# THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF FILE SHARING:

# CONSUMING NAPSTER AS A GIFT

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## Abstract

This research seeks to inform our understanding of the consumption meanings and communal activities surrounding file-sharing systems. In the present netnographic analysis of Napster consumption meanings, we develop a theoretical framework that conceptualizes file-sharing systems as gifting communities. Within this framework we discuss the gifting structure, describing the mode of exchange and the ways in which it constructs community. We then employ four predominant metaphors to conceptualize gifting motivation as realization, purification, participation and renovation. This netnography is based on cyber-interviews, emails, homepages and entries on message boards.

**Extended Abstract**

Different online gatherings are on the rise and of interest to consumer research. In this exploratory netnographic analysis of Napster consumption meanings, we analyze 40 cyber-interviews, 35 emails, 56 homepages and 40 entries on message boards. We develop a theoretical framework centering the concept of the parasitic gifting community. Within this framework we discuss the gifting structure, describing the mode of exchange and the ways in which it constructs community before conceptualizing gifting motivation through four predominant motivational metaphors of gifting as realization, purification, participation and renovation. The study of Napster holds several important insights for consumer behavior in the fields of gift giving, community in cyberspace, consumer resistance and emancipatory consumption.

The Napster network is built upon a software base that combines the convergence of mp3 music files with an Internet relay chat feature which enables free access to, and download of, up to 2 million copyrighted songs archived on the private hard drives of 60 million subscribers word-wide. We suggest that Napster exchanges can be fruitfully conceptualized as a new form of gift giving that transpires in digital networks.

Individual Napster consumers evaluate single transactions in the context of multiplicity. First, a gift is always a perfect copy of an mp3 file stored on the donor's hard drive. Second, a donor is usually recipient and a recipient is usually donor at the same time but not to each other. Third, it is the recipient and not the donor who initiates a gift transaction. Fourth, donor and recipient are anonymous and gift exchange is usually not reciprocal. Therefore and with respect to the fact that negotiation of equivalent or formal return is absent, Napster's gifting economy is parasitic because consumers assume the role of host, troublemaker and parasite at the same time.

The basic paradox underlying Napster consumption draws back on Weiner's (1992) suggestions of maintaining through giving. Unity over exchange points to a continuous not necessarily moral connection, but to an economic *linking value*. Following Mauss' (1924) fundamental interpretation of giving of gifts as a prototypical contract, Napster constructs community.

Two basic conceptual distinctions can help to organize our theorization of gifting motivations at Napster – the purpose of action (cf. Holt 1995), which is gifting here, and the addressee of gifting. In terms of purpose, gifting behavior can be both ends in itself (autotelic) and means to some further ends (instrumental). In terms of addressee, gift giving may range from agonistic, where the consumer uses gift giving as "a vehicle for self-aggrandizement" (Sherry 1983) to altruistic where the consumer attempts to enrich "other(s)". A resulting 2 x 2 matrix presents four predominant motivational metaphors of gifting. Gifting as realization draws on a consumption experience appreciated as the satisfaction of primary file sharing needs as an end in itself and for oneself. Viewed as gifting as purification, Napster's gifting economy is prized for its functional instrumentality in serving as a means to accomplish deliverance from the evils of the mainstream music consumption culture, as a quest for personal harmony and ethical hygiene. This dimension represents the subjective perspective of resistance through gifting. The gifting-as-participation metaphor emphasizes motivates that are drawn from the impulse to add oneself to the community as a quest for social integration. A final dimension, gifting as renovation,

emphasizes Napster's role as a locus of communally enacted social change. Here, the collective perspective of resistance through gifting is emphasized.

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"The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control - and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against an ideal."

Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra & Simulation

Napster.com is the premiere example of an information exchange technology referred to as peer-to-peer file sharing. Aggregating more than 10 million users in six months and attaining a growth rate of 200.000 new subscribers in a single day, Napster became the noisy center of a new social reality that struck terror into even the most sturdy of music entertainment executives. Behind this threatening new reality stands a software combining the convergence of mp3 music files with an Internet relay chat feature. Together, they enabled not only community, but free access to and download of a up to 2 million copyrighted songs archived on the private hard drives of 60 million subscribers world-wide.

