Participatory Listmaking:

Encyclopedic Lists, Evaluative Lists, Playlists

Jon van der Veen

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By: **Jon van der Veen**

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_____ External to Program
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_____ Examiner
Dr. M. Allor

_____ Examiner
Dr. L. Shade

_____ Thesis Supervisor
Dr. W. Buxton

Approved by _____
Dr. M. Allor, Graduate Program Director

October 5, 2012

_____
Dr. B. Lewis, Dean
Faculty of Arts and Science

Abstract

Participatory Listmaking: Encyclopedic Lists, Evaluative Lists, Playlists

Jon van der Veen, Ph.D.
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Lists tend to be treated in media studies as "pre-text", "con-text", or "para-text", but rarely in a focused and tailored manner as "text". One reason for this, I suggest, is rooted in the list form's ambiguous constitution as both the multiple individuated *items* in the list as well as the singular *ground* onto which they are drawn together, accounting for a paradoxical quality that confers upon the list form both its heady participatory capacities and more limiting "granular" semiotic capacities. Defining a list most generally as "a category, communicated", this dissertation identifies and explores three such kinds of lists and their sites of listmaking, analyzing each through the co-ordinates of *participation*, *selection*, *order*, and *rhetoric*. *Encyclopedic lists* exhibit a style of listmaking whose roots I trace to the great 18th century encyclopedic projects, emphasize a mode of amateur contribution aimed at completing the list in an expanding and proliferate world, and exhibit a paradoxical rhetoric of totalization and fragmentation that, I argue, resolves through an ethic of "completism." *Evaluative lists* such as Top 10 or Best-of lists exhibit a style of listmaking I trace to the history of women's and lifestyle periodicals, and exhibit a rhetorical stance that combines the fragmentation inherent in masses of individual "subjective" experiences with the more authoritative aims of the genres to act as "arbiters of taste", resolving in an ethic of "tacit commensuration." *Playlists* across various music scheduling, personal compilation, and digital contexts exhibit a

mode of listmaking focused on the artistic criteria of the playlist-maker, where the form is pulled rhetorically towards its pretentions of reflecting an artistic work in its own right and reflecting a fan-perspective that emphasizes the received identities and social existences of its items, prompting an ethic of "contingency" in an attempt to secure a fleeting authorial coherence. I conclude that we turn to participatory lists when we are committed to exploiting the participatory capacities inherent in encyclopedic *completion*, evaluative *commensuration*, and aesthetic *contingency*, but in an addendum to the theory of "participatory cultures" (Jenkins 2009), we may also recognize the limitations inherent in texts that describe the world by the accretion of "facts", that never quite sustain a singular argumentative arc, and that paint pictures using the coarse brushes of others' commercial-aesthetic works.

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Sandra, whose cheerful support was a welcome resource, especially after long pre-holiday periods of work, and my brothers Frank and Blake. To dip into this dissertation's ideas, I might finally say that this list of gratitude is not an *encyclopedic* list, and there are many fellow students, co-workers, friends, and family who deserve similar acknowledgements. It is a cliché, but true, to say that this dissertation would not have been possible without all of your support.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> There exists in the life of a collector a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order.
>
> --Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

For a form of inscription that by some accounts characterizes the writing on Wikipedia (Rosenzweig 2006), that is recognized among website publishers as a popular and profitable article format,[1] and that has become a site of activity for engaging with digital music and other digital works (Bull 2008), listmaking is rarely discussed or accounted for in media and communication studies or related disciplines. In fact, lists defy many of the conventions upon which media studies has approached print, broadcast, and online cultures since Harold Innis's first writings on the subject of written and oral forms of media (Innis 2008; Innis 2007). While lists are stored and transmitted on media or on some cascade of mediating technologies and practices—a quality they share with even the most generic notions of "the text" in media studies—their creation, functions, and receptions are poorly captured by generic textual-research paradigms organized around narratives, conversations, journalistic reportage, entertainment products, scientific treatises, essays, correspondence, or the like, all of which tend to contain variegated discursive elements that are woven together, building an over-arching argument or

[1] Interview with "Marie", May 4, 2012

"whole" of some kind (i.e. Barthes's "texture") that stands as the story, message, meaning, or content of the text (Barthes 1989, 60).

A list frustrates this perspective because any "whole" that may be read into it is always undermined by the individuated items in the list, and conversely, any attempt to treat the list as a multitude of individual signs is undermined by their presentation as belonging to the common category headlined by the list title. That is, a list always asserts that a single term cannot stand for its items, which must be enumerated, while it paradoxically presents the common ground that unites its items and could conceivably thereafter stand in for them in the Saussurean tradition of the *signifier* (Saussure 1986). While this tension is evident to some degree in all of the more generically-approached textual examples I mentioned above, such as narratives, essays, and conversations, insofar as they are all constituted by "collections" of words, exchanges, stanzas, and so on that carry independent meanings and that can thereby "problematize" or be used to "deconstruct" their very contexts and receptions, I highlight this tension in lists because, as I will argue, it uniquely defines lists.

Similar to such under-studied and ill-fitting forms within textual and media scholarship as the "memo" (Guillory 2004) or the "footnote" (Grafton 1999), a list tends to be treated as either "pre-text" (e.g. an essay outline), "con-text" (e.g. the cetological and inventory listings of *Moby-Dick*), or as "para-text" (e.g. the index of a dictionary), but rarely in a focused and tailored manner as "text". Yet the list represents—in its own right, and in various distinctive guises—several genres and several rich histories of texts in the form of printed books, periodicals, and audio

and video formats. I will show in this dissertation that there is value in developing a comparative media-studies approach that extends across print, electric, and online forms of lists and approaches them according to how they are utilized to reach various communicative ends within different contexts and communities of practice. These differing contexts and aims account for different types of lists as I will describe them in encyclopedic, evaluative, and aesthetic contexts. Before picking up this analysis with the enlightenment ideals of the 18th century, however, I will introduce the current literature on the subject of lists. This literature captures the role lists play in *communication,* but I will use it primarily to establish my greater interests in how lists and related collections are created to effect new orders of knowledge, public discourses, and aesthetic works; that is, a focus not only on lists but on *listmaking*.

What is a List?

In a review of Jorge Luis Borges's fictional bestiary *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, William Gass marveled at the *invention* evident in the bouquet of monsters that Borges had fashioned and how he had framed them, in the Baroque catalogic fashion of bestiaries, as a collection, "alphabetically arranged." Gass was less sure about its place in contemporary literature, on the basis that despite the evident imagination in the creation of the monsters—which were created mostly by means of "mechanical operations" such as jumbles, collages, mathematical multiplications and divisions of body parts—Gass argued that "there's no longer a world left for these creatures to inhabit" (Gass 1969). The claim echoed, or would soon echo,

Foucault's comment in *The Order of Things* (1966 in French; 1970 in English) about another of Borges's lists, the illogical animal taxonomy supposedly originating from "a certain Chinese encyclopedia," where Foucault marveled that "What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible" (Foucault 1970, xviii), before setting off to typify different historical "epistemes" that would ground more familiar strange propinquities. I recount these critical inspirations credited to Borges because fifteen years later, Gass described what could be considered the common formal mechanisms Borges employed to such effect—the endless combinatory possibilities of lists; as Gass put it, "lists are juxtapositions… collage… [they] bring strangers together" (Gass 1985, 118). In the lists that populate the chapters ahead, I will invite you to consider the repercussions of a set of textual practices that "bring strangers together" in several senses.

Lists and catalogues operate in the field of order and disorder by selecting and grouping certain signs into coherent systems while excluding others, and in so doing they rehearse the structuralist semiotic position that Levi-Strauss famously defined:

> (the) decision as to what to put in each place also depends on the possibility of putting a different element there instead, so that each choice which is made [involves] a complete reorganization of the structure, which [is never] the same as one vaguely imagined nor as some other which might have been preferred to it. (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 19)

The discontinuous form of the list or catalogue draws upon and establishes meaning by way of sorting signifiers, and by implication their referents, into groups, orders, and classes, and in so doing is deeply interconnected with prevailing

systems of classification, taxonomy, and nomenclature. Yet while interconnected with them, it is important to remember that lists are, as Izmirlieva noted, "discursive phenomena" rather than being themselves taxonomies or classification systems (Izmirlieva 1999, 9).[2] Here, Izmirlieva also noted, Foucault reminds us of the 19th century taxonomist Carolus Linnaeus's clarification in *Philosophy of Botany*: "the [classificatory] system indicates the plants, even those it has not mentioned; which is something that the enumeration of a catalogue can never do" (Linnaeus cited in Foucault 1970, 146).

Beyond classification, the list and catalogue also relate to the more general concept of a category, and the process of categorization. Bowker and Starr (1999) discuss categorization and its relation to lists of data, exploring 18th century medical records and census lists. For Bowker & Star, categories structure our sense of the world:

> Remarkably for such a central part of our lives, we stand for the most part in formal ignorance of the social and moral order created by these invisible, potent entities. Their impact is indisputable, and as Foucault reminds us, inescapable. Try the simple experiment of ignoring your gender classification and use instead whichever toilets are the nearest; try to locate a library book shelved under the wrong Library of Congress catalogue number; stand in the immigration queue at a busy foreign airport without the right passport or arrive without the transformer and the adaptor that translates between electrical standards. The material force of categories appears always and instantly. (Bowker and Star 1999, 3)

Bowker & Star (1999) characterize categories in a way that I aim to reflect in my characterization of the list/listmaking dualism, which is that the one always calls

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[2] Izmirlieva also draws on Foucault to distinguish *nomenclature* from classificatory systems: "Nomenclature, unlike taxonomy, does not by itself presuppose order. Yet the ambition of any systematic knowledge is to correlate the terms it uses with its own classificatory system to the point that its nomenclature becomes also a taxonomy (Izmirlieva 1999, 5;ct. Foucault 1970, 208).

forth the other. For Bowker and Star, the practice of making categories can usefully be thought of as "in-between a thing and an action," and so too I propose should the practice of listing always suggests both the list and the parameters of listmaking (*Ibid*, p.285).

Rather than following scientific classificatory or taxonomic principles of ordering things based on the phenomena themselves, in practice, categories are often formed *ad hoc.* The making of categories is fluidly related to the contingencies of daily life, as Lakoff remarks in his look at categories in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*: "Many categories are formed by the influence of a framing structure, normally an activity or contingent event, rather than by member similarity" (Lakoff 1987, 21). Daily mundane lists occasioned by shopping trips and multiplying chores attest to the frequency with which a contingent life event mandates a new category, such as "things I need to buy today," and in turn requires inscription into a persistent form as a list. Across these mundane contingent categories all the way to the great lists of taxonomic and canonic continuity, I argue in this dissertation, there are to be found many, many lists.

The role of the list in writing and print culture has been characterized by some scholars in the stark terms of establishing and maintaining "control." The uses of lists in early writing to keep inventories and preserve fragments of knowledge represent, for Oxley, "man's efforts to control and to preserve, to dominate his environment, his property, and other men" (Oxley 1982, 12–13). The lists of names of God, for Izmirlieva (1999), across various orthodox and magical contexts, emerge as acts "of controlling the targeted domain":

> Listmaking of its routine everyday varieties that result in to-do lists, shopping lists, pro-and-con lists, is always an act of taking control over a potentially overwhelming and critical situation. By segmenting a domain (of all the things to do, to buy or to consider in a decision-making) and by embracing its multiplicity in a unified manner, we dispel the power that the plurality of our experience has over us, take a hold of our own anxieties and, in so doing, establish control over the crisis at hand. (Izmirlieva 1999, 50)

Lists nominally store multiplicities, be they names of people, of words, of things of any kind, and in so doing, they provide a compelling window into the overlapping contexts of when and why we feel an urge to collect elements together, wherever they come from, into a single place at once (to *com— prehendre:* catch, seize). These aspects include the different logics by which things might be chosen and ordered together, the different arrangements in which list-makers are able to create, contribute to, or gain access to such lists, the settings in which lists emerge in writing, the genres of literature in which they are to be found, and the arguments, philosophies, or indeed cosmologies that lists are rhetorically put to use in advancing or subverting.

The *OED's*[3] definition of *list* in the context used in this dissertation is closest in its sixth variant: as a noun, a list is "a catalogue or roll consisting of a row or series of names, figures, words, or the like," while in its verbal form it means "to set down together in a list" among more specific instances of the same involving real estate, the telephone directory, and in the *OED's* 1997 additions series[4], in the context of computing, "to display or print out (a program, the contents of a file, etc…)." Substantial uses of the term are also found relating to borders, edging, a

[3] Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edition. (Simpson and Weiner 2009)
[4] Oxford English Dictionary Additions Series 1997. (Simpson, Weiner, and Proffitt 1997)

strip of land enclosing a field, or indeed to any long, narrow strip of material, especially those on the margins or that enclose or bound. Such examples predate those of the catalogue variety, as do their verbal variants, "to enclose…bound…limit," and would therefore seem to give rise to them by virtue of the visual resemblance between such borders and long strips of writings or rolls of catalogues.

There are also several verbal usages in the *OED* in which *to list* is "with personal construction…to desire or wish (for something)", "to wish, desire, like, choose": for example, "Thou mayst make sale of it to whom thou list", or "Let them think what they list". Other meanings include a ship's *listing* to one side, a person's being *listless*, i.e. without particular inclination, and several usages rooted from *list* as shorthand for *listening*. While these related meanings may be an accident of the term's multiple common roots in the English language, the variants suggest nonetheless the mix of formal, semiotic, and social influences that funnel into the broad practices of *listmaking* (which, coincidentally, the *OED* does not define).

Lists reflect Roman Jakobson's *poetic function* in that they "project" the paradigm along the syntagm: a list "projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (Andrews 1996).[5] As Gass put it, lists part their elements while retaining them, and in so doing, they "divvy, weigh,

[5] Izmirlieva also suggested this point (Izmirlieva 1999). Saussure distinguished what has come to be called the *paradigm* from *syntagm*, associating with each *metaphor* and *metonymy*, respectively (Saussure 1986); Jakobson expanded on these concepts to suggest different communication functions that correlated to different text types, in which the poetic function in particular "projected" the selective, metaphoric axis of the paradigmatic upon the syntagmatic, contiguous axis of combination to effect motifs, rhymes, symmetries, repetitions, etc. (Jakobson, Pomorska, and Rudy 1987).

equalize, and order" (Gass 1985, 110). Lists usually differ from mathematical set theory or prepositional logic in that they often do not enforce a firm logical relationship among members, but suggest or posit at least a rough equivalence or shared paradigm—a category or group of greater or lesser objectivity—within which all items fall to some acceptable degree. It is as a result of such coequal relations, rather than a subversion of them, that ranking, alphabetical order, or other orders within a list have coherence. The paradigmatic nature of lists also connects them to practices of inscription that store or record things as *kinds* of things, multiply and coequally, or to systems of thought and governance that see the world as collections of individual things or people of various *kinds*, all of which recommend listing to contexts such as archives, encyclopedias, censuses, the mechanisms of democracy, bureaucracy, and database technologies.

A list is nominal, in that it deals with names of things, be they people, objects, events, or other attributes, and it must contain more than one.[6] The partial discontinuity or fragmentation of a list—its nature as a *collection* of discrete elements—is such that the list connects things together while it keeps them separate, a characteristic that if transgressed means the list is no longer a list. An example of a list that fails to keep its elements separate is a list of players on a sports team that is edited to have only the team *name* stand in for the group. While it may point to the collective referent of the group of players just as the list did, it is no longer a list. Alternatively, an occurrence of a list's transgressing its *joining* characteristic would be a list whose multiple signifiers are physically separated

[6] Barney considers 'how many makes a list'? He concludes "four, or more." (Barney 1982).

from their common site of inscription, as happens regularly with the common "For-Sale" pamphlets stapled to telephone poles in which the seller's contact details are printed repeatedly in a partially cut list for easy tearing off by passing strangers. Once the contact numbers have been removed and are circulating, they no longer form a list.

Such are some of the bounds of lists, which occupy a middle zone between discreteness and unity. As Belknap suggested, a list is "a formally organized block of information that is composed of a set of members", where meaning is derived simultaneously from "the sum of its parts and the individual parts themselves" (Belknap 2004, 259). As I will touch on throughout this dissertation, this ambiguity of lists also accounts for both its unique capacities to combine multitudes of signifiers and participants together into one site of inscription as well as its semiotic and rhetorical limitations in making coherent unified statements as a singular text.

Most generally, I describe a list as a category, communicated. The most common first elaboration made regarding the operations of listmaking is that between the *selection* of which elements to include in the category, and the decision of how to *order* or arrange those elements, as Oxley described:

> The two basic structural principles of listmaking are (1) inclusion and (2) order. By the first, the lister decides what to put in and what to leave out; by the second, he decides which item will come first, which second, and so on down to the last item. From these simple principles the many different types of enumerations result. (Oxley 1982, 13)

In her study of Slavonic Christian catalogues, Izmirlieva also posited the fundamental import of *selection* and of *order* (Izmirlieva 1999, 16-18), where the operations of *selection* are in turn composed of qualitative and quantitative variants.

The "taxic qualifier" represents the qualitative determinant for which elements are to be selected for inclusion into the list, and it establishes perhaps the most salient aspect of understanding any list, the *whatness* of the list. Barney similarly made such a distinction in writing about the lists of Chaucer, and called it the "principle" of the list: "the 'what,' which a list explicates in detail (Chaucer's terms for giving a list are *reherce* and, less frequently, *undo*) its *principle*… Lists give details (things 'cut off') of principles… A list without a principle would seem bewildering if not pointless—we need to know what is being listed" (Barney 1982, 191). The *whatness* or "principle" of the list is also often the title or name of the list when one is given, as for example in "fruits on sale today: mandarins, pineapple, kiwi,…", in which case the title serves to prepare the reader for a list and provide its principle—and offers the possibility of standing in for the actual list when it has become well known enough to invoke by merely threatening.

Izmirlieva termed the *quantitative* aspect of selection in lists the "catalogic quantifier" (Izmirlieva 1999, 17), which establishes how many elements are to comprise the list. This quantifier may also enter the title or preamble of the list, as when it is designated by a certain numeral (such as "these are the *ten* Hebrew names of God", or "5 ways to get off work early"), or the quantifier may remain silent and just be implied in the multiplicity of elements listed. For several reasons I will explore in the following chapters, several genres of online lists tend to favour the titular presence of these "catalogic quantifiers" for their clear communication that the article or text in question is a list, and as a communication of the parameters it will follow. I have found such terms helpful in this dissertation,

though I refer simply to the "taxic qualifier" of the list as its "topic", and to the optional "catalogic quantifier" as a list's "quantifier".

Izmirlieva also distinguishes between "exhaustive" and "partial" catalogues as another aspect of *selection*, finding in this distinction an important marker for her contexts of religious and magic catalogues that aspire to totalizations of their domain and to bequeath upon their holder a consequent *control*. "Exhaustive" catalogues may use titular signifiers such as "All" or suggest in other contextual ways that the catalogue is exhaustive, as does *The 72 Names of the Lord* by invoking the number 72 and its implications of totality (Izmirlieva 1999, 26). "Partial" catalogues, on the other hand, often contain markers of partiality such as "These are a few of my favorite things" or Whitman's qualification "let me give you the names of some of these perennial blossoms", or in my own contexts, Top 10 lists (Ibid). For my purposes of engaging not only with existing textual lists, but with listmaking itself, categorizations regarding a list's partiality or exhaustiveness are always in flux, and I find such qualities integrated within the broader practices of the different sites of listmaking I explore; there are after all many different approaches to the "partial", and many encyclopedic assumptions packed into "exhaustive".

A related distinction is also that between "numerical" and "non-numerical" catalogues. This cannot, however, be seen to double the distinction between "partial" and "exhaustive" lists because an exhaustive catalogue need not be numerical, and a numerical catalogue may be—and often is, in my contexts on the web—explicitly partial (as for example is the list "10 Reasons Why You Shouldn't Work at Google" would not necessarily imply that those reasons exhausted the

paradigm and therefore foreclosed the set). Numerical catalogues often employ numbers that are perceived of as "round" and symbolically significant for that culture where the catalogue circulates, such as the 10 Hebrew names of the Divinity, the Kabbalistic catalogue of the 72, or the Islamic catalogue of the 99 "beautiful" names of Allah (crowned by the one ineffable, hundredth, name), each of which in its context operates on the notion of totality (*Ibid.,* 27-28). This dimension will emerge in my evaluative lists chapter discussing "Top 10" genres of lists.

Besides the co-ordinate of *selection*, there is that of *order* to consider. Izmirlieva generally distinguished between orders of "objective", "subjective", and "formal" criteria (*Ibid.,* 29-32). "Objective" orders follow external orders such as time (chronological arrangments), space (catalogic ekphrases of head-to-toe listing of body parts), and may include other sub-groupings. "Subjective" are left relatively unexplored but refer to an author's ordering of elements according to his or her own criteria of, for example, poetic significance. "Formal" criteria are those we usually associate with the concept of list orders, and include such orders as alphabetic or numeric. Formal criteria, as Izmirlieva clearly articulates, "are usually applied to neutralize the relation between position and significance and re-emphasize the equipollence of the class-members" (*Ibid.*, 31).

Gass found three principles of *order* in any list: lists made with no formal organizing principle, that is, arranged as "things simply come upon," such as one's adding items onto a shopping list; lists arranged by a particular principle, alphabetically, numerically, hierarchically, etc., "often so that things can be easily located"; and lists ordered by an externally imposed system, "as dictated by the

order of things themselves," such as table of contents which refers to the order of the book (Gass 1985, 117). These can be mapped onto Izmirlieva's three principles quoted above, of *subjective*, *formal*, and *objective*, respectively, except that Gass's order of "things simply come upon" does not quite encompass literary lists ordered for poetic reasons, and one may ask how it differs from "externally imposed" systems which one "comes upon". Belknap (2004) adapted Gass's distinctions of *order* by adding a fourth to Gass's set, which Belknap associated with "literary" lists, or those cases in which the list-maker chose a particular order towards some poetic or literary end (Belknap 2001, Location 206-222).

With respect to Izmirlieva's, Gass's, and Belknap's types of *order*, it should be noted that in the realm of computation and databases, these distinctions hold in fewer circumstances than they do in print. There are several reasons for this that will be explored, but, to note an example, the ordering of a Top 10 list is either a subjective, objective, or "literary" ordering principle in this arrangement, but I treat such lists, in chapter 3, as prominently "intersubjective" sites for discussion and argumentation. Furthermore, in most database and web applications, lists can be re-ordered into alphabetical, chronological, most-recently accessed, or other orders, which collectively transgresses the distinctions. As with *selection*, I find *order* an important co-ordinate in lists, but want to locate it within a setting where the list is being created through certain processes and towards certain ends rather than "read" into a given list a particular literary valency.

There have been several approaches posited for how to systematically typologize the study of lists and catalogues in the contexts of ancient anthropology

(Goody 1977), through medieval and renaissance religion and magic (Izmirlieva 1999), and various periods of print literature (Eco 2009; Barney 1982; Oxley 1982; Belknap 2004; Gass 1985). I will describe these approaches in order to add to my initial co-ordinates of *selection* and *order*, and to describe the settings in which listmaking tends to occur.

Manuscript Lists

While von Soden (1936, quoted in Izmirlieva 1999, iv) has called listmaking "the beginning of writing," and Eco (2010) has called it "the origin of culture," some of the most important points about ancient lists for my purposes have been made by Goody (1977), who looked at logographic scripts in the fertile crescent from about 2500 B.C. to 500 B.C. Goody generally argued that prior discussions of a "traditional-modern" distinction (Lévi-Strauss 1966) should be replaced by the "oral-literate" distinction, for two functions of writing—stable *storage* and the *decontextualization* of concepts from the context of immediate speech—together engender the abstract categorization and emergent systems of classification Levi-Strauss associated with the "modern" mind.[7] Distinct from the savage-modern or oral-literate argument, however, there are several points that Goody makes that I wish to draw out in listmaking: listmaking and classification, the shifting

[7] The distinction may call to mind, but should be distinguished from, Kittler's consideration of communication systems embodying the three serial qualities: storage, transmission, and computation (alphabet/WW1, then wireless radio and blitzkreig of German tanks in WWII, then computation and cracking of codes and Cold War) in (Kittler 1999).

commercial and governmental contexts of trade and listmaking, and the materiality of lists in corralling into a single site multitudes from across space and time.

Goody emphasized the role of writing in supporting *classification* through the functions of storage and decontextualization we associate with literacy: "The difference is not so much one of thought or mind as of the mechanics of communicative acts**,** not only those between human beings but those in which an individual is involved when he is 'talking to himself', computing with numbers, thinking with words" (Goody 1977, 12). Differences such as whether a tomato be considered a vegetable or a fruit, Goody argued, would not so much be impossible to discern in an oral context but would rather not arise in the first place, because it was the presence of such markers in lists, tables, boxes, and other diagrammatic inscriptions that added import to such decisions (Goody 1977, 105). Once such distinctions were set in writing, they continued their course; "the matrix abhors a vacuum" (*Ibid.*, 153).

Goody drew attention to how this classificatory valency can universalize classificatory decisions ("over-generalise"), such as when he considered the *Onomasticon of Amenope*, organized generally from celestial phenomena to terrestrial ones and found "dew" not as an obvious mediator, but inserted as the last celestial name: "In oral discourse it is perfectly possible to treat "dew" as a thing of the earth in one context and a thing of the sky in another. But when faced with its assignment to a specific sub-grouping in a list, or a particular column in a table, one has to make a binary choice" (*Ibid.*, 105). Such sensitive distinctions can be equivocated when writing in prose (an argument Goody does not consider at length

in his equation of writing and listmaking), but necessitates in a list or table either a clear distinction, or a new (potentially problematical) category of its own.[8]

Listmaking also ties in to contexts in which other forms of mixing takes place anew, as it did during the expanding of trade patterns and the need to communicate quantities to distant strangers. Early Sumerian writing from about 3000 B.C. roots from clay tags or labels being attached to objects, and such labels eventually came to stand for those objects in discussion and calculation. Tags on objects led to ledgers, consisting of names of things and their number.[9] As noted by Gelb (1963, 64), these trade origins of writing are tied to needs arising from a shifting public economy and administration, the rise of output of countries, and state-controlled canalisation of cities, which led to surpluses being fed into granaries and depots of cities. Lists were therefore important in redistributive economies, such as palaces and courts, where taxes, labour, goods coming in and going out, had to be accounted for. Drawing on Woodley, Goody also tied listmaking to the framing of things as sets of equivalents, and thus towards ease in trade among different groups, activities, and with differing resources: "Items with very different material properties are equated as contributions […] in this way accounting procedures can be used to develop a generalised system of equivalences even in the absence of a generalised medium of exchange" (Goody 1977). Other histories of lists and tables in relation to accounting such as those of Edwards (1960) and Campbell-Kelly *et al.* (2003) emphasized the role of quickly changing trade patterns upon the rise of new systems of accounting.

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[8] See Eco *(2000)* for an extended study of such a problematic case in *Kant and the Platypus*.

[9] Cf Izmirlieva's (1999) founding the catalog model on the two concepts of *name* and *number*.

A related but more general aspect of Goody's approach to lists I want to draw out is their materiality in providing a single site of inscription to mediate multiplicities over space and time. As an example, Goody describes a LoDagaa funeral with gifts coming in over a period of many days from visitors around a large area:

> People arrive from here and there, in the middle of a particular rite, and make offerings that differ from individual to individual depending upon specific factors such as the state of his granary, his chickens or his pocket, the state of his relationship with the deceased or his relatives, etc. [This activity] requires the application of intellectual skills which are only inadequately summarised under the heading of 'memory' or 'recall'… The fact that these events have been written down as they occur means that they can now be re-sorted according to different criteria, such as the name of the god, kind of ritual, or by calendrical position.... (Goody 1977, 85-87)

The ritual described above illustrates a unique aspect of lists as technologies that hold together in a centralized location the many marks inscribed on them from (potentially) multitudes of people, over distances, and over time, signifying a (potentially) multitude of things in one place for consideration by an individual or group. The very King-lists that von Soden, Goody, and others place as the root of history are accretive in this sense of being constituted by different people in different immediate circumstances over long periods of time. Lists enable an accretion of contributions to be centralized into a common material site, and therefore are particularly well-suited to contexts where pluralities of people, concepts, signifiers, goods, and events over space and time are profitably accounted for and managed by a single person or group. It is this aspect of "governmental" control that Werbin (2008) drew on in his Foucaultian assessment of lists that delimit and control populations.

In typologizing his concept of lists, Goody (1977) outlined three broad categories into which list varieties can fall, based on the kinds of things being listed: inventories, itineraries, and lexical lists. *Inventory* lists include any "record of outside events, roles, situations, persons, a typical early use of which would be a king-list" (Goody 1977, 80). *Itinerary* consists of any list that guides future action, such as a shopping list or recipe, a schedule, or a to-do list (*Ibid.*). The l*exical list*, rooted in Van Soten's *Listenwissenschaft* (Von Soden, quoted in Izmirlieva 1999, 5), is an inventory of concepts rather than things, "a proto-dictionary or embryonic encyclopedia" used mostly in the context of schooling, through copying and repetition (*Ibid.*). Goody's distinctions serve his purposes well—namely, exploring early lists and the role of literacy in mediating Levi-Strauss's "savage" and "modern" mindsets. However, Goody's categories of *inventory*, *itinerary*, and *lexical*, because they draw their identities from those of the objects they list, are given to proliferate in print and online settings where the types of things listed may not faithfully indicate the processes of listmaking behind the list; for example a modern cookbook, which combines inventory, itinerary, and a kind of cooking encyclopedia, would confound such a classification scheme. For these reasons, a different approach is required than categorizing lists based on the kinds of items they collect.

Lists of Print and Literature

The study of lists in print differs from studies such as Goody's, because they often frame their approaches with reference to the literary devices and genre structures indicative of a list's literary functions. In Umberto Eco's anthology of lists

in literature throughout the ages, *The Infinity of Lists* (Eco 2009), he distinguished most broadly between the coherence of a figurative, narrativistic or artistic aesthetic *form* on the one hand, and *the list* on the other, using examples from Homer's *Iliad* to illustrate each: the description of Achilles' shield and the catalogue of ships, respectively. Eco writes:

> [A] figurative work of art (as well as a poem or a novel) possess a *referential* function: a narrative told in words or images about the real or the imagined world. This is the narrative function of Achilles' shield. … Homer was able to construct (or imagine) a closed form because he had a clear idea of the agricultural and warrior culture of his own day. He knew his world, he knew its laws, causes and effects. This is why he was able to give it a *form*. There is, however, another mode of artistic representation, one where we do not know the boundaries of what we wish to portray, where we do not know how many things we are talking about and presume their number to be, if not infinite, then at least astronomically large. We cannot provide a definition by essence and so, to be able to talk about it, to make it comprehensible…we list its properties. (Eco 2009, 12-15; emphases in original)

Eco's distinction between form and list might imply a characterization of lists as typical of primitive cultures, those in the process of organizing their systems of knowledge, but Eco points to the ubiquity of lists throughout all ages and into modernity to suggest that "we are subject to the infinity of lists for many reasons" (*Ibid.,* 18). There are many contexts into modernity in which we are faced with infinitely numerous and unknowable realms of things, and that as a result we resort to lists.

Most of the studies of lists in literature frame them as various genres of *catalogue*. Recalling the first *OED* definition above of a list as "a catalogue or roll," the term is worth exploring in its own right. The *OED* circularly defines *catalogue* as "a list, register, or complete enumeration" but adds, in a second sense, "usually distinguished from a mere list or enumeration by systemic or methodological

arrangement, alphabetical or other order, and often by the addition of brief particulars….” This second sense is the one usually taken up, where the list is seen as the more general term, and the catalogue the marked term indicating a more complete, closed and intentionally arranged list that contains particulars beyond the names and orders of the things listed.

The term *catalogue* comes to English from the Greek *katalogos* and *katalegein*, meaning to enumerate, recount (*kata*-, meaning “down, thoroughly,” and *legein*, “gather, speak”.)[10] Izmirlieva (1999) suggested a similar distinction between lists and catalogue: “A catalogue sensu stricto is therefore not a random enumeration of words but a systematic arrangement of terms thought of as equivalent at a certain level of generalization**.** It both presupposes and constructs each time anew a particular order of things, according to which the multifarious and apparently disorderly world in seen as organized in neatly tabulated equivalence-class” (Izmirlieva 1999, 4).

A similar stance is taken by Oxley in his study of the lists of Homer, Whitman, and Borges, although Oxley takes the distinction further:

> A list, in my definition, is a creative act, while a catalogue is an act of knowledge. We list ‘things to do,’ or impressions brought on by an experience, or words in an attempt to describe. But we catalogue the historical fact of titles in a library, people at a funeral, heroes at a battle. …The greater the possibility of free play among the items, the closer the catalogue shades into being a living and creative act. (Oxley 1982, 3)

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[10] "cata- | cat- | cath-, prefix". OED Online. June 2012. Oxford University Press. http://0-www.oed.com.mercury.concordia.ca/view/Entry/28655 (accessed August 15, 2012). “catalogue (n.)”. Online Etymological Dictionary. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=catalogue&searchmode=none (accessed August 15, 2012)

For Oxley, then, while the catalogue "freezes itself and its items," the list is "a beginning" (Ibid, 4).

While such a distinction is useful as an act of categorization itself, it puts one in the position of referring to any authoritative and intentionally arranged list as a "catalogue," even if it were not otherwise nominally identified as such, and even if other aspects of a catalogue such as its completeness of subject matter or the inclusion of additional particulars were absent. Such would be the case, for example, with authoritative Wikipedia lists of innumerable narrow subjects, such as "Hugo award winners". The distinction also naturalizes the very questions of authority, agreement, order, and creativity that are most important to an understanding of list- (or catalog-) *making*, insofar as it may become unclear whether a catalogue is named as such by convention, or if it has been named as such by virtue of someone finding in it those qualities of authoritativeness, completeness, and order. Moreover, the very catalogues studied in the many studies of the catalogue form undermine those very qualities, as Barney shows in his study of Chaucer's very creative catalogues (Barney 1982). For these reasons, I will use in this thesis the more general term "list" unless "catalogue" or another term is already used to describe the example in question.

Both Eco (2010) and Belknap (2004) consider the pantheon of classical rhetoric from early literature as it relates to lists and catalogues, but find the field ultimately lacking in accounts of lists and catalogues. Eco (2010) found *enumeratio* in the context of *antonomastic* lists beginning in medieval literature, and links such lists to collections such as the *laudatio puellae* (for example, in the Bible's *Song of*

Songs), as well as to panegyric *or* encomiastic literature, forms of remembering, assessing, or celebrating the fallen or absent, such as Shakespeare's eulogy to England in *Richard II* (*Ibid.*, 222). These attributive and panegyric lists resonate in contemporary online lists; there is a connection that remains in contemporary online lists with such attributive, panegyric forms of assessment of people, entities, and events, present and past, as for example in the Facebook meme "25 Random Things About Me", and in evaluations of "End-of-year" lists as I will discuss in chapter 3. In other respects, the rhetorical figures available to listmakers are, however, more common in aesthetic lists, which empower listmakers to create lists to their own personal rhetorical aims.

Along these lines, Eco was most interested in considering how lists allow one to express things not otherwise expressible. He found throughout various genres of works an attempt to express the ineffable by resort to onomastic or antonomastic plenitude (*Ibid.*). Onomastic lists to express inexhaustible quantities of things or people, for example drawing on Homer's catalogue of ships in the 2nd book of the *Iliad*—says Homer, "the multitude exceed my song"—, or antonomastic lists such as those invoking the "rhetoric of enumeration" to attribute names or properties to things in a redundant manner. In these cases, lists are motivated towards suggesting an "infinity" or inducing a "vertigo" that only the excesses of lists can communicate. It is this quality that Eco found lacking of any concept or description in the traditions of rhetoric, as did Barney, who after amassing a list of rhetorical terms having to do with "gathering, heaping, summing up, enumeration", concluded that "[t]hese skimpy reasons merely indicate that the rhetoricians did not choose to

examine the uses of lists in general" (Barney 1982, 209). Barney added one justification for the importance of lists in argumentation, however: "If one dart in the list fails to hit the opponent, another may" (Barney 1982, 209). This latter strategy is evident particularly in evaluative lists, where publishers are keen to profitably draw readers in by listing items of which one or two may hit an opponent—in this case a web customer.

