Or better, reading ourselves in others' music." (*Mix Tapes, Memory and Nostalgia* 20)

In a recent email to me, a friend of mine back in England drew my attention to an interview with the artist Kristin Hersh. The interviewer asks, "Is it important to you to that people interpret your songs the way you intend them?" To which Kristin Hersh responds, "I don't allow my intentions to enter the picture, so it's a moot point. The songs are smarter than I am which allows them to function as other people's soundtracks too".<sup>45</sup> Hersh recognises that her listeners will inevitably draw their own conclusions and interpretations about her songs; it is something that everybody does. The artistry of mix tapes involves taking one's own interpretation of somebody else's song, and using it to hopefully communicate meaningfully and successfully with another person. And as my friend Melanie continued in her email,

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<sup>45</sup> Russell Bartholomee, "Kristin Hersh: Doing Things Differently," *Being There* 8, April 2005, 16 June 2005 <<http://www.beingtheremag.com/content/0504/hersh.html>> .

mixtapes are... such a powerful medium for communication: as much as a great work of art is. And regardless of whether this communication (/ 'message') is coded, or hidden, or deliberately masked, or for that matter misconstrued or misinterpreted, it is a very personal, intimate act of sharing a close communication.<sup>46</sup>

This echoes my suggestion in Chapter Four that mix tapes, “are a means of communication, and if the message is sometimes confused or misinterpreted, well, that just seems to add to their charm.”

Melanie’s notion that mix tapes are as powerful a medium for communication as are ‘great works of art’ is central to the discipline of folklore. I would argue that folklorists, more so than scholars working in any other academic discipline, are more adept at recognising, and inclined to celebrate the creativity and *artistry* of everyday people. In Chapter One I draw parallels between the commercially produced Anthology of American Folk Music and an individual mix tape, and argue that the importance lies, not in the manner in which the artifact is produced, but in the meanings which it has for its creator and for the people who listen to it. I believe that this thesis documents the value and importance which mix tapes have for the people who both make and receive them, and their continued relevance as a means of communication and enjoyment makes them a subject worthy of study.

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<sup>46</sup> Melanie Maddison, e-mail to the author, 1 June 2005.

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