Based on peer-to-peer music-sharing using a particular software format, Napster presents a transferable site of an online subculture of consumption acknowledging Schouten's and McAlexander's (1995) definition as "a distinct subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity." In fact, Napster's file sharing system suggests the creation of a complex and contradictory subculture of consumption challenging the interrelations between technology, culture and consumption that can inform our understanding of the relation between technology, culture and consumption. In his study of the surfing subculture, Irwin (1973) proposes that a subculture of consumption exhibits a life cycle consisting of four stages: articulation, expansion, corruption, and decline.

Napster was invented by Northeastern University's first year student Shawn Fenning in 1999 because of "frustration not only with MP3.com, Lycos, and Scour.net, but also to create a music community" (articulation stage). In order to prevent further damage to signed artists, Napster was sued by America's Recording Industry Association (RIAA) in August 1999 and finally forced to stop the sharing of copyrighted material after a preliminary injunction plus a lawsuit marathon in March 2001 (corruption stage). Although the principle of file sharing has irretrievably penetrated into current cyberspace consumption culture, Napster itself seems destined to resemble an abandoned beehive in the very near future.

Napster's decline from the bad boy to the toothless tiger seems preordained. Yet its "outlaw mystique" hearkens back to the later Jean Baudrillard and society's transformation into hyperreality (Baudrillard 1981 and 1988). Following Baudrillard virtuality retranscribes everything in its space as a "satellisation of the real." "That which was previously mentally projected, which was lived as a metaphor in the terrestrial habit is from now on projected entirely without metaphor into the absolute space of simulation," writes Baudrillard (1988), making the computer screen a "depthless surface" of representation. In this reversed image the Internet offers a virtuality which resists our attempts to totalize it as a world, presenting instead loci for playing with the assumptions that we have taken for granted in modernity: community, information, liberation and self. Napster's subculture of consumption entails a correlative transformation in human relations contrasting mainstream society, and it is these new relations that become the relations of Napster consumption waiting to be interpreted.

Over the past decade, qualitative consumer research has broadened its domain of inquiry to incorporate different cyberspace consumption phenomena. An increasingly diverse set of research methods has been developed, including socio-cognitive analysis (Granitz and Ward

1996) and netnographic analysis (Sherry and Kozinets 2000). Finally, a lot of research energy has been devoted to the analysis of online gatherings including e.g. Turkle's (1995) immersion into "Life on the Screen", Tambyah's (1996) treatment on self and community online, McMellon's et al. (1997) analysis of cyber seniors, Kozinets' (1997) netnographies of the X-Philes and Star Trek fan subcultures or Okleshen's (1998) analysis of Usenet groups, to name just a few. However, our understanding of the ideological and consumption practices of online communities consuming file sharing has yet to be informed.

This article has two objectives. First it presents a netnographic analysis of one file sharing community, Napster, operationalized as the totality of people using the Napster software to exchange mp3 files. Secondly, it argues in favor of a new form of gift giving in networks having precedence here as a powerful analytic category for understanding the objects and consumption meanings within Napster and other file sharing communities. We begin with a methodological description of the project and then discuss our findings in terms of two major concerns: (1) the structure of Napster as a gifting economy and (2) its motivation understood as the underlying values and their expression and maintenance.

**METHOD**

Following Kozinets (1997), netnography presents "a fusion of established and innovative ethnographic techniques adapted to the naturalistic study of virtual communities, and their research representation" striving for the profound experiencing of digital sociality (Sherry and Kozinets 2000) and enabling immersion into Napster's virtual consumption cortex. Terms and conditions of data gathering evoked by this netnographic research are given further account in the following section.