For Gass, lists are for writers who wish not to "hit" opponents, but who embrace the very joys of verbal plenitude: "Lists, then, are for those who savor, who revel and wallow, who embrace not only the whole of things but all of its accounts, histories, descriptions, justifications… Lists are finally for those who love language" (Gass 1985, 119-120). So it was when Eco said for example of Joyce and Borges that "they didn't make lists because they didn't know what to say, but because they wanted to say things out of a love of excess, hubris, and a greed for words, for the joyous (and rarely obsessive) science of the plural and the unlimited…[t]he list becomes a way of reshuffling the world" (Eco 2010, n324).

A general distinction that both Eco (2010) and Belknap (2004) make is that between "practical" or "pragmatic" lists and "poetic" or "literary" lists. A "practical" list is one such as a to-do list, card catalogue, dictionary, or census list, while a "literary" list refers to any list authored for poetic or literary effect, as those by Homer or Whitman mentioned above. The distinction is not as unproblematic as it may appear, however, which is signaled in the disagreement Eco raises with Belknap in considering the consequences of each kind of list. Belknap considers "practical" lists essentially *open*, for a list such as a shopping list has "no requisite

force of closure" (Belknap 2004, 418-431) and can therefore go on forever in theory as the shopper thinks of new items to add to it, while "literary" lists have aesthetic and formal limits of prose and verse to *close* them. Eco counters, perhaps out of a need to justify the emphasis he places on the "infinity" of many "literary" lists:

> It seems to me that the argument can easily be turned on its head: insofar as practical lists designate a series of things that, when the list is drawn up, are what they are and no more, then such lists are finite (and the telephone directory of the following year is simply a second list that differs from the first) whereas, immaterial of the constraints involved in poetic techniques, Homer could have extended his catalogue of ships to infinity and Ezekiel could have added new attributes to the city of Tyre." (Eco 2010, 116)

Clearly each form would seem to have practical and aesthetic limitations that could foreclose them, as well as possibilities for allusions towards "infinity" or "openness", which vary by circumstance, technology, and list-maker/list-user. More provocatively, Eco also considers the ways in which "practical" and "literary" lists intermingle or cross over. Eco points to Borges's list of animals from the Chinese encyclopedia becoming a "practical" list in the setting of an exam in a Latin-American literature course, representing for example the correct answer to the question "What was Borges's Chinese encyclopedia list of animals?" (Eco 2010, 371). Likewise, the series "Bacigalupo, Ballarin, Maroso, Grezar or Martelli, Rigamonti, Castigliano, Menti, Loik, Gabetto, Mazzola, Ossola" may seem to be a list of random names, while to some it can be recognized as the list of names of the Torino soccer team that died in a plane crash in 1949, but it has also become a mantra chanted by team fans, and thus, a "poetic" or "literary" list (Ibid).

I consider the very distinction between "practical" and "literary" lists interestingly problematic in the context of my three main sites of interest, where

lists meant to appeal to readers in various contexts waver along the continuum between a practical benefit to their readers, referencing things in the world, and reflecting an essential poetic form, as would a playlist of songs of some significance. Yet missing again from such an approach is the question of how the lists are made: with aims towards practical use, or towards expression? While the encyclopedic lists tend more towards referential practicality, and playlists more towards what is sought after here with the concept of "literary" (I might say, aesthetic), and while many of the evaluative lists in the middle section of this study draw on both aspects in a pragmatic fashion, the question of *listmaking* raises questions about the practices of creation rather than just those of reception.

Museums, Publics, and Democracy

Ancient and Medieval *Summae*, encyclopedias, archives, and other reference works feature recurrently in contexts of lists and listmaking for several reasons: because they are often created as collected fragments (James Murray and the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary* comes immediately to mind, with its overflowing pigeon holes of user-submitted word clippings (Murray 2001)); because such reference works are often presented as lists arranged in various orders that reflect a particular epistemology (the arrangements of Francis Bacon's text being one example; Diderot's (1986) alphabetical order being another); and because entries themselves can consist of lists and tables of data (the almanac being an extreme case, but also including taxonomic descriptions, genealogical histories, timelines, lexical descriptions, etc…).

The concept of the *museum* founds the connection between collections and knowledge, rooted in the classical Greek "dwelling of the Muses", as a kind of master-trope for *collecting* in the late Renaissance, and was intertwined with concepts such as encyclopedias, libraries, galleries, as well as being formative in distinctions between "public" and "private", as well as "social" and "intellectual" (Findlen 1989, 59). In a context where artefacts were introduced from the New World, where the Reformation had shifted orders of knowledge, and where the development of printing had publicized collecting outside of courts, universities, and churches, Findlen suggests that "the seventeenth-century natural philosopher, the creator of the new encyclopedia, was in search of a new model to explain a perplexing, increasingly illogical and pluralistic world" (Findlen 1989, 61–71). The result was various forms of collecting "as an archaeological enterprise in the sense that it reified scholarship by translating vague antiquarian and philosophical concerns into specific projects, whose existence was predicated upon the possession of objects" (*Ibid.*). As such projects diversified, various encyclopedias, catalogues, and compilations emerged as "microcosms" of the museum, revelling in "discontinuities" that had disconcerted prior scholars, but were now, in a new context, part of the publicization of print and thereby the "logical outcome of the desire to gather materials for a text" (Findlen 1989, 61–71). These Renaissance roots around the concept of the museum and various related forms of encyclopedic, public, archival and personal collecting reveal themselves in their shared themes of "collections management," which as Johnson notes, was more generally referred to simply as *selection* until the mid-20th century (Johnson 2009, Location 328).

Paul Valéry—although himself an unheralded listmaker (Rhyne 1996)—voiced the uneasiness he felt towards the discontinuities of museums, when he wrote that "I find myself in a tumult of frozen creatures, each of which demands, without obtaining it, the inexistence of all the others… A strange organized disorder spreads out before me." As technologies shift from the private collections and manuscripts to the printed page, and then to the database and webpage, the parameters of *selection* and *order* shift along with them, but as long as collections are conceived as fragments assembled into a common resource, they will reflect a certain order of things based on the political configurations of the project. The order of collections and lists always raises the question, "whose order"? Collections and lists must therefore be explored in terms not only of *selection* and *order*—as published artefacts—but also in terms of *who* is authorized to create and curate the museum, encyclopedia or gallery, who is able to contribute to them, and who can visit or read them, and in what ways, signalling the importance of the co-ordinate term in listmaking that I refer to as *participation.* I use the concept of *participation* to populate the roles of the listmakers as well as the list-readers, and everyone "in-between," in order to consider the role of listmaking in mediating among a diverse groups of differently empowered creators, contributors, supporters, and "consumers" of the list.

Lists are inherently democratic, Gass argued, because all items appear similarly and equally, suggesting for example that of the 1003 women on Don Giovanni's list, "presumably, all [were] loved equally by the list, if not by the Don" (Gass 1985, 121). Buell (1968) and Belknap (2004) similarly assess the listing

tendencies of the catalogues of American transcendentalist authors such as Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau. For both Buell and Belknap, these lists allow those poets and writers to formally incorporate transcendentalist democratic notions of plenitude, unity through diversity, and reader participation into their works in a way not possible in other forms.

White considers the list form in the post-modern literature of John Barth and others as a technique for reader interaction, where, for example in a series invoking 200 names of whores, "the reader is implicitly invited to add to the list and the generous white border provides room to do so" (White 1992, 82). These tropes of democracy and participation in listmaking recur in this dissertation: lists engage participation across a wide range of contributors by lowering the bar for amateur contributions to a level where nearly anyone can contribute or “vote” by suggesting an item, and they enable easy collaboration among participants because the item-level logic possible with lists provides an easy and built-in way to distribute workload without requiring collaborators to integrate contributions with each other. As I will explore in the next chapter, it is perhaps with such a notion of the democratic potential inherent in the list form in mind that Koepp (1986) can speak of a new “alphabetical order” arising in 18th century France work relations.

Finally, Eco connected lists to the marketing of the commercial sphere in the context of mass-media lists. Following Marx’s conception of capitalism, where “the wealth of those societies in which the Capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as an immense accumulation of commodities,” Eco traced the visual arrangements-as-lists of products in shop windows, trade fairs, galleries, and

modern department stores and malls, or looking at the lists of Chinese food menus with their numbered dishes (Eco 2010, 354-360, 374). In these cases of mass media and commerciality, unlike the lists of literature, "the technique of the list is not intended to cast doubt on any order in the world, on the contrary its purpose is to reiterate that the universe of abundance and consumption, available to all, represents the only model of ordered society" (*Ibid.*, 353). As I continue my study from print to the web, I will show that commerce can however take many forms, and can suggest different approaches to listmaking that will combine abundance with accounting, the group with the paragon, and chaos with order. Yet Eco makes mention of the web in this commercial context, while distancing from the order he found in the latter to stress again the "vertigo" of this "Mother of all Lists," the web, "which is both web and labyrinth" (Eco 2010, 360).

Most generally, lists play an important role in terms of creating key nodes through which we are led to apprehend a world as ordered a certain way, and we participate with lists because we wish to be brought together with strangers in juxtapositions of creating new compilations, old things in new contexts, new filiations from old categories, of knowing or experiencing more things, and maybe *all* things, or just as often, of experiencing fewer things, only the best, or the most recent, or the oldest. Lists can suggest "a world of hostile facts" (DeLillo 1985, 81), or a clear, logical, hierarchical "arboreal" structure, or they can wrongly imply order in a set that may be disordered, or take the form of a "transversal" of proper or former categories, in the model of a rhizome; that is, a list can "preserve fragments of order, express breakdown of order, indicate the beginning of new order" (Oxley

1982, 12). I try to capture these varied concepts in the co-ordinate of *rhetoric*, drawing on Kenneth Burke's meaning of the term as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (1969, 41)

These concerns about totalizations, fragmentations, chaos and order emerge especially at the close of each of my main chapters, in which through the lens of *rhetoric* and in drawing together the sum of my analysis I consider how the list as partly a collection of items and as partly a text in its own right navigates the role of writing a collection into being. Moreover, at the end of each chapter, I locate within the *rhetorical* tenor of encyclopedic lists, evaluative lists, and aesthetic playlists different paradoxical crises that each endeavours to overcome in different ways according to a certain listmaking *ethic*. Listmakers seek to paradoxically benefit from the perceived advantages of listmaking while aiming to achieve the full effect of the non-list textual counterparts in their respective domains; and lists always speak both in terms of their individuated members *and* in terms of the common ground for their collection. Using this literature to establish a methodology for studying lists tailored to my purposes, then, and having critiqued various approaches to creating a list typology based on the *kinds* of items being listed, or the *orders* exhibited by different lists, I draw on the co-ordinates outlined above of *participation*, *selection*, *order,* and *rhetoric* to inform and structure my research into my three sites of listmaking.

Sites of Listmaking

Although her study was focused on Christian lists, Izmirlieva argued in favour of a broad study of lists analogous to the variety of settings discussed above in which collecting and listmaking is prominent. She found that "the catalogue trope gravitates primarily toward three spheres of operation: science, religion and art" (Izmirlieva 1999, 44), noting that as what became science and literature gradually began to emancipate from each other over the course of the enlightenment, lists began to diverge into distinct areas:

> Science gradually monopolized normative and systematic catalogues in the capacity of heuristic instruments, repeatedly banishing from its discourses lists that manifest "literary" qualities: playfulness, redundancy, unpredictability and overt figurality. The opposite pole of literature, on the contrary, embraced odd, circumstantial and apparently disorderly lists that bring about a complex play with other tropes, thus maximizing the application of catalogues as rhetorical ornaments.(Izmirlieva 1999, 44)

I approach my listmaking sites informed by studies of the sociology and aesthetics of science in the second half of the 20th century, which have critiqued notions of "objectivity", and suggested that distinct areas of study are neither "silos" fragmented with incompatible values nor indicative of separate routes to "validity", but show evidence of establishing different practices with reference to various texts, theories, tools, and positions of power, and can be better understood as kinds of "intersubjectivity" with certain explicit processes of resolution (e.g. Kuhn 1996; Latour 1987; Daston and Galison 2010; Weber 1991; Habermas 1985; Shapin 2012). Accordingly, I describe "objectivity" in this context as a mode of "intersubjectivity" aimed at reaching, as Rorty described it, "unforced agreement" regarding a matter under discussion (Nelson, Megill, and McCloskey 1990, 42).

In the following chapter, I describe the "objective" systematic catalogues indicative of scientific knowledge and classificatory systems as they appear in reference works, emphasizing the continuity from the great 18th century encyclopedic projects through to Wikipedia and other sites claiming to collect *all* members of some category or to be the *definitive* catalogue of a class of items. Rather than include any list that enumerates the taxonomic particularities of flora and fauna, or any list that appears within a recognized encyclopedia, as examples of this list type, I delineate *encyclopedic lists* on the basis that I locate in them certain features along my four listmaking co-ordinates. I describe *encyclopedic lists* as evincing a *participatory* model that leverages the list form to draw distributed fact-based contributions from far and wide into the flexible epistemological construct of the list, with a core group of more committed participants focused on matters of pruning and editing the lists consistent with the *selection* and *order* co-ordinates. In turn, I characterize the *selection* and *ordering* as focused on creating neutral and complete orders of knowledge "proper" to a given cultural context. I finally describe a paradoxical *rhetoric* rooted in competing notions of the *fragmentation* and *totalization of knowledge.*

In chapter 3, I look at popularly circulated print and online lists such as "Top 10" or "Worst 5", or "Best of the Year" articles that I collectively refer to as *evaluative lists*. These lists assume the position that Izmirlieva describes above as "religion", but only insofar as they invoke public discussion over matters of how to evaluate the complexities of the world so as to move towards "the good life". Shapin (2012) argued that what is considered the often-maligned "objectivity" indicative of

science, and the "subjectivity" of aesthetics, represented by the classical Greek truism that "there's no accounting for taste", are better described as different poles along a continuum of "intersubjectivity." In the middle are robustly intersubjective areas of public discussions that "absent such arguments and discussions, we would not be able to recognize the fabric of our quotidian social life" (176).[11] Rather than emphasize *evaluative lists* as *ranked* in their orderings, or as typically engaging in the listing of artifacts of popular culture such as movies or "notable" events, I emphasize how these lists engage robust public argumentation and gather input from readers in a style I trace to the history of periodicals and consumer guides. I locate in these lists a model of *participation* based on drawing and engaging a readership, *selection* and *order* tied together by what I term a *tacit commensuration* of multitudes of experiences and tastes onto common grounds, and a *rhetoric* that paradoxically tends towards both incorporating the experiences and tastes of the many, while aiming to perform the more singular guiding role of acting as an "arbiter of taste".

In chapter 4, I look at the more "subjective" aesthetic *playlists* created to display, discuss, and organize music listening on sites devoted to discussing them, as well as on sites from which they are played such as iTunes, Rdio.com, or YouTube. Rather than argue that any list that appears on such a site is a playlist—which as I will show is not the case—I suggest that playlists reflect a certain configuration of

[11] The concept of "intersubjectivity" is perhaps most associated with George Herbert Mead and the link between "subjectivity" and the "social" (see for example Joas 1997; Biesta 1998), a project which Habermas drew on and extended (Habermas 1985). I do not intend it to link only this couplet here, but to bridge both "subjectivity" and "objectivity".

listmaking co-ordinates. First, I connect playlists to a mode of *participation* where the task is not as much to add items towards "completing" the list, nor to argue for certain arrangements of items, but to create or enjoy a playlist as an artistic endeavor where the sovereignty of the artist is respected and discussion is suggestive and personalized. I locate in playlists certain practices of *selection* and *ordering* based on various aesthetic tools that emphasize creating a pleasurable "flow" to the list. I finally place playlists within the paradoxical *rhetoric* of reflecting the many identities of their constitutive song or video items and reflecting the very personal and situated identities of the listmakers.

At the end of each chapter, I locate a strategy adopted by each, a certain *listmaking ethic*, that I suggest can be found in the attempt to resolve this dialectical tension. This *ethic* aims to maintain for these texts a condition of their textuality—that unifying, singular aim at the core of each of the encyclopedic project, the periodical feature, and the aesthetic work that makes it valuable as a text—while it aims to hold on to the benefits of the list form, which calls forth with promises of abundance, communion with others, and new combinations.

In identifying my three main sites of listmaking—*encyclopedic lists*, *evaluative lists,* and *playlists*—I do not wish to suggest that they encompass all lists; I would note as omitted in this dissertation many *to-do lists* helpful in daily tasks, many of the lists of literature alluded to in the literature review above, and several emerging digital list forms, such as those that tend to be called *timelines* in social media contexts, or those that are generated by *recommendation engines* that suggest new books or movies in commercial contexts, and there are certainly more still.

Instead, I focus on lists as "texts". The lists I explore are created, populated, and discussed with reference to the collections that they inscribe rather than, for example, private shopping lists that rarely escape in their short lives the clutches of their creators, or the algorithmic lists of recommendation engines that are often formulated computationally based on the prior behaviour of a user, and for the most part are not explicitly shared or discussed by others.

My sites of listmaking, in the "objective" realms of encyclopedic knowledge, the "subjective" aspects of aesthetic playlists, and my middle chapter focused on public argumentation and "intersubjective" debate, also resonate with conceptions of distinct "spheres" of values that emerged throughout modernity. Weber described processes of differentiation over the course of modernity, focusing on distinct *value-spheres* with their corresponding forms of reason: the theoretical reason of *science*, the practical reason of everyday legal and moral *decisions*, and the aesthetic reason of the *arts* (Weber 1991; Habermas 1985, 164–177; see also Harrington 2000). Such a tripartite distinction maps onto my three sites, although Weber's emphasis on the conflict between these *value-spheres* is not particularly evident in my research aims of understanding and characterizing various sites of listmaking.

Habermas also added to Weber's distinctions his own forms of differentiation emerging throughout modernization, in the form of a corresponding set of criteria for achieving *validity*. Through his "theory of communicative action", Habermas argued that the different areas of valuation that Weber described amounted to three distinct processes for establishing agreement through debate and discussion: *truth*,

represented in statements of fact; *rightness*, represented in commands and precepts; and truthfulness or *sincerity*, represented in artistic, expressive statements (Harrington 2000, 84–85; Habermas 1985).

While I draw from Izmirlieva's discussion of catalogues through science, religion, and art, as well as Weber's *value-spheres*, I do not argue here that Habermas's spheres of validity obtain in my different sites of listmaking. Rather than ascend to arguments about *truth*, encyclopedic listmakers emphasize established facts and expert claims; rather than focus on the *rightness* of selecting certain evaluative list items and certain rankings, the ethic of evaluative lists is rooted more in playful debate, and in the interests of engaging audiences; and rather than attempt to resolve debates occurring around playlists by resorting to assessments of *sincerity*, playlist participants tend to resist engaging in debates in the first place.

The proposed areas of study are also reminiscent of Hallin's "donut" model within journalism studies, of the topics available for media coverage, as elaborated in *The Uncensored War* (Hallin 1989). In this model, the smallest in a set of three concentric rings represents a small central "sphere of consensus" of matters commonly agreed to, while around it a greater sphere of "legitimate controversy" represents matters proper for public discussion and argument, and a large sphere represents outlying positions for the most part not amenable to public discussion. My sites of listmaking map somewhat onto such a tripartite model, in terms of *encyclopedic lists* emphasizing the establishment of scientific or classificatory consensus, *evaluative lists* encouraging debate and controversy, and *playlists*

representing a site of listmaking less given to either factual assertions or argumentation. Yet Hallin's model assumes certain normative orientations that bind the issue of particular spheres to different propositions about society and the media; *encyclopedic lists* are certainly not generally agreed upon already, as matters of consensus in Hallin's model are, while *playlists* do not resist public discussion for the same reasons presumed in Hallin's model, which is that they represent taboo or ridiculed *opinions* that Hallin argues are not deemed worthy of media coverage (*Ibid.*). In all these cases, models created to reflect matters of public discourse tend to emphasize the textually cohesive, authorial concepts of claims or opinions, while they struggle to describe discourses of collecting and listmaking, which gather many participants and contributions onto a single page.

In the chapters that follow, I also address the contexts of the web and related digital technologies, how we got there, and the literatures that have tended to be used to study and describe them. In theorizing between print, analogue, and digital cultures, I draw on the consistencies of approach described by Gitelman:

> I define media as socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation. (Gitelman 2006, Location 145)

This dissertation emphasizes the continuities inherent in certain of these structures of communication associated with the list form amidst technological and social change, and concomitantly I do not attempt to theorize at a general level the discontinuities associated with digital versus print and analog forms of media, as does, for example, Manovich (2001). Calling to mind Schumpeter's critique of Marx

that "social structures, types and attitudes are coins that do not readily melt" (Schumpeter 2012, 12), I rely on Hayles's concept of *intermediation* to structure both a search for consistency and to sustain questions about change:

> When literature leaps from one medium to another—from orality to writing, from manuscript codex to printed book, from mechanically generated print to electronic textuality—it does not leave behind the accumulated knowledge embedded in genres, poetic conventions, narrative structures, figurative tropes, and so forth. Rather, this knowledge is carried forward into the new medium typically…[in a] pattern of initial replication and subsequent transformation. (Hayles 2008, 58–59)

My focus in the chapters that follow lies in listmaking, in the context of lists understood as texts, and in the peculiar differences inherent in these practices as compared to those of writing and reading more prose-oriented texts. The differences I locate between print, analog, broadcast and the web follow a pattern of *expansion* in list topics, orders, participation, and rhetoric, rather than marked shifts. I suggest in my conclusion how an appreciation for the contexts and continuities of my sites of listmaking can inform web-based concepts around *sharing* and "participatory cultures."

Chapter 2

Encyclopedic Lists

> All dictionaries and encyclopedias must be flawed, but this should not concern us unless we look to them for what they cannot supply. The idea that the list can be neutral and comprehensive is the real problem.
>
> --Ramona Fernandez, *Imagining Literacy*

Introduction

The role of the encyclopedia and other reference works has always been to *select* and *compile* the "most important" knowledge circulating in books and other documents in the culture. The encyclopedic project in this sense is an operation of listmaking, for, to use Diderot's terms to describe the creation of the *Encyclopédie*, it meant to "assemble" knowledge that was "scattered" (quoted in Koepp 1986, 235). Listmaking is predominant in reference works not only because articles often include lists (lists of people, taxonomies of species, lists of places, etc…), but because the whole encyclopedia is a list in the sense that it is a collection of *concepts* deemed important for a well-rounded knowledge. *Encyclopedic lists* and *encyclopedic listmaking* attempt to collect all members of a category together so as to represent the 'totality' of a circumscribed area of knowledge in an objectively-ordered fashion. Encyclopedic lists engage expert and amateur participants in compiling complete collections of knowledge, they posit their contents as authoritative statements about the circumscribed area of knowledge, they are ordered alphabetically or in some other neutral way rather than by an overt editorial statement of value, and the

resulting rhetoric of the encyclopedic list is one that paradoxically mixes totalization and fragmentation.

In this chapter I will explore the links between the *encyclopedic project* and listmaking, with particular attention to the four registers of listmaking I have described in my introduction: participation, selection, order, and the rhetoric of the list as a whole. As I will show, *encyclopedic lists* emphasize: (a) an ethic of amateur *participation* aimed at completing the list; (b) a specific tenor of objective, authoritative *selection* that seeks to discern "proper" topics and list items; (c) an eschewing of the semiotic richness of thematic orders of knowledge as used in classical and medieval works in favour of a neutral, objective *order* that encourages flexibility and the ease of updates of new or changed knowledge; and (d) a paradoxical *rhetoric* of totalization and fragmentation that revolves around the impossibility of its various notions of "completeness." I will explore the nature of encyclopedic lists both in print in on the web—the latter in the online encyclopedia Wikipedia—through the different locales of *amateur science* since the 18th century, *encyclopedic literature* since the 19th century, and in print and web-based encyclopedic works to show a fundamental tension inherent in the encyclopedic project with respect to establishing authority, order, and completeness in a context of distributed and uneven contributions, competing orders of knowledge, and a changing world.

Wikipedia provides a privileged site on which to study encyclopedic lists because the site records the changes, discussions, deletions and additions to the encyclopedia, revealing how the metaphorical "master list" of articles that makes up

Wikipedia as a whole and the individual list-articles within Wikipedia engage in the tension described of mass participation, neutral order, and completism. Wikipedia lists draw out some of the core issues facing Wikipedia: How can a distributed effort speak with authority? How can a resource ever be "complete" and well-rounded in a changing and infinite world? How are we to order, categorize, link to, make available to search, and index the mass of items included in Wikipedia such that "objective" order, convenience, and better understanding of the subject material can be mutually maintained?

Methodology

My methodology in this chapter is to explore the encyclopedic and dictionary works themselves (e.g. *L'Encyclopédie, Encyclopedia Britannica, Wikipedia*) as well as secondary sources in the contexts of:

(a) how my registers of *participation, selection, order,* and *rhetoric* apply to the lists of encyclopedic and dictionary projects;

(b) the interplay of listmaking as a particular kind of authorial activity with the multiple types of activities entailed in encyclopedic projects, including the framing of the entire project itself, the collaboration involved in such large projects, the authoring of individual entries, and the reception of encyclopedic works.

The approach I take to do this will be one of discourse analysis of the texts, their technologies, and the social formations supporting and receiving such projects. I draw from Boczkowski (1999; 2005) a discourse analysis that takes into account

changing technologies, changing discourses from users/creators about those technologies, and a sensitivity towards how describing historical change in such a setting requires situating the claims made in terms of the conditions of possibility experienced by the actor in question. Boczkowski describes the changing nature of online newspapers in the context of a longstanding prototypical print model, and makes a point of maintaining an interweaving of technology and society even after the "document" had been posted or the emergence of an apparently dominant design or feature set, since changes occurring in this protean site thereafter continue to challenge interpretations (Boczkowski 2005, 10). Similarly, my study features technologies set against more static conventional markers (encyclopedias, dictionaries), and the challenge is to engage with the content, discussion, presentation, and interface technologies and structures at play throughout, while keeping an eye on the general shift of an "online" mode of authorship and its implications for listmaking.

My study involves the reading of Wikipedia articles, lists, user discussions, guidelines, "requests of comment," and essays, in addition to secondary sources about Wikipedia. Drawing on methods used by Giles (2005a) and Rosenzweig (2006), a comparison of 20 Wikipedia list pages and 20 Wikipedia article pages was carried out, matching them in pairs of similar topics (see Appendix A). The articles were selected by trial and error of looking for articles and lists that matched each other in terms of discussing similar topic areas, most often beginning by looking for lists rather than the more populous articles. Lists on Wikipedia were found by (a) browsing lists in Wikipedia that have been categorized as "lists"; (b) exploring lists

in the "Featured Lists" nomination discussion pages; (c) exploring lists in the "Nominated for Deletion" pages; and (d) searching using Google, and limiting searches to those on the English Wikipedia domain and to those that include the phrases "List of". Using mostly the methods (b) and (c) above, respectively, I also studied Wikipedians' notions of what makes a "Featured List" and why a list should be deleted from Wikipedia.

Drawing on methods used in other studies of the relationships between the culture of Wikipedia and its encyclopedic content (see e.g. Clark, Ruthven, and Holt 2009; Fallis 2008; J. Reagle 2008), I studied not only the lists and articles discussed above, but also various guidelines, policy discussions, requests for comments, and user pages, with attention to (a) the claims being made about how encyclopedic content should be selected and ordered; and (b) the references to both Wikipedia policy guidelines and, often more tacitly, to "prior" encyclopedic conventions and how those were used in Wikipedians' claims. These various pages and discussions were found by recursively browsing list-related guidelines (such as the "manual of style", the "notability" guideline, "Featured List" criteria), and pages posted to by users who were involved in list-related issues (such as user pages with list-related thoughts, requests for comments, specific deletion discussions).

In the Wikipedia lists and articles themselves, I looked at the content as it changed over time using the "History" feature, the discussion pages for the content, and various statistics for the pages including: the number of "users" who edited the page, the date of the initial edit, the number of words, the number of references cited, the number of outward links on the page, and the number of total edits done

to the page. These statistics are compiled by Wikipedia's "Page History Statistics" tool[12], except for the number of words on the page which was calculated by Microsoft Word, the number of references, which I counted manually, and the number of outward links, which I calculated using a browser plug-in tool.[13]

Reference Works as Collections

Several writers have explored the histories and epistemological-organizational aspects of encyclopedia, dictionary, and other major reference work projects, with an eye to how their compilation from multitudes of authors and sources are translated into authoritative texts, infamous across centuries by such titles as *Naturalis Historia*, *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers,* or *The Oxford English Dictionary*, among others (see Eco 1984; Koepp 1986; McArthur 1986; Yeo 2001; Fernandez 2001; Rockwell 1999; Headrick 2000; North 1997; Herman and van Ewijk 2009; P. Burke 2000; Stalnaker 2010; Blair 2010).

Beginning with the *summas* (or "sums" of knowledge) of the Middle Ages, reference works have betrayed in their very titles their statuses as "collections", and summoned different analogies for their acts of compilation (titles translated by McArthur 1986, 78):

> *Kitab 'Uyun al-Akhbar:* The Book of the Best Traditions
> *Chronica maiora:* The Greater Chronicles

[12] Like many of Wikipedia's features, this is a tool made by a fellow Wikipedia user with the username "X!".
[13] The tool is called "SEO Site Tools," for the Google Chrome for Mac browser.

Differentiarum libri: The Books of Differences
Disciplinarum libri IX: Nine Books of Subjects
Speculum triplex: The Threefold Mirror
Hortus deliciarum: The Garden of Delights
Ortus vocabulorum: The Garden of Words
Li Livres dou trésor: The Treasure Books
Thesaurus linguae romanae et britannicae: Treasure-House of the Roman and British Tongues

Dictionaries were rooted in the scholastic necessity of adding snippets of descriptions to difficult terms in copied text. The snippets began to appear in stand-alone lists that could serve the memory across multiple texts – what began to be called *glossae collectae* – and were originally ordered as the words were come upon rather than alphabetically (McArthur 1986, 76). With the elaboration of different kinds of such lists into the renaissance and beyond, a shift in terminology took place towards more precise terms for the various kinds of reference works being created, but there remained an emphasis on the diversity of the contents and the self-conscious role of the work as a *collection* (titles and descriptions from McArthur 1986, 78–79):

Alvearium (a bee-hive or honey-store)
Glossarium (an explanatory list, usually collected from other lists)
(h)ortus (a garden)
lexicon (a wordbook, a collection of *lexis* or words)
manipulus (a manipule, a handful)
promptuarium or *promptorium* (a store-house)
vocabularium (the words of a language, especially if listed in any way)
vulgaria (various "common things" of life or language)

Prior "encyclopedias"—the *summas* and *specuale* that date back to Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* in first-century Rome—were like current encyclopedias in the sense that they were collections of the available knowledge in their areas of focus, but they were organized thematically rather than by an alphabetical series,

and tended to be less systematic in their aims and construction processes. It was the proto-dictionaries of bilingual and then unilingual word-lists that lent to the encyclopedia a mold of an ordered list of roughly equipollent items.

Like Yeo does, Bolter describes encyclopedias as serving conservationist roles across the ebbs and flows of the availability of books in a culture, emerging during the proliferation of books and condensing their content, and keeping that knowledge available during a scarcity of books (Bolter 2001, sec. 1732–1767). Several lexicographers have argued that the current "dictionary" emerged, like the lists studied by Goody among Akkadian and Sumerian writers, in a setting of exchanges between newly mixing groups, in this case between scholarly users of Latin and an emerging class of vernacular speakers in Europe after the Middle Ages. McArthur describes the bilingual wordbook that initiated the switch to position the vernacular as the first column in the pair, and the Latin the second, created by the Dominican friar Geoffrey the Grammarian in 1440 (McArthur 1986, 82). These bilingual lists were created as reference aids in a context of newly mixing languages, and the mixing of Latin words into English (in addition to further mixing between vernaculars) became a long-lasting quarrel of authority over the English language from which the concept of the unilingual dictionary emerged, argues McArthur (89).

In a Renaissance setting where it became important to define what it meant to be "French", "Italian", or "Spanish", and often sponsored by national academies in a spirit of fixing the shifting regional dialects, the unilingual wordbooks became what we today understand as "dictionaries", with authoritative statements about all the *proper* words for a given language or culture (*Ibid.*, 93).

Thus it is that statements such as this one by Lord Chesterfield in his *Letter to the* World in 1754 could be made in support for Samuel Johnson's plan for a dictionary of the English language:

> I cannot help but think it a sort of disgrace to our nation, that hitherto we have had no such standard of our language (as the French); our dictionaries at present being more properly what our neighbours the Dutch and the Germans call theirs, WORD-BOOKS, than dictionaries in the superior sense of that title. All words, good and bad, are there jumbled indiscriminately together, insomuch that the injudicious reader may speak, and write as inelegantly, improperly, and vulgarly as he pleases, by and with the authority of one or other of our WORD-BOOKS...The time for discrimination is now come. Toleration, adoption and naturalization have run their lengths. Good order and authority are now necessary. (quoted in McArthur 1986, 97)

The shift, then, from the *glossae collectae* and bilingual Latin-first word lists of Scholasticism, to the reversed word lists for vernacular users, to the fixing of vernacular languages in authoritative, unilingual national dictionaries, could well be summarized using Lord Chesterton's particular words—as the imposition of "good order and authority"—and it marks the tenor of authoritativeness involved in selecting the items to be listed in these dictionaries and establishing their order of presentation. Together, these contribute to a totalizing yet fragmented rhetoric indicative of all encyclopedic listmaking because it is no longer motivated by a scholar's listing of difficult words, or a bilingual word-list's inclusion of common words to be referenced, but rather a Quixotic attempt to collect and fix *all* words of a language.

With the popularization of dictionaries in Europe, the term "dictionary" and their authoritative rhetoric began to be lent to those texts like the summas and larger "commonplace books" as they adopted the systematization and universalizing aims of the dictionary, though the more general term "dictionary" as applied to

concepts (as opposed to *words*) would be more frequently replaced with the term "encyclopedia" largely in response to the popularity and influence of Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia, or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* in 1728 (Yeo 2001, 120-144). The emergence of the term *encyclopedia* from the 1550's onwards, but especially in the great works of the 18th century, rooted from the Greek *enkyklios paideia*, meaning "recurrent or rounded-out training", "circle of learning", or "general knowledge" (Liddell & Scott). Several critics have raised the connection between the circularity inherent in the term and the totalizing aims of the genre (Yeo 2001; Fernandez 2001; North 1997). North (1997, 184) in particular mentions the unexplained jump from "complete circle of learning" to "complete circle of knowledge".

Encyclopedic projects produced several paradoxes, as Yeo notes, such as the universality of their knowledges in contexts of national sponsorship and individual editorial decisions, their collaborative creation by a "gentlemen of letters" while exhibiting the idiosyncrasies of particular peoples' life projects, and a paradox between the encyclopedia's role in representing different types of knowledge while itself becoming a "typos" of knowledge. Dolan (2005) discusses this development:

> [The encyclopedia became] a 'model' of knowledge, capturing a movement away from medieval compendia such as the Speculum Maius (ca. 1250) – something regarded as a 'mirror' of nature and divine order – and a turn towards a secular circle of knowledge, a 'course of education' in the liberal arts and sciences that gathered up all the latest knowledge in an attempt to restore what was lost and to record humanity's industry and progress. (Dolan 2005, 90)

The shift away from the divine order of the Medieval *summas* occurred notably within the context of the elaboration of science outward in all directions, with

naturalists finding and categorizing more flora and fauna, explorers tabulating more colonial lands, chemists, mathematicians, botanists, and so on, adding to the deluge of scientific printed material. This is the "classical" episteme that Foucault associated with the completion of tables:

> The profound vocation of Classical language has always been to create a table - a 'picture': whether it be in the form of natural discourse, the accumulation of truth, descriptions of things, a body of exact knowledge, or an encyclopaedic dictionary. (Foucault 1970, 310)

While Stalnaker suggests that the tensions involved in the widespread amateur and academic inscription practices of this era "would eventually resolve themselves in our modern distinction between literature and science" (2010, 6), the encyclopedic project born of this era indulges in the scientific classification (and its dissemination in letters and books) and other amateur work emphasizing the enumeration and tabulation of the proliferating categories of taxonomies, the growing findings of empirical measurements in increasingly specialist fields, the expanding concerns over geo-political borders, titles, and statistics, and so on. The "taxonomic urge" indicative of this era is an ideal match for listmaking, as Belknap noted:

> When it comes to authoritatively ordering the variety of things in the world, the scientific categorization of natural history is perhaps the epitome of the pragmatic list. The work of Linnaeus and others in classifying the components of the living world by means of language enabled an astounding variety of literal listings. Every species in Noah's Ark could be named, and subsequently the natural world could be gathered in professional and scientific ways. (Belknap 2004, sec. 1942)

It is no surprise, then, that the list is a ubiquitous feature of the encyclopedia, serving as it does to gather these items of knowledge for analysis, communication, and preservation.

Lists *in* Encyclopedic Works

The lists *in* the great encyclopedic and dictionary works of the 18th century onwards, and, to a lesser extent, *encyclopedic lists* in general, are of the "conventional catalogue" types that rehearse pre-established taxa or classificatory categories rather than establish "circumstantial" or "novel" categories. They are "exhaustive" rather than "partial," and can be, in either of their encyclopedic or lexical forms, respectively, more of either "onomastic" or "antonomastic," although in their comprehensiveness they tend to collect aspects of both.

While more commonly written serially in prose and separated by commas, colons, or series markers such as 1st, 2nd, 3rd…, lists within articles can be found frequently in the encyclopedic texts of the 18th century onwards.[14] These lists, unlike the lists of headwords that constitute the works, are not generally given a line break to create a vertical list. Although the writers of these early works, emerging out from a descriptive poetics that would soon bifurcate into separate realms of science and literature were not interested in, and could not technically manage, the inclusion of the many compendia of taxonomic lists and other data tables burgeoning at the time (Stalnaker 2010), they frequently included short lists and enumerations that contained well-established and important categories within topics: well-known species, geographical features, scientific classes, famous figures, and so on.

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[14] Likely due to space requirements; when dealing with the navigationally-important headwords, however, these works provided a line break to justify the headword along the left margin. (*cf* with Wikipedia where the navigationally functional linked terms in a list, and the lack of space limitations on a page, make the vertical list far more common.

For example, in the original Encyclopédie, under the headword "Métal", we find short listings of the six known metals (with some writing of a seventh), and three principal characteristics of metals:

> On compte ordinairement six *métaux;* savoir, l'or, l'argent, le cuivre, le fer, l'étain & le plomb. Mais depuis peu quelques auteurs en ont compté un septieme, que l'on nomme *platine* ou *or blanc. Voyez* Platine.
> Il y a trois caracteres principaux & distinctifs des vrais *métaux;* c'est 1°. la ductilité ou la faculté de s'étendre sous le marteau & de se plier, sur - tout lorsqu'ils sont froids; 2°. d'entrer en fusion dans le feu; & 3°. d'avoir de la fixité au feu, & de n'en être point entierement ou du moins trop promptement dissipés.[15]

The "Rois de Rome" entry lists several powers of the position, and covers each of the known kings.[16] The entry "Angleterre" lists all 52 provinces of England, the main rivers, items of food, minerals, flora and fauna, and so on.[17]

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* lists similarly conventional categories within its entries. For example, in the canonical 11th edition, the entry for "Dog" contains a listing of all the "points" of a dog, as well as an enumeration with images of the main breeds; the entry for "California" includes a list of the state's governors; the entry for "Missions" includes numerous lists of missions, societies, and locations; and so on. The Oxford English Dictionary, meanwhile, lists not only its headwords, but the multiple senses of the words, synonyms, provides examples of their usage, and frequently contains lists of important types, species, classes, examples, people, positions, locations, etc., in the course of its definition.

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[15] From the ARTFL *Encyclopédie* project; http://Encyclopédie.uchicago.edu/, headword "Métal".
[16] Ibid, headword "Rois de Rome".
[17] Ibid, headword "Angleterre".

The lists in reference works since the 18th century constitute a continuation of the listmaking that constitutes those works as collections of authoritative, sanctioned knowledge that, while limited in many ways in how much they could contain, provide complete courses of knowledge in a given culture within a context of shifting orders of authority. With the explosion of information that occurred concurrently with the large encyclopedic projects of the 18th century, it was increasingly difficult for even the largest encyclopedic projects to adequately perform the conservationist function of storing information from across so many books and documents. Herman and van Ewijk (2009, 169) argue that it was Diderot who first recognized that the rhetoric of completeness and totalization was a mirage, and that the *l'Encyclopédie*, in its alphabetically ordered collection of entries, was an "open form" to be compiled with authorial decisions about inclusions and exclusions rather than the classical or Medieval approach of collecting all available documents. The encyclopedia was, and still is, however, treated by Western civilization as a symbol of universal or total knowledge (Yeo 2001, 1).

The great encyclopedic and dictionary projects of the 18th century were treated as universal works in part because they were produced, Yeo argues, as "responses to what contemporaries perceived as a knowledge explosion, witnessed in the rapid multiplication of books and the pace of discovery in geographical exploration and in the physical sciences" (Yeo 2001, 7). And the encyclopedia delivered in this Enlightenment context, argues Yeo, for while it "remains a crucial element in most conceptions" of the Enlightenment, it also "epitomiz[es] the success of print capitalism" (*Ibid.*, xii). This explosion and response should seem familiar to

our own informational circumstances, as Stalnaker suggests with reference to Wikipedia: “our relationship to knowledge curiously resembles that of the Enlightenment describer: as individuals, we find ourselves cobbling together multiple fragments of a virtual encyclopedia that is collectively constituted but individually experienced by each of us in isolation" (Stalnaker 2010, 214). It is to Wikipedia, and the continuance of the encyclopedic project on the early-21st century web, which I turn to next.

The Wikipedia Project

The web has always possessed an encyclopedic quality rooted in its technical and rhetorical “word-wide” universalizing ideals, but it was the creation and surging popularity of Wikipedia during the first decade of the 21st century that established the web as the default platform for the next large properly encyclopedic project. Until then, the dominant mode of new media encyclopedism appeared to be the CD-ROM or DVD-ROM, which with its periodicity of regular updates released as new “editions”, better matched the prevailing authoritative, educational, and commercial expectations of encyclopedic releases, compared to the rather evolving and unstable collection of documents represented by the web.

Wikipedia was initially developed in January 2001 by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger as an added “little feature to Nupedia”, a kind of *pis allez* to jump-start the productivity of their stalled web-based encyclopedic project called *Nupedia*, which followed the more traditional development process of commissioning articles from

experts.[18] In the words of co-founder Larry Sanger at the time of its introduction, although the Wiki would be kept "absolutely separate" from the authoritative Nupedia project, it could be a "potentially great source for content", and a particularly high-quality Wiki article could, theoretically, "be put into the regular Nupedia editorial process".[19] Sanger added that they would instruct users of the Wiki "to try to make their entries resemble encyclopedia articles."[20] The Wikipedia project's pages quickly surpassed the production of its parent project, and in 2003 its founders took the Nupedia servers off line and incorporated its content into Wikipedia.[21]

Wikipedia functions on software called MediaWiki, which is itself built upon on the standard "LAMP stack" common across the web, so it should not surprise that Wikipedia functions very similarly to the web in general. Although the software has been through many iterations since its first development in 2002, it has kept stable a model of document creation and editing, which is similar to writing in hypertext, but with an added layer to simplify the syntax of often-used editing commands, such as the creation of headings, links, lists and tables, and so on. It has also maintained through the years a model of user collaboration on all documents in the encyclopedia, and the record-keeping of this collaboration, two aspects of Wikipedia that distinguished it from contemporary web practices in general, and that also

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18 http://web.archive.org/web/20030414014355/http://www.nupedia.com/pipermail/nupedia-l/2001-January/000676.html (accessed August 20, 2011).
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia (accessed August 20, 2011).

distinguished it from other encyclopedic projects ongoing at the time.[22]

Wikipedia Scholarship

Wikipedia has attracted much scholarly attention in the past few years for its encyclopedic aims and its structuring of encyclopedic authors and content—an undue amount of attention rooted, argues Reagle (2010), in the anxieties Western cultures have about educational matters.[23] Many studies are curious about the reliability, quality, and scope of its coverage with respect to other reference works (e.g. Rector 2008; Giles 2005b; Lih 2004; Voss 2005; Emigh and Herring 2005; Fallis 2008). There are also many shorter articles and posts engaged in a discussion of "bias" within Wikipedia (see McHenry, 2006). Reagle (2008) has characterized the intellectual history and prevailing guidelines that orchestrate Wikipedia's functioning. Much work in the second half of the decade since Wikipedia began focuses on the equity, social dynamics, and products of its model of mass collaborations (e.g. Iba et al. 2010; Wilkinson and Huberman 2007; Kittur and Kraut 2008; Adler et al. 2008; Arazy et al. 2010; Choi et al. 2010; Wattenberg, Viégas, and Hollenbach 2010; see also, for a more detailed breakdown of this literature, Niederer and van Dijck 2010).

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[22] Although more common as the decade progressed and social networks and other web-based collaboration sites became popular, the main model of authorship on the web is that of a document host (the 'author' and 'printer' in the print sense) and a document reader (the 'buyer' and 'reader' in print).

[23] For example, Facebook has received far less academic scrutiny than Wikipedia, argues Reagle, because, despite being more popular in many respects, social networks do not pivotally function in conceptions of education (Reagle 2010).

Scholarship also exists that addresses the formal and genre aspects of writing on Wikipedia. Rosenzweig (2006) found that in looking over 25 historical articles on Wikipedia that an ethic of "completeness" and "factualism" pervades the Wikipedia pages, qualities which resonate with amateur historical work:

> Wikipedia's view of history is not only more anecdotal and colorful than professional history, it is also—again like much popular history—more factualist. That is reflected in the incessant arguing about [No Point of View], but it can also be seen in the obsession with list making. The profile of FDR leads you not just to a roll of all presidents but also to a list of every secretary of the interior, every chairman of the Democratic National Committee, every key event that happened on April 12 (when Roosevelt died), and every major birth in 1882 (when he was born). (Rosenzweig 2006)

Rosenzweig attributes these qualities not only to the non-professional status of the contributors, but to "the lack of a single author or an overall editor" (*Ibid.*). Kittur and Kraut (2008) also found that articles featuring something of an "overall editor" in Rosenzweig's sense were of a higher quality than those with more egalitarian contributions from among its contributors. Clark, Ruthven, and Holt (2009) found different genres in Wikipedia including "lists, reviews, guides, news articles, events" among others (2009, 6), although they also found lists appearing as features of several of their genres, an indication of the complex role lists play on Wikipedia. The disjointed and list-like aspects of Wikipedia have more generally been commented upon in non-scholarly settings as well, such as by a blogger named Tom Morris who noted that "Wikipedia is pretty good, but often reads like a laundry list" (Morris).

Lists *in* Wikipedia

Wikipedia can be divided into, on the one hand, all the pages that represent "encyclopedic content", including all article entries on the site—which Wikipedia calls its "main namespace" or "mainspace" or yet again its "article namespace"—and all the pages that contain other discussions, debates, user pages, talk pages, pages nominating articles for deletion, pages nominating articles for "Featured Article" status, and so on, which are frequently called "non-mainspace" pages. Wikipedia's lists, however, all reside in the "main namespace" of Wikipedia with the articles, and are therefore required to meet the content guidelines set by Wikipedia, whether they are lists within articles (called "embedded lists", such as those of the presidents and key events that Rosenzweig found in the FDR article), or so-called "stand-alone lists" which include Wikipedia pages that are composed of a list of items of encyclopedic interest (such as "List of birds of Canada"), indexical lists of other articles on Wikipedia (such as "Index of conservation articles"), or even "lists of lists" that gather together on a page many lists on Wikipedia (or even the existing "List of lists of lists"). Yet Wikipedia also distinguishes several functions served by lists in a way that they do not for articles: lists have *navigational* functions, as when they are used primarily indexically to navigate to other articles or lists on the site; they are used *informationally*, as are all articles on Wikipedia to enlighten a particular topic; and they are used *developmentally*, to make visible areas of knowledge on Wikipedia that are not well represented by Wikipedia articles by

showing so-called "red links" of missing articles and providing lists of "related topics".[24]

Wikipedia most generally distinguishes within its "main namespace" between "articles" and "lists", but in fact the two are not automatically or naturally distinguished by the MediaWiki software—to write a new list is technically identical to writing a new article, and the MediaWiki software does not distinguish it from an article without editors taking the optional step of categorizing it as a "list." Wikipedia thus also holds both lists and articles to the same standards set out by its guidelines, including that they advocate "no point of view" (abridged in Wikipedia parlance to NPOV), that they be "verifiable" (V), that they contain "no original research" (NOR), and that the article and list topics are "notable" enough to warrant appearance in an encyclopedia (N), among other guidelines. As Wikipedia's manual of style puts it, "Stand-alone lists *are* Wikipedia articles; so are subject to Wikipedia's content policies".[25] Yet their *navigational* and *developmental* aspects confound: how is a navigational list of articles, or a developmental list of missing articles, to be assessed as containing a "point of view", or as being "notable", or as containing "original research"?

Lists are "a defining feature of Wikipedia," according to the recent explanatory text *How Wikipedia Works* (Ayers, Matthews, and Yates 2008), which adds that while they "can be about nearly any topic", they "should ideally be

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[24] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List (accessed August 20, 2011).
[25] Emphasis in original; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Manual_of_Style_(stand-alone_lists) (accessed August 20, 2011).

referenced". Wikipedia's guidelines both recognize the value of lists on Wikipedia, and they attempt to mitigate somewhat their lack of cohesion and their status as collections rather than wholes. While Wikipedia guidelines argue that lists work "synergistically" with other ways of representing information on Wikipedia, they also recommend that "in an article, significant items should be mentioned naturally within the text rather than merely listed."[26] Much of the tension inherent in lists on Wikipedia can be indicated in those phrases, "significant items," "merely listed," which together hint at an approach at the core of the Wikipedia project that encourages collaboration towards completeness while it is dissatisfied with the fragmented fruits of that labour.

Wikipedia guidelines make reference to several different kinds of lists, such as glossary, index, bibliography, discography, timeline, etymology, etc…, but lists can be categorized more generally as covering topics that are permanently framed as collections of items into lists, or *conventional* lists, and pages that discuss topics contingently framed as lists, due to their not being incorporated into prevailing systems of knowledge as a significant entity, *contingent* lists.

Encyclopedically *conventional* lists describe those that cover topics that are sanctioned as collections, and include all navigational lists on Wikipedia, which are intended as collections by definition, and all the conventional lists in paper encyclopedias, such as lists of presidents, birds, states, metals; that is, all lists of taxa, geo-political lists, and any other list intended to enumerate collections familiar

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[26] Ibid.; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Embedded_list (accessed August 20, 2011).

to existing orders of knowledge. Encyclopedically *contingent* lists, by contrast, describe the lists that enumerate items because there is no established concept that describes the phenomenon being described; Eco (1984) elaborated on the example of the platypus, which was described as a list of divergent properties ("mammal, that lays eggs, etc...") in an absence of a coherent place in the prevailing taxonomies of knowledge. Such lists on Wikipedia are more likely to be deleted, for they challenge the authoritativeness of the encyclopedia in representing "the sum" of knowledge, or else they become incorporated into an existing and more acceptable article on Wikipedia, or become a more prose-based article once they can be apprehended and written into a context, and given a history, with more and less important aspects and examples; examples include, respectively, "Lists of –cons", "List of MacGyverisms", "List of bow tie wearers". Yet the very rhetoric of the encyclopedia, that it *does* convey the sum of knowledge, spurs contributors of Wikipedia to establish, elaborate, and suggest items to be added to such lists, some doing the latter even as they argue for deletion of the lists. This, in part, begins to describe the precarious nature of the encyclopedic list and to suggest why so many lists are created and deleted on Wikipedia.

Lists represent the extremes of Wikipedia. The longest pages on Wikipedia are mostly lists: as of the time of writing this article, the longest page on Wikipedia (in terms of kilobytes) is "List of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd edition monsters".[27] If it were not for the practice of regularly splitting longer lists into numerical or alphabetical sub-lists (e.g., "List of…monsters (A-D)"), it is fair to

[27] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:LongPages (accessed August 20, 2011).

assume that *all* of the longest articles would be comprised of lists. On the other hand, the shortest Wikipedia pages are also lists – often short navigation lists to several options that a term may refer to, which Wikipedia calls "disambiguation pages".[28] Similarly, the articles with the most links, and especially links-per-word, are lists.

Lists also comprise many of the most unique, celebrated, and infamous pages on Wikipedia. While most stand-alone and embedded lists on Wikipedia present "conventional catalogues" that have a pedigree as an established category at home in an (albeit very large) encyclopedia, many more novel Wikipedia lists become celebrated as representing the fringes of the site's content: the "List of unusual deaths," "List of McGyverisms," and "List of common misconceptions" are three example of Wikipedia pages that have been listed themselves on popular web aggregator sites that discuss popular topics and trends on the internet.[29] In contrast to the non-list articles that regularly appear on web aggregators as celebrating the most unique or strange of Wikipedia pages, the Wikipedia lists have often had to survive—or have thereafter not survived in some cases—several nominations for deletion. The "List of McGyverisms," for instance, has had a turbulent existence on Wikipedia, having been nominated several times for deletion, losing some, being integrated as an embedded list into a main article about the show ("McGyver"), from which it was later pruned. As will be discussed in the section about *selection* and authority in an encyclopedic context, many lists have entered such a cycle of

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[28] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:ShortPages (accessed August 20, 2011).
[29] aggregator examples for these Wikipedia lists include digg.com, 4chan.org, and cracked.com, among others.

beginning as an embedded list, spun off as a stand-alone list, nominated for deletion, and having been reintegrated into an article as an embedded list.

Furthermore, lists represent, according to several editors involved in the relevant discussions, a large number of all the articles nominated for deletetion, for failing to fulfill Wikipedia's standards.[30] In perusing the long history of lists nominated for deletion, some trends become apparent. The first is that those discussing the fate of a list nominated for deletion rarely agree or even coherently communicate their divergent opinions on a framework for how to judge lists. Nomination for deletion discussions most-often use the following arguments in the service of voting for the deletion of a list: that it is an "indiscriminate" collection or one resembling a "directory" because the criteria for selection are not clear,[31] that it represents an "overcategorization,"[32] that it is "too long,"[33] that the collection or criteria implies a "point of view,"[34] that the "notability of items" in the list is insufficient,[35] that the "notability of the collection" itself is insufficient,[36] that items in the list are "unsourced,"[37] that the list may represent a "copyright violation,"[38]

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30 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Notability/Archive_42#Who_decided_that_lists_needed_independent_notability.3F (accessed August 20, 2011).
31 e.g. "List of churches in Edmonton"
32 e.g. "List of monarchies by GDP (nominal) per capita"
33 e.g. "List of female television actors"
34 e.g. "List of socialist countries"
35 e.g. "Characters of View Askewniverse"
36 e.g. "List of renamed products"
37 e.g. "List of songs about Oklahoma"
38 e.g. "PC World's "The 50 Greatest Gadgets of the Past 50 Years"

that the list may represent "original research,"[39] or that the list would be better represented as a "category" on Wikipedia.[40]

Of all the arguments for deletion, the least effective argument among lists nominated for deletion is the one suggesting that the list be deleted because the collection would be better represented as a "category" on Wikipedia. "Categories" on Wikipedia represent another dimension of the site that will be discussed in the section below on *participation*. The most damning arguments for deletion are those based on a clear "copyright violation," those that in their collection imply a "point of view", and those that address an insufficient "notability of the collection". As I will discuss in the section on *selection*, these arguments all revolve around insufficiently "encyclopedic" criteria for selection: the first is unclear, the second is biased, and the third is not "notable."

The paradoxical nature of encyclopedic lists explored throughout this chapter allows, through particular arrangements of *participation*, *selection*, *order* and *rhetoric*, a carefully curated collection to partake in a rhetoric of completeness and totalization. To achieve a rhetoric of totalization, the encyclopedic list must envelop many contributors and many sources, and it is to the different ways that encyclopedic projects structure collaboration in compiling the list that I turn to next.

2.1. Participation: Adding the Fact

While characterizations of Wikipedia often distinguish it from traditional reference works on democratic grounds—it is "the encyclopedia that anyone can

[39] e.g. "List of self-contradicting words in English"
[40] e.g. "List of Windows Vista topics"

edit"—large reference works have always involved in their production, and rhetorically invoked in their dissemination, collaborations from groups of like-minded people. Works such as the *Encyclopédie*, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, while belying any suggestion of equivalence among contributors, nonetheless involved large groups in amassing the wide and distant sources of information into final, published texts. The participation of encyclopedic listmaking is focused on compiling a "definitive" list of an extensive number of diverse and distributed—temporally and spatially—items, which leads in encyclopedic listmaking to a dynamic of a few highly involved editors exerting a strict editorial eye on *selection* while a wide but shallow sea of collaborators add suggestions, items, examples, and so on.

In *l'Encyclopédie*, Diderot emphasized an authorship based on a "society of men of letters and skilled workmen, each working separately on his own part, but all bound together solely by their zeal for the best interests of the human race and a feeling of mutual good will" (Rockwell 1999, 6; note is from Diderot, note 10). As Rockwell characterizes Diderot,

> He takes particular care to stress the authorship of the work, both by putting the phrase "society of men" in the subtitle of the Encyclopédie and in the opening pages of his article on the subject. This was in part to counter criticisms made after the publication of the Prospectus to the effect that no single person could be an authority on all the subjects to be covered, but also to stress a vision of cooperative intellectual work he inherited from Francis Bacon where likeminded men of letters could cooperate in the production of…one of the most influential multi-authored projects of the enlightenment. (Rockwell 1999, 6)

Like Wikipedia, Diderot intended *l'Encyclopédie* to keep track of authorship by attempting to have all articles signed, with the expectation that collaboration

required accountability in the authoritative context of the encyclopedia, but it also left much editorial control in the hands of Diderot and d'Alembert over the final content of the articles.[41]

In an even wider instance of mass collaboration, the production of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* under the editorship of James Murray, put out several calls beginning in the 1870's for readers in all English-speaking countries to submit slips of paper with instances of word usage from literature (Murray 2001, 178). James Murray worked in an outbuilding with its walls lined with 1029 pigeon-holes to hold the some 1000 new slips that would arrive daily, which contained usages of words found by amateur collaborators in several circumscribed (and, in some cases, intentionally published for these efforts) collections and epochs of literature (*Ibid.*). The *OED*'s participatory circle, it should be emphasized, was limited to such submissions of found artifacts directly sourced; contributors could not send in actual definitions to be published, or un-sourced submissions relayed by word of mouth. The OED also had trouble in receiving a balanced sample rate of submissions over the literature they suggested; 18th century, and more so, 17th century works were more rarely drawn from by contributors than the more common and enjoyed 19th century texts (Mugglestone 2005).

Yet in many ways the "amateur" submissions from the *OED's* production mirror aspects of Wikipedia's contributions: in both cases, most contributions are required to be directly sourced if they are to survive an edit by the page's more resident users. More generally, Wikipedia contributions tend to lack balance in all

[41] Despite these intentions, however, Blair notes that historians have been unable to determine all of the 140 or so contributors to *l'Encyclopédie* (Blair 2010).

these senses: swaying towards a large concentration of work on the site done by a small minority (about 0.7%) of users, article coverage tends towards unevenness, swaying more to the salient, accessible, or popularly-known areas of knowledge, and strong articles require steering from one or a few editors to address ignored areas and fit them into a large structure (Rosenzweig 2006; Clark, Ruthven, and Holt 2009; Kittur and Kraut 2008). This tradition of collaboration better explains in many ways some more popular models used to describe Wikipedia's structuring of participation towards building a large and reliable encyclopedic resource.

The theory of the "wisdom of crowds" has been invoked often in the context of Wikipedia, to explain the benefit of large-scale collaboration in encyclopedia building (Niederer and van Dijck 2010; Fallis 2008; Anderson 2006; Sunstein 2006). The prototypical example of the phenomenon is recounted by Surowiecki (2005), where in 1906, a group gathered at a livestock exhibition in Western England, and a prize was offered to the winner who could guess the weight of an ox. Francis Galton, studying the situation later, found that the average of all 800 guesses came closer to the correct answer than any one participant—within 1 lb. The theory of the "wisdom of crowds", however, requires that the task being performed by the crowd, and the crowd itself, have certain properties. The crowd must be large, independent, and diverse; a small crowd, one that follows a few leaders, or one that shares relevant characteristics that would bias its answers, is unlikely to be "wise" in the sense described, while the task should be one whose answers can be averaged over the crowd, either quantitatively calculated as the average of the guesses, or in the case of multiple-choice answers a vote can determine the best answer

(Surowiecki 2005, 4). Yet, as Fallis (2008) points out, most contributions on Wikipedia are not calculated as aggregations of all contributors in either sense; "Contributions to Wikipedia are added sequentially by single individuals" (*Ibid.*).

The notion that among the hundreds of thousands of Wikipedia contributors there is a well-balanced level of participation has been a well-known falsehood since Wikipedia's beginnings, with founder Jimmy Wales himself noting that from its inception through to 2006, 50% of the work on Wikipedia has been done by 0.7% of its users (Niederer and van Dijck 2010, 1371). These numbers are also indicative of other large collaborative open software projects (Niederer and van Dijck, 1371).

Evidence suggests, furthermore, that such a concentration leads, in violation of any assumption of the primacy of democracy to the quality of open-source projects, to better articles. Kittur and Kraut (2008, 43) found that a higher concentration of editing tasks in a small subset of the overall contributors improved article quality, particularly because these dynamics allowed a cohesive point of view and structure to be established throughout the article compared to more balanced groups of contributors. Yet, they also suggest that for other tasks, "such as proofreading an article or adding facts", articles "benefit from having many independent contributors" (*Ibid.*). Lists on Wikipedia, though not specifically explored by Kittur and Kraut, certainly benefit from "adding facts".

From the point of view of Wikipedians, there is a high level of collaboration, and thus a high cost, when venturing into paragraphs of text and integrating new points, or changing current arguments. As (Van den Heuvel 2010) has voiced it,

> Very often it is difficult to contribute because if I see a text in front of me and I don't like that text, I am not going to muddle with it. If I can just change one

> line, then yes, but sometimes, I think, 'I really have to rewrite this.' (…) So I just don't do it. (…) Sometimes I'd like to add something, but the narrative element stands in the way of being involved.

The modes in which Wikipedians collaborate to produce encyclopedic content are diverse, but in collaborating on Wikipedia lists, users have a natural place to "add" items to the list without "muddling" with text. For this reason, Wikipedia lists feature more users per word than do Wikipedia articles, a dynamic I will describe next.

Comparing Articles and Lists in Wikipedia

To ascertain differences in various semiotic, formal, and statistical aspects between Wikipedia articles and Wikipedia lists, I collected 20 Wikipedia article/list pairs matched for similar topics and age, where one was an "article" and the other a "list", for a total of 40 Wikipedia pages (see Appendix A). The Wikipedia page pairs are as follows:

Bestseller	List of best-selling books
web search engine	List of search engines
Emotion	List of emotions
Conspiracy theory	List of conspiracy theories
Economist	List of economists
Dieting	List of Diets
United States Constitution	List of amendments to the United States Constitution
Prime Minister of Canada	List of Prime Ministers of Canada
Top Gear (2002 TV series)	List of Top Gear episodes
Geographic information systems software	List of geographic information systems software
Alloy	List of alloys
Apollo program	List of Apollo astronauts
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders	List of mental disorders as defined by the DSM and ICD
Nazi concentration camps	List of Nazi concentration camps

The Simpsons	List of The Simpsons episodes
National Monument (United States)	List of National Monuments of the United States
2010 Olympic Village	List of 2010 Winter Olympics medal winners
Icelandic art	List of Icelandic artists
Politics of Latvia	List of political parties in Latvia
Pope	List of popes

As did Giles (2005a), I tried to sample articles across a diversity of subject areas to provide a sample of Wikipedia's range. I selected pairs of roughly similar Wikipedia topics to reduce the bias associated with certain topics, and to spur comparisons between the handling of similar content. I chose the articles and lists by browsing through Wikipedia and recursively searching for appropriate matches to the article or list being considered, rejecting pages that were drastically different in age (>3 years), which would have provided a competing rationale for several potential differences due to the accretive nature of several of the statistics being tracked (eg. number of users, number of edits).

According to some Wikipedians, the nature of the participation on list pages is different in terms of the kinds of activity among both light and core contributors to any given list, with one user suggesting that lists draw widespread but short contributions: "Lists are somewhat different from other Wikipedia articles. They are particularly subject to casual editing, and attract addition of items by novice editors."[42]

I found certain differences between how users participated in contributing to the articles and lists I compared. The articles were longer than the lists in terms of

[42] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Manual_of_Style_%28lists%29

word count (averaging 4453 words compared to 3074 for lists), which reflects the commonsense idea that prose articles contain more text than lists on any given topic. In my comparisons, I found that the prose-heavy articles put this length to work by being particularly more informative in terms of historical, narrative, and other contextual description of topics, while the lists would touch on broad contextualizing information in their prologues and other prose-based sections, if any were included. The blurbs accompanying list items, when present, also mitigated this relative lack of contextualizing information, but opportunities to enlighten readers more were passed up, presumably to maintain the modular system of list participation that keeps item blurbs systematic in their relative length and scope, and resists cohering some of the items with each other through textual connectives such as passages with shared narratives or particular relationships among only some list items.

Because Wikipedians make non-list articles so much longer in terms of word count than list articles, it should not surprise that they contained more endnote references (averaging 51 compared to 26 for lists), had more total users on average (1282 users compared to 713 for the lists), and contained more total page edits by their users (averaging 2837 compared to 1676 for lists). Yet when controlled for the differences in page length (word count), lists had more users editing the page (users per word were 0.4 for lists and 0.25 for articles), more edits on the page (edits per word were 0.81 for lists and 0.56 for articles), and more links to other content on Wikipedia and on the general web than the non-list articles (links per word were 0.244 for lists and 0.196 for articles).

These findings suggest that Wikipedia lists concentrate more highly their users, editing activity, and links for an article of a given length of text compared to Wikipedia articles. My comparisons support the notion that Wikipedia listmaking practices, like those of James Murray's in reaching out to the masses to contribute word usage excerpts during the making of the Oxford English Dictionary, excel at engaging a high number of users in making short, factual contributions and providing references to other sources on Wikipedia and the web, when compared with non-list textual passages of similar lengths.

Yet, perhaps surprisingly, the lists that draw the most users to suggest items and generally engage with them are those most likely to be deleted, moved, or considerably bolstered by more context—the more *contingent* lists. Many *contingent* lists can be found in the sections collecting all lists nominated for deletion, where Wikipedia users discuss whether and why particular lists might not follow Wikipedia's standards, and thus might need to be deleted, moved into an existing article, or considerably edited. Browsing these lists, I found many instances in which users cannot seem to help themselves, even while discussing whether to "delete" or "keep" a list, from suggesting missing items, noting favourites, or generally engaging in some way in a listmaking fashion. For example, a user who nominated for deletion "List of post-Ellen American television episodes with LGBT themes" on the grounds that the "post-Ellen" delimitation was an example of trivial "overcategorization" also added, in an apparent non sequitur, that the list "didn't

even include" items from the program "Queer as Folk".[43] While lists on Wikipedia in general attract users into the process of completing them, it is the lists on the fringes of encyclopedic authority—the *contingent* lists—that, in part due to the difficulty of a main editor to oversee their completion in a quick manner, attract distributed and repeated suggestions for additions and deletions.

Lists vs Tagging (i.e. Wikipedia "Categories")

Decisions to delete an article from Wikipedia, as with most other decisions in Wikipedia, are carried out through discussion on the site by normal Wikipedians, and are initiated by any Wikipedian "nominating" an article for deletion. In browsing the discussions Wikipedians have about whether to delete an article or not, one rationale that emerges regularly—but is precluded by accepted Wikipedia guidelines, when those are invoked—is the argument that a list should be deleted and replaced by the *category* feature built-into Wikipedia.

Categories on Wikipedia, unlike articles or lists, are not in the "main namespace" of Wikipedia, and thus do not share a requirement that they conform to Wikipedia's encyclopedic content guidelines, but they provide a way to create a "category" and "put" Wikipedia pages (articles or lists) into them. Categories are like lists insofar as that when viewed, they show collected Wikipedia pages that have been marked (or in more common web parlance, *tagged*) as belonging to some common category. However, while a list is populated with items when a Wikipedian

[43] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Otto4711/List_of_post-Ellen_American_television_episodes_with_LGBT_themes

edits *the list,* Wikipedia *categories* by contrast are populated automatically by the MediaWiki software any time an editor adds a small line of code (or *tag*) to the page or pages that they want placed in that "*category*." The distinction is akin to two options for dividing a group into teams in recreational sports: a group can be divided up by someone deciding the matter, who creates a list for each team and writes members' names on one or the other; or the group can be divided by writing team names on several small pieces of paper, putting them into a hat, and passing them around for each person to select, categorizing each member as belonging to whichever team is written on his or her piece of paper. The first localizes the categorization activity on the list; the second localizes it on the members. The former is listmaking as I consider it in this dissertation; the latter is known as *tagging* on the web. While most Wikipedians refer to the latter process through its *categories* feature, I will refer to it here as *tagging,* noting that while the former term emphasizes the listing of the tagged items on a category page, and the latter term, *tagging,* emphasizes rather the act of marking an item as belonging to a certain *category*, the two on Wikipedia go hand in hand.

Wikipedia guidelines accept both lists and tagging, and neither option should be used as an argument to preclude the use of the other, but due to the uneven motivations and familiarity with the guidelines characteristic of Wikipedians, the argument to delete a list and simply use the tagging feature is a common one. In a discussion over the deletion nomination of "List of Nokia products", one experienced Wikipedia editor responded a "replace with tagging" argument with a

recitation of the Wikipedia policy supporting both list pages and category pages,[44] but also noted that:

> "[L]ists are much easier and less time consuming to maintain than categories. Categories require tagging or untagging potentially hundreds of different pages, with server and download delays for each and every page. Updating the items on a list do not have those delays because they're all on the same page.[45]

The distinction between lists and tagging points to how accessible each nexus of categorizing activity is to the person (or other agent, as in this case both human effort and computer networking effort were invoked) making the decision to categorize.

A first question, with either "lists" or "tagging" is, "who makes the decisions to include an item in either?" In the case of Wikipedia, the answer to both instances is: "anyone", so it is possible to put items in lists and to tag items into categories either way. A second question, however, the point made by the user above, is that of locality or convenience: that is, is a person focused on and keeping local to a specific list, and making decisions to include and exclude multitudes of items from that list? Or is the person focused on an item that may have multitudes of tags she or he would like attached to it? In the former case, a list allows for easy adding and subtracting of multitudes of items; in the latter case, a "category" system (in the Wikipedia sense) allows for the adding and subtracting of multitudes of tags from a specific item relatively easily.

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[44] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Categories,_lists,_and_navigation_templates

[45] The Transhumanist 06:56, 3 January 2008 (UTC), "List of Nokia products?"

Lists localize the collection of multitudes into a central location, and thus give those authorized to participate in the listmaking a nexus of control over that activity, provided that they can access the locality of the list. Tagging localizes the activity of categorization at each item to be tagged, and thus provides a convenient system of categorization when the item to be categorized is more accessible to the agent making the categorization decision (or when that item is *identical* with the agent making categorization decision, as when we are concerned with how we are personally categorized and collected in everyday life)—which, also, makes it a more convenient system any time the categorizing person or entity is involved in working with multitudes of categories on a single item.