**Data and Analysis**

The data used in this study was gathered by the authors throughout a period from October 2000 until February 2001 and includes cyber-interviews, emails, board postings, homepages, functional and historical writings as well as the authors' own observation using Napster.com. All data was electronically catalogued and stored. As was suggested in previous research (Kozinets 1997) all informants' names were changed in order to guarantee confidentiality. In addition, informants' permission for direct quoting in this paper was explicitly sought by email resulting in participants' unanimous agreement.

*Cyber Interviews.* A primary data set is used including 40 cyber interviews virtually recorded on Napster's Instant Messaging System documenting the normative expectations of behavior and the ideology attending the consumption of Napster.com. In order to find potential informants the authors occasionally entered Napster's instant messaging system as ordinary subscribers "knocking on other online subscribers' doors" projectively tasking potential informers for a "friendly talk about Napster" in service of an in situ, conversational semi-directive individual interview. Contacting potential informants, contacting the authors by informants and meeting was perceived to be simpler than in meatspace. In order to attract potential informants' attention an intrication homepage (Kozinets 1995) presenting research questions and offering ways to contact the authors was used. Though facing financial restrictions in accessing technology and information (Dougan 1997) integration and participation are simplified due to the participatory egalitarian ethics of the Internet originating in its early ARPANET days (Castells 1996) and anonymity (Slevin 2000). Conducting interviews and analysis were done in tandem. Interviews were commented upon and comments and interviews

were again read and commented upon at a distance. In the familiar iterative process of grounded theory formation, analysis and data were integrated with each other before being presented for member check feedback by informants whose email addresses had been provided. This was done in order to achieve maximum trustworthiness, representativeness and informed consent (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

The cyber interviews represent both the richest and most sensitive set of data and are given interpretive primacy in this study. However, the broad and structured, participative, observational and interview procedures of ethnographic research in face-to-face situations (for an account see, e.g., Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf 1988; Fetterman 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Hirschman 1986; Jorgensen 1989; Lincoln and Guba 1985) are uniquely inflected in cyberspace due to the somewhat "textual" reality of computer-mediated-communication (e.g., Williams et al. 1988; Rice 1990, 1992). While overcoming the spatial and temporal boundaries of meatspace new boundaries arise in cyberspace constraining and extending (1) the nature and degree of social representation, (2) integration and participation, and (3) accessibility of social information of available data (Kozinets 1997) within our netnographic study. Hence simulation of or *self-fragmentation* to, a higher or lower social status, age, gender or language gestus (Reid 1991; Hall 1992; Stone 1992; Witmer 1997; Smith and Kollock 1998) were commonplace. This "reconstruction" (Turkle 1995) or "refashioning" (Gergen 1991) of self in postmodernity draws special implications for netnographic inquiry: cyber interviews not only comment on how things are remembered by informants (Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989) in terms of a *perspective of action* (Gould et al. 1974) but how things are actively constructed (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) suggesting researcher's increasing acknowledgement of a *perspective of simulation*.

*Additional data.* (1) information on 35 emails, 56 homepages as well as 40 entries on a number of online message boards were gathered serving as a second experiential channel adding to our analysis the observational part as a supplementary to participation, as was suggested by Tedlock (1991). This observational data was read approximately five times and reviewed. Although being recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) we did this without authors' feedback due to the somewhat escalating size and variety of data combined with the impossibility to trace every author ex post. (2) A third experiential channel was carved out by the authors including basic economic and legal information on Napster.com and its direct environment with respect to the last two years since its foundation in 1999. (3) In order to provide firsthand immersion in the phenomenon gathering and "close reading" (Sherry and Carmago 1987) of data as a text also concerned our own embedded existence as Napster consumers during the last two years. Embeddedness is crucial in that it increased our acuity as the pre-eminent instrument of research (Murray 1943) while both exalting and harnessing our own idiosyncrasies (Sherry and Kozinets 2000).