The distinction also touches on the concerns over the authority and control granted to an entity that can make lists of other people. Werbin (Werbin 2008) explores this capacity for lists to serve "governmentality" in the Foucaultian sense because lists are technologies by which centralized power can efficiently manage categorizing decisions on a distant multitude. By functioning without a necessary marker upon the very members of a list, the list form as I've distinguished it here from tagging lends itself to situations in which the very members of a list are not aware (since they are not necessarily "tagged" or otherwise marked) that they are being listed. As a recent Canadian television investigation into the secret 1950's government *PROFUNC* program put it,

> Secret lists are among the basic building blocks of national security. The trouble in lists are that people who end up on them rarely know about them, or what the people who record their names ultimately do with them, who they share them with. (Anon. 2010)

The relationship between lists and the authority of government power, then, revolves around the *authorizations* that members of a list have to that list in terms of knowledge about it, access to it, and control the contents of that list. The establishment and distribution of access to and authorizations for listmaking can adopt a democratic valence, but because lists fix the locality of the whole collection or category on a single website rather than distributed across the member items, lists favour categorization and management of the list at a distance from its member "items" (see Werbin 2008 for an elaboration of this critique pertaining to Nazi population lists and contemporary no-fly lists).

However, a system focused on democratically allowing potential list members to access, and possibly control, their *own* multiple categorizations in different areas lends itself better to the tagging system because the site of categorization in this case is localized or identical with the individual and his/her/it's many and multiply overlapping categorical possibilities. Wikipedia lists, while open to participation from all in terms of which items to include and exclude from the lists, nonetheless create small terrains—the list pages—that focus participants on this process of including or excluding items from the list. The Wikipedia "category" system of tagging, by contrast, still creates antinomies because it is also open to participation from all members, but in the Wikipedia context of encyclopedic contributors who tend to be interested primarily with a circumscribed area of focus and thus "close" to those articles day-to-day, it affords more efficient editing of which categories each of those articles belongs to. If one were to start from the democratic assumption that one has the authorization to determine one's

categorization for oneself, then the ideal system to effect that configuration of power is the tagging system rather than by endeavouring to edit lists.

The encyclopedic project, however, has little to do with the efforts to democratically distribute control for one's own characterization and categorization, as is dramatically evident by the displeasure some infamous personalities have demonstrated in struggles over their own Wikipedia pages. While the tagging system has its benefits for those focused on the multifarious categories that a given Wikipedia article may or may not belong to, the encyclopedic project is predominantly one of listmaking, of exerting from a centralized location based around the list itself a system of participation that populates the list according to the authoritative norms of the encyclopedia, and that provides for readers a powerful reference function that leverages from that same nexus of power. As will be discussed in the next section on *selection*, however, the norms of selecting encyclopedic content as a process of listmaking are rendered problematic when that content, in turn, is comprised of lists.

2.2. Selection: Encyclopedic Authority and the Notability of Lists

Encyclopedias have always emphasized the operations of selection. Zimmer (2009, 97) reminds that "only certain privileged information was included in the contruction of the encyclopedia", and Fernandez (2001, 55) characterizes the "philosopher encyclopedist" as "an expert who creates the boundaries and selects the items for collation into a whole, creating a list".

In his history of reference works, Collison describes a "mystique" possessed by

reference works that allowed them to resist contestations of authority, by the Church, academy, or state, relative to other smaller, singularly-authored, and less ambitious works of the time could get away with: "...the offending encyclopedia always appears to have enjoyed a privilege of comparative immunity that no individual author would have gained" (Collison 1966, 5).

This occurred for several reasons, but most revolved around the fact that the works—Collison used the example of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*—were such voluminous collections from multiple authors over such long periods of time that potentially offending aspects were lost in the totality of the work, with a *renvois* in an article about political systems that pointed only years later to one about abuse of power, or an article about corrupt clergy in colonial countries that described abuses of power more familiar to those closer to home. For his part, McArthur links the reverence for these works to the "quasi-sciptural or classical quality" they inherited from their progenitors (1986, 106). Yet, notwithstanding critical descriptions, suggestive *renvois* references, or blatantly incorrect statements of fact, reference works also attract a particularly unique kind of critique and contestation of authority proper to the genre. Perhaps less concerned with the descriptions and connections made by the works, contestations of the authority of reference works are most powerfully exhibited around questions of *what makes the list* and what does not; that is, of *selection*.

While editors of dictionary compilers, at least since Murray's democratic approach to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* have resisted the characterization of their role in normative, prescriptive terms, opting instead to frame their goals as

capturing the usage of language in the culture, dictionary and encyclopedic projects are often received as authoritative statements about what words and things are sanctioned as proper for that culture, and criticized on these narrow grounds.

For example, when *Merriam-webster's Third New International Dictionary* of the early 1960's was attacked, it was not for aspects of definition or etymology, but for the very inclusion in the list of certain words. For Wilson Follet, writing in *The Atlantic*, "vulgar" words not deemed proper to an English dictionary were being authorized by the editors: "the fact that the compilers disclaim authority and piously refrain from judgments is meaningless: the work itself, by virtue of its inclusions and exclusions, its mere existence, is a whole universe of judgments, received by millions as the Word from on High" (quoted in McArthur 1986, 140). A related stance is that of granting the works the authority to redefine the list of proper inclusions in a language in spite of any disagreements, which are powerless in the face of the authorial tenor of the reference work, as was voiced by Norma Isaacs of *The Louisville Times* (October 1961): "The net is that we have a new dictionary and it will become the accepted authority, despite all the literary hassles that will ensue" (quoted in McArthur 1986, 140).

In another example of the same critical phenomenon in an encyclopedic setting, Morris Wolfe critiqued the *Encyclopaedia Britannica's Fifteenth Edition* from a Canadian perspective, in a 1974 *Globe and Mail* piece. Wolfe writes:

> It's difficult to understand the reason behind the Fifteenth Edition's inclusion or exclusion of any given Canadian subject. Three of Canada's Prime Ministers have separate entries in the Macropaedia: Laurier, Borden, and King. But why three? And if only three, why Borden and not Sir John A.? If the Macropaedia has entries on Bobby Hull, Gordie Howe and Bobby Orr, why

> not Rocket Richard and Jean Beliveau? Why is not one Canadian artist included? (Wolfe 1974)

One imagines that if all literature were limited to such list-based critiques, key questions of literary significance would be confined to issues such as how many of the crewmen in *Moby-Dick* Melville ought to have been named, and whether any of the harpooners should have been categorized as Christian (both of which, incidentally, warrant discussion on the Wikipedia page for the book).[46]

Another aspect of dictionary and encyclopedia compilation that emerges in contestations of authority is the question of *whose* encyclopedia or *whose* dictionary it is. In a common move, Wolfe segues to this question from his question of inclusions and exclusions: "But in fact about half the 'worldwide community of scholars' contributing to Britannica is American; another quarter is British" (Morris Wolfe). The contestation of encyclopedic authority is often based on selections, and those selections in turn implicate an often multitudinous and distributed effort of questionable equivalence.

Wikipedians exhibit the same concerns about the authoritativeness of Wikipedia articles as do traditional encyclopedia makers—Wikipedians and Wikipedia policy in fact regularly make reference to traditional expectations of what should be in an encyclopedia. Although Wikipedia defines *its* encyclopedia as different from those prior works in some respects, such as "Wikipedia is not a print encyclopedia, and won't run out of space", and that Wikipedia is also a sort of almanac, biographical encyclopedia, and news source of developing events,

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[46] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Moby-Dick#.22.5BH.5Darpooners...all_non-Christians.....22

Wikipedia has developed guidelines for what constitutes a "proper" topic for inclusion in an encyclopedia. In terms of selecting which topics ought to be included in Wikipedia, the most prominent guideline is that the topic be *notable*.

Wikipedia defines as *notable* any topic that has received "significant coverage" in "reliable sources", and it has applied that guideline to lists in the same language: "If a topic has received significant coverage in reliable sources that are independent of the subject, it is presumed to satisfy the inclusion criteria for a stand-alone article or stand-alone list".[47] Wikipedia has elaborated the *notability* guideline to be tailored to different areas of focus, for example recognizing that the notability of a book must be discerned differently than that of an event, or a living person differently from that of a television program. Yet Wikipedia struggles most with the question of *notability* when it comes to lists, including both *which lists* to create, and *which items* to include in the lists. In completing the lists, Wikipedians struggle between the encyclopedic urge to enumerate *all* items, and the urge to enumerate only those items *proper* to an encyclopedia. In authorizing Wikipedia's lists themselves, Wikipedians emphasize the encyclopedic propriety of the topics of the lists—of the categories being enumerated—and they struggle when a list is either transparently proper for an encyclopedia by existing as a published list elsewhere, or when a list makes a questionable, novel, or circumstantial collection of items that are otherwise, were they collected into a more conventional list, encyclopedically sanctioned. In what follows, I will describe these competing tensions and paradoxical stances, first around the guideline of *notability* as

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[47] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Notability

discussed in *a Request for Comment* from 2010, and then around the guideline that good lists be *comprehensive* as articulated in Wikipedias "Featured Lists" criteria.

Request for Comments (*RfC's*) are common on Wikipedia policy discussion pages, serving to gather community consensus on matters of policy, and they frequently result in changes to the tenets and wording of policies on the site. A *RfC* was begun in response to consistently high rates of the creation and deletion of stand-alone lists on Wikipedia, and it was aimed at defining more precisely how *Notability* was to be applied to lists. The problem with applying *Notability* to lists is, first of all, that it is unclear what is being tested for notability: if the precise list itself *as an artifact or a published list* is tested, it would pass for example Billboard 100 list and Nixon's enemies list as lists receiving significant coverage in reliable sources, but would exclude almost all the lists on Wikipedia; if the *category* or *group* that the list collects is tested, it would pass for example a list of American astronauts as a notable group that has been covered as such, even though an already-concocted *list* of them may not have; or, if the *concept* behind the category or group is tested for *notability*, it would pass not only lists of astronauts, but also, presumably, lists of calculators, lists of dentists, lists of elementary schools, and so on, each of which has been considered notable enough a topic to warrant an article in Wikipedia even if individual instances or examples of them rarely share such notability; or, finally, if each of the items included in a list were tested individually for *notability*, it would pass only lists that contained only notable items, which would exclude most lists on Wikipedia.

The *RfC* concluded, with no support for the last option, limited support for the second-last, and a spirited but minority support for the strict first option, opting for the second option—to require that the *category* or *group* being listed is *notable* for having received significant coverage *as a group* in reliable sources, even if not all the items listed are notable, and the coverage does not necessarily extend to an artefactual or published list as such. In the quirky language of Wikipedia RfC's, one of the participants summarized as such:

> We found a compromise between the notability of X (too lenient) and notability of List of Xs (too strict) to make it notability of Xs. It's something I agree with in spirit, as frustrating as it is to find the right wording.[48]

The variety of interpretations considered above have not emerged from happenstance by Wikipedians; *notability* of non-list articles more straightforwardly asks that the topic of the article be notable, but determining the seat of "topic" in a list confounds. In addition, since Wikipedia sets its community guidelines by following rather than prescribing community behavour, many different kinds of lists on Wikipedia—especially those intended primarily for navigation through the site—run afoul of one or another of the interpretations of *notability*. Furthermore, as articulated by a particularly active member of the *RfC* who supported the strict first position above (and who received a community ban from the site as a result of his intransient minority support of that position), several other interpretations of the *notability* of lists unintentionally violate other Wikipedia guidelines.

For example, creative collections of novel lists can arguably violate the Wikipedia guideline that articles not contain *original research* or findings that are

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[48] username Shooterwalker, 3 December 2010 (UTC), at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Notability

not echoed in reliable sources. To quote this user:

> Creating entirely new or novel lists based on editorial opinion is original research in my view, since the creation of lists without any externally verifiable rationale is an entirely novel and original list topic that has not been already published by a reliable source.[49]

This position led the user to argue that only those lists that are deemed notable *as existing or published lists* existing in reliable sources already, be deemed to pass the *notability* test. Two other participants in the *RfC* put the matter clearly in a short exchange:

> I guess I'm still not sure what this gets us. Were people really insisting that "**Delete**: sorry, you have these perfectly good third-party sources talking about Green Bats of Japan, but we couldn't find a source about a List of Green Bats of Japan"?
>
> Absolutely, that's why its an issue.
>
> Wow, I had no idea.[50]

On the other hand, as several respondents in the *RfC* pointed out, the "no original research" guideline on Wikipedia does not apply to all research done in the service of writing or editing an article, which always involves some research in terms of collecting reliable sources and checking facts. In fact, as another commenter suggested, a competing concern is that lists that heeded the "no original research" interpretation suggested by minority user above, and that therefore existed elsewhere as published lists, would in turn violate Wikipedia's own *copyright* guidelines since they would be word-for-word copies of published texts.

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[49] user Gavin Collins, 27 March 2010 (UTC); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Notability/Archive_42#Who_decided_that_lists_needed_independent_notability.3F

[50] users Shooterwalker and Mike Cline, 25 August 2010; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Requests_for_comment/Inclusion_criteria_for_Lists#A._Proposed_language_changes_to_WP:N

That such problems abound with respect to encyclopedic lists attests to the implications that lists are fraught with when they are deemed to have the authority of the encyclopedic project behind them. On the one hand, authorizing the list in question for inclusion in the encyclopedia requires authorizing some aspect of the list, the category that it enumerates, and/or one or all of its members. On the other hand, an ideally-authorized list defies the encyclopedic convention of *summary*—and, arguably, the laws of *copyright*—by including a list as published elsewhere. The boundaries of the authoritative space of the encyclopedia therefore lie somewhere within the field delimited by lists: a space where there is room to summarize the external sources, and where there is some room for research that compares different sources to select the members of the *authoritative* encyclopedic version of the list, yet, throughout, where the notability of the list itself, and thus the very reason for its inclusion in the encyclopedia, is established with reference to trusted external sources.

While the "Featured Articles" section on Wikipedia's main page is one of the most visible aspects of the site, touting as of this writing 3,350 "Featured Articles," the accompanying "Featured Lists" section nearly matches it with 2100 recipients.[51] Featured articles and lists are meant to represent, as the guidelines for each similarly word it, "our very best work."[52] The "Featured Lists" program began in May 2005 as a response to the difficulty that even Wikipedia's best lists had fared in passing the criteria for the popular "Featured Article" program created two years

[51] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_articles ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_lists
[52] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_list_criteria ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_article_criteria

earlier.[53] The "Featured Lists" criteria were based largely on those for "Featured Articles", "but with necessary modifications."[54] Some of the paradoxes of listmaking on Wikipedia are drawn out by the different assessment criteria in choosing the "best" lists.

While nearly identical, the first modification to Featured Lists criteria that differentiates them from those of Featured Articles is the addition of a proviso that the list be "Useful", meaning, it "covers a topic that lends itself to list format by bringing together a group of related articles that are likely to be of interested to a user researching that topic."[55] The distinction is a reference to the navigational functions of lists on Wikipedia; an article, while it should be informative and include links to other relevant articles, is not required for Featured status to serve as a navigational guide for someone researching that topic. As one user put it, "The important thing about an article is the prose—the wikilinks are a useful extra feature. With lists, the items on the list are the thing."[56] Other Wikipedians suggested during discussions for Featured Lists nominations that there are lists whose items do not have their own Wikipedia articles (such as "Chicago Bears seasons") or, as is common for "Timelines", lists that do not generally collect resources commonly helpful as a group to a researcher (such as "Timeline of peptic

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[53] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_Signpost/2007-04-30/Featured_list
[54] Ibid.
[55] http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Featured_list_criteria&oldid=13881784
[56] username Tompw, 13 January 2007: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Featured_list_criteria/Archive_1

ulcer disease and Helicobacter pylori").[57] Such lists can nonetheless represent, at least in their nominators' eyes, pages worthy of "Featured" status.

Another distinction that evolved as Featured list nominations and discussions accrued was around the requirement common to both Featured Articles and Lists—that the page be "Comprehensive". While initially the two criteria were word-for-word copies—they both read: "Covers the topic in its entirety; does not omit any major facts or details"—the *comprehensive* requirement proved more vexing in the case of Featured Lists. The problem is that a comprehensive list that does not omit any items often begins to conflict with other guidelines, which users brought up over the period of several years' of Featured Lists nomination discussions. Comprehensive lists will often include items that, as mentioned above, do not have their own Wikipedia articles, resulting in a list of so-called red links. Comprehensive lists can conflict with sourcing requirements; as one user put it, "there is a tension between requiring completeness and requiring verifiability," because a complete list will often surpass published sourcing, using as an example the list "Locks on the Kennet and Avon Canal".[58] Comprehensive lists can also conflict with the length guidelines for Wikipedia articles, meant to keep page loading times appropriate (it is actually concerned with size in kb). Finally comprehensive lists can conflict with the criteria that Featured content be "Stable", where its "content does not change significantly from day to day".[59]

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[57] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Featured_list_criteria/Archive_1
[58] Username ALoan, 3 October 2006; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_talk:Featured_list_criteria/Archive_1
[59] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_list_criteria

In addressing these problems, the "Featured Lists" criteria began a bifurcation of sorts on the issue of "Comprehensiveness" into what can be seen as two addressees, one concerned with (a) the *items* being listed, and one with (b) the *topic* or *category* of the list. The "Featured Article" criterion on "Compresensiveness," by contrast, consists of one line that has been relatively unchanged through the years.[60] Furthermore, within each sub-section, there is an equivocation of sorts on the issue of comprehensiveness, asking for example that the list provide "at least all the major items and, where practical, a complete set of items; where appropriate...".[61]

The paradoxes of making encyclopedic selections in the context of lists are also evident in Wikipedia's manual of style for lists. Under the "common selection criteria" for creating a list, it mentions the following:

- *Every entry meets the notability criteria* for its own non-redirect article in the English Wikipedia. … This standard prevents Wikipedia from becoming an indiscriminate list, and prevents individual lists from being too large to be useful to readers. Most of the best lists on Wikipedia reflect this type of editorial judgment.
- *Every entry in the list fails the notability criteria*. These lists are created explicitly because most or all of the listed items do not warrant independent articles: for example, List of minor characters in *Dilbert* or List of paracetamol brand names.
- *Short, complete lists of every item that is verifiably a member of the group*. These should only be created if a complete list is reasonably short (less than 32K) and could be useful (e.g., for navigation) or interesting to readers. The inclusion of items must be supported by reliable sources. …[I]f a complete list would include hundreds of entries, then you should use the notability standard to provide focus the list.[62]

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[60] The Featured Article criterion reads: "comprehensive: it neglects no major facts or details and places the subject in context";
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_article_criteria
[61] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_list_criteria
[62] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Lists_(stand-alone_lists)

This collection of divergent standards for list articles has no counterpart in non-list Wikipedia articles. While the first points to a desire to collect "encyclopedic" items, partly to spur navigation, and the last points to a desire to create "encyclopedic" content through collections, the middle criterion points to a "completist" encyclopedic urge to address the things the others leave out, to include *everything* in the encyclopedia, even those items that do not belong in an encyclopedia.

Elsewhere, Wikipedia guidelines seem to acknowledge the Borgesian nature of listing on Wikipedia, with calls for restraint:

> The potential for creating lists is infinite. The number of possible lists is limited only by our collective imagination. To keep the system of lists useful, we must limit the number of lists. Lists that are too general or too broad in scope have little value. [63]

Selection is a fundamental operation in listmaking, and in the encyclopedic context, it must negotiate with the paradoxes that result from an encyclopedia's authoritative policing of its inclusions, for the propriety of an encyclopedia's selections and its authority go hand in hand, and the encyclopedic ambition to encapsulate *all* aspects human knowledge, for an encyclopedia is a definitive account, a complete circle of learning. These competing desires emerge in the kinds of *selection* authorized when creating and populating encyclopedic lists in such a way that a list, or the master list of the whole encyclopedia, is to be composed only of "proper" or "notable" items, and that these items must also be "all" items. What is less paradoxical is that sooner or later, despite efforts that usually span several decades, the list must be published, and it will include and exclude items that are

[63] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:SAL

contested. While encyclopedic selection inspires an authority that speaks of the great aims of society, the "sums of human knowledge", the lists must finally fit within the bounds of printed publications and downloaded web pages, and maintain a semblance of authority while the next definitive collection is prepared.

2.3. Order: Neutrality and the Alphabetical Series

Another key aspect of the encyclopedic list genre is its approach to order. In a chapter entitled "The Art of Knowing Everything", John North argues "it is through its *ordering* function that an encyclopedia often makes its strongest epistemological claims, even when order is not a very conspicuous quality of such works" (North 186; emphasis in original). Encyclopedic orders of knowledge have, since the late-Enlightenment birth of the encyclopedic project, moved away from the proto-encyclopedic orders that systematically mapped out contents according to an overarching scheme, such as Bacon's distinctions between "memory", "reason", and "imagination", and have since emphasized neutrality and an equivalence among items in the collection. As such, encyclopedias have avowed an alphabetical order as a way of neutralizing the inherently biasing aspects of any order, as well as an appreciation for the ease of lookup on readers' behalves and the streamlining for compilers and publishers ability to add and subtract items within the volume without requiring a reconfiguration of an entire epistemological-organizational structure. As Izmirlieva noted, "Formal criteria for ordering are usually applied to neutralize the relation between position and significance and re-emphasize the equipollence of the class-members" (Izmirlieva 1999, 41).

In adopting an alphabetic ordering of articles, encyclopedias stopped modeling themselves after the "tree of knowledge" and began to appear more like, as Koepp put it in her study of the *Encyclopédie*, "a pile of leaves" (Koepp 1986, 237). The shift away from thematic orders of encyclopedic knowledge was fraught with concerns about the randomness and de-contextualization inherent in the alphabetical series: Pawley notes some contemporary critics who argued that alphabetical ordering entailed an abandonment of the encyclopedic search for "an orderly view of the circle of knowledge" (Pawley 2003, 276), while the *Encyclopaedia Britannica's* preface criticized the "folly" of communicating science under "various technical terms arranged in an alphabetical order", which lacked the coherence of "the very idea of science": "Where is the man who can learn the principles of any science from a Dictionary compiled upon the plan hitherto adopted?" (quoted in Yeo 2001, 179).

In his prospectus of 1750 for the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot planned a thematic system adapted from Francis Bacon, with its hierarchical values, "branches" of learning, and he made an effort to justify the divisions and their contents (quoted in Koepp 1986, 236). D'Alembert, for his part, in his "Discourse" volume that accompanied the *Encyclopédie*, included such a thematic outline for the encyclopedia, for example ranking employments hierarchically from the most honoured to the more less honoured, and indicating the more lowly forms with a dismissive "etc..." (*Ibid.*).

As Burke (2000, 94) suggests, encyclopedic orders can be seen as "expressions or embodiments of a view of knowledge and indeed a view of the

world". The view of the world within which the *Encyclopédie* was released echoed with the "zero degree of taxonomy" of alphabetization, a kind of articulation of equality among list members that discursively mirrored a sense of *egalite* in the populace (Charles Porset, quoted in Yeo 2001, 25). James Fuchs argues in the context of Vincenzo Coronelli's earlier alphabetical encyclopedia, *Biblioteca Universale* (1701), that Coronelli's decision to adopt an alphabetic order was similarly motivated:

> The topical encyclopedia became for him a symbol of all the hierarchies on earth that he opposed and correspondingly, he thought that by arranging his encyclopedia alphabetically, he was striking a symbolic blow against them. The alphabet was the great leveler. Religious matters would not be ranked above secular ones, mechanical skills would not be placed below intellectual ones and articles on princes would appear side by side with articles on peasants. (quoted in Headrick 2000, 163; see also Zimmer 2009)

The alphabetical organization was, to quote Ernst Cassirer, "equal and yet still orderly" (quoted in McArthur 1986, 108). It is with this notion of the symmetricality inherent in list elements in mind that Koepp (1986) can speak of a new "alphabetical order" arising in 18th century France work relations, concurrent with the publication of Diderot and Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. Only such an order, Koepp relates, would allow "mendiant" to precede "noblesse," and "chaircuitier" to come before "clerc" (Koepp 1986, 238).

A symbiotic account that McArthur also forwards is that alphabetical order came about, starting with wordbooks and concordances in about 1600, in part as a result of a familiarity engendered over 100 years, and continuing beyond, with the use of the printing press, which required of its practitioners an ease with alphabetical order in working with the stacks of movable type (1986, 77). While

first making appearances as indexes relegated to the backs of texts, and included almost as an afterthought second to the more epistemologically informative thematic orderings featured by the texts, readers increasingly made use of the lists as they became more familiar with the ordering principle. By the time of the 1852 release of Roget's *Thesaurus*—a tour de force in thematic organization that taxonomized the words of the English language into different categories—the popularity of the index in the back was such that it eventually shifted the text into an alphabetical list of words that included taxonomic categories for each, rather than a taxonomic organization of English words that included an alphabetical index (McArthur 1986, 121). The thematic structure, McArthur notes, had the effect of "hard "facts" like birds, beasts and animals vanishing almost from sight under headings like *volition* and *extrinsicality*" (*Ibid.*).

The alphabetical index in the back, meanwhile, listed the "facts" plainly, and thus provided a navigational function inherent to the it, since it required only foreknowledge of the alphabetical order rather than that of the taxonomic system authored by Dr. Roget. As Isaac Watts suggested, it offered the new benefits of encouraging "consultation, rather than sustained reading" (quoted in Pawley 2003, 120). The alphabetical order thus also helped to make what we now call reference works easier to approach and navigate without a full immersion into their systems—that is, to "reference".

In a related argument made by several scholars of reference works (e.g. Zimmer 2009, 101), the alphabetical ordering also eased the creation of reference works in the printing age by simplifying the integration of new knowledge into

subsequent versions of printed runs. While new inclusions in a thematically ordered collection might distort carefully created categorical boundaries and require significant reworking—it might require in Yeo's words significant "implications for traditional doctrines in long treatises" (Yeo 2001, 25), the inclusion of a new entry in an alphabetical series requires only, perhaps, the exclusion of another of similar-length, if the publication size is to be maintained. Although, in an effort to limit the number of plates needing change, additions often spurred a critical eye towards candidates for deletion on the same or on neighbouring plates. The alphabetical series enabled, then, the somewhat paradoxical phenomenon of the printing-press-era encyclopedia that must contain all relevant knowledge while enabling easy additions and deletions from the list a rate that printing runs dictate.

Alphabetical organization of dictionaries and encyclopedias accommodate changing and contingent knowledges by allowing the accretion, substraction, and re-ordering of items without the need to fix new knowledge into a permanent, systematic schema, suggest an equivalence among the items included and thus leave to the reader the task of establishing a program for making sense of the whole, and allow users to quickly navigate to specific items with knowledge only of the alphabetical order itself. A side-effect of such an approach, however, is that the neutral ordering of knowledge gives us a model of authoritative encyclopedic knowledge as morselized into discrete elements, singularly titled, and decontextualized from related concepts.

Order on Wikipedia

Order within lists on Wikipedia emphasizes the same qualities of epistemological and organizational neutrality that lent to the dictionary and encyclopedic lists their tenor of objectiveness, sense of equality among items listed, and their ease of updating the list without requiring major epistemological commitments. Encyclopedic lists on Wikipedia are ordered neutrally—alphabetically, chronologically, numerically—or, when an established system of categorization exists, such as scientific taxonomies or geo-political divisions, they are grouped categorically and ordered neutrally within those groups.

Most lists on Wikipedia are ranked alphabetically, and lists that are not created initially with an alphabetical order or some other of the systematic orders mentioned above are quickly converted to it. Chronological order is common in Wikipedia lists that feature media products such as movies, television, or music releases, lists of other consumer products where age features strongly in the product's valuation such as computers or athletic shoes, and in *timelines* of events. The style guide for stand-alone lists recommends chronological order from earliest to latest except in cases where a list is frequently updated with new items, such as the list of "Deaths in 2010", in which case reverse-chronological order emphasizes to the readers the most recent items.

Numerical orders are also common on Wikipedia, and are at times used similarly and sometimes in combination with alphabetical lists. For example the "List of Mathematical Articles" is ranked numerically and alphabetically by article's

first numeral or letter, whichever the case may be, starting with 0-9, then A-Z. However, numerical ordering is more often used to rank quantities when an appropriately authoritative and *notable* list mandates such a quantitative ranking. These are sometimes called "lists of superlatives" on Wikipedia, and emerge when Wikipedians create encyclopedically-sanctioned collections of quantitative extremes on different areas, listing the "longest", "tallest", "fastest", etc. in technology, culture, business, and so on. For example, the "List of Highest-Grossing Films," "List of tallest buildings in the world", and "List of heaviest people" all rank their defining quantities from highest to lowest, while "List of smallest fish in the world", "List of shortest people", and "List of NFL teams with fewest points scored" order their elements from lowest to highest quantities.

Such quantitatively ordered lists would seem somewhat discordant with the encyclopedic ideals of neutrality of order, and they do cause pause among Wikipedians; I will discuss in the next chapter on evaluative lists how these types of lists are used to traffic between encyclopedic and evaluative genres. Such lists are regularly nominated for deletion on grounds that tend to critique the notability in external sources of such rankings. For example, the "List of best-selling albums worldwide" was nominated for deletion on the grounds that the category it enumerated, some number of the "best-selling albums worldwide," was not discussed in reliable external sources as a notable group, and the calculations required to populate the list were unclear and inconsistent.[64] In the ensuing discussion some sources discussing such a category were offered, several competing

[64] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/List_of_best-selling_albums_worldwide

criteria for inclusion were suggested (including shifting the quantifier from some defined number of best-selling albums to a floor system that included any album that sold more than 20 million copies), and the list was finally spared from deletion.

Another example of problematic ordering on Wikipedia is the "List of longest-lasting empires," which was nominated for deletion twice by Wikipedians, who opted to keep it the first time but delete it the second.[65] The person who nominated it for deletion argued that there was not a proper rationale for calculating the length of time an empire lasted (nor a clear definition of "empire"). Interestingly, another list exists which is strikingly similar in several respects, the "List of Empires". "List of Empires" is formatted as a *sortable table*, but its native order, as it initially appears to the user who does not re-order it, is as an alphabetical series based on the name of the empire. Another column lists the "duration" of each empire, and this column is sortable—meaning that by clicking this button, the list is transformed into one similar in criteria and order to "List of longest-lasting empires". While issues about the validity and sourcing of its claims of the duration of empires has occurred in the discussion pages for "List of Empires," it has not been subject to the nominations for deletion that "List of longest-lasting empires" has, nor has it received the same level of criticism over its place in Wikipedia. This seems to be a case of letting sleeping dogs lie, the re-orderable column for duration in "List of Empires" being more discreet about its encyclopedically-questionable principles of order as compared to the blatantly-titled "List of longest-lasting empires."

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[65] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Articles_for_deletion/List_of_longest-lasting_empires_%282nd_nomination%29

In assessing the propriety of lists, Wikipedians prefer a neutral ordering rationale reminiscent of the preference for the sense of *égalité* proffered by the alphabetical lists of the 18th century encyclopedias and dictionaries. On Wikipedia, this preference is directed at the order of lists as it is communicated in the title, elaborated upon in the prologue, and as it initially presents itself on the user's screen. While many "superlative" lists exist on Wikipedia, their presence attracts suspicion and critical attention. The best of the quantitatively-ordered superlative lists, paradoxically—and I have discussed this paradox above with respect to other Wikipedia list properties—flirt with copyright violations, since the valuations that determine their orders are granularly mirrored in a published source.

Furthermore, when the copyright issue is muted by the collation of items from multiple sources into the list (as for example if several lists of best-selling albums were aggregated into one list on Wikipedia), the list flirts with violations of the "no original research" guideline. With these pitfalls in mind, it is clear why the vast majority of the "Featured Lists" that Wikipedia publicizes as its best content are ordered alphabetically, chronologically, or inherit authoritative taxonomies or categories from their respective fields of study, within which they are ordered, again, neutrally.

Order and Navigation

The alphabetical series serves the referential accessibility, easy updating, and neutral ordering of dictionary and encyclopedic entries at the cost of an impoverished account of their places within a system of knowledge, or with respect

to other contextually-illuminating but categorically extrinsic concepts. Concurrently with their adoption of the alphabetical order, then, compilers made attempts to add supplemental interconnections among related concepts. Initially used by Emphraim Chambers in his *Cyclopaedia*, references to other entries were most infamously implemented with Diderot's system of *renvois* in the *Encyclopédie*, which affixed pointers to related entries as a way of indicating some connection that added to but still accorded with the alphabetically-ordered system—without, that is, entering into the more systematic orderings indicated in d'Alembert's "Preliminary Discourse". While d'Alembert made much of his Bacon-like tree of knowledge, Diderot stated in his entry "encyclopedia" in *l'Encyclopédie* that his system of renvois was "the most important part of our encyclopedic scheme" (quoted in Rockwell 1999, 8).

The connection between Diderot's *renvois* and the realizations and history of the hyperlink has been well commented upon (Zimmer 2009; Rockwell 1999; Bianco 2002; J. Reagle 2008). Both renvois and hyperlinks have been said to defer "absolute meaning or knowledge to another article" and relinquish readers from their position as "passive spectators of representation" to become "an integral part in the…production of narratives of knowledge", calling forth proto-web theorists such as Vannevar Bush and anticipating Tim Berners-Lee's World Wide web (Zimmer 2009, 104). Yet, for all of Diderot's excitement about his system of renvois, it also featured in its realization an inconsistency, editorialization, and not infrequently, dead-end links to non-existent articles that, taken together, are also indicative of the limited realizations of hyperlink signification on the web. Both

belying the rhetoric of coherence and systematicity of the encyclopedic project and falling short of the promises of complex significations, of readerly authority, and of the alternative provision of a thematic contextualized system of knowledge, the *renvois* shares with the hyperlink nonetheless the fundamental benefit of enabling a contingent and flexible navigational system through large collections.

Wikipedia, particularly its lists, raises the bar on how links and lists interact to encourage navigation—the familiar cost remains however in coherence and systematicity. Many lists on Wikipedia exist for their navigational value—to guide readers to articles of a certain topic from a central location. Lists on Wikipedia hereby perform a similar function to indexes in printed reference works, except that a full index of all Wikipedia articles would be too long to easily load in the browser, so lists allow sub-groupings of relatively short lists of topics.[66]

Similarly to the *renvois* of Diderot, links also help to characterize the topic in question while they encourage navigation. Pages will often show relevant lists that the article may be included on, and will show the "categories" that the page is included in. Pages often include a section of "external links", which is a list of links to other web sites "external" to Wikipedia, as well as the lists of "references", "further reading", "notes", "see also" sections, and so on, that appear at the end of pages. Lists work with links on Wikipedia to offer both contextual and navigational help in understanding a topic more fully within a system of neutral ordering.

Like Diderot's *renvois*, however, lists and links attempt to address the losses inherent in abandoning a systematic order of knowledge with a tool that is itself

[66] Most often, the function of a traditional index is performed on Wikipedia by its search tool, which indexes the site.

rather unsystematic in its execution. Unlike "categories" that appear at the bottom of an article automatically by the MediaWiki software once that article has been added to it, the related lists that an article may be on, and the lists of "external links", "see also", "notes", etc., at the bottom of article pages, depend on users inserting them directly on the Wikipedia page, and are relatively unsystematically entered. The alphabetical order allows for a neutral, flexible, and accessible collection, but it comes at the cost of an order of knowledge that, although there have been many attempts to overcome it with additional markers of signification, is a somewhat random list.

2.4. Rhetoric: Encyclopedic Totalization through Completism

The spectre of incompletion haunts encyclopedic projects, not only because of their mammoth sizes (the *Oxford English Dictionary* took nearly a century to complete from its planning to the first bound print edition in 1928), but also because a world in which a complete list is being compiled is an ever-changing world, and mandates an ever changing list. As Herman and van Ewijk (2009, 169) recount of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, with reference to Mendelson's (1976) concept of the "encyclopedic novel", the character Mitchell Prettyplace's attempt at creating the "definitive 18-volume study of King Kong" encounters a problem reminiscent of Godel's theorem, where there is ''bound to be some item around that one has omitted from the list'' (Pynchon 1973, 14–15).

Encyclopedias frequently release additions, supplements, and new volumes, ostensibly attesting to their roles in providing "the definitive account" in a changing

world, but, as North asks, “What is the point of writing an encyclopaedia…if new conventions in the future can wipe out all our work?” (North 1997, 191). Encyclopedia and dictionary compilers have not seriously contemplated containing the unabridged totality of the world within their works, but the far-reaching mandates of the projects discussed in this chapter have established a rhetoric of totalization—they are to contain *all* the words, *all* the concepts, or in Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales’s words, *the sum of human knowledge*, or in the scholastic *summa* created by Saint-Victor, a *summa* as *brevis quaedam summa omnium* (“a specific brief summation of everything that exists”) (McArthur 1986, 54). Yet as a collection—a list—these works are morcelized, fragmented, and always less than complete. As Mendelson wrote , "[t]he encyclopedic project hovers between totalization and fragmentation, pitting the analytical gaze against the synthetic fusion” (quoted in White 1992, 109), and as a result, they tend to subvert the very totality to which they aspire. Harold Innis, using language that calls to mind the pigeon holes of Murray’s dictionary definition slips, but in reference to his recent visit to a Diderot *Encyclopédie* exhibit while Innis was lecturing in France, remarked that “encyclopedias may tear knowledge apart and pigeonhole it in alphabetical boxes” (quoted in Buxton 2004, 182).

The paradoxical rhetoric of fragmentation and totalization makes encyclopedic lists always a collection, yet always an authoritatively-sanctioned whole. While the need to update, to incorporate newly-found contributions, and include newly emerging phenomena disturbs the ideal of *wholeness* in a text, the route back, to transcend its status as a *collection* is to strive for completion.

Encyclopedic lists thus primarily exert an anxiety surrounding *completeness* in an attempt to resolve the paradoxical aims of fragmentation and totalization.

An encyclopedic list is a list that claims, or at least aims for, completion, and the same applies to lists on Wikipedia. "Template-boxes" on Wikipedia are often applied as warnings about the quality of an article, and make such suggestions as that the article presents a "point of view", that it "requires sources", that it "requires expertise", that it needs to be "cleaned up", among other suggestions; with respect to lists, however, while all templates apply equally to them, the most-often used template is by far one that suggest that the list is "incomplete". When considering lists for deletion, Wikipedians have a collection of negative descriptors for poor lists, but the most damning in terms of leading to deletion decisions seems to be a consensus that the list in question is "incomplete, and may never by complete".

In a user essay on Wikipedia titled "Creating a Better List," the author attempts to quiet the level of concern for the completeness of lists, and to focus instead on matters of selection criteria: "Don't sweat completeness but think about completability" is his recommendation.[67] The encyclopedic list-maker finds him- or herself in this awkward position: an encyclopedically authoritative list must be completable, but it will never be complete. There is, then, as part of the encyclopedic list genre, an emphasis on a Derridean *deferral* of authority. This is the paradox of the encyclopedic list, finally: that because a list is a published, communicated document, rather than a conceptual category or some other indefinite article, it is always potentially a lie, and rhetorically charged with

[67] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Mike_Cline/Conquerng_the_Dilemma-Creating_a_Better_List

authority that it no longer possesses. The encyclopedic list is in this sense an anachronism of 18th century science when mass numbers of amateur scientist were still contributing local tabulations, not yet phased out by what Lyotard described as "postmodern science…concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, “fracta”, catastorophes, and pragmatic paradoxes” (Lyotard 1984, 60). Admitting of the amateur’s completist urge to add more facts, tabulate new taxa, to complete the list, except on the scale of mass collaboration through the web, Wikipedia extends and expands upon the practices of the great encyclopedic projects in funneling many contributions onto the privileged site of the encyclopedic page.

The encyclopedic list rhetorically presents as a paradox of completeness in several senses of the word: it is “complete” in terms of being a finished project which is no longer in development, and whose parts are no longer yet-to-be-assembled or in a state of breakdown, yet the encyclopedic project is never finished; it is “complete” in terms of being the “total” of a circumscribed area of knowledge, rather than just some parts of it, yet a list is always a selection and collection that is authoritatively sanctioned; and it is “complete” in the sense that it is a unified, coherent whole, yet the encyclopedic list is, of course, and belying the intimations of circularity in its title, fractured and always unstable with respect to elements that may enter or exit the list.

Conclusion: Encyclopedic Lists on the Web

Outside of self-proclaimed encyclopedic projects, we can find many lists that accord in some familial manner with the encyclopedic list's practices as described in this chapter. Melville's listmaking in *Moby-Dick*, as explored by Belknap (2004, sec. 1933–2336), is encyclopedic in its tabulations of cetology and ship inventories, and as such is a prototypical example of the "encyclopedic novel" (Mendelson 1976). Responding to a publisher that "demanded veracity" rather than romance, and requested "documentary evidence", Melville "plundered" private and public libraries to collect his facts from many sources, and described a rhetorically totalizing world related to the ship and cetology, using neutrally framed enumerations of supplies and scientific taxonomies (Belknap 2006, sec. 1632). As mentioned above, Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is another text that attempts to portray the "totality" of a world with resort to frequent listmaking (White 1992).

As Kirschenbaum (2008, 79) remarks, we tend to take it for granted that the web provides us with a large, reliable encyclopedic memory, and much listing on the web is of the encyclopedic variety. Listings of popular culture, including movies, television, music, sports, and so on, can be encyclopedic when they aim to be the definitive reference. Although most sites on the web that make lists, and good writing in general, make a virtue of accuracy and veracity, what distinguishes encyclopedic lists are the additional participatory means required to ensure these virtues across a large domain of knowledge, the systematic adherence to certain guidelines in selecting admissible topics and items, the yearning to resist evaluative or aesthetic orders of knowledge, and a rhetorical stance that proclaims its mission towards a totalization in the described domain of knowledge. On the web, these

qualities make encyclopedic lists more likely than the other kinds of lists explored in this dissertation to be technologically supported by, functionally operative as, and rhetorically elaborated upon as databases unto themselves, from their built-in search functionality, their presentation to the user as a store of data that needs to be queried, and their intonations of absolutes. By comparison, evaluative lists are more often presented as magazine-style features, and playlists as various "albums" on users' home profiles.[68]

The Internet Movie Database (IMDB), for example, abounds with encyclopedic lists, which primarily present themselves as conventional catalogues for the different classes of entertainment they cover. IMDB includes participation in the form of contributions from a wide audience of contributors and concentrates authority over which items make the list on a smaller number of editors, emphasizes both authority and completeness in their selections, orders its items neutrally—usually chronologically—and partakes in a rhetoric of totalization—they "catalog every pertinent detail about a movie".[69] web-based projects cataloguing books, such as the Google Books project, are encyclopedic in their aims, as are the enumerations of sports teams and leagues on fan-supported sports web networks. Examples of other encyclopedic sites can often be found on the web by combining

[68] Nonetheless, from a certain technical perspective, all three engage in the functions and technologies associated with the database by virtue of being digital forms of content on the web and elsewhere.
[69] http://www.imdb.com/help/show_leaf?about

searches for lists with modifiers of absolutes: full, complete, authoritative, definitive.[70]

Such sites tend to have common features that support the listmaking operations indicative of encyclopedic lists. First, they are usually constitutive of, or are created by, large groups of contributors that share a common epistemological aim, and this larger aim or mission is usually elaborated upon somewhere on the site. Second, they tend to feature list prologues—or more developed sites such as the IMDB can follow Wikipedia's model and have separate pages—that discuss selection criteria for contributors to follow written by those most involved in the project. Third, they tend to have areas for discussion or comments to take place, where suggestions for contributions to the list and short arguments for inclusions and exclusions can take place. Fourth, because the lists are neutrally ordered and do not rely on their order as a main part of their semiosis, they often allow for re-sorting of various kinds, and because they tend to be large, they often allow for searching of individual entries. These features enable, encourage and structure contributions, while a lack of access to the list directly serves as a mechanism to maintain final authority over the complex and at times paradoxical selection criteria indicative of encyclopedic lists.

In comparison with the other genres of lists explored in this thesis, the encyclopedic list is the genre of list that most disavows its status as a *selection* of items by emphasizing the expertness and authority of those selections to represent

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[70] examples include 'complete lists of works by and involving Stephen King' on a literary site; 'lists of all Universities by state' on a .edu site, 'list of all palm trees' on a conservation site.

all relevant items; it encourages a *participation* that draws widely from light contributors in the task of completing the list; it neutralizes its *ordering* capacities by insisting on an alphabetical or other neutral approach; and it rhetorically, and paradoxically, speaks with both the voice of totalization and fragmentation, a paradox, or at least a rhetorical tension, that is overcome through the strategy of completism.

Chapter 3

Evaluative Lists

> Ars longa, vita brevis:
> Life is short, the art long, opportunity fleeting,
> experiment treacherous, judgment difficult
>
> --Hippocrates, *Aphorismi*

Introduction

If encyclopedic lists belong to the canonical, institutionally sanctioned tomes kept in libraries behind the reference desk and out of circulation, evaluative lists such as the Top 10 lists and Best-of-the-Year features represent the "fickle canons du jour" (Izmirlieva 1999, 29) of magazine circulations that proliferate regularly from competing publishers in a more frequent monthly or yearly periodicity, commercially anchoring in a variety of advertising and reader models of payment, and spreading on the web promiscuously through aggregation sites and social media in search of increased site recognition and user clicks. The Top 10 list is familiar to many as a well known format featured on David Letterman's late night shows, but lists that purport to evaluate a category and pass on to readers, viewers, or listeners the names of the "top", "best", "worst" (or any other superlative) from the pool of available items have proven to be popular and reliable features across many general interest and lifestyle periodicals and diverse broadcasting channels, especially since Letterman's promotion of it in the 1980's. Other contemporary examples that feature evaluations towards some rankings or admission of one or multiple members into the superlative spot or category are as diverse as the

television "vote-in" shows *American Idol* or the BBC or CBC series *Great Britons* and *The Greatest Canadian*, institutionally-produced lists such as the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted Fugitives" list or Greenpeace's lists of most environmentally friendly companies, yearly printed periodical end-of-year content such as *Time's* "Best of" issue or the *Consumer Reports* yearly "Buying Guide," or regular and spontaneous lists that occur as features, featurettes, or blog posts by countless publications and sites, such as entertainment-oriented lists categorized according to some playful criteria like "Top 10 movies with shouting,"[71] product guides focusing on topical interests such as "Best Cases for the (new) iPad 3,"[72] or rankings of any sort of cultural phenomena that presumes to confer some evaluative pressure on an area of interest to a certain readership such as "Top 100 comic book villains."[73]

The differences between these texts are many, including their channels of dissemination, methods of compilation, domains of inquiry, goals for the texts they create, sources of funding, among others. What unites them however is the conceit of an application of some kind of evaluation, a judgment upon the pool of "things" such that they are ranked according to some measure, or a subset are singled out as superlative, or both. I thus chose the term "evaluative list" rather than the perhaps more commonly used "ranked list" to both include items that were featured but not necessarily granularly ranked, as is evident in, for example, many "best of the year" articles, as well as to emphasize that it is the evaluative aspect of these lists that

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[71] http://www.whosjack.org/top-10-movies-with-shouting/ (accessed May 27, 2012).
[72] http://news.cnet.com/8301-13579_3-57395630-37/best-ipad-3-cases-and-covers/ (accessed May 27, 2012).
[73] http://comics.ign.com/top-100-villains/ (accessed May 27, 2012).

represents their distinctive nature as compared to the completist impulses of encyclopedic lists or the personal and aesthetic impulses of playlists. While the evaluative process may take the form of reader votes, the critical opinion of the author, or any of the other possible hybrid processes available, evaluative lists nonetheless assert the results of a judgement on a category of items.

Unlike the encyclopedic lists protected by the "objective" spaces of online encyclopedias, database services, and other trusted reference sites, or the playlists that are often cordoned off for use for specific commercial audio and video sites, evaluative lists represent the public face of lists on the web. They are boldly inter-subjective, engaging with multiple writers and multitudes of readers, "voters", and commenters, and represent some of the most popular articles that their respective publishers, sites, and blogs publish during the year. Notions about the prominence of lists on the web, often equivocated as at least partially as much a weed as flower,[74] usually refer to the pesky prevalence of evaluative list articles.

I position evaluative lists in the middle of the other list types in this dissertation because along my intersubjective axis in this dissertation, they take the central position—in a few ways. Evaluative lists are featured in the robustly intersubjective realm of public debate, thus centering them between the "objective" and "subjective" realms of encyclopedic production and personal playlist content management, but they also feature processes of evaluation for which they are named that I will show attempt to bridge individual experiences of a mass of readers/subscribers with rational, "objective" measures. Yet again, in a third, more

[74] http://modernl.com/article/10-reasons-why-top-10-lists-are-so-popular (accessed May 22, 2012).

nuanced way, evaluative lists bridge the other two chapters in that they provide an understanding of the "wide middle" of intersubjective discussion that is evident across the web, and as a result of which, for example, Wikipedia polices its boundaries where its lists begin to show the characteristics that I describe below of evaluative lists, while the ethic of playlists from the other side reveals similar discomfort when an evaluative ethic emerges in a playlist or is posited as the rules of a collaborative playlist.

Evaluative lists in their current manifestations show evidence particularly with respect to the idea of incorporating a commercial readership's experiences with an expertise into a *guide* reflected back to them, of the relationship between early women's periodicals and their readerships from about the 18th century onwards, of aesthetic criticism of the 19th and 20th centuries that became applied to mass consumer objects and "lifestyle" interests, and these combined especially in the lists of consumer and aesthetic guides of the 20th centuries which exhibit many of the qualities of evaluative lists, especially as they grew in popularity since the 1980's and again on the web over the 2000's. The core of this historical sketch will be to illustrate how evaluative lists came to combine the situated experiences of individuals within their readerships on the one hand with processes of rational and systematic analysis on the other hand, all applied to a wide collection of cultural domains typical of various general interest and lifestyle magazines. I reach similar conclusions below in an overlapping theoretical look at how evaluation is characterized in several influential literatures, touching on Bourdieu, and the notion of commensuration as it is applied in a sociological context. Here again, the act of

evaluation is characterized predominantly as a middle ground that attempts to combine the aesthetics of taste as experienced by individuals with the quantified, rational and "objective" measures of normative social life.

In what follows, after providing those theoretical and historical contexts to evaluative genres, I will discuss how evaluative lists demonstrate a unique model of *participation* that results in a model that is responsive to and dependent on the experiences of its readership; how the parameters of *selection* and *order* are combined in evaluative lists into one measure characterized by what I term "tacit commensuration"; how evaluative lists evince a *rhetorical* stance that paradoxically combines both the fragmentation resulting from the masses of individual "subjective" experiences and the more authoritative aims of the genres to act as "arbiters of taste" by recommending readers towards a unifying, recommended ideal; and how evaluative lists finally resolve that tension through an ethic that makes a virtue of approximating not a unified recommendation but a collection of experiences and items pointing towards "the good life."

Methodology

Drawing on other studies that attempt to characterize a wide variety of web-based articles according to a certain type or genre, this study collects a corpus of representative exemplars, and supplements it with a qualitative interview component (Crowston and Williams 2000; Rosso 2008). The corpus of web-based evaluative lists was assembled by searching and browsing over a period of several months, as well as by including some other list articles that were outliers to

this process, either because they were unique lists that I came across, or they were not lists at all but other kinds of articles I use here for comparison with lists, or because they represent other list articles that interviewees began referring to in interviews (see Appendix B: Evaluative Lists Corpora).[75]

For the majority of the lists in the corpus, however, I used an advanced search in Google to generate search results, from which I browsed and selected some lists for inclusion. The search focused on articles that had been passed through the social news aggregation site digg.com. I then searched for modifiers "top" and restricted the results to each year, proceeding from 2008-2011. I selected articles from these search results that were clearly titled and written as "Top X" lists, and that in aggregate represented a variety of sites and publishers and explored a variety of cultural, lifestyle, and product domains of interest. To include in my analysis "end-of-year" lists, I did separate searches for "of the year" and "of 2011", selecting articles both from within the digg.com domain and from Google's main index. Again, I collected several based on appropriateness to my aims of finding 'end-of-year' best-of lists, and maintaining a variety of sites and authors. As a result, there are some exclusions from my corpus of evaluative lists, such as few lists that focus on "worst" or other negatives (although I included some through separate browsing), and my historical perspective as it applies to my exemplar data is limited to the period 2008-2011.

I also did a small number [4] of interviews with some of the authors of the lists in my collection. These were carried out variously over phone, internet phone,

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[75] The lists corpora used in this chapter are collected in Appendex B.

and one by email, and I adjusted the questions slightly for the latter (Opdenakker 2006). I contacted several list authors for whom I could find contact information and interviewed those who I could schedule. I offered them full anonymity if they wished, if it would help them speak frankly about listmaking on the web, and one accepted this offer. My questioning followed a grounded theory model based for its 'theory' on my theoretical touchstones in this dissertation of participation, selection, order, and rhetoric (Glaser and Strauss 2007).

I made an effort to identify one list the interviewee had created to be the focal point of the interview, in order to organize the discussion and provide a instantiation for the theoretical concepts. However, because my questions pertained to processes that had occurred during the listmaking some months or years before, I let interviewees switch focus instead to lists they preferred talking about. I also used 'lead ins' in order to draw the interviewee into a flexible scenario (D. W. Turner 2010), such as: "I came upon your list "The Top 6 Most Self-Conscious TV Show Appearances By Musicians." Could you talk a little bit about how you decide to write certain list topics?"

I interpreted the corpus of lists and the interviews based on my four key touchstones of participation, selection, order, and rhetoric, and by comparing these with both other kinds of lists in this dissertation and with other kinds of evaluative texts (i.e., non-list evaluative texts). I also paid attention to unique aspects that emerged outside of my theoretical approach, including especially in the case of evaluative lists the financial importance of popularity of list articles in this space compared to Wikipedia articles or playlists. My analysis of my web lists corpus

begins after my theoretical and historical contextualization of the idea of publishing regular evaluative list features that bring large numbers of readers, advertisers, and publishers together onto one page.

Theoretical and Historical Contexts of Evaluative Lists

As perhaps the most influential theorist on the question of "arbiters of taste", I must discuss the work of Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984). It may surprise some that Bourdieu neither discusses too much nor gives much credit to "critics" specifically as a group. He illustrates a model of how dominant classes have the power and inclination to set tastes somewhat arbitrarily from the perspective of the aesthetics of "tasting" or "consuming" the products themselves, and to make such tastes appear natural—to make it appear that they flow by birthright because those classes "have distinction." He describes his "aesthetic disposition" in opposition to Kantian aesthetics; Bourdieu's is the result of a habitual relationship (i.e. "habitus") between one's available capital, the options available to him or her to capitalize on it, and the necessities of life. So while for Bourdieu the bourgeoisie can afford lifestyles that include learning piano and going on cruises, and the working class afford instead playing accordion at public dances, it is the greater point that these products of the system Bourdieu describes are reported as subjectively preferred 'tastes' by each group: the working class can exhibit an ethic of "making a virtue of necessity", and the dominant class exhibit one of reproducing privilege by maintaining the notion of distinction (Bourdieu 1984, 128–129).

Because the specific aesthetic qualities of the items on which the judgement of taste is passed are not a focus of his conception of taste, Bourdieu, unlike other accounts I describe below, does not theorize the rise of consumer-oriented product and lifestyle evaluative texts as a coming together of an aesthetic disposition with a newer, (consumer-oriented) rationalization. For Bourdieu, the kinds of evaluations I consider in this chapter would rather be present any time rationalization—as a result of some economic need—was met with the kinds of aesthetic language applied to high art. This situation is the precise one he uses to describe the "new petite bourgeoisie" category, into which, significantly, he places magazine journalists, as opposed to the critics of the fully legitimized culture such as the theatre operators or publishers. This new—in 1960's and 1970's France—group of influential "petite bourgeoisie" did not quite have the capital to freely remove themselves from the necessities of daily life the way Bourdieu sees the dominant classes as exhibiting in their machinations to create distinction; rather, the new petite bourgeoisie share some of the concerns of the middle-class, including an engagement with simplicity, time management, and an appreciation for low-cost art forms, but they draw from the dominant class the language and stylistic affectations that are applied to fully legitimate culture such as high art:

> (T)hese new intellectuals are inventing an art of living which provides them with the gratifications and prestige of the intellectual at the least cost; (…)[they] apply the cultivated disposition to not-yet-legitimate culture (cinema, strip cartoons, the underground), to everyday life (street art), the personal sphere (sexuality, cosmetics, child-rearing, leisure) and the existential (the relation to nature, love, death). (Bourdieu 1984, 370–371)

These new petite bourgeoisie combine aspirations to speak in the aesthetic language of high art with a fidelity to more popular art and pop culture, to other

lifestyle domains such as decoration of the home, leisure practices, issues of romance, and so on…the kinds of issues that populate lifestyle magazines. Bourdieu's notion of the rise of the petite bourgeoisie accords with the theoretical and historical sketch I aim to establish in this section, which posit evaluative texts since the early 20th century as exhibiting a duality of aesthetic and more rationalistic approaches, understanding that for Bourdieu such a "duality" applies only superficially in the sense of aspirational, affective "aesthetic" cues adopted by the new petite bourgeoisie being combined with their otherwise considerable economic rationalizations. Bourdieu's model as a whole is anything but a duality—the schema of fields, economic and cultural capital, and the connective habitus creates a unified model plotting the "spaces" of lifestyle and social position.

It is helpful to consider the data sources that lie behind Bourdieu's model, which Bourdieu helpfully includes in the appendices of his book. The data comes largely from a series of detailed surveys and follow-up interviews asking about a list of socio-economic factors such as paternal occupation, place of residence, income, line of work, and various questions dealing with cultural issues such as preferences and knowledge about art, leisure, and consumption practices. While it asks for preferences in movies, music, novels, and other artistic areas, it also lists examples and asks respondents to check which ones they've seen, asking for the name of directors, actors, composers, and so on along the way if known (Bourdieu 1984, 512–518). Such a survey would seem to be the precise design needed if one wanted to create a model that links cultural tastes to socio-economic factors, collecting as it does various markers for each, which is precisely what Bourdieu does with it. This

design is also an ideal starting point for creating lists aggregating preferences for each group and category asked about, such as lists of which movies, genres, photograph subjects, and so on, people prefer, which Bourdieu also does (Bourdieu 1984, 526–545).[76] In fact, we can say that Bourdieu was compiling evaluative lists from his respondents. Moreover, by leaving room for respondents to not only select from options, but to enter in details such as names or other examples, Bourdieu's methodology mimicked consumer surveys and guides, such as the *Zagat* restaurant guide, and can be seen one of those precursors of the current style of web-based evaluative lists that feature the types of name-dropping in the comments sections that was invited by Bourdieu, absent the side of the questioning establish socio-economic-familial factors.

My research in this chapter is not designed such that it can assess Bourdieu's theory of taste-making based on study of the evaluative lists I explore below; that would require similar information from list contributors regarding their incomes, education, parental occupations, and so on, as well as better knowledge and control over the population administered by the surveys and interviews. However, the design similarities between the two speak to the power of evaluative lists to be able to communicate to, engage with, and accurately contain a wide breadth of people across different interests, occupations, incomes, and dialects; the options in the lists provided, if any are provided in the survey, maximally include as a responsive population all those who speak the language—but even then, translation of a few

[76] Format-wise, Bourdieu orders the lists into columns for each response rather than the common evaluative list format explored in this chapter of creating singular columns based on all respondents and showing each response in quantitative order.

terms combined with the encroaching globalization of cultural products broadens even language requirements of such evaluative surveys/evaluative lists.

My point is not to characterize Bourdieu's *Distinction* as a kind of evaluative list, but to characterize evaluative lists on the web as potent tools of social rationalization, their similarities to Bourdieu's survey techniques demonstrating an adeptness for registering the experiences, tastes, and rationales of very different people across different regions from a common site of inscription. As I will argue in the next section, this quality of evaluative lists was used to reflect the interests of a somewhat mysterious readership population, which needed to draw on the experiences of distant others to create value for their readers.

The popularization of the multi-media Top 10 format has been connected with the debut in 1985 of David Letterman's Top 10 parody feature (McShane 1991; Gilatto 1990). Show writer Steve O'Donnell reports having conceived the idea however from similar popular features in women's and lifestyle magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and *People*, which began around the same time including "Top 10" or "Worst 5" lists (Rosenthal 2009). The genesis from women's and lifestyle magazines is not arbitrary. Throughout the post-WWII years, general interest magazines such as *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *People* (to select from Time Inc. brands) demonstrated an increasing reflection of contests, categories of items, and multiplicities, but a more fundamental connection to the form is one forged throughout the expanding literacies of the enlightenment and a desire to reach emerging readerships.

An often-cited progenitor of women's magazines – and from them, general interest magazines – is the *Athenian Mercury*, first published in 1691 (Shevelow 1989). The *Athenian Mercury,* a 'question- answer' journal, emerged as a periodical that addressed wide-ranging, didactic, and personal questions submitted by readers, and answered by a committee composed of its founder John Dunton and several others. As Shevelow argued, the participatory model of the format ensured that "(t)o read the Athenian Mercury was to confront the potential of writing to it, the possibility of recounting in print the details of private situations" (Shevelow 1989, 66).

Yet the increasingly personal question-answer format that had spun-off within two years of its founding a short-lived 'women's version' (*The Ladies'* Mercury) reflected a greater shift in the democratic underpinnings of reading and writing:

> The popular periodical developed in the late seventeenth century partly as a consequence - and itself became partly a cause - of significant transformations in literacy and the public's reading habits. By the final decades of the seventeenth century, the reading public had expanded beyond the traditional ranks of the aristocracy, gentry and upper levels of professional classes, to encompass readers drawn from other walks of life [such as] commercial farmers, merchants, tradespeople, and skilled craftsmen (…) domestic servants and even laborers." (Shevelow 1989, 27)

The pioneering role of women's magazines in particular, Shevelow suggested, occurred because the publishers were mostly men with a need for content and guidance from their readerships, and because the magazines maintained an exaggerated tenor of accessibility in its language, aiming at as wide a readership as it could gather since, argues Shevelow , the gender gap had proved more robust than gaps based on class distinctions when it came to the democratization of literacy and

education levels (*Ibid.*). These very efforts by publishers to address the "more rudimentary, limited literacy" available to women, which indeed began to accord women "a highly visible role in the periodical as readers, contributors and correspondents", also initiated a style and address that caught-on beyond women's periodicals as "an important part of the periodical's pioneering appeal to an extended and therefore less sophisticated readership" (Shevelow, 28).

The connection I want to establish here is the one between the emergence of women's magazines and the model of participation whereby readers begin to contribute in various ways to the content, the language and content is intentionally accessible to a wide variety of literacy skills and content-related expertise, and where the readership is indeed accorded despite these condescending entreaties by publishers consideration as contributors in practice or in a readerly confrontation with the "potential" of having contributed to a developing sphere of knowledge being elaborated by the text – in the case of women's magazines, the sphere is that of the knowledge, practices, aesthetics, and collective identity of the domestic sphere.[77] Once readers were implicated in writing letters that would be printed and answered, and in the 19th and early-20th centuries in submitting content such as printing patters, household best-practices, and other tips and essays, wider shifts of the same kind began to occur in periodicals.

The "New Journalism" that emerged as a matter of concern and discussion near the end of the 19th century, for example, was according to Chapman and Nuttall

[77] Cf Terry Eagleton (Eagleton 1982, 13), who wrote of the "bourgeois 'feminization of discourse'," which both "travesties women as technicians of the heart" while "it is also a mechanism which partly readmits them to the public sphere'."

"inescapably bound up with notions of the feminization of the press" (Chapman and Nuttall 2011, 255). When George Newnes began to publish *Tid-Bits* in 1881, he offered money prizes for submissions of information (those "tid-bits") or for correctly answering multiple questions (*Ibid.*, 239-240). Newnes also initiated *Strand Magazine* in 1892 "with the promise of a picture on every page" (*Ibid.*), a similar kind of systematic integration of visual content to many of the evaluative lists I explore in this chapter.

Elsewhere, as Wood (1949) described in his history of magazines, publisher of the *Ladies' Home Journal* Edward Bok initiated more strategies of reader interaction during the same period:

> To stimulate reader response, Bok, immediately on assuming the *Ladies' Home Journal* editorship, turned to what is now called the 'survey technique', offering a series of prizes for the best answers to questions he put to his readers. What in the magazine did they like least? Why? What did they like best? What new features would they like to see started? Thousands of answers were returned, and the editor acted on the reader advice thus obtained. (Wood 1949, 109)

Yet as Chapman and Nuttall emphasize, "(s)ignificantly, this democratization of the reader bore no resemblance to the interplay between newspapers and readers' letters in the traditional daily press," whose letters to the editors admitted of readership feedback especially in the form of agreements or disagreements with certain stances taken by the publisher (Chapman and Nuttall 2011, 239). Rather, magazine reader participation called for informative and factual "item" contributions, often relating to matters of domestic interest such as etiquette or modes of dress, and were re-framed by the publication "so worded as to make every simple letter-writer imagine that he or she was the peculiar care of the editor to the

exclusion of all others" (Symon 1914, 253). The focus on the often-female readership of many of these periodicals would force a concomitant shift when that readership became increasingly associated throughout the 20th century with the rise of consumerism.

While Shevelow discussed the shifts in women's periodicals in the aftermath of the *Athenian Mercury* era, from modelling the female reader as a seeker of epistolary advice towards practices of the 18th and 19th centuries of offering a "curriculum" for women that would guide them towards improvement, so does Ferguson (1983) discuss a subsequent shift in women's magazines over the course of the 20th century that framed reader/contributors in terms of the "woman as consumer", and eventually to all sorts of 'consumers' (Ferguson 1983, 146). With the increased spending on products not originated in the home – "off the rack" clothing and fashions, emerging markets for entertainment products such as records and movie theatre tickets, and, especially in the post-WWII years, a generalized proliferation of domestic goods, there emerged a need for the guidance of a generalized consumer in the mould of, and as a partial continuance of, women's magazines. The participation of readers with texts that could guide them as consumers—the format of the periodical as consumer guide—was begun in this context.

Approaches to consumption over the course of the 20th century in turn have become more rationalized and individuated than they were when the century began. Zukin (2004) describes the shift during the 1920's and 1930's from a Veblenesque ascetic rationality and suspicion of consumptive pleasure giving way to a greater

"balance" with aesthetic pleasure and bettering readers' standards of living, a shift which coincided with, for example, *Consumers Union Reports* in 1936 (Zukin 2004). The publication began surveying users about their experiences with diverse products in 1940, and by 1954 had published the results of similar questions about readers' satisfaction with their automobiles (Anon.).

Zukin describes another shift during the 1960's from individual- or household-oriented consumption to one that increasingly connected consumption to "lifestyles"—founded in the practices and writings of *New York Times* restaurant reviewer Craig Claiborne (Zukin 2004, 174). For Zukin, Claiborne's writings represented the "hybrid rationality" that is the hallmark of consumer guides, integrating aesthetic pleasures and distastes with a more rationalized, critical valuation system to create "the modern grammar of our shopping language" (Zukin 2004, 181). Claiborne included positive and negative reviews, employed a star-based rating scale, and approached food criticism using the aesthetic language of a learned visitor, sampling only some items but able to speak about the place the restaurant holds in the big picture (*Ibid.*).

The kinds of participation engendered in publications such as *Consumer Reports* and Claiborne's use of ratings and the aesthetic, experiential language of high art was combined in the *Zagat* line of restaurant guides first published in 1979. The *Zagat* guides have been described by restauranteur George Lang as "*vox populi"* and as "market research turned inside out" by Zukin (194). By requesting from individual readers the reports of their experiences with individual products, consumer guides, drawing on participation strategies of women's and general

interest magazines, began to aggregate feedback in the form of experiences and ratings from a wide-ranging readership in order to create an aggregation speaking in a common voice to a group it rhetorically created—consumers.[78] The dualistic nature of evaluative guides, combining both the distributed experiences of readers and the attempt to combine them into making a "best" recommendation, is evident throughout *Zagat*'s guide, which combine a point-based survey method created by the Zagats, as well as individual quotations drawn directly from readers' contributions. Guides like *Zagat* combine the experiential descriptions of contributors with the rational devices of aggregation and commensuration utilized by the publishers.

Around the same time during the 1970's and 1980's, similar commercial products featuring the evaluative listing of items in fact began to multiply. In their analysis of a prominent example, Espeland and Sauder (2007) describe an emerging genre that represent only a minor jump from distributed restaurant guides, focusing on creating publicly engaging lists that would prompt discussion and boost circulation rather than focus on "insider" discernments and discussions:

> Beginning with *USN's* rankings of colleges in 1983, graduate and professional schools in 1987, and *Business Week's* ranking of business schools in 1988, popular media began producing rankings of colleges and graduate programs created for *consumers* rather than insiders. These rankings quickly became lucrative enterprises, providing new information to prospective students and others. (Espeland and Sauder 2007, 9–10 emphases in original)

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[78] Upon *Zagat's* being purchased by Google in 2011, senior Google executive Marissa Mayer compared its model to the participatory content creation characteristic of the web, noting of *Zagat* that "its surveys may be one of the earliest forms of UGC (user-generated content)—gathering restaurant recommendations from friends, computing and distributing ratings before the Internet as we know it today even existed" (Barth 2011).

This system of participation puts an emphasis on the commensuration that can take place to fit the various peer- and statistical-based numbers generated by the surveys into a single quantified ranking, which will be discussed specifically further below.[79] Yet these features are positioned to attract the interests of a wide range of readers by engaging not with the specific question of which school a student ought to choose for which reason, but by creating a periodically-published feature that shows different rationalized aspects of many schools—one or a few of which different readers will hold a special connection to, and thus will naturally have an inclination to locate and compare the individuated and relative valuations ascribed to them by *U.S. News* or *Business Week* to their own experiences.

In his examination of valuation, Stark (2011) invokes Dewey's consideration of value as "prize", in which Dewey distinguished between a more subjective "prizing" and a more rational "appraising:

> For in prizing, emphasis falls upon something having definite personal reference, which, like all activities of distinctively personal reference, has an aspectual quality called emotional. Valuation as appraisal, however, is primarily concerned with a relational property of objects so that an intellectual aspect is uppermost of the same general sort that is found in "estimate" as distinguished from the personal-emotional word "esteem."
>
> (Stark 2011, 327)

Like the hybrid subjectivity that Zukin ascribes to consumer guides, an approach to evaluation indicative of Dewey's system of value-as-prize emphasizes the personal and aesthetic *along* with the collective and objective. Stark muses about Dewey's

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[79] To give a taste of the reactions of 'insiders' to this commensuration, one dean they interviewed suggested that it 'dumbs us down…(and) dumbs down student in making selections because they just look at those numbers that reflect so little" (Espeland and Sauder 2007, 18).

characteristic hesitance to even individualize either of his opposing terms, setting them out to clarify the concept under discussion before suggesting that they represent two sides of a coin. Evaluation is perhaps only problematically ever split into individual subjective experiences similar to prizing and collective systems of agreed-upon markers for appraisal.

Approaching the issue from the angle of music, Antoine Hennion emphasizes the value that publicized discussions have on matters of complex evaluation since we each hold certain things dear, and experience is so unevenly distributed. Speaking directly in response to Bourdieu, Hennion argues that evaluative texts allow an "inscription" of experience to be aggregated and consulted diachronically:

> partly delegating one's judgement to those who have other experience than oneself…is one of the basic techniques that the novice has to get closer to good things (with tests, comparisons, consultation of guides, etc. - all ways of doing things which similarly can be deployed only through collective action and the inscription of a taste in time). (2011)

Because the evaluations discussed in this chapter are singular texts and products to be purchased and enjoyed in their own respects—features in newspapers like Claiborne's *New York Times* features, the monthly and year-end periodicals of *Consumer Reports*, the Top 500 rock songs as decided by *Rolling Stone*, or the popular web features such as Top 25 Love Songs of the 1980's on Nerve.com—there is also the public aspect to these acts of evaluation that suggest a performative dimension. Hennion concludes on a performative note since, for Hennion, talking and arguing about taste is not a Bourdieu-ian function of inter-class differences in arbitrary positions in a grand game of distinction, nor the inconsequential riff-raff of intra-class arguments like those held by the working class over rival sports teams,

but, in an act of performativity, it is another way of 'tasting' and enjoying the music: "When one says that one loves opera or rock - and what one likes, how one likes it, why, etc. - this is already a way of liking it more, and vice-versa" (Hennion 2004).