## STRUCTURE

At its core, Napster's software combines the convergence of mp3 music files with an Internet relay chat. Although forms of textual communication between members are inherent to the system and also possible on Napster's website message boards, Napster's primary function is the sharing of mp3 files. Each member's computer functions as a node presenting a certain amount of mp3 files which can be accessed and copied to any other member's computers. This principle suggests the mp3 transaction to be classified as a gift transaction between donor and recipient. However, it is one that requires some technical broadening that acknowledges four important

consequences of digitized information in digital networks. First, a gift is always a perfect copy of an mp3 file stored on the donor's hard drive. Second, a donor is usually a recipient and a recipient is usually a donor at the same time but not to each other. Third, it is the recipient and not the donor who initiates a gift transaction. Fourth, donor and recipient are anonymous and gift exchange is usually not reciprocal. "Jeff's" (connected via cable, sharing 352 files) comment, however, hints at yet another form of reciprocity:

Actually I'm one of [60] millions of anonymous people accidentally spread all over the globe but involved in the same thing – sharing. I'm part of a community to which I contribute with my stuff and which showers me with music in return.

A different form of reciprocity occurs introducing the third "virtual exchange partner," the "community" which itself simultaneously assumes the role of donor and recipient relative to any connected member. Instead of constructing Napster's gifting economy as one that takes place in between individuals, Jeff's statement suggests that some informants see it from an individual consumer's perspective as a reciprocal giving to and receiving from the "community." This is in line with an earlier anthropological understanding of gift giving behavior. Mauss (1924) has presented it as a way of creating social networks and individual integration. Reciprocity in social networks does not necessarily involve total reciprocity between two individuals, but the social obligation to give, accept, and "repay" – which means to reciprocate within the network (cf. Gouldner 1960; Levy 1959). An individual Napster user evaluates the single transaction in the context of multiplicity. In contrast to Sherry (1983), multiplicity is not reduced to transactions between one donor and one recipient but is embedded in transactions within the whole Napster community.

**A Parasitic Gifting Economy**

As a way of conferring material benefit on a recipient, gift giving at Napster opens up a different avenue in that it entirely brackets away negotiation of equivalent or formal return discussed e.g. in Sherry's (1983) treatment on the economic dimensions of the gift in favor of a more communal contribution. Contrasting "economical equality" underlying most of western gift giving ideology, a basic principle of fairness at Napster states, as "Nina" (connected via 56k, sharing 65 files) puts it, to "have at least a few mp3 files on one's own drive whenever downloading from another member's." A frequent complaint in postings and interviews was directed to the existence of "fellow travelers" or "ignorants" violating this etiquette by benefiting from Napster's vast collection of music without contributing to it. Hence when one of the authors tried to download a file from another member, he instantly received the following emphatic note from "Tom" (connected via cable, sharing 639 files) via instant messaging:

Hey, asshole! Don't see a single file on your drive! No sharing, no Napster! Either you immediately add some or I kick your ass…

However, a study conducted by the Palo Alto Research Center (Adar and Huberman 2000) testing the basic principle of fair use at another music community named Gnutella found that almost 70% of Gnutella users share no files, and nearly 50% of all responses are returned by the top 1% of sharing hosts. The authors of the study argue that, as these communities grow, users will stop producing and only consume up to a state in which the system collapses due to the fact that files are only provided by an extremely small number of hosts. Fellow traveling as observed by Adar and Huberman seems to be reflected in the statement of "Chris" (connected via ISDN, sharing 0 files):

Let me put it this way: we are in a self-service shop here and I'm not one of those bloody idiots who gives access to their private hard drives to complete strangers. I mean, it's not a security issue but one of just sucking the latest mp3s from the Internet.

Napster's ideology of exchange may be better understood employing Michel Serres's (1980) concept of the parasite. "To be a parasite means to eat at somebody else's table" (p. 17). This does not only apply to the Napster phenomenon as a whole regarding its relation to the recording industry in general but to Napster's mode of exchange in particular. Parasites, following Serres in his relevant study, are indispensable whenever the noise of new conditions has to be translated into a system of relationships. They are lured by the noise and usefully produce a usable sense in a previously senseless environment (Baecker 2001). "The parasite is 'next to', it is 'with', it is detached from, it is not sitting on the thing itself, but on the relation. It has relations, as one says, and turns them into a system. It is always mediate and never immediate. It has a relation to the relation, it is related to the related, it sits on the channel." (p. 64-5) In Napster's parasitic economy driven by gift exchange consumers enrich themselves; they assume the role of host, troublemaker and parasite at the same time.