Stark, quoting Muniesa in an forthcoming publication, also finally considered valuation as partly performative insofar as contemporary approaches aim to "collapse" the "distance between value and its measure" by approaching valuation as inseparable from the 'devices' we use to help us judge and guide the way—"there is no calculation apart from calculating devices, no judgments apart from judgment devices… We, assemblages of humans and non-humans, perform" (Stark 2011, 335–336). These performative approaches remind us that the publishing, reading, and public discussions about evaluations are constitutive of the processes of consumption and enjoyment rather than logically *meta* guiding texts about the objects of consumption and enjoyment.

Jagose describes lifestyle texts as those that draw together "a range of concepts such as taste, income, health, status, diet, aspiration, subculture and leisure in order to represent everyday life in advanced capitalist cultures as an accretion of personal style achieved primarily through consumption" (Bell and Hollows 2006, 4). In an attempt to "historicize lifestyle," Bell and Hollows (2006) describe the "rapid growth" of lifestyle texts since the 1970's in terms of offering guides to the proliferating "goods…services and experiences" that, in following Anthony Gidden's theories of detraditionalization, come to show the way in more and more aspects of life where traditional knowledge is no longer available (Bell and Hollows 2006, 4).

Lifestyle texts leverage their engagement with consumer and cultural products to place themselves between advertisers and readers who had relatively high economic and cultural capital and a well-formed subjectivity for the consumptive enjoyment of such products, while at the same time serving content to an aspirational readership who while otherwise participatory in the content and features could enjoy the taste-making without necessarily engaging in the costly purchases, restrictive VIP events, or expensive vacations discussed in the pages of the magazines (Zukin 2004, 183). Needless to say, this latter aspect of standing-in for the costly purchase of bests grew along with much lifestyle content that related to celebrity and pop culture, which were connected to mediated products such as movies, music, and television, but did not directly evaluate a product available for purchase as much as evaluate a way of living.

The lineage described above helps to explain, then, why *People* magazine could coherently announce itself as a "guide," for the "millions," to "the singular" personality, as it did in this quotation taken from its introductory issue: "We aim to be the indispensable guide to those millions of aware Americans who cheerfully acknowledge that what interests them most is other people—especially the above average, the important, the charismatic, the singular."[80] The collection of genres that are called "lifestyle" then are found, in the 20th – 21st centuries in Western culture, in this intersection among the collection of experiences of individual readers into aggregates that are devised in an effort to rate and place each item relative among all the others, and generally to engage with readers who will find some of these

[80] People magazine, vol. 1 issue 1.

items of particular interest in a performative redeployment the very acts of reflection, guidance, tasting, consumption, and finally, evaluation.

Evaluative lists, then, in summarizing the variety of enunciations by Zukin, Dewey and Stark, Hennion, and Espeland and Sauder, among others above, have always been connected to the need to draw from and reflect back a readership, as emphasized in early women's magazines and throughout the 20th century in consumers and lifestyle periodicals, have involved the pursuit of "good things" by combining these distributed and fragmented aesthetic experiences of individual readers with some method of rationalization towards a collective, aggregate, or authoritative measure of the good, often drawn from the evaluation of art but by necessity incorporating the kinds of rating scales employed by *Zagat's*, *U.S. News Law School rankings*, and at their most accessible and engaging, forgo strict quantitative rationalizing and an orientation to costly and exclusive purchases in favour of evaluative lifestyle features that let readers engage performatively in matters of assessment, ranking, and vague but democratic forms of commensuration.

This historicization of the idea of creating magazine features that profitably act as intersections among readers and editors of the endless evaluation and ranking of things in the world emphasizes the duality of their listmaking practices, drawing from both the qualities of the "objective" encyclopedic listmaking and the aesthetic pleasures and pragmatics of "subjective" playlist creation, combining personal experiences of taste with an aim for some final authoritative conception of

the best, and along the way, mixing in a publicized, ordered text the preferences, opinions, and tastes of readers and editors.

So it is that many fan sites and forums on the web can be placed in a lineage that includes other participatory celebrity and pop culture genres, as well as the more producerly fan-fiction and other sites of fan-based participatory culture discussed for example by Jenkins (Jenkins 2006b). The lists of the "Best Star Wars characters," the short "reviews" of Simpsons episodes, the agonistic rankings and discussions of comic-book villains, all engage with readership participation in drawing together the experiences of the reader, using a rationalistic method of aggregation and commensuration of some critical ratings scale, or other editorial form of rationalization into a text that evaluates a broad range of products, people, and culture on a common ground aimed at selecting from the many to get to the good. In what follows, I will begin to describe the peculiarities of evaluative lists as they appear on the web, in an effort to show how the concerns evident in the genres have been tweaked to enable instant mass collaboration on an evaluative text, to draw these many collaborators into involvement, to engage their interests, and to sell to advertisers their many active participants.

Anatomy of Evaluative Lists on the Web

Evaluative lists on the web typically consist of four main elements, the characteristics of which reflect an interest in establishing the rules of the game, the tenor of authority of the listmaker, and to deliver to the audience the basis for inter-

subjective argumentation while delivering to the advertisers a high number of viewers.

The first element, the *list title*, recalling the surging import of headlines during the rise of the penny presses, is similarly important in a market where high viewership of the article requires interest in the individual headlines rather than in other models such as devotion to the site through subscription. While the penny presses from the mid-19th century onward helped to spur the integration of journalism into capitalism, featuring emphases on egalitarian ideals, solicitation of advertising, aims for a large audience and decreasing emphasis on editorial, web-based magazine and lifestyle sites similarly began to organize the technologies of websites, blogging platforms, web-based advertising, and emerging social aggregation and distribution opportunities such digg.com and *Huffington Post* (and by about 2006-onwards of emerging social media sites like Facebook and Twitter) to commercialize and spread their articles to more viewers on the web (Chapman and Nuttall, 2011). While many details diverge between the early American penny presses and the post-2000 rise of advertising-supported online sites, the shift in the context of their sales from one associated with the site or newspaper as a package to one atomized over daily newspaper sales or individual article viewership led to emphases on the attractiveness of headlines.

A good headline for an evaluative list is different from that of an encyclopedic list or a playlist: while the encyclopedic context demands sober taxonomic description in order to be fitted in its place within the encyclopedic work, and the playlist plays to the whims and personal contexts of its creator, a good evaluative

list title advertises for a passing public its most attractive features. First, a good evaluative list includes the qualitative superlative employed in the list (eg “Top”, “Best”, “Worst”, etc.) and often, the quantifier (5, 10, 100), which together communicates to the reader that it is indeed a list created as a result of an evaluative pressure applied to a category of items. The effects of such a title are several: it rhetorically speaks of the existence of – and the listmaker’s familiarity with – a whole category of items that potentially could have made the list, but were not deemed qualitatively sufficient to make the quantitative cut-off for inclusion—let us consider this its rhetoric of rationalization; it communicates to the reader that the article will carry all the benefits of a list of several perspectives or options, including providing resources in terms of multitudes of suggestions and links for the best items in the category, evaluative argumentation in terms of experiences by the listmaker(s) and commenters—i.e. an experiential rhetoric; it will suggest criteria to use when evaluating similar items in the future;, and it suggests a compact between reader and writer that the investment made in clicking on the title and scanning the article will not require full, sequential reading or the integration of all parts of the article towards a final argument, but will award to the reader its benefits roughly in proportion to the number of items read. Evaluative list titles, and the lists that lie behind them, have proven so attractive to web readers that they are commonly referred to disparagingly as “link bait” – articles created primarily for the attractiveness of their headlines in order to spur visits to the site.

The next element, the *preamble*, is particularly distinctive in the case of evaluative lists as compared to other kinds of articles, as well as to the other types of

lists discussed in this dissertation. Usually comprising the first paragraph of the article, the preamble itself tends to consist of some familial combination of the following elements: a *topical link*, reference to the list *criteria*, an *extolling of arduousness* of the evaluative task, and a *call for participation* from readers. I will describe each below with reference to an example list, IGN.com's ranking of the "Top 25 Futurama Characters."[81]

The *topical link* in the preamble establishes a *raison d'être* for the list by linking it to a recent event or occasion. In the case of the "Top 25 Futurama Characters", the event was the reappearance of the series on cable television:

> On June 24th, 2010, Futurama made its way back onto television, thanks to the fine folks at Comedy Central. (…) With the show back on the air, Futurama's being talked about around the water cooler again here at IGN, so we figured….[82]

Because evaluative lists do not directly address topical issues or events – as might, in the example above, an article discussing the news and terms of *Futurama's* return to television – lists often live in an alternative world divorced of history or context, which prioritizes at the top of the list some account, however tenuous, of its importance in the here and now. Furthermore, the circumlocution with which authors connect the event or occasion to the presentation of the list ("so we figured…" in the example above) speaks to the *topical connector*'s nature as an alibi of sorts. It is a tenuous link, sharing a common topic but little else that might elaborate the news mentioned at the top of the article. The priority with which the sites I viewed establish some topicality of the list and the ambiguity with which they

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[81] http://tv.ign.com/articles/110/1100619p1.html (accessed May 22, 2012).
[82] Ibid.

articulate the import of that link suggests that pop-culture and lifestyle sites are uncomfortable posting random articles, but that at the same time, evaluative lists rarely inform events or shed light on news topics, but exist as popular, link-drawing, marginal or sidebar resources to related topics.[83] Since the *topical link* is also often literally a link in the HTML sense – the hypertextual device that links text to another webpage – evaluative lists nonetheless serve to lead readers to non-feature sections of the site such as news and opinion, and as often, related links on the non-feature sections mirror them by drawing readers to related lists.

The next aspect common to the preambles of evaluative lists consists of the *criteria,* the brief and often vague descriptions of how items were selected, ranked if applicable, with at times some reference to the participants in this process. Indicative of the "selection and ordering" section of evaluative lists I discuss below, this aspect of the preamble usually consists of a sentence or two that establishes a sense of what qualifies for consideration on the list, and usually offers a few words explaining the superlative used and who might have collaborated in the process. In the *Futurama* list, the authors write that (and continuing from the quote above) "…we figured we would gather together our biggest fans of the series and name our 25 favorite characters."[84] As these phrases suggest, there is little explicit discussion of criteria for selection, order, or even the participants (was it all the writers, or just

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[83] However, the topical connector can be at times, in rare cases as I found them, quite strong and informative of the news issue at hand, as was for example a list accompanying news of another bank bankruptcy in 2009 a list of the "The 10 largest U.S. Bank Bankruptcies", which provided useful historical context to the events and numbers at hand: http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2009/fortune/0905/gallery.largest_bankruptcies.fortune/ (accessed May 22, 2012).

[84] Ibid.

some self-professed fans from among the writing staff? Were they *really* fans or just around when you were making the list?) These few indications of *criteria* leave lots of open questions, yet as I argue below in the "selection and order" section, it is the open nature of this "tacit commensuration" that draw the participation of readers/commenters who find in them opportunities for a flexible schema that can contain their own unique and partial contributions. In only a slight restatement of this "openess" of the criteria, the vague statement of criteria also endows the main body of the list with an anticipatory tension as readers try to infer the precise criteria used through a reverse-engineering of the examples proffered, and devise alternatives to those criteria and examples. While more established evaluations, including some well-known evaluative lists such as the US News *Rankings of Law Schools*, the *Maclean's* University Ranking issue, or the *Fortune 500 list* now explain their criteria in much more detail, most online evaluative lists engage in the altogether easier and paradoxically engaging practice of mentioning minimal criteria for selection and ordering of items in the list.

Usually following the brief explication of criteria is an interesting aspect of many evaluative list preambles, a passage that I describe as the *extolling of arduousness* of the evaluative task. This element is reminiscent of the preamble in the list of ships in Homer's *Odyssey*, that has the singer calling out to the "muses" for help in describing the long list that is thereafter sung out, often to applause (see Minchin 2001; Eco 2009, 17). In the *Futurama* list, the authors write: "With hundreds of characters to choose from, this wasn't an easy task, but after much

deliberation, we settled on a list."[85] These statements are performative. Like the *topical links*, they hint at what is lacking in evaluative lists as compared to other evaluative articles; in this case, lacking are the contextual arguments, mitigating statements, historical backdrop, and so on, that link different parts of an evaluation into a coherent argument, and that make the article more than a collection of items that conceivably could have been thrown together in a few minutes, in the same way that the Homeric singer wishes to frame the mnemonically-intensive list section so as to ward-off expectations that the plot will advance in the coming section of the poem.

The recurring presence of the *extolling of arduousness* in list articles may suggest that the authors worry that unsaid, the reader may assume that the list was rather haphazardly put together "with scissors and paste pot" – and relatively little agonizing. As I have argued with respect to encyclopedic lists, one of the benefits of lists in contexts of dealing with multiple authors working on common documents is that the list allows easy rule-based collaboration without signalling a poorly-written, un-cohesive mass-authored text. As I will explore further in the participation section below, evaluative lists also benefit from this same quality of enabling easy mass collaboration upon a single textual site, and one hint at the ease with which these relatively long articles are collected, ordered, and written up is the agonistic and disruptive discourse within which they are often pre-emptively framed.

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[85] Ibid.

The last aspect of the preamble consists of a *call for participation*, where the listmakers signal to readers how to interact with the article, normally by directing them to voice their opinions on the lists in the comments section. For example, the *Futurama* article concludes the preamble with: "Take a look, and make sure to tell us what you think in the comments section below." The *call for participation* is again a performative gesture that rhetorically frames the article as an open text that may literally be changed as a result of feedback, or, more commonly, one that admits of other authorities who may conceive of other list selections and rankings. The call for participation has a long history in newspaper and magazine publishing as I have documented above in the history of women's magazines and later lifestyle and consumer guides; they establish the text as a common site to be returned to for robust public discourse, flatter the readers' tastes and authorities, and leverage the free labour of readers to enrich content (Chapman and Nuttall 2011, 247–271). Even strongly dissenting comments have value for the listmakers: they signify high viewership and engagement of the article, they offer readers more resources by dint of the additional suggestions in the comments section, and according to interviewees, they offer free research and resources to the listmakers who can use it to create new lists.[86]

It is also of note that the words used to describe the impending "reading" of the list itself (in the *Futurama* example, it is "Take a look…") are rarely literary terms such as "get ready to read", but more visually- or functionally-based terms, such as "check out", "have a look", or "get ready for….". The terminology seems to

[86] e.g. Interview with "Marie", May 4, 2012.

align itself with the non-cohesive, non-essay-like, often systematically visual nature of these lists, in the sense that they often contain one image per item in the list, and it encourages readers to peruse and jump around the list without implying a need for apprehending the whole list serially.

After the preamble element, online evaluative lists usually present the *list items* themselves. Ranked and numbered, or not, the list items usually carry a textual title, an accompanying image, and a short blurb of one or a few sentences describing some aspect of the item. Lists tend to be systematic in these formal senses in that they either tend to have these elements for each item in the list or for none of the items; rarely are list items approached formally as bespoke creations. One of the attractive qualities of lists is that they provide content creators with consistent frameworks for creating complete articles: titles are usually linked to product resellers or to entertainment or encyclopedic databases (Amazon.com, IMDB.com and Wikipedia are common link destinations for such lists), items are usually each accompanied by a stock image of some kind, blurbs for each of the items are often of similar length, and the numerical quantifier that often accompanies the list provides a clear marker of the goal for and ending of the article. A structural distinction of economic import among lists on the web is how they are paginated. Lists that are collected on one or two pages are often preferred by readers, but lists paginated so that each item needs a click on a “next” button or arrow to become visible in its own URL create proportionally more pageviews for site owners when clicked-on by readers. Sometimes called “galleries”, these lists

benefit sites that sell advertising on a pageview basis by inflating the number of unique URLs the reader has to access to view the items on the list.[87]

One aspect of note to the blurbs accompanying list items, if they are present, is the minimal amount of information included in many cases. As I will argue in the participation section, one of the attractions of the list format is that they allow amateur writers with limited knowledge of a subject area to create a full article while writing very little in terms of comparative, contextual information about any given item on the list.

Although the issue of criteria tends to be discussed only superficially in the preamble, as I discussed above, there is often little more in the item blurbs themselves that explain further issues of criteria. Platitudes about certain qualities usually suffice for reasoning as to why an item holds its place on the list. Even among a collection of items being commensurably compared to one another by a presumed criterion of evaluation, there is little comparison in the text of the list itself; items tend to live on islands of their own. As I will explain in the following two sections, this may be because, (a) the blurbs were written by different writers, and/or (b) the listmaker(s) are attempting to emphasize the tacitness of the process in order to engender participation by diverse others in the list.

Lastly, a typical evaluative lists features as its last element the *comments* section towards which so much of the list has been focused. The number of comments on lists, although difficult to quantify across the many different variables

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[87] As one interviewee noted, "every time you see a format like a slideshow or a click-through list, it's not for the benefit of the reader; it's very much for the benefit of the company's page views." Interview with "Marie", May 4, 2012.

for articles online, are by most accounts high relative to those of other types of web texts. Readers like to respond to lists for many reasons. The rules of listmaking ensure that there are usually no complex arguments within the article text that can be missed by even a cursory reading of the title and preamble, thus ensuring against the scornful and crude response to inattentive commenters often abbreviated as RTFA ("read the f ing article"). Amateurs writers – those with what Bourdieu would refer to as low "cultural capital" – are able to interact with lists successfully for the reasons that their writing skills are still high enough relative to those required to promote or critiquing specific items that appeared or did not appear on the list, and their knowledge of the domain likewise often admits of, even in cases where readers are approaching domains of knowledge unfamiliar to them, at least one or a few examples of items in a category that have touched them personally. Adding for example the quite valid comment to an article that the listmakers "forgot XYZ" requires only familiarity with one or a few of the items in question.

Any comparative knowledge between an item in the article list and a favourite item also puts the commenter in good standing to make a strong suggestion based on a presumed existing criteria, along the lines of "if you thought X was A, why didn't you include Y, which is way more so!". Lists thus draw commenters into an article by creating a set of democratically available options for valid comments based on an interaction with some aspect of the domain, and require a relatively sporatic attentiveness to the article as a whole.

As a result, comments tend to take common forms, as is comically illustrated by an American NPR's entertainment and pop culture blog about the "20 unhappiest

people you will meet in the comments section of year-end lists" (Holmes 2011). Holmes includes such categories as the "surprisingly lucid narcoleptic" who condemns a list by beginning with "Zzzzzzz", or the "The Disbelieving" who exclaims "Really? Are you serious? Did you mean to leave off my favorite thing?" Most responses to lists, however, revolve around the relatively simple rule of suggesting an alternative item, critiquing the inclusion or ranking of an item already on the list, critiquing the list as a whole by virtue of either of the prior two, or, perhaps more common on long lists which impose less exclusionary pressure on the category, critiquing the list based on the relative rankings of two included items.

Other common comments revolve not around inclusions, exclusions, or rankings, but use the opportunity of a mentioned item – mentioned by the list itself or by a fellow commenter – to identify with or proclaim the virtues of that item, in a process that calls to mind Hennion's dictum that to speak about taste is to enjoy the tasting again (Hennion 2004). It is in this latter mode of commenting that even lists which do not capture the evaluative imagination of readers still garner interest and comments from readers who take the opportunity to discuss an intersection of their interests with one item on the list. As an interviewee who was experienced in editorially overseeing popular evaluative lists suggested, you often click to view a list in order to answer the question, "will this list include the thing I really like?"[88] List comments, as the final section in this anatomy of web lists, also represent a powerful fulcrum of the socio-economic value of the evaluative list. As I will explore

[88] Interview with Peter Smith, April 24, 2012.

in the next section, collaborative creation is one reason why lists are such flexible tools to draw together multitudes onto a common site.

3.1. Participation: Collecting Experiences and Distributing Work

The collaborative practices of evaluative lists on the web reflect the practices emergent in women's magazines and in the lifestyle magazines and consumer guides of the 20th century in several ways: they draw from the situated and partial experiences, tastes, and opinions of diverse participants, from a broad readership to a site's distributed writing staff, in order to frame themselves as valuable guides to the culture; the list form allows them to integrate these diverse contributions together quickly and easily by both commensurating the contributions according to some rationalistic logic and/or by dividing the workload of creating the list features according to the list's already-fragmented logic of item-level signification; lists draw reader interest by creating a curiosity in passing readers' minds about whether those items they prize are reflected by the listmakers, and by implication, the wider culture; and as commercial features published on the sites and blogs, lists are finally controlled by a more closely-knit team of editors who have final say on the list topics and rules of the game.

The notion that the practices of news and lifestyle periodical publications on the web may harken back to other historically locatable news and general interest practices is not an uncommon one. Chapman and Nutall for instance frame the state of news reporting since the rise of the web 2.0 as indicative of a specific period of news gathering, arguing that "'professional' journalists have once again to accept

working with amateurs in the way that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century newspaper editors accepted foreign stories filed by amateur reporters who were merely members of the public traveling overseas" (Chapman and Nuttall 2011, 290). Other examples include the collection of variously distributed reportage by reader-reporters, such as the emergence in the 18th century of sport reportage, and the development of reader-response features throughout the 19th century, such as James Gordon Bennett's introduction of a letters column in the New York *Herald* for readers to comment on the paper (*Ibid.*, 251-261). However, news organizations police the boundaries of amateur involvement closely; for a truer reflection of the kinds of participatory practices evident in evaluative lists on the web we can look towards the practices that sought to draw content from a readership in order to better reflect it back, and to balance its aims as a guide that makes critical recommendations to readers with its openness to include their findings and experiences in those recommendations.

One interviewee, an editor at a music and lifestyle magazine website, suggested that lists allow his site to create content of wide-ranging interests by involving multiple authors, and that the wide-breadth draws in a similarly wide-breadth of attention from readers and others mentioned in the list articles. Speaking about overseeing a series of list articles for each decade themed around different topics, such as "Top 25 Breakup Songs of the 2000s,"[89] and similar lists for the 1990s, 1980s, 1970s, and so on, this interviewee reasoned that:

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[89] http://www.nerve.com/music/the-25-greatest-breakup-songs-of-the-2000s (accessed May 22, 2012).

> No one person is going to know all the songs, or necessarily have a grasp of a wide range of genres or styles, (but) you want the writing to feel personal -- you want people to write about songs they care about. So we have everybody in the office nominate songs and we divided up the write-ups that way.[90]

Writers working on collaboratively-written lists thus engage with the fragmented nature of lists to offer opportunities for dividing up expertise, interests, and time. Items considered for inclusion on lists are sometimes suggested by a vote system, where individual writers vote by suggesting certain items, as was the case with the above editor's lists of songs. Drawing to mind the voting mechanisms of periodical and, later, consumer guide and evaluative texts, votes often occur within a group of writers to establish at least the beginnings of a list. A resulting list in this case, although dealing with a relatively circumspect sphere of "songs from the 2000's," touches on varying genres and styles of music as was suggested by various staff members, and while relatively short, the blurb accompanying each item is often written by the very writer who had voted for its consideration.

Another interviewee, who writes for a technology website, discussing a list provocatively received by the readership called the "Top 50 Cloud Innovators" of 2011,[91] suggested that they collaborated across the company on it, using a similar system of individual writers suggesting companies, which were then entered into discussion, adding that "it was definitely a collaboration in terms of choosing the companies and writing them up."[92] This interviewee reports collaboration occurring among distributed co-workers in other cities through online tools such as email and

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[90] Interview with Peter Smith, April 24, 2012.
[91] http://gigaom.com/cloud/structure-50/ (accessed May 27, 2012).
[92] Interview with Derrick Harris, April 25, 2012.

Google Docs (an online document editor), "in real time": "The goal was to make an expansive list and one person doing that would likely have a bit of tunnel vision."

Attributing authorship to a group, such as "by the editors", or "staff", often signals for readers that multiple writers contributed to the list, and it also makes a rhetorical claim similar to that adopted for centuries by reference works that attempted to leverage the authoritativeness of their many sources into an increased estimation of their text (see e.g. Blair 2010).[93] A function of the *extolling of arduousness* I noted above seems to be to emphasize the deliberative dimension of this process and to downplay the distributive dimension where an item is written up by whoever suggested for it in a relatively easy group effort to churn out an article. In most cases, then, rather than suggest to the readers that work was divided up to hide the fact that different writers are unknowledgeable or untrustworthy about different areas covered by the list, evaluative lists often foreground the collaborative process of argumentation concerning the selection and ordering items. Evaluative lists hide weaknesses in their publishers' various breadths and depths of knowledge by drawing widely and framing differences as differences of opinion over a common sphere of knowledge.

Lists also allow writers who are less familiar with the domain they are writing about to write whatever they *do* know or can research quickly, a valuable strategy for less experienced or more wide-ranging amateur writers on the web. It is striking, looking through evaluative lists, how little at times is said in the blurbs for each

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[93] e.g. http://www.popularmechanics.com/cars/news/industry/2011-automotive-excellence-awards#slide-1 (accessed May 27, 2012).

item. Commonly, writers collect in the blurbs as little as one to three sentences pertaining haphazardly to some aspect of the item, quite independently from the concerns of the evaluative task at hand, but offer a final sentence that pays some broad service to the evaluation, often with little more than a superlative connected to a quality of the item. For example, in a list article listing the "Top 10 Worst Album Covers" of 2010, the entries add little to an explanation of the criteria at work, and while only two or three sentences long, function for the most part to fill in material before a short sentence or phrase that references the topic of the list, the album cover, is entered.[94] For example, the blurb accompanying the entry of an album by Ne-Yo is in full:

> R&B powerhouse Ne-Yo's fourth album, Libra Scale, is, get this, a concept album about three garbage men who become superheroes and eventually have to choose between saving the world and falling in love. *Right.* Whatever the premise may be, there's way too much going on with this cover, and none of it is good.[95]

Such examples do not reflect poor listmaking or poor writing; they reflect a role that lists play in enabling content to be written in diverse areas of knowledge without large investments of expertise, writing skill, evaluative effort, or time, and enable small morcels of knowledge in short blurbs of text to be used in different list articles. Like the strategy described above of creating lists to feature the strengths and personal experiences of particular writers, lists can also be leveraged by writers with little expertise, interest, or time to invest in a particular area of knowledge to

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[94] http://www.prefixmag.com/features/cocorosie-ghostface-killah-grinderman-mia-mgmt-mike-watt-ne-yo-sheek-louch-soundgarden-weezer/best-of-2010-top-10-worst-album-covers/46982/ (accessed May 27, 2012).
[95] Ibid.

create credible, full articles ready for publication, by virtue of the limited and modular textual requirements for each item.

One interviewee, an evaluative list writer who creates her lists without collaborating with other writers, speaks of a process of constantly bookmarking and excerpting webpages as she goes about her work, in preparation for unknown future lists, and of relying on external trusted authorities such as favourite web stores, publishers, and sites to offer exemplars for different areas of interest that may come up in a list.[96] In these cases, listmakers distribute some of the authority of their collections over time by organizing their experiences for future unknown uses, and across other institutions by relying on other kinds of collections to suggest items. Another source of participation in evaluative listmaking on the web—as it was for participatory and evaluative genres in print—is the considerable input provided by readers.

One listmaker I interviewed described the contributions from readers in terms of extremes. On the one hand, she found that comments resulting from evaluative lists that were set in a clear ranking were a source of frustration that she preferred to avoid, serving only to "make [the article] more controversial, [and] to open yourself up to criticism from the readership."[97] In some instances, she found the lists made readers "absolutely outraged", and reflected on how this affected her listmaking:

> When I was a bit greener, that used to quite upset me, because I'd almost always put in the structure of my intro something like, 'if you know any other great items, shout them out in the comments below'. So I'm not saying this is

[96] Interview with "Marie", May 4, 2012.
[97] Ibid.

> the definitive list of every single [item] in the world, I'm calling for participation. But you'll often find in the comments things like, 'but how could you miss this', or 'you're an idiot because you missed this'. So that 's the more negative side of list comments.[98]

The arguments about what ought to be included on an evaluative list, or what ought to be ranked where, make up the majority of comments in list articles, and represent the core of the kinds of inter-subjective discussions that evaluative lists generate. On the other hand, these very arguments are a source of value for the article from the perspectives both of readers, who can count on them to contextualize and extend the content of the article among other readers, and from the listmakers themselves, who can rely on the suggestions and critiques to suggest content for related or extended future list articles. As the same interviewee put it: "What I actually found is that there are enough decent submissions in the comments to generate another entire article of 10 further [examples]. That's the feature writer's dream in terms of content generation."[99]

What can at times seem like two poles of a spectrum of reader participation common on the web—of the commenters' unwelcome and at times ferocious criticisms on the one end and their welcome and constructive contributions on the other—are more often characterized in the case of evaluative lists as a unified, double-edged sword of list-participation, where comments offering suggestions, ranking changes, and critiquing inclusions and exclusions comprise many of the comments made to lists. Suggestions by commenters, like those proffered by list writers working on collaborative lists, often come from their own experiences,

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[98] Interview with "Marie", May 4, 2012.
[99] Ibid.

expertise, and interests. One interviewee suggested that a strong draw for readers to click on, read, and comment on an article is to answer the question of whether one's experiences with culture is echoed by the taste-makers and the collective cultural evaluative mechanisms. For example, he suggests, upon just seeing a link listing the "Top" television shows in some area, "I wonder, will they include Freaks and Geeks? So I might click on it just to see."[100] A common reader comment is simply to mention—to register by invoking the name—a prized item. For example, common comments from my collection of evaluative lists take the form of this one: "You forgot Valkyria Chronicles. Best Romance in a Game Ever"[101] or "Eric Clapton at #2? Who else had that song pop in their head as soon as they saw the title?"[102] Commenters participate on evaluative lists in part because they carry with them certain experiences and partial expertise and wish to see it reflected back to them as valid or wish to register it as their evaluative contribution to the list.

Readers also comment in order to contribute to the arguments being made more generally; to partake in the discussion of how a generalized superlative such as "Top", "Best", or "Worst", or so on, could be applied to diverse items with different qualities. This kind of reader participation mirrors that of listmakers who extoll the arduousness of their disagreements in coming to terms with the demands of the list. Just as listmakers often provide a short argument that sheds some light on their reasoning, so too do commenters also make argumentative explanations

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[100] Interview with Peter Smith, April 24, 2012.
[101] http://digg.com/news/story/Top_10_Video_Game_Love_Stories (accessed May 27, 2012).
[102]http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/crossfade/2010/08/top_ten_best_songs_about_cocai.php (accessed May 27, 2012).

that raise certain criteria above others and reassess certain items based on that criteria to the expense of others.

I will discuss this and the prior examples of reader participation more in the next section, dealing with selection and order, but suffice it to say for matters of participation that readers comment about list criteria and matters of judgment in ways similar to that of listmakers, since they are also often partly the listmakers, even if only in the comments section. Unlike perhaps a didactic article of interview or investigative reportage, which may reflect capacities or investments on behalf of the article writer(s) that reader/commenters can rarely match in their responses, many commenters are able to match the tone of the arguments and rhetorical scope of blurb evaluative writing, at least for one or a few items of particular interest to them, which suggests that listmakers and list commenters are more alike in the evaluative list form than in other public forms such as news, opinion, and more essayistic evaluative articles.

Readers also participate, mirroring writers again, by voting, either through explicit mechanisms set up by sites to create the final lists or more figuratively when a site's listmaker draws on the responses of commenters to influence the creation or supplementation of the list (or in more common web parlance, to "update the list"). Echoing listmakers more completely, some commenters finally participate by creating in the comments section an entire list of their own. In these cases,[103] commenters at times wish to evince such a complete evaluative opinion on the

[103] E.g. see comments at: http://ca.askmen.com/top_10/cars/top-10-car-repairs-you-shouldnt-pay-for_1p.html (accessed May 27, 2012).

domain that they will collect new items, or re-order existing items, or both, to create a new list. This form of participation is not seen as presumptuous, as might seem—conceivably—a news article fully re-written in the comments section by a commenter. It is often taken in a stride by other commenters as an aggregation of the "usual comments" in list articles about which items should be included and where.

Readers participate in evaluative lists then in the same way that listmakers do: as contributors who bring their own particular experiences and areas of expertise to bear on evaluative suggestions, as members in the conversation or argument who disagree and argue over criteria for the selection and order of items, as amateur web contributors who value lists for the minimal amounts of cultural capital required to make a valid and useful suggestion in a phrase or two reflecting a missed or mis-ranked item, as voters whose aggregate opinions affect the list, and in some senses as complete listmakers themselves, at times contributing, in the comments section, full lists intended as alternatives to those in the main article space. This participation positions listmakers and readers not quite as equivalents in web-based evaluative lists, for the two are still divided in most cases by the singular power of the site publisher over the space of the list and its initial creation and rules, but it does frame reader evaluations as essential to the process and constitutive of the full product of evaluations, and frames the evaluative actions of listmakers and readers as similar and in agonistic interaction with each other.

3.2. Selection and Order: Unification through Commensuration

Selecting List Topics

Periodical publishers and websites that post evaluative lists profit from and gain influence by drawing greater numbers of readers—whether this means buying an issue, subscription, or clicking on the link to view a list article, or, all the better for them, if the article draws votes, comments, or other types of engagement with the site—so evaluative lists tend to favour and periodically return to popular topics of focus. Amateurs of many kinds report that they enjoy participating in some way with lists even with relatively little experience or familiarity with the topic of the list, because such lists engage with whatever experiences and feelings readers bring to them, and relay clear categorical rules for participation through the comments or other mechanisms of contribution. Evaluative lists in their most popular forms tend to revolve around items for which people have strong experiences and feelings and that are accepted as topics of public debate within the breezy list format.

While Wikipedia is compelled to structure its pages to singularly but completely cover all kinds of known phenomena, never repeating precisely the same topics multiple times from different points of view or different user input, evaluative lists periodically and to greater numbers revisit popular areas of interest in which they can combine the feedback of many users, for example in such topical areas as entertainment, culture, and aspirational or frequently shifting product categories. A Wikipedia-like master list common to all readers that would be constantly updated would exclude the important participatory aesthetic of engaging with specific

readers' experiences and opinions at different times, while a playlist-like issuing of lists for each reader to maintain on, for example, their profile pages, would omit the all-important elements of guidance gained from their publicity and collective determination. Evaluative lists follow a magazine-style periodicity whereby lists are updated from time to time on similar or closely related topics, providing another chance for a reader to register his or her experiences and find updated feedback on expert or collective wisdom before too long.