**Constructing Community through Giving**

The Internet embodies the compression of time and space (Ellul 1964; Gergen 1991; McLuhan 1964) and fluid social situations, which contributes to the feeling of "no sense of place" (McLuhan 1964; Meyrowitz 1985). These two dimensions make it possible for Internet users to create new forms of action and interaction challenging the ways in which culture, technology and consumption interrelate. The permanent techno-cultural reconstruction reifies and reinforces the postmodern principle of "double-coding" (Jencks 1986) by embodying a variety of existential tensions and paradoxes. For instance, a well-known paradox includes the tension between the

tendencies of technology to solve problems versus creating others (Mick and Fournier 1998).

Napster's subculture of consumption is built on individual contribution, big or small, of enough

members and maintained by their gift exchange leading up to a state of "communal prosperity".

The basic paradox underlying Napster consumption invokes the notion of maintaining through

giving. Following Weiner (1992) all gift exchange is a search of permanence in a social world

that is constantly changing. As Malinowski ([1922] 1961) remarked in his analysis of the tribal

economics of Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea, there is a "fundamental human impulse to

display, to share, to bestow," a "deep tendency to create social ties through exchange of gifts." If

we follow Mauss' (1924) fundamental interpretation of giving of gifts as a prototypical contract

(van Baal 1975) and Barlow's (1995) idea that the traditional community as we know it is

"largely a wraith of nostalgia", and that it is possible to create a community in cyberspace

(Rheingold 1993) with the human spirit and the basic desire to connect, then in fact, Napster's

gifting economy constructs a parasitic gifting *community*. It is important to note that the concept

of community at Napster is neither based on intense textual communication nor on physical

contact. Solely uniting over exchanges and transactions points to a continuous not necessarily moral

connection, but an economic *linking value*, as was suggested by Cova (1997) in a framework of the

metamorphosis of social link from tradition to postmodernity.  Recognizing the economic

underpinnings of marketing[1] in general and the fact that the study of Napster concerns gifting as

a special category of exchange, different *consumer values*, for example, defined "as an interactive

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[1] Although being widely criticized as a core concept outside the Kotlerian sphere of marketing

theory (e.g., Foxall 1984, Firat 1984, Martin 1985, Hirschman 1986, Belk and Coon 1993), the

marketing = exchange analogy has been found wanting.

relativistic preference experience" by Holbrook (1999) referencing Hilliard (1950), point to individual gifting motivation.

## MOTIVATION

To distinguish the strategy that prompts exchange from the structure of exchange itself it is essential to gauge the motivation of a member to consume Napster's gifting economy relative to the community. Two basic conceptual distinctions can help to organize these motivations at Napster – the purpose of action (cf. Holt 1995), which is gifting here, and the addressee of gifting. In terms of purpose, gifting behavior can be both ends in itself (autotelic) and means to some further ends (instrumental). In terms of addressee, gift giving may range from agonistic, where the consumer uses gift giving as "a vehicle for self-aggrandizement" (Sherry 1983) to altruistic where the consumer attempts to enrich "other(s)". Crossing these two dimensions yields a 2 x 2 matrix placing four metaphors used to describe the predominant modes of gifting motivation at Napster: gifting as realization, purification, participation and renovation (see Figure).

FIGURE

FOUR GIFTING METAPHORS

|  | | ADDRESSEE OF ACTION | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  | | Agonistic Actions | Altruistic Actions |
| PURPOSE OF ACTION | Autotelic Actions | **GIFTING AS REALIZATION** | **GIFTING AS PARTICIPATION** |
|  | Instrumental Actions | **GIFTING AS PURIFICATION** | **GIFTING AS RENOVATION** |

*Gifting as Realization.* The gifting-as-realization metaphor refers to the motivation of consuming Napster's gifting community simply translated in "for myself and the song". The primary motivation is the *functional* benefit of Napster (Levy 1959), it is more or less a strictly individualistic utilitarian purpose (Foxall and Goldsmith 1994). Realizational gifting draws on a consumption experience appreciated as the satisfaction of primary file sharing needs such as finding a rare Beatles record as an end in itself. Consider, for example,  "David" (ISDN, sharing 144 files):

Napster is a great way to discover new music, or check out music before spending the money. At the same time you also find a lot of music that is just not available anymore or that has never been published. I found life cuts of Root Boy Slim and a rare odd flipside of a 45. Root Boy was never released on CD and it is nice to find high quality recordings available. I was listening to John Lennon's last interview two hours before he was shot, which I found on Napster and I also put the music of my band online and hope someone will download it!

Gifting experience for gifting's sake is accompanied by self-orientation. Though one's Napster consumption may also provide value to others, the primary source of value lies in the capacity to contribute to one's own consumption experience, either giving or being given to or giving.

*Gifting as Purification.* Also a personal rather than communal motivation is represented by the gifting-as-purification metaphor. This metaphor predominantly points to gifting as a form of resistance against the influence and impacts of the contemporary music entertainment regime. The critique against modern music marketing is evident in the picture drawn by "Laura" (ISDN, 45 files shared). Her statement suggests a correlation between pop stars and fashion ideals like Britney Spears and being pressed by the "mass media dictatorship":

Whenever you switch on the TV today they just poison you with this army of Britney Spears girls and tomorrow you may dress up like her. A day later you are hanging over the toilet and puking yourself to the shape of Britney and so on. So what has Napster got to do with it? It just gives me a way to boycott this whole mass media dictatorship for the rest of my life!

Here self-orientation means self-extension (Belk 1988, Kozinets and Handelman 1998) in that gifting is used as an agent through which a personal violation of moral values is indicated, the differentiation from a surrounding evil is given form. Personal dissatisfaction with dominant structures or predominant practices affecting oneself rather than others, e.g. artists or society, is the motor for critical positioning. Consuming Napster's gifting economy is prized for its functional instrumentality in serving as a means to accomplish deliverance from the evils of mainstream music consumption culture, as a quest for personal harmony and ethical hygiene. Kozinets and Handelman (1998) have also stressed the importance of "symbolic personal significance as a vehicle of self-realization and personal harmony" as a dimension of resistance. Gifting serves as a way to come closer to one's "ideal" self. The ideal "music fan" in the case of "Thomas" (ISDN, sharing 357 files), seems to hearken back to their discussion:

Boycotting the business is an issue for any real music fan! It's not fellow travelling some crazy fashion, it's for yourself!

Holbrook's typology of customer value posits that ethics (including justice, virtue, and morality) is one of eight kinds of value that may be obtained in the consumption experience. Smith (1996) has suggested a distinction between altruistic and agonistic motivation of consumption experiences. Thus gifting as a means of boycotting at Napster can here be understood as an agonistic act of ethical purification for oneself.

*Gifting as Participation.* The gifting-as-participation metaphor emphasizes those motivations that are drawn from the impulse to belong and to integrate. Typically, participation

in a community here is an end in itself maintaining social ties while being only perfunctorily

interested in the central consumption activity. For example, "Sarah" (ISDN, sharing 72 files)

illustrates her happiness about participating:

It feels good to be part of such a powerful movement. Isn't it strange that people all over the
world have somehow the same feelings?

The community is seen as a movement to which one wishes to add one in order to add value to

others. At this end, altruism is used here not to denote selflessness, but rather to indicate a

primary intention to please one's exchange partners in the first sense and thus becoming "a part

of it" in the second sense. The individual benefit of file sharing via Napster may at the same time

act to represent consumers to other consumers, expressing their membership (Foxall and

Goldsmith 1994) in Napster's file sharing community.