A notable distinction regarding list topics between the "End-of-year" genres of evaluative list and the "Top 10" genres is that the former appear more topically conservative than the latter, emphasizing the core expertise of the magazine, site, or blog in devoting an end-of-year focus to an issue, whereas the Top 10 style lists will more likely circulate over a wider circumference of topical areas. For example, the site snowmobile.com issues the end-of-year list "The Best 2011 Snowmobiles for the West", adding similar features for other sub-groupings, while during the year including for example "Top 10 Tips for Staying Safe on Ice," drawing from information gathered by the Insurance Bureau of Canada.[104]

Magazine or lifestyle-based listmakers on the web evince a process of topic selection based on their placement as intermediaries between the cultural and lifestyle product producers. For example, musically-oriented sites and blogs place themselves as "guides" between music creators—i.e. musicians, the record companies, radio, etc.—and the music fans; or, technology product sites like

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[104] http://www.snowmobile.com/manufacturers/ski-doo/the-best-2011-snowmobiles-for-the-west-1306.html (accessed May 27, 2012).; http://www.snowmobile.com/how-to/tips-for-staying-safe-on-the-ice-443.html (accessed May 27, 2012).

cnet.com place themselves between product manufacturers, retail stores, trade shows, etc., and prospective buyers. Their practiced eye for readers' interests in exploring valuable evaluations leads them to create novel Top 10 style rankings and reliable end-of-year lists. One interviewee explained his rationale for a recent series of lists of songs related to relationships:

> I'm in charge of editorial, and I had the idea to do these song lists. We did love songs last fall, and did breakup songs last week. I chose these lists mostly because I thought that it was a subject that everybody could relate to, that could have a lot of smart writing about it, and that was likely to have some viral pickup to it.[105]

In the same way that, as I will discuss below, evaluative list criteria tends to emerge from the very processes of invoking such criteria during the compilation of the list, so too do evaluative list topics emerge from the processes of listmakers' processes of regular research and browsing while creating other content and lists. As one interviewee described her process:

> As I'm going around the web, I'm constantly bookmarking shots, articles, and products that might be interesting for a feature so that when it comes to actually writing an article I'll have a look at my bookmarks to see if there's anything relevant. I know the kinds of retailers who would fit certain lists, and see what their latest offerings are, and decide what would be the most popular to put up on my list.[106]

Another interviewee similarly describes strolling for list ideas by aligning herself with other cultural intermediaries and using them for inspiration for new lists:

> My process with any article is to sit down late in the day and check music news sites (MTV, nme.com, billboard.com, rollingstone.com, etc.) and find a story that interests me or inspires me. I use that as a jumping off point to decide what I want to write about for the next day's column.[107]

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[105] Interview, Peter Smith, April 24, 2012.
[106] Interview, "Marie", May 4, 2012.
[107] Interview, Rae Alexandra, May 7, 2012.

Selecting quantifiers for the lists is similarly based on criteria around creating articles that are attractive to readers; in cases where items are more scarce or likely to be chosen by readers to the exclusion of others, such as more expensive consumer products, the quantifiers tended to be smaller, usually 5-10, while in cases where items are often enjoyed in multitudes, such as songs, images, or celebrities, a higher number was less unusual; the highest evaluative quantifiers are often such lists of media products or the pop cultural disarticulations and aggregations performed on them, such as the "Top 100 Comic Book Villains."[108] As an interviewee suggested of the "Top 25 Breakup Songs" list, "25 was barely enough."[109]

The quantifiers used are also commonly culturally significant intervals, in the present context of lists within Western culture, this translates into base-10 and their divisions (5, 10, 25, 50, 100, 500, etc.) and to other potent numbers such as 7 and its multiples. As a point of comparison, Izmirlieva discusses the cultural significance of the quantifier in the magical Christian list "72 Names of the Lord" to its audiences during the middle-ages (Izmirlieva 1999). As does that religious-magical list, it is notable that in comparison to the other types of lists discussed in this dissertation, evaluative lists alone typically draw attention in their titles to a quantifier. It seems to me that the importance of quantifiers in the context of evaluative lists is rooted in their roles in establishing the evaluative pressure being applied to a category of items, and advertising it in their titles. Evaluative lists balance the higher evaluative significance of the items appearing in a list containing fewer items, with the

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[108] http://comics.ign.com/top-100-villains/ (accessed May 27, 2012).
[109] Interview with Peter Smith, April 24, 2012.

competing benefit of including more items and thus more chances of drawing participants and readers who hold an interest in or search for a particular item.

The importance of such quantifiers to both the magical-religious lists Izmirlieva studied and the evaluative lists studied in this chapter can be further noted by comparing them to the "objective" encyclopedic lists of the previous chapter, which generally do not allow of an arbitrary quantitative scope on the items listed, and the "subjective" playlists discussed in the next chapter which are delimited rather on the bases of experienced playing time or other factors. While encyclopedic item selections are regulated by how well they reflect the taxonomic conventions of science and scholarly consensus, or more commonly, how well users with a motivation to add or remove certain items prevail in community discussions about these matters, and in the aesthetics playlists, suggested additions or subtractions are often carried out by individual listmakers when they make their own, personal version of a list, evaluative list items are measured through a process sociologists call commensuration. It is the aspect of commensuration that unifies for evaluative lists the questions both of which items are selected, and the order in which they appear in a ranked list; both are tied to the common evaluative measure, ostensibly the "Best-ness", "Worst-ness", "Top-ness", etc., of the items in relation to the other items. It is to the concept of commensuration that I turn to next in an effort to show how even the simple "Top 10" list can reveal behind it a complexity of tacit assumptions about the world.

Commensuration

Commensuration refers to the process whereby different qualities are measured using a common system of measurement. As Espeland, Stevens, and Sauder review the concept, it is "the expression or measurement of characteristics normally represented by different units according to a common metric," transforming along the way "qualities into quantities, difference into magnitude" (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 315–316; Espeland and Sauder 2007). In evaluative lists, commensuration occurs often when diverse items are purportedly ranked according to a measurement of how good, bad, "best", "worst", or so on they are determined to be according to the listmaker's practices and criteria of measurement.

Commensuration plays a powerful role in the world, underlying many aspects of quantification, market functions, state-based systematization and bureaucratisation, and authority-at-a-distance (J. C. Scott 1999; Porter 1996). Espeland and Stevens connect the concept pivotally to Weber's notions of rationalization, arguing that for Weber, "the expanding role of calculation as a strategy to manage uncertainty was a central feature of Western rationalism and crucial for the development of capitalism" (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 320). Meanwhile, commensuration also produces many kind of different scientific, governmental, and social categories, labels, and lists as a result of the equivalences necessary to undergird measurement by common units (Bowker and Star 1999).

Reminiscent of how the sense of égalité of French working conditions and the taxonomic proliferations of the time were reflected in the "alphabetical order" of the

Encyclopédie discussed in the last chapter (Koepp 1986), the tenor of commensurative categorizations, assessments, and rankings raises the spectre in its case of a Foucaultian normalizing function, with its "insidious and rhetorically potent" conflations between "what *is* with what *ought to be*" in both statistical and moral senses (Espeland and Sauder 2007, 36). Yet, commensuration is also an underlying tenet of democratic practices, since it offers

> an adaptive, broadly legitimate device for conferring a formal parity in an unequal world. (…) In decisions characterized by disparate values, diverse forms of knowledge, and the wish to incorporate people's preferences, commensuration offers a rigorous method for democratizing decisions and sharing power. (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 330)

Through its power to integrate into common sites diverse and incomparable phenomena, commensuration features strongly in both the dystopic violent reductionisms of normalizations of a population, as well as the more utopic aspects associated with systematic equality and governmental representation. In both cases, a fulcrum of power resides in the precise ways that people, things, and the potentials observed in the world are rendered comparable so that they can be counted as a single population and as residing in this category or that, while at the same time they can be ranked as more and less dangerous, valuable, or as "good" directions in which to proceed, and how in the end of a process one can be recommended as the "most" of this, as the "best option."

Evaluative lists that can give semblance to a commensuration among different peoples' experiences, different options historically taken, and different measurements and contests held, can make powerful statements that play upon both our desire to be understood and incorporated into decisions as well as our

yearning for the received wisdom of authority and good measure. By promising both rational testing and measurement along with personal accounts and experiences, evaluative lists employ commensuration to profit from its promise to transcend the bifurcation between following received wisdom, which may be collectively held but seem unconnected to one's experiences, and engaging in a preferred path of one's own, which may seem more fulfilling but prove treacherous. As Espeland and Stevens put it, "commensuration encourages us to believe that we can integrate all our values, unify our compartmentalized worlds, and measure our longings" (1998, 323).

"Tacit commensuration" and Evaluative Lists

Some systematic studies by magazines and websites result in evaluative lists that largely follow the description of commensuration as outlined above. A list in the *Globe & Mail,* for instance, called "The GTA's Top Employers of 2011"[110] describes its processes of commensuration in measuring diverse organizations and companies as somehow more and less "Top": it describes eight specific criteria, which include "work atmosphere," "health, financial and family benefits," "community involvement," and "employee communications", which refers to "the company's procedures to communicate and get feedback from employees."[111] While the descriptions of evaluation criteria like those for "The GTA's Top Employers of 2011"

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[110] http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/toronto/gtas-top-employers-2011/the-gtas-top-employers-for-2011/article1806621/ (accessed May 27, 2012); the list is created by 'Canada's Top 100 Employers', (owned by Mediacorp), a career-oriented intermediary print and web publishing firm that runs several publications and sites, including a Canadian job search-engine.

[111] Ibid.

are certainly to some degree opaque screens over the practices that result in such lists, I am interested in the commitment of such sites to at least portray systematization in their commensuration practices. The *U.S. News* ranked list of law schools, and *Maclean's* magazine's annual ranked list of universities follow such a form. However, most of the web-based evaluative lists I encountered, such as the "Top 100 Comic Book Villains," or the "Top 25 Breakup Songs" lists, do not provide such details outlining a systematic process for their commensurations. They select and often rank their items, and offer the types of claims and calls for participation outline in my "anatomy" section, but the quantifications normally associated with the concept of commensuration are not to be found.

Drawing on Michael Polanyi's concept of "tacit knowledge," where "we can know more than we can tell," I invoke a similar notion of a personal capacity that cannot quite be disclosed, named, or quantified, as characterizing the commensurative practices (i.e. the selection and ranking of items) of many web-based evaluative lists (Polanyi and Sen 2009, x). While Espeland and Stevens for the most part consider commensuration in tandem with quantification,[112] they do point to several "dimensions" of commensuration that can occur. One dimension is concerned with how technologically elaborated they are, and here they make reference to instances of the phenomenon that are "only marginally elaborated, such as the often ad hoc calculations made by spouses to determine the relative equitability of household chores" (Espeland and Stevens 1998, 318). Such rough and

[112] Although they also explain how conceptually the two notions of commensuration and quantification are related, and often interchanged or mistaken for one another (Espeland and Stevens 1998).

ready processes of commensuration are closer to the vague or discursively unavailable elaborations on process evident in many of the evaluative lists in my corpus.

Listmakers who disclose a more tacit process of commensuration make reference to their learned intuitions and amassed expertise or authority when accounting for the practices of commensuration. The "tacitness" of the evaluations also engages amateur participation of a broad range of effort—in keeping with the theme of lists engaging amateurs in this dissertation— since tacit commensuration allows for the possibility of ignoring many of the items being evaluated, their positioning within the final metric of ranking not betraying after all whether or not the listmaker had performed the ratings on them. By contrast, a systematic method of rationalized commensuration would require a familiarity with all the items in the pool and a commitment to at least assign them the more detailed ratings outlined by those processes.

For example, the list "Top 10 Classic Loony Tunes Cartoons" contains the common preamble that establishes the topicality of the list, makes a vague reference to a collective and agonistic process of evaluation, and makes a call for participation:

> In honor of the Looney gang's comeback, we're counting down our 10 all-time favorite classic Looney Tunes. Narrowing it down to just 10 was tough, and other 'toon fans probably have a thing or two to add about their own favorites, so, sufferin' succotash, feel free to sound off in the comments.[113]

Yet the process of commensuration employed to lay the cartoon items out along an evaluative measurement, from what is framed as a collective short list of "our

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[113] http://www.aoltv.com/2011/05/03/top-10-classic-looney-tunes-cartoons/ (accessed May 27, 2012).

favorites," implies a far more tacit process of commensuration than that evident in "The GTA's Top Employers" article. Such lists as the Loony Toon one make some comments in the item blurbs the contextualize the ranking process slightly, as when the Loony Tunes list writes that "this gem is easily one of the all-time greatest Daffy, and Looney, performances," but such comments imply neither a level of import or systematicity of the mentioned quality as ranking criteria. Yet the participants in the comments section appear to enjoy the openness of the commensuration process by making known and integrating their own preferred cartoon moments into the list. One user writes: "a few of my faves were on here, but i'm surprised there was no mention of Tweety, Taz, or The Roadrunner and Wyle E. Coyote"; another adds: "How can you leave off the 3 little Bops"? Another commenter compiles his or her own list:

> Not a bad list. However, my top 3 would be:
>
> 1. Duck Rabbit Duck - The fiddler crab line was priceless
>
> 2. Three Little bops
>
> 3. Bugs and Thugs[114]

Lists that can integrate, even if only in the comments section, such reader suggestions, additions, and re-arrangements into new lists, are the norm for evaluative lists on the web; I argue that the *Consumer Reports* model (or the "GTA's Top Employers" example above) represent the "marked term" of Saussure's semiotic coupling, necessitating both notice to readers and a more explicit explanation of commensuration among items and evaluators. The "unmarked"

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[114] Ibid.

exemplars of evaluative lists on the web make assumptions of commensuration among items in terms of publicly discussing specific criteria, selections, and rankings, but avoid disclosing any quantitative and systematic rules for such evaluative disagreements.

Is this rather a case of "there's no accounting for taste?" Such a subjective ethic is not apparent in the evaluative lists in my corpus. If anything there is a performative enjoyment evident in the very circumlocution of what is commonly accepted as commonly-accessible rational task of evaluation. It is just the case that the processes for rationalization are not stated anywhere in these lists, and seem to be intersubjectively un-fixed, unlike those of the more explicitly calculated lists referred to above. While disagreement in those latter lists can take place at the relatively complex level of how different measurements were measured, or why some measurements were not included in the processes of calculation, the arguments available as valid to participants in the tacitly commensurated lists include the very selection and rankings of certain items, combining into one gesture the positing of certain items to the list for others to consider, and by tacit implication of the qualities attached to or drawn out from those items, suggesting to others how the rationalization should be done.

The different approaches can come to a head when a site's readership expect a more explicitly systematic process of evaluative commensuration than the listmakers endeavoured to undertake, a misunderstanding that can occur especially when readers consider a list too important due to subject matter or due to the source of the list, to have its selections and ordering system left breezy, unstated,

and presumably unsystematic. For example, the website GigaOm.com, a well-known technology news and opinion site, published in 2011 a list central to its area of focus and to that of its readership, namely enterprise and infrastructure "cloud-computing". The list, called "The Structure 50: The Top 50 Cloud Innovators," was framed by the site's editors as a continuation of the kinds of expertise and editorial "knowledge" the site generated related to this particular topic, having several years prior begun organizing regular conferences in this area of focus, and created a special "channel" of the site to curate all news related to it. The list preamble states: "Now for the first time, we've decided to condense that knowledge into the Structure 50, a list of the 50 companies that are influencing how the cloud and infrastructure evolves."[115] Few other details were provided outlining a methodology for combining and evaluating such disparate entities as can be contained by the terms "cloud" and "infrastructure" computing. In an interview I conducted with one of the editors a year after the list had been published, he reports that they "learned a lot" from this list.[116]

Readers responded with disdain concerning the lack of explicitness of the list's rationale. A common response in evaluative lists is to offer suggestions that "ought" to be in the list, according to the respondent's opinion, but commenters to this list complained that the list was not systematic or rational enough. One commenter wrote for example that: "You have Verizon on there[,]even though Terremark was acquired by Verizon(…) Just seemed odd that you would have

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[115] http://gigaom.com/cloud/structure-50/ (accessed May 27, 2012).
[116] Interview with Derrick Harris, April 25, 2012.

Facebook in the ranks? Also, no mention of Savvis or CSC? I just don't get it."[117]

Another commenter compared the list unfavourably to the more methodologically explicit Fortune 500 and Forbes lists:

> Forbes ranks based on "sales, profits, assets, market value, and employees." Fortune's list is "ranked by gross revenue after adjustments made by Fortune to exclude the impact of excise taxes companies collect." All hard numbers.And your list? What is it based on? Perhaps revealing that information would help your readers understand how your team chose the Top 50.[118]

Some readers were suspicious that the list had "secret" criteria based on some list members having advertising relationships to the site: "This is a completely useless list without a basis for how the list was built. Is it a list of banner advertisers that you like?" In the context of commensurating over a wide range of different companies, by a site that is read for journalism and opinion in the technology sector, commenters were dissatisfied that the list applied an otherwise quite common process of "tacit commensuration" that leaves the list open to involvement and equally-tacit rankings by amateurs, and draws participants to the site, preferring instead in this instance a more systematic evaluative list.

The editors, in turn, seemed to be after the more breezy ethic of "tacit commensuration" common to web-based evaluative lists, responding with encouragements to readers to participate in kind, and to make it a "living list":

> Do you think we should have included another company? Let us know. In the comments, tell us why you think that company or its technology is changing the future of cloud computing. We genuinely want to know what you think… Lists like these are meant to spark discussion and encourage debate. So we invite you all to join in."

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[117] http://gigaom.com/cloud/structure-50/ (accessed May 27, 2012).
[118] Ibid.

As the commenters left feedback, the editors also began to add more details about their criteria in selecting the companies that they viewed as "top." Editors eventually elaborated on their processes in a manner that reflects the difficulty listmakers have in articulating their "tacit" listmaking rationales:

> "So, our methodology involved sifting through a list of companies we thought were doing interesting and innovative things, followed by some healthy debate with our editorial team and industry experts. We used all that feedback to compile our final list."
>
> "This list is about future potential more than current performance."
> "We wanted a broad list of companies that are doing new things in the cloud, regularly pushing the bounds of existing technologies, or that are influencing how the cloud is taking shape."[119]

Such details seemed to be appreciated by the readers, but their emergence during the discussion surrounding the list rather than prior to publishing reflect a quality common to many of my web-based evaluative lists.

Studies of evaluation have suggested that rather than be a starting point for evaluative discussion, it is during the discussions and deliberations of evaluation that the criteria for evaluation are developed and elaborated. In reviewing some of the cases outlined in his collection, Stark shows how "selection criteria guiding the judges are not given at the outset but emerge during the jury's deliberations" (Stark 2011, 325). Similarly, in her study of how academics evaluate each other, Lamont shows that the processes of focused debate or deliberations "both produce and uncover common standards" (Lamont 2009b). Lamont also found that evaluators tended to begin with their own short lists and rationales, which were then used as

[119] Ibid.

reminders of criteria and personal preferences when deliberating on the common rankings:

> panelists of- ten refer to notes they took when initially evaluating the applications and then offer arguments in favor or against proposals. Many have rehearsed arguments in advance, mentally comparing proposals as part of their effort to produce their own rankings in preparation for the meeting. (Lamont 2009a, 48)

Recalling the listmaking in my interview, one of the editors of the GigaOm Top 50 list described the process of creating the list as one that combined the initial separate suggestions of all the editors/writers involved in the listmaking, with their diversity of criteria, into a single common list which generated new criteria, and continued in this cycle in a "build and whittle" strategy:

> Everyone had their own criteria, and then the criteria came into play afterwards, when you kind of say 'ok why would this company and not this company be here.' And that's where we started trying to put some criteria in place. And criteria are difficult in this space [of cloud computing], especially in dealing with startups, because there aren't actually quantitative criteria in place a lot of the time. To some degree it was—I don't want to say subjective—but more of a qualitative thing. 'What makes this cooler than this?' We can't go with revenue numbers for example, because some of them just launched, etc., so it makes it very difficult at that point to do it based on some quantitative criteria. It's a 'build and whittle' strategy.[120]

The conversations held to "whittle" the list, rather than exhibiting the explicit rationale of a multi-factor system of ratings, suggest a relatively tacit form of commensuration that, after provocations from readers (and interviews), were partly enunciated in terms of looking for companies that are "regularly pushing the bounds" and "cooler" than others, in a relatively unstructured "healthy debate."[121]

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[120] Interview with Derrick Harris, April 25, 2012.
[121] Ibid.

Another website editor, overseeing a series of "25 Greatest Love Songs" lists, reports a similar process of collecting from various writers their individual selections, orderings, and implicitly, criteria, and brainstorming for areas that were ignored when suggestions were aggregated.[122] The suggestions in this case are treated as votes, which then also decided the order: "songs that got the most votes would go towards the top."[123] Otherwise, selections and order were decided pragmatically, often with respect to how they relate to other songs being considered at the time, in a process of commensuration based on general positive ideas and feelings. For example, this interviewee reports looking for "universal and timeless" songs that "felt right" to include, aiming to maintain to some degree a balance of gender, race, and "a good distribution of artists and styles" among the short list of songs to be whittled down.[124] A song that was given a #1 spot in one list, Cyndi Lauper's "Time after Time," this interviewee notes, was selected because it was enjoyed by many of the writers-voters, and because it seems to have come to be one of the songs that, compared to the others available at that point near the top of the pile, represented the decade of music well. Lamont similarly emphasizes that in making ranking evaluations, "the dynamics of ranking are such that many judgments are relational" (Lamont 2009a, 131).

Under this system of relatively "tacit commensuration" that I describe above, it is perhaps useful to look at what tends to be rejected, among the lists I explore, as invalid reasons for certain selections or orderings. Although readers will at times

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[122] Interview with Peter Smith, April 24, 2012.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

critique a site for treating a list too breezily, as was the case with the Top 50 Cloud computing companies list above, or will accept a nearly undefined process, as readers of the 25 Love Songs lists did for the most part, readers of evaluative lists definitively reject lists that reveal a little mastery over the domain being listed. In my corpus of lists, one such list was "Top 10 Greatest Geeks of All Time."[125]

Criticisms of the "Greatest Geeks" list were based on the fact that the selections were all recent and non-representative of geeks prior to the 1990's ("What about people like: Charles Knuth, Babbage, Ada Lovelace…"), that some were more wealthy technologists than geeks ("This is just a list of techno celebrities with no objective criteria for ranking contributions at all"), and that the listmaker did not demonstrate enough familiarity with the history of geeks in his/her write-ups ("argh tell me something most people don't know").[126] An evaluative list can be provocatively misguided to the eye of a beholder, but if the listmakers demonstrate incompetence towards the category they drew upon for an evaluation, readers are highly critical. It is interesting nonetheless that readers still took the trouble to complain in fair numbers to this list on the site and on digg.com; when it comes to a list, few lists in popular and somewhat novel topics are bad enough to be left with "no comments."

Evaluative lists are also critiqued when participants do not feel comfortable evaluating the items. For example, the Lonely Planet's Top 10 countries for travel in 2011 – a forward-looking list at the best countries to visit – vacillated between an

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[125] http://www.itnews.com.au/News/127873,the-top-10-greatest-geeks-of-all-time.aspx (accessed May 27, 2012).

[126] http://www.itnews.com.au/News/127873,the-top-10-greatest-geeks-of-all-time.aspx (accessed May 27, 2012); see also comments on digg.com listing

evaluative list and, because others would quickly rush to defend countries excluded or panned in the article or by commenters, more of an un-evaluative list of countries to visit that better resembles the "playlist" ethic I will discuss in the next chapter.[127] Similarly, in the list of "Top 10 Worst Album Covers" discussed above, some commenters expressed hesitation to pan album covers, with responses such as "Art is Subjective."[128] When the objects of an evaluative list are not allowed to be excluded or ranked poorly, an evaluative list cannot obtain —as Bourdieu puts it, taste is always a distaste (Bourdieu 1984).

Readers are also patently derisive of evaluative lists that select items for inclusion that do not belong in the category announced in the title. In my lists, the list "Top 10 Sleeper Hits Gallery," a list by *The Hollywood Reporter* meant to collect "sleeper" movies—i.e. significant performers that surprised Hollywood—was critiqued for including many items that were not in fact "sleepers", which made their "hit" status relatively less notable ("Umm, about half of these films weren't remotely sleepers. Terrible list. When a film is loaded with name brand talent its not a sleeper film").[129]

These examples may shed light on what I have found as an oddity of evaluative lists: while criticisms of the list can take several forms, many of which I

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[127] http://www.lonelyplanet.com/albania/travel-tips-and-articles/76164 (accessed May 27, 2012).
[128] http://www.prefixmag.com/features/cocorosie-ghostface-killah-grinderman-mia-mgmt-mike-watt-ne-yo-sheek-louch-soundgarden-weezer/best-of-2010-top-10-worst-album-covers/46982/ (accessed May 27, 2012); comment from digg.com's comments section.
[129] http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/gallery/top-10-sleeper-hits-66525#1 see also comments on digg.com listing (accessed May 27, 2012).

have touched on above, including an overly vague rationale, a lack of any mastery over the domain, and a categorical incompetence at selecting valid entries, compliments for a list tend to take mostly one form, “good list”. “Pretty good list”, “nice list”, and “not a bad list” are also common. Stronger or more specific compliments tend to be directed to one or some of the items listed—an indirect compliment for sure that the listmaker has exhibited great judgment in choosing a certain exemplar, but not a direct compliment aimed at the listmakers themselves or the list. Why can a list never receive a better compliment by the relatively unrestrained internet commenter than a good list?

I think there are a few reasons that emerge for this systematic limiter upon reflection of the critiques discussed above aimed at these lists: it is difficult to formulate a compliment that is not banal for a listmaker’s having properly selected only categorically valid items for his/her chosen list topic, and it is similarly difficult to compliment a listmaker who titles his list “Top 10….Of All Time” for having a competency over the major exemplars of renown. But the greater reason is that an evaluative list “aims” as defined in this chapter to commensurate from among distributed experiences and opinion and diverse products and other phenomena in the world to establish a singular document containing a multitude of the best (or worst, top, etc.), and as such it can be said to reflect or not the opinion of a reader, and prove more or less resourceful to him or her, but it is incapable of transcending—as a text in its own right—the items that constitute it because its tacitness leaves it open to a thousand critiques. The very same quality of multiplicity that makes such lists so popular with participants who find in them an item of

interest, a bone to pick, a rearrangement to propose, then, also limits their statuses as texts that can receive such praise as that they are insightful, original, transporting.

3.3. Rhetoric: Commensuration towards 'The Good'

Ars longa, vita brevis, attributed to Hippocrates— "life is short, the art long, opportunity fleeting, experiment treacherous, judgment difficult"—has long been invoked to justify different strategies of collecting and refining the widespread wisdom of others long gone in ancient compilations of knowledge (Blair 2010). Evaluative lists rhetorically argue that an evaluation of a domain of items is best carried out and communicated by collecting widespread experiences, tastes, and opinion, with the goal of ascertaining which options in life represent "the good" and which fulfill Hipppocrates' "difficult and treacherous" ends. Top 10 and "End-of-year" genres, for example, regularly posit that such acts of canonization best capture the "good" in a category or year. As *The Atlantic* argues in an end-of-year-list collection, for instance, "the year in TV is best captured not by listing newsworthy events, rather by taking stock of the best moments on screen."[130] Evaluation-by-exemplar furthermore has a rich history in encomiastic and panegyric forms of writing, where celebrations of the passed feature a collection of significant moments recalled by a procession of speakers, and which in sum serve to paint celebratory and overwhelming portraits of a character and a life lived (Eco 2009, 133). Transferred to mediated web culture, the list format of recalling and assessing a

[130] http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/12/best-television-episodes-of-2011/249496/ (accessed May 27, 2012).

period come and gone carries over the benefit of collecting together a portraiture of items that draw audiences and advertisers together to revel in favourites and re-hashed memories and old content under an alibi of the celebratory, dutiful, and solemn witnessing of anniversaries, or topical rationales for the round-up of some category of items.

Terry Eagleton wrote of the role of the critic that it is "to explain and regulate change as much as to reflect it…[The critic] must actively reinvent a public sphere fractured by class struggle, the internal rupturing of bourgeois ideology (...) and fragmentation of knowledges" (Eagleton 2005). If encyclopedic lists are created to provide an "objective" resource that many users find value in, and playlists makers find value in creating them multiply to suit various "subjective" contingencies of life, then evaluative lists draw on the spheres of each in engaging with the wide middle-ground, the public, agonistic, and profitable territory of intersubjective sites of discussion, argumentation, and guidance. Readers find them valuable partly, like the encyclopedic lists, as collective resources that reflect the best authority and consensus, and partly, as with playlists, as opportunities to commune with others about their experiences, preferences, loyalties, and hard-won knowledge developed and nurtured in specific music, televisions, schools, cars, or whatever the topic of the list may be.

David Simon, the creator of HBO's *The Wire,* critiqued such trivializations emerging from what he termed the "critical-industrial complex"—features such as rankings of the "best" characters, episodes or seasons from the show—as uniquely

fragmenting to the overall arguments and arc of his show (Simon 2012).[131] Often framed to him by fans as a compliment, Simon describes such proclamations of the "bests" of his work as "wearying" because they lose in their individuated evaluative measures their roles in the over-reaching argument for which they were conceived:

> We thought some prolonged arguments about what kind of country we've built might be a good thing, and if such arguments and discussions ever happen, we will feel more vindicated in purpose than if someone makes an argument for why The Wire is the best show in years. (Simon 2012)

For his part, when asked which character on the show he most enjoyed writing for, Simon responds "the city of Baltimore", the show's setting (*Ibid.*). Evaluative lists focus on the objects of assessments because they aim, as textual products in their own right, to use the multiplicity of those objects to draw a multiplicity of readers and participants, but in doing so they forgo a capacity to make an overarching evaluation. For instance, an article on the *Guardian* site discussing the role of drugs in rock and pop music over the last 50 years makes an overarching claim about shifts in the reception of drugs usage within music lyrics:

> Nearly twice as many songs deal with cocaine and they are also generally negative. Some from the 1960s and 1970s such as "She don't lie, she don't lie, cocaine", from Eric Clapton's version of JJ Cale's Cocaine, and the Grateful Dead's "Drivin' that train, high on cocaine", are hardly negative. But by the 1990s the attitude is far more trenchant with rap music presenting cocaine, particularly crack, as a loser drug.[132]

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[131] Simon was responding to both the general trend towards listing and to a specific episode in which the culture and sports website Grantland.com began ranking among its staff in weekly head-to-head competitions the 'best' characters on *The Wire.* The chief editor of that site, columnist Bill Simmons, had during this time interviewed U.S. President Obama in an interview framed as limited to the topic of sports and popular culture, which he concluded with a question about the president's favourite character from *The Wire.*

[132] http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2003/oct/27/drugsandalcohol.popandrock (accessed May 27, 2012).

By comparison, the list article collecting the "Top 10 Best Songs About Cocaine" is focused on an evaluation of the songs themselves as coming from a novel category and being differently deserving of merit within that group.[133] As a result, it proceeds, unlike the *Guardian's* diachronic historical claim, to collect comments from visitors naming "missed" items (one writes "no "White Rabbit" by Jefferson Airplane?"), clarifying issues of categorization ("Umm, is this a top ten best songs about herioin or cocaine? …please know your drug slang and do your research…"), and generally ranking songs and looking for shared resonances of ("Eric Clapton at #2? Who else had that song pop in their head as soon as they saw the title?"). By concentrating their communal efforts on the evaluations of the items themselves, evaluative lists emphasize the items or objects of evaluation rather than other more reportage-oriented articles.

Evaluative lists often struggle to establish the particular extra-categorical significance of one item or a subset of items above the others by the very rhetoric of the categorical grouping of commensurate list items. A list of the "10 Least-Green Government Subsidies" collects those items and despite ranking them from 10 to 1, if it wanted to make a specific point about how one transcends the exercise of the list and thereby all the others, or how some can be seen as connected to a common cause to the exclusion of the others (e.g., as SUV and Highway subsidies might have been in the list above), it must somehow undercut its own message of

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133 http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/crossfade/2010/08/top_ten_best_songs_about_cocai.php (accessed May 27, 2012).

commensurate rankings within an otherwise consistent category of equivalents.[134] As one commenter suggested in response to that list, "It's hard to decide which subsidy is worst!"[135] Yet as other commenters show, the participatory orientation of evaluative lists is to establish just that by leveling more and more suggestions and support for particular items. The yearning to combine the masses of individualized opinions while moving towards a goal of a singular wisdom is evident throughout the evaluative list project.

Above I described Bourdieu's *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984) as a text that uses as its research the kinds of answers and suggestions that evaluative lists traffic in—statements of tastes through the preference for certain items such as favourite movies, directors or actors—to suggest that while it forwards a theory of taste, Bourdieu's *Distinction* is also, in part, a statement about the role of evaluative lists. What separates the final product from the aggregates and commensurations of different lifestyles reflective of the questionnaires in the appendices is that Bourdieu mobilized them not to reflect back to readers a list of tastes for each group (although he did provide this, e.g. p.128-129), but in drawing them together, he used them as data towards the more important unifying argument. That is to say, the list was for him a beginning, not an end.

In 2006, the *New York Times* surveyed a collection of American writers to determine the "Best Great American Novel of the last 25 Years," a request which returned a ranked list of the results that the NYT dutifully published along with links

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[134] http://ecosalon.com/the-10-least-green-government-subsidies/ (accessed May 27, 2012).
[135] Ibid.

to their review for each novel on the list. However, the newspaper also included an essay by literary critic A.O. Scott in which Scott wrote about the request made to opinion leaders and writers of American fiction, their reactions, their responses, the history of the contest itself, the novels that did and did not get many votes, and American writing in general over its history, transcending all bounds of the list. Like Bourdieu's work, Scott's essay is very un-list-like: he resists framing the article systematically as a collection of distinct items, and although he does write about the higher-ranking novels, his arguments more often than not make unsystematic (and not warranted by the list results) groupings of a few of the works against others, and he discusses trends that predate and transcend the items and category represented.

In giving voice to those writers who criticized the idea of participating in the NYT list, Scott discussed the aspect of evaluative lists that collect the dispersed opinions of some group:

> More common was the worry that our innocent inquiry, by feeding the deplorable modern mania for ranking, listmaking and fabricated competition, would not only distract from the serious business of literature but, worse, subject it to damaging trivialization. (…) The determination of literary merit, it was suggested, should properly be a matter of reasoned judgment and persuasive argument, not mass opinionizing. Criticism should not cede its prickly, qualitative prerogatives to the quantifying urges of sociology or market research. (A. O. Scott 2006)

Bringing to mind the sociological processes of Bourdieu's theory of distinction and Zukin's description of the evaluative listings of *Consumer Reports* and *Zagat's* as "market research in reverse", Scott's passage suggests a discomfort with the lesser amount of "reasoning" and "persuasive argument" evident in or available to lists that evaluate literary merit.

"Top 10," "End-of-year" lists, and other evaluative lists struggle with externalities, from the scope of the list, that certain items may represent, including historical and causative externalities that may challenge the voice of commensurability and multiplicity captured in participatory lists. Evaluative lists are stuck in the forever-present, engaging more with the pleasures of enumeration than in finding reasons for the list results that cannot be located within the logic of the list itself. More cohesive examples of evaluative writing—the critical essay, for example—reflect the commonality and import of such maneuvers. For example, Scott reaches back to the last time the NYT conducted such a poll, in 1965, in contextualizing the winner of the more recent evaluation, Toni Morrison's *Beloved:* "It is worth remarking that the winner of the 1965 Book Week poll, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, arose from a similar impulse to bring the historical experience of black Americans, and the expressive traditions this experience had produced, into the mainstream of American literature" (A. O. Scott 2006). Scott's contextualization using the 1965 list—and thereby, using also several novels of the 25 years prior to that list as well as the evaluative environment evident at the time—allows him to begin to sketch out the salient resonances among different generations of writers asked to select the "best" American novels and the kinds of novels they select. While still dealing in several ways with multitudes—trends, styles, themes of the works, groups of writers, etc.—the essay nonetheless transcends the bounds of the list to contextualize the items, and Scott contextualizes them outside of the list's usual systematic routing, whereby all comments apply either to the whole (in, e.g., the preamble or concluding paragraphs) or to individual items only (e.g. in that item's

blurb). The essayistic initiative to discursively instantiate these emergent groupings, phenomena, and reasonings by Scott allows him to speak the novels into a new reality that is not available in an item-level semiotic system limited to selection, order, the relationships that obtain between these, and individuated contextual "blurb" passages.

Zukin wrote that "[w]e read consumer guides because we want to reconcile our individual desire with our collective dreams" (Zukin 2004, 196). Evaluative lists attract high participation because they can occupy this popular middle-ground where some users will consult them as a resource, particularly those with an anxiety or need for guidance in the domain discussed, some will participate enthusiastically as vocal contributors, particularly those with strong feelings or a sense of mastery over the domain, while most will approach them with an equivocation of these urges, drawing out resonances between their experiences and expert or collective consensus while also submitting their suggestions and observing the reaction that obtains. It is this high participation which both feeds the sense of robustness of the commensuration among different tastes and experiences, but which also fragments the final aims of evaluation of providing guidance through the treachery of experimentation and misjudgement. Publishers of evaluative lists resolve the paradoxical tensions pulling them in opposite directions—the fragmentation of individual experiences and tastes, and the aims of a unified recommendation pointing towards the best product, quality, or decision—by evincing an ethic of "tacit commensuration" that collects and combines into a single site as many

preferences and recommendations as it can gather in order to approach, in aggregate, “the good.”