*Gifting as Renovation.* A fourth dimension, gifting as renovation, emphasizes Napster's

role as a locus of communally enacted social change. Gifting is attached to a political matter of

concern as a means of liberation from the former limitations set by the old order of music

business in capitalist society. Consumers often refer to the perils of copyright which, following

"Derek" (cable, sharing 693 copyrighted files), "has eaten those art species that are not accepted

by the masses.", while at the same time offering alternative ways to think about the status and

value of information as "a free resource for all of us." It is a widespread practice to attach

socialistic, anarchist and revolutionary metaphor to the gifting economy of Napster. For instance,

visual proof is found in old socialist poster and graffiti nostalgia as in "Napster - la revolución",

subtitling the portrait of Che Guevara on the background of rebellious labor class workers as

well as a fake "reminder of the Recording Industry Association of America" warning "When you

pirate MP3s you are downloading communism", accompanied by a scene showing diabolical

accomplice Lenin encouraging an obviously American white male student surfer to consume

MP3. The "Napster Manifesto", an anonymous call for "net communism" even makes use of

Marx's and Engel's Communist Manifesto while plugging in the term "music industry" and

"capitalism" for terms like "bourgeoisie", "bourgeoisie class" or "agriculture and manufacturing

industry":

> We see then: the means of production and of exchange, on whose foundation the music industry built itself up, were generated in a capitalistic society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the conditions under which capitalistic society produced and exchanged, the capitalistic organization of the music industry, in one word, the capitalistic relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.

Where Marx and Engels cried "Abolition of property!" some Napster users cry "Freedom of

Information!" today. Gifting becomes a tool for the collapse of the old capitalist system and the

end of capitalist market hegemony while serving as an alternative consumption activity at the

electronic frontier. However, it is important to carve out the insuperable paradox in this

observation: Napster itself is driven by market forces and products while intensively refusing the

market's validity in search of a self-reflexive otherness. Consuming resistance against well-

established market and industry structures at Napster, both in the case of gifting as renovation

and purification is like going with the parasite against the parasite. Returning to the early work of

Baudrillard (1968), Napster seeks to build up and communicate an alternative to the regime of

signs, and in doing so, it still resides in its center.

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper we have developed a theoretical framework that offers the concept of the parasitic gifting community to understand consumption meanings of file sharing systems such as Napster et aliud. Within this framework we discussed the structure, describing the gifting economy and the ways in which it constructs community.  Moving our focus to the motivation of gifting at Napster we developed a schema of four metaphors describing the predominant motivations attached to Napster's gifting economy.

Under acknowledgement of the above mentioned methodological restrictions caused by the nature of textual communication in cyberspace and the crisis of representation (Sherry and Kozinets 2000), the study of Napster can hold several important insights for consumer behavior research in the fields of gift giving, community in cyberspace, consumer resistance and emancipatory consumption. Digital technology in networks yields a new information economy based on gift giving. Gifting unites consumers in parasitic gifting communities, which serve as a locus to celebrate alternative and emancipatory modes of consumption. The "parasitic" offers at least two different perspectives. First, consumers engage in the gifting community to overcome the parasitic outside inside contemporary consumption culture through different forms of resistance. Second and in doing so, consumers are hosted by exactly those parasitic entities they wish to overcome.

The concept of parasitism also promises further enlightment in, for example, Holt's (forthcoming) suggestion to see Marketing in postmodernity as a parasitic cultural machine "that pilfers from public culture to cycle through commodities valued meanings and pleasures at an ever increasing velocity". Napster's parasitic gifting economy also draws on previous attempts to define marketing which, following Kotler (2000) involves exchanges of value, as a transaction

between two parties in which each party gives something of value in return for something of value. Conversely, exchange within parasitic gifting economies is multidirectional. Relations are established in the community and it is impossible to offset the one against the other. Hence another concept of value is needed, adding to our understanding the ways parasitism evolves consumption.

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