Chapter 4

Playlists

> The most widely practiced American art form: the personal mix tape of favorite songs that serves as self-portrait, gesture of friendship, prescription for an ideal party, or simply as an environment consisting solely of what is most ardently loved.
>
> –Geoffrey O'Brien, *Sonata for Jukebox*

Introduction

One of the most beloved aspects of the web and of digital culture in general has been the increased control available in terms of creating new personal collections of digital aesthetic items. Recorded music has demonstrated over the course of the 20th century, and into this century, the value, in various commercial and personal senses, of dis-articulating its items from a whole and re-articulating them into a new whole, whether that destination is a jukebox, the radio, the dance floor, a mixtape, or a listener's collection. The concept of the playlist has been applied to all such sites, but takes particular relevance as an art and technology when, with the popularization of cassette recorders, and later computers and portable digital music players, the creation of mixtapes or playlists became a democratized and widely practiced art form that could be created relatively easily and by each person. Playlists, combining in most cases both a textual aspect that represents the contents of the collection and a technological aspect that activates the users' experience of the songs, represent a type of list that in a more generalized sense as an aesthetic collection of any kind – songs, images, sequences of videos –

are quite common on the web as quick, easy creations that allow their creators to make an aesthetic statement using pre-existing items collected and arranged in new ways.

I will describe in this chapter how playlists are in some ways rooted in play-lists from radio, jukeboxes, dance floors, but after their "personal turn" reflect practices of playlist-makers in the contexts of the personal compilations of mixtapes and computer-based playlists. Playlists are sites whereby users select, collect, and organize their experiences of aesthetic, temporally-extended items such as songs or short videos to create a certain sequence and effect. As such, playlist-makers emphasize an aesthetic, artistic approach to the form not as evident in other kinds of lists, and their personal nature allows them to act as a kind of work of art that can be created relatively quickly and be re-created for individual events, tastes, occasions, moods, and as gifts for others.

Playlists tend to engender a model of participation based on personal criteria, whereby users share personal contexts for the creation of the lists with others, who discuss them and make suggestions about them, but with a respect for the artistic sovereignty of the list creator that is in contrast to the vibrant collaborative discussions and arguments of evaluative lists. Selection for inclusion on a playlist is made in a spirit of artistic endeavor, often reflecting a theme or a prototypical member, but following more personal, tacit, and sometimes mysterious criteria than is evident in other lists. Items are ordered in playlists primarily to aesthetic effect, emphasizing smooth and interesting transitions from one item to another such that the playlist coheres and exhibits what users call a "flow", rather

than some order based on an explicit valuation or an objective criteria such as alphabetical order. Finally, playlists speak rhetorically as personal, partial, and artistic creations, rarely framed by their creators as ideal for all listeners or circumstances, and are suggestive of an ethic of attentiveness to a particular person, mood, time of day, occasion or experience. Playlists are increasingly common on the web and in other database-related mediated spheres, such as mobile computing, where lists are used to structure temporal experiences from a large pool of available music, video, or other entertainment or educational resources.

Because they are used in contexts of technologically activating the experiencing of media files, playlists are commonly functional in a somewhat more "closed" sense than the other kinds of lists explored in this dissertation. They often require for their technological activation of media files to be created within the specific sites that offer those media files, under a specific user account; an iTunes or YouTube playlist, for example, requires the user to be, respectively, within the iTunes program or connected somehow to the YouTube site in order to "play" the list. Moreover, because playlists in particular often refer to collections of copyrighted songs, playlists take on the import of a commercial strategy in a way that is more predominant than encyclopedic lists, and, though also sharing proven commercial clout with them, more explicitly part of a commercial endeavour than evaluative lists are on the open web.

Yet, it is this granular identification of playlists with specific sites and user accounts that makes them so multiple, so available to be amassed within and across

sites by each and every user of those sites; it allows them to be created for any reason, and re-created at will as tastes or occasions change.

Methodology

In this research I relied primarily upon a set of 685 playlists created by users of the site Art of the Mix (www.artofthemix.org; abbreviated AOTM) between January 2003 and December 2010, in which users posted some discussion about their playlists. The Art of the Mix site also has a user forum that I used in this research, consisting of approximately 50 threads of discussion, as well as blog entries that users posted to the site. I selected the playlist corpora from 2003-2010 to emphasize the period since the advent of mp3 files, yet to ensure a large enough corpora to draw conclusions.

The Art of the Mix (AOTM) is a website where users post and discuss the track listings of their mixtapes, mix CD's, and computer playlists. The site also allows users to "message" each other and to post "responses", or as they appear on the site, "feedback," to other users' posted playlists. The process of posting a playlist involves entering the artist and song information for each track, and optionally adding in album information and comments about the playlist. Users on Art of the Mix also often offer and request trades, where users will reciprocally exchange physical mixtapes or CD's of their respective playlist postings.

I also explored a set of 232 playlists posted to the site smartplaylists.com. Smartplaylists.com is a site focused on the "smart playlists" feature incorporated into Apple iTunes music software. Unlike the Art of the Mix playlists,

smartplaylists.com is concerned with sharing the methods by which users create automated playlists in iTunes, and is concerned with how song metadata and playlist programming can combine to achieve certain effects.

Lastly, for context about other sites that use playlists, I explored the online music subscription service Rdio.com and on the video site You Tube (youtube.com). These were done in both instances by performing searches limited to "playlists" and browsing in an exploratory manner under my own user account. I sought to gather from these sites an appreciation for how playlists are constructed by users, which playlists are popular with other users, how playlists are commented upon by users, other qualities of the playlists (size, age, number of playlists that specific users create), and clues related to how the playlists are used.

Unlike for example (Cano 2004) or (Cunningham, Bainbridge, and Falconer 2006), I emphasized how the playlist postings themselves were framed and responded to by other users of the site. This approach is sometimes called online ethnography or netnography. As opposed to statistical methods, which do not aim to put the playlist data into a social context, or the interview method, which can be obtrusive and frame observations in a context fabricated by researcher, an online ethnography of the playlist postings, forum discussions, and blog posts and discussions follows users in their own settings as they engage in playlist-related discussions (Kozinets 2010).

In studying my corpora I emphasized questions related to two areas:

(a) how my registers of participation, selection, order, and rhetoric apply to the online communication, discussion, and reception of playlists; and,

(b) how textual-techno-aesthetic objects such as playlists (as they are posted on the sites I studied rather than as cassettes, CD's, or algorithmic objects in computer music library software) are used in their diverse capacities to:

(i) *textually* communicate collections;

(ii) *technologically* collect and partly automate the playing of a set of songs or videos;, and

(iii) *aesthetically* cohere as works of art in and of themselves.

Although all the playlists studied engaged these dimensions, they can be expected to do so in different ways, with those services that use playlists to algorithmically play the music or videos on the site they are assembled (Rdio.com and YouTube) possibly emphasizing a technological role that the playlists posted to Art of the Mix might not. One of the challenges in this chapter is to engage with this complex of functions that fall under the rubric of the playlist.

A notable limitation of my approach to exploring the playlists, their usage, and the discussions around them is that my findings, while more attentive to the context and chronology in which users interact around playlists, are more limited to the sites studied than are some other methods such as interviews, where researchers can probe interviewees on the topic of other contexts that may not be actively discussed within the particular domain that I studied (Kozinets 2010). I address this limitation by studying several different sites that differently use the concept of playlist and explore different aspects of each, as well as by performing an extensive literature review of other studies of mixtape and playlist research which offer findings about the generalizability of my claims beyond one site of study.

This approach also raises an ethical concern. Some have raised the question of whether online forums that at times discuss personal information are private or public, and whether posting to them constitutes informed consent (Paccagnella 1997). The playlists discussions certainly broach personal topics—indeed, I will argue, the personal nature of playlists is one of their defining features compared to the other lists explored in this thesis. However, unlike certain forums which require users to create an account on the site and log-in before reading the postings, Art of the Mix is framed as a site viewable by all. Accordingly I identify users by their public usernames and use their postings as I would public blog postings.[136]

The 'Personal Turn' for Playlists

Playlists require the presence stabilized, discrete musical objects such as records or digital files to be chosen, listed, ordered, or excluded. Playlists emerged as a radio term for the groups of songs that could be played at any given time period for a particular radio station. The concept of a collection from a larger pool of records also had a history in jukeboxes, which had to be filled according to some strategy. Jukeboxes required low-priced records, and although the storage capacity of jukeboxes crept up over the 1930's, it did not rise indefinitely (Segrave 2002, 45–50), mirroring the pattern of quick rising but subsequent slowing or plateauing of the capacities of records, cassettes, and mp3 players. The selection of specific records to be included in a jukebox can be seen as a *proto*-playlist, in that it

[136] Paccagnella cites the ProjectH Research Group: "Personal? - yes. Private? – no."

structured the interface between a universe of available records with the contingent, personal listening decisions made "on the floor" (*Ibid.*).

The popular Top 40 radio format was inspired by jukebox playlist strategies, according to the founding myth of Top Forty radio, when Todd Storz witnessed the level of repetition evident in jukebox listening practices (Walker 2004, 57). He sought to devise a format based on repetition, ever tightening playlists, and a regimented clock system (*Ibid.*). As Dick Clark put it, "Todd Storz was the genius behind it, saying, 'Hey, people go into a saloon and they play the same forty records over and over again.' " (quoted in Fong-Torres 2001, 40). Records were repeated more often, with more input from station owners, but the format's symbiotic rise with the surging record industry ensured that a complex mix of interests were being funnelled into the weekly playlist. Top Forty radio became a site where the playlist took prominence as a technology that crystallized the interaction of station owners, DJ's, advertisers, record companies, and listeners. The practices and technologies surrounding the playlist in these contexts thus emerged as a key strategic site for the play of familiarity against variety, authority against resistance, structure against agency. These practices engendered in listeners an expectation for short, discrete musical objects that repeated (but not too much) and that were popular or authoritative (but still personalized and localized). Such preferences would continue on into mixtapes and digital audio practices in the yearning for a radio-like experience that mixed familiarity with novelty.

Mixtapes emerged in the 1970's as "party tapes", serving club-goers who wanted their music at home and in the car and acting as a source of income and

promotion for DJ's (MTV.com 2007). The "underground" mixtape industry remains alive into the 21st century in the hiphop community, serving as an indication of up-and-coming trends and a channel of promotion. As cassette recorders became more popular in the 1980's the practice was generalized from DJ tapes to any collection of songs that listeners wanted with them in the stereos, on their Walkman's, or in their cars. Most touchstones for mixtape nostalgia emphasize the 1980's and 1990's as the golden years of amateur mixtape practices, often framing the practice within an adolescent or young-adult phase concurrent with the negotiation of other intimate and formative life experiences (see for example Sheffield 2007; Hornby 1995; Moore 2005).

As recordable CD drives on computers emerged in the 1990's, the practice of burning mix CD's emerged in concert with them, borrowing easily from the practices of mixtape creation and distribution. However, because the process of computer CD creation involved the transfer of music onto a computer hard drive, and with the popularization of the MP3 format allowing at the same time the digital transmission of musical collections through services such as Napster, the burning of CD's was contemporaneous with the rise of the computer digital-music economy and the increasing use of iPods starting in 2001. The "jukebox" computer software that emerged to facilitate the management of music on the computer adopted the term "playlist" to describe the kinds of album-sized, user-created collections of music from a user's library that would be required to burn a CD, create a playable collection of MP3's on a computer, or to transfer that album-sized collection to an iPod or other device for portable listening. The playlist thus emerged as a kind of

collection in the form of an album, following closely the practice of creating mixtapes, that both helped to organize and structure into smaller collections a user's entire library of songs, and as a tool for arranging collections for listening when away from one's home library or as a gift to others.

Playlist and Mixtape Literature

Research on mixtapes and playlists has stressed the extremes of personal, qualitative, and, at times, autobiographical accounts of mixtapes on the one hand, and computer science-based statistical and algorithmic approaches to playlist mapping and creation on the other. Moore (2005) collects memories from musicians and journalists recounting the role of mixtapes. As Matias Viegener puts it in that work, "(t)he mix tape is a list of quotations, a poetic form in fact" (35). Or consider the inequality inherent in making a mixtape for another, one that exceeds normal notions of "sharing", as expressed by Dean Wareham:

> It takes time and effort to put a mixtape together. The time spent implies an emotional connection with the recipient. It might be a desire to go to bed, or to share ideas. The message of the tape might be: I love you. I think about you all the time. Listen to how I feel about you. Or, maybe: I love me. I am a tasteful person who listens to tasty things. The tape tells you all about me. There is something narcissistic about making someone a tape, and the act of giving the tape puts the recipient in our debt somewhat. Like all gifts, the mixtape comes with strings attached. (in Moore 2005, 28)

There are of course many reasons to make a mixtape. In an autobiographical account of mixtapes, music journalist Rob Sheffield listed several genres of the form:

> The party tape; I want you; […] I hate this fucking job; the radio tape; the walking tape. [...] The drug tape. The commute tape. The dishes tape. The shower tape. The collection of good songs from bad albums you don't ever want to play again. The greatest hits of your significant other's record pile,

> the night before you break up. There are millions of songs in the world, and millions of ways to connect them into mixes. (Sheffield 2007, 21–23)

In reviewing the separate accounts of mixtapes and playlists by O'Brien and Nick Hornby, the latter of which will be returned to later below, Sante sums up the variety of roles the mixtape or playlist plays with reference to different forms of collections: "Over the last twenty-five years the mix tape has become a paradigmatic form of popular expression. It is one part Victorian flower album, one part commonplace book, one part collage, and one part recital" (Sante 2004).

The last of his examples, "recital", points to a difference between mixtapes or playlists and the other kinds of lists and texts studied in this dissertation: mixtapes and playlists carry with them a temporal dimension, a performative, processural aspect to their identities that is more important to them than is the temporal dimension in, say, reading an encyclopedic list of birch trees. This aspect of mixtapes and playlists means that the core research questions explored in this chapter invoke musical aspects such as taste, genres, identity, as well as specific aesthetic concerns such as, for example, how tempo affects selection, or how key affects ordering of songs.

Hennion has explored aspects of music playlist programming in radio (Hennion and Meadel 1986; see also Ahlkvist 2001), and has developed a wide-ranging pragmatic approach to musical taste that focuses on the enjoyment of music by fans (Hennion 2004; Hennion and Teil 2003). Hennion draws focus, especially with respect to the latter, on the ways that the environments of musical acquisition, organization, and listening, as well as the contextual framing of music as collections play important roles in how music fans understand, develop, and share their

listening skills. Hennion reports interviewing an avid music listener and receiving answers typical of prior findings concerning educational background, influential concert experiences, and so on, until entering the music fan's environment and being shown around, where he "opened up,"

> revealing to another amateur his gestures, his odd little ways, his lists with items ticked off, his equipment. His taste had found its space, and there was nothing passive about it. For example, before putting them away he used to leave many new records in the bottom right-hand corner of his bookcase - until the day he had the idea of transforming this disorder into the basis of a system for arranging his records. … This is a typical invention of an amateur: his record library gradually changed into a reflection of his tastes. The amateur triumphed over the musicologist: his taste, not the history of music, governs his system of classification. (Hennion 2004, 138)

For Hennion, stated musical preferences, arrangements, discussions and shared experiences are not hollow representations of an "arbitrary" that naturalizes domination, nor so many moves in games of positioning of arbiters of taste within a field, but rather reflect how practiced music listeners continually perform their understanding and enjoyment of music in collectives with others. Speaking more generally of artistic study, he argues for a pragmatic turn where the "works themselves" are shown to constantly change meaning as their frames change: "the way they have been gathered together, presented, commented on and reproduced, have continuously reconfigured the frame of their own evaluation" (*Ibid.*, 133). Referencing de Certeau's "tactical" city strollers (de Certeau 1988), Hennion argues that specific practices of selecting, arranging, listening to, and discussing music, among the many other aspects of musical practice that I will discuss below as being at the heart of practices surrounding online playlist creation and sharing, highlight the inventive, heterogeneous, and historically changing phenomena of listening at

the hearts of amateur music fans (*Ibid.*, 139). While Hennion also explores the ways in which amateurs present themselves (Goffman 1959), how they form collectives, and the roles of socio-economic positions and identity, all of which play a part in discussions that take place around playlists, I mean to direct attention to how these aspects of musical discourse, for my purposes concerning the creation, discussion, and sharing of collections, nonetheless place musical things at the centre: "No language, no nose, no taste for wine until the wine has become the object of a set of practices that place it at their centre. No ear, no musical emotion, without a music to listen to. It took over three hundred years of practices and inventions to create our way of loving music" (Hennion 2004, 140).

In an essay about the celebrity playlist section on the iTunes music store, Dan Kois betrays his own personal criteria for a great playlist, which involves a mix of the known and the unknown: "Thievery Corporation's playlist is fantastic, the mix tape you always wished someone would give you: globe-spanning, genre-hopping, with just enough familiar stuff to recapture your attention when it starts to wane" (Kois 2004). By contrast, for Kois, Beyonce's playlist "sucks" because it is too self-involved (*Ibid.*). Evident in such distinctions are the kinds of aesthetic details that go into making an enjoyable and useful playlist, as well as some hints about what I will describe in this chapter as the overarching ethic of contingency in how Kois positions experientially fragile notions such as "familiarity" as important to the selections and orderings of songs.

In a piece about his unlikely love for both classical and punk music, Alex Ross speculated in 2004 about the possibility that digital playlists were in the process of

reclaiming a musical heterodoxy that had faded since the commercialization of popular music albums:

> On the iPod, music is freed from all fatuous self-definitions and delusions of significance. There are no record jackets depicting bombastic Alpine scenes or celebrity conductors with a family resemblance to Rudolf Hess. Instead, music is music. … It seems to me that a lot of younger listeners think the way the iPod thinks. They are no longer so invested in a single genre, one that promises to mold their being or save the world. (Ross 2004)

Ross is edging towards a familiar academic conception of the fragmented, postmodern condition, and in contrast to Bull (2005), he allies the iPod with a declining concern for singular control. Similarly, a Wired article described the iPod as being indicative of a new form of listening practice that is personalized, local, and social, in a fashion that ignores the prior thirty-year history of mixtapes:

> Music fans once turned to radio DJs to expose them to new music. But as music grows on the net, listeners are relying on friends and strangers to feed them—often in creative combinations…. Forget the album and corporate radio. Fan-built playlists and mixes are taking over the way people get their music. (Dean 2005)

An interviewee in that article, who runs a playlist-related internet service, remarks that: "Mix tapes and playlists are really the new container for music…They're dirt simple, they're social and they work" (*Ibid.*). Throughout such accounts, playlists are described as objects of radical personalization.

Other playlist research has shown that office residents engage in "impression management" through the curating of their iTunes music libraries (Voida et al. 2005), that people make stereotypical judgements about the listeners of various musical styles (Rentfrow, McDonald, and Oldmeadow 2009), and that music preferences can act as cues in young people for similar values and thus spur bonds between them (Boer et al. 2011). Playlists on AOTM have been explored in other

studies, mostly because a large data set of 29,000 playlists from that site, without any contextual information or discussion, were made available to research in the early 2000's, which several studies have used to general statistical models and algorithms of songs patterns and predictors of taste (e.g. Alghoniemy and Tewfik 2001; Berenzweig et al. 2004).

Cunningham *et al.* (2006) also looked at AOTM playlists in qualitative study. They analyzed the kinds of playlists or mixtapes users made, arriving at their own typology of playlists that included Artist/Genre/Style, Event or Activity, Romance, Message or Story, Mood, Challenge or Puzzle, among others (2). Cunningham et al. sought to make a clear distinction between "playlist" and what they call a "mix" (or, at times, "formal mix"):

> While conversationally the terms playlist and mix are often used interchangeably, here we are more careful in distinguishing between them. A mix is usually of a set length, enough music to fill a CD or (less commonly these days) a tape, usually has a strongly defined theme, and the order of the songs can be significant. It is often a gift for someone else. Playlists, in comparison, are typically for personal use, have varying lengths and a less strictly defined theme. (Cunningham *et al.*)

While this distinction holds well enough for computer library listeners and portable music listeners who will often organize playlists for themselves while gifting a mix-CD (or less so today, a mixtape), I suggest in the context of AOTM and in other contexts of mixtape/playlist discussions that unless referring to the material artefact of a tape or CD, the term "playlist" covers both the creation of personal collections and the creation of gifted collections. Cunningham et al. find that playlist and mix creators explore their music libraries and settle on a theme to begin selecting songs, that playlists or mixes tend to represent certain moods, genres,

messages, or events, and that a good mix "gives a perspective into the individual songs that you wouldn't have had without seeing them in that idea", according to one respondent (Cunningham et al.).

Bull's in-depth empirical research into mobile music listening practices (Bull 2005; Bull 2006; Bull 2008) characterizes Walkman users, and more so, iPod users as benefitting from the control that mobile personal listening affords them. Bull reports that iPods were an improvement over previous personal stereos since they resolve listeners' "attempts to judge what music to take with them on their daily commute":

> …(For walkman users), a hastily bundled selection of tapes or CDs would go into their bag in the hope that it would serve the purpose. What united personal stereo users at the time was the claim that no music was better than the 'wrong' music, by which they meant music that did not correspond to their current mood. The development of MP3 players has now provided a technological fix to the management of the contingency of aural desire…Users now take their whole music collection with them (Bull 2005, 344).

The iPod's ability to hold a person's "whole library in his pocket" addressed the pivotal problem of having the "wrong" music. Bull states that users will at times select individual songs or albums to listen to on the iPod, but that "(m)ore typically users will have a selection of play-lists that suit a variety of moods, times of the day or perhaps weather conditions or indeed times of the year" (Bull 2005, 344). The positioning of the playlist as a mediator between, as Bull puts it, "moods, times of the day or perhaps weather conditions…." on the one hand and the entire music library on the other hand is indeed a strategic and interesting site of activity. What is perhaps most important about playlists as a technology indicative of digital music practices is that they are able to negotiate between a planned listening experience

and the contingencies of, as Bull stated, mood, weather, and time out in the street (Bull 2005, 348).

4.1. Participation: An Artistic Sovereignty

Playlists tend to engender a model of participation whereby they are seen as personal, artistic artefacts that may draw discussion and suggestions from others, but where more passionate or authoritative interventions by others are treated as antithetical to the form. Playlists are approached as reflections of personal tastes, and unlike canonical encyclopedias or the commensurated sites of evaluative lists, playlists are multiple; each person will have many playlists for different sites, occasions, moods, and relationships, and others will attest to preferred songs or artists that they might replace in their own versions. While the technical affordances for participation in playlists vary across the different platforms studied in this chapter, users across the sites tend to approach the playlists of others with a respectful distance from harsh criticism or meddling that treats the lists as creative works of arts of a kind in their own rights that can co-exist with their own playlists.

Different websites and technological platforms structure playlist collaboration in different ways, ranging from sites like Art of the Mix that allows the free entry of any songs (indeed, existing or not) into a playlist, but does not allow them to automatically be "played", to iTunes and their "smart playlists", which require that a playlist be generated using songs on a user's computer or subscription account, to YouTube or Rdio.com that allow the creation of playlists drawing from any video or song on the site. Regardless of the design of the playlist

interface, however, a specific ethic of collaboration persists when considering playlists that frames the playlist-maker as engaging in a personal and artistic endeavour, and frames others as appreciators of this art who may respond in an interpretive, suggestive, or lightly critical fashion. Unlike evaluative lists or encyclopedic lists, playlists are generally not viewed as common textual ground that a large number of people struggle over, but rather as sites that each person can create anew, reflecting their tastes, experiences, moods, and so on, while inspiring others. Since anyone can make a playlist, few feel privileged or motivated to "correct" another's playlist, and authorship is generally respected as belonging to the listmaker.

Playlists are different from other musical creations because they are more readily created by music fans (or, in the cases of non-musical playlists, by fans of those forms, such as photography enthusiasts on Flickr (see for instance Terras 2011)) who may not possess the considerable technical skill in creating original "authoritative" albums in whole but who possess other creative and at times aspirational capacities, particularly involving forms of art that are structured so as to make use of pre-existing cultural artefacts. Jenkins (2006a) has characterized this dynamic as "fan culture", which is "produced by fans and other amateurs for circulation through an underground economy and [which] much of its content from the commercial culture" (285). For Jenkins, such works are respected as exhibiting artistic merit in their own rights, refocusing acts of fandom for particular artists or texts by actively creating new contexts for those texts. Eco writes of the same phenomenon, that "one must be able to break, dislocate, unhinge" a work before

making being able to repurpose it as a "cult object," "so that one can remember only parts of it, irrespective of their original relationship with the whole" (Eco 1986, 198). Though neither Jenkins nor Eco discuss playlists and mixtapes as examples of fan culture or the unhinging of works of art into new wholes, the practice of making mixtapes and playlists engages in processes that similarly construct new "wholes" from available "parts". A playlist has always been an accessible art form to those already managing their own listening experiences, and provides an avenue for music fans to present themselves and express their knowledges and tastes relatively easily while incorporating the works of favourite artists and the organizing structure of the music album.

On smartplaylists.com, participation tends to be more technical about algorithmic strategies than suggestive of songs. For example, one user suggests a playlist that will reduce battery usage on an iPod, by keeping songs under a certain length.[137] Users respond with technical and strategic suggestions, with one user suggesting an additional argument that the playlist avoid songs encoded in a higher bit rate.[138]

A desire expressed on smartplaylists.com that is shared by users on Art of the Mix, but is articulated differently, is to create playlists that draw on other authorities to select and order the songs. While users on Art of the Mix draw on other users to satisfy this yearning, users on smartplaylists.com seek to recreate the effect of radio playlists and the mix of repetition and surprise they carry with them.

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[137] http://smartplaylists.com/comments.php?id=146_0_1_0_C (accessed December 8, 2010).
[138] Ibid.

Several discussions on smartplaylists.com expressly search out such radio-like automated playlists. For example, one post seeks a method to recreate a specific radio program: "BBC Radio One have a feature called The Wonderyears where they play a song from 1990, then the next from 91, then one from 92 etc. I wanted to recreate this using Smart Playlists".[139] Another poster, "Davepmiller" writes that: "Weighted play by ratings is absolutely the key to making your iPod a true personal radio station".[140] The notion of a "true personal radio station" is an interesting one to consider—it is nearly an oxymoron. What does it mean?

It seems to refer to a desire by listeners to incorporate the suggestions and expertise of others, but within a framework that allows for one to maintain control over the parameters of that involvement. Behind such claims for a "radio"-like experience seem to be lie yearning for some influence beyond one's own to suggest and incorporate new and surprising tracks, if not to cede control to another user or corporate entity in full. This often gets operationalized using "smart" playlists that increase the pool of tracks included in the playlist from one or two albums-worth to hundreds or thousands of available songs, and by incorporating an algorithm that suppresses repetition and encourages variety within thematic bounds.

However, on sites not centrally concerned with algorithmic strategies, such as the Art of the Mix site, participation surrounding playlists most often takes the form of a playlist-maker asking for feedback to flesh out a playlist idea, or likewise, of gentle suggestions by others about songs and artists that might be applicable to

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[139] http://smartplaylists.com/comments.php?id=1013_0_1_0_C (accessed December 8 17, 2010).
[140] http://smartplaylists.com/comments.php?id=532_0_1_0_C (accessed December 8, 2010).

the playlist in question. For example, one user makes an implicit plea: "I am making this mix for a boy I'm interested in that I've been hanging out with a lot lately. I'm not sure if he likes me as more than a friend or not yet. It's not quite complete, I need some song suggestions".[141] Users tend to respond to such requests in a straightforward manner, in this case with one user suggesting "How about "Are You The Trouble I've Been Looking For?" by The Magnetic Fields", while another simply states "very nice (and a tad seductive)".[142] Another playlist carries a thankful note for the users who made suggestions: "And thank you to Adam B., Emily S. (…) for their generous supplementation and inspiration for this mix! I don't know where I'd be without you all. hugs to you all ".[143]

Perhaps due to the generally respectful approach users take to the playlists of others, playlist-makers are frequently humble about their playlists and, by extension, the limits of their musical knowledge and wit. One user writes:

> This addition to the series was made after I made 2-4, and everyone came up to me and said "I love them, but where's insert awesome song that I was too stupid to think of ?" And I was forced to hang my head in shame.[144]

Beyond particular feedback on a playlist, many users of AOTM engage in making playlists to broaden their familiarity with music, seeking to incorporate the authority of other music listeners into their own listening practices. One novice user warned: "This is my first mix on artofthemix.org. [I] love mixing cd's, and I'm

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[141] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=49734&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[142] Ibid.
[143] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=61560&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[144] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=91221&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

hoping to receive some response to my mixes so that I can broaden my musical interests."[145] Users respond to this with encouragement, saying "excellent selections" and "oh this is good. You're gonna like this site…trust me".[146] Playlist-makers on AOTM often post their playlists not only to effect influence on others but to spur personalized feedback that draws on the authority of other music fans.

When playlist-makers do not incorporate the feedback of others, it is usually a personal preference regarding the songs in question rather than a rejection framed as a condemnation. Consider one example, where a poster averts suggestions by others *a priori* with the warning: "Don't whine about how I didn't include your favorite song, because 1) I have retarded taste and 2) I'M NOT MAKING ANOTHER ONE, DAMMIT!!!".[147] It is telling that in cases where disagreements arise in discussing a playlist, they most often tend to be digressions of fact rather than opinions about inclusions, exclusions, and ordering aspects of the playlist itself. Where this does not hold is where the playlist in question is more properly another kind of list framed as a playlist: most often in these cases, an encyclopedic-list-as-playlist or a ranked-list-as-playlist. For example, a playlist entitled "Inferior Originals" claims to collect all songs whose cover versions, in the opinion of the playlist-maker, "bettered" the originals.[148] This playlist shares more in common with an evaluative list for its featuring of a constrained, opinion-based enumeration

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[145] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=54571&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[146] Ibid.
[147] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=59017&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[148] http://www.artofthemix.org/FindAMix/getcontents2.aspx?strmixId=99668 (accessed October 17, 2011).

that is designed to spark disagreement and engender discussion. It does so, attracting more comments than most on the site, including strong disagreements that are rare on the site, such as: "NO WAY is that dreadful, played-to-death Soft Cell di-version of "Tainted Love" any better than Gloria Jones's original. And: The Clash surpassing the mighty Junior Murvin? The lousy Damned better than Barry Ryan?...".[149] Strong responses like this one are the exception to the rule in playlists, however, where differences in opinion are often equivocated as reflections of different tastes.

The most collaborative playlists are those that allow any user to participate in creating a communal playlist, and while this is a feature offered to playlist-makers on Rdio.com, on AOTM it is sometimes achieved by creating an account and distributing the password on the playlist page that also spells out the theme and rules for contributing. In these cases, perhaps to avoid violating the understanding of playlists as personal expressions, users prefer a clear theme or set of criteria for inclusion for the collaborative playlist; one user reported creating one, "but it didn't catch on (…) (t)he theme is key I think".[150] One collaborative playlist that did 'catch on' carried a theme of containing "epic" songs, where the rules specified that the songs had to be at least 5 minutes in length.[151] Users reported enjoying the playlist and filled it out with suggestions, but still exhibited in their responses tentativeness towards dominating the sovereign space of the playlist. One user warned, playfully,

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[149] Ibid.
[150] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=97309&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[151] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=97309&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

that he or she was "Totally ruining the classiness of the mix so far with a 9 minute Ween song about oral sex, but hey, that's what you get for letting just anyone in on one of these things".[152] Playlists encourage respect for authorial intent of the playlist-maker, and contributors are somewhat tentative about stepping on each others' artistic toes.

Popular collaborative playlists on other sites where such collaborations are featured more strongly in the design of the site still tend to attract submissions only when the rules for inclusion are more clear than they usually are for playlists, and thus, presumably, the potentials for transgressing the playlist ethic are reduced. For example, on the site Rdio.com, a popular collaborative playlist open to all users to edit is one simply tracking the top 100 songs downloaded in iTunes, and encourages listeners to update the list as rankings change, which hundreds of users have done.[153] However, like the somewhat abnormal levels of disagreement engendered by the hybrid evaluative-list-as-playlist, the participation authorized for this "Top 100 songs on iTunes" playlist seems rooted in its being an encyclopedic-list-as-playlist hybrid, by virtue of attempting to accurately reflect the sales status on the iTunes site. Playlists that are more properly in the playlist mode, such as a collaboratively-open playlist called "Sad songs", are less likely to be collaborated on, and tend to attract supportive comments and quiet listeners rather than large groups of collaborators who endeavour to edit the playlists.

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[152] Ibid.

[153] http://www.rdio.com/#/people/jtjdt/playlists/5183/iTunes_Top_Charts_(US)/ (accessed October 17, 2011).

A model of participation cherished by playlist-makers, however, is what is commonly referred to as "alternating DJ" collaborations, where two playlist-makers take turns adding songs to the list, working within the constraints afforded by the other's prior addition and aiming to create a coherent experience for the listener. In one example that folds in a narrative to accompany the playlist, two popular contributors to AOTM recount a favourite local bookstore they share, whose owner they had befriended, and how they seek to create a playlist that could be played in the bookstore over the winter.[154] Users enjoyed what became "a genuinely organic collaboration", with one respondent noting that "This is gorgeous (…) a dangerous duo, you two", while the playlist itself earned a weekly award from the site for best playlist.[155] This model of collaboration, where one or a small few users are framed as the creators, and others are framed as respondents who express enjoyment or light suggestions, characterizes playlist collaboration, where the list is not primarily an enumeration of fact or a site of contestation, but an artistic, aesthetic artefact whose creators are given authorial respect.

4.2. Selection: More Art than Science

Songs are selected for inclusion on a playlist in a spirit of artistic endeavour, reflecting a theme for the collection, and often following several tacit rules of playlist-making that can nonetheless always be broken. An often-repeated maxim in creating mixtapes and playlist is, as one user put it in responding to a new user who

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[154] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=109342&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[155] Ibid.

was worried about selecting too many songs from one artist: "We have one rule-there are no rules".[156] As Cunningham et al. (2006) put it, it's "more art than science". Nonetheless, playlist makers on AOTM exhibit several tacit rules for making good playlists, including a specific or more general selection of a theme to structure the collection, an emphasis on a few prototypical or pillar songs that structure the playlist, an ethic of representativeness across the pool of available albums and artists rather than repetition of a few, an attempt to consider the tempos of the songs, a requirement that the pool being selected from is sufficiently large, and a suspicion of popular hit songs. I will explore these factors below, but want to suggest that each accords to the maxim "more art than science" by reflecting an aesthetic concern with creating an overall "work" that "works against" the fragmentary nature of the songs or videos that constitute the playlist.

The theme of a playlist has a strong effect on the song choices. Some themes define the selection criteria more explicitly, such as the themes *Songs by [Artist]*, *[Genre] Mix*, or *Favourites of the [Decade].* Others keep the selection criteria more mysterious, as part of the artistic aspect of the playlist, such as those for a special someone who may or may not be briefly described, an event that occurred in the past and is touched upon, or activity that is planned.

Calling to mind Lakoff's assertion that categories are often conceived with a prototypical member in mind (Lakoff 1987), playlist-makers often frame their lists around one or a few privileged examples that serve to structure the other selections and communicate to others a unifying philosophy behind the playlist. One user

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[156] http://www.artofthemix.org/FindAMix/getcontents2.aspx?strmixId=112206 (accessed October 17, 2011).

created a playlist based on a recent conversation she had with a friend about how they relate to lyrics differently throughout their lives. In the resulting playlist, she arranged it so that "(a)ll the songs and artists with 's next to them are ones we discussed in our chat, and they sort of form the backbone of the mix. the others are ones i gathered she might like from her taste & personality".[157]

Playlist-makers describe how certain songs can give coherence to a whole playlist, as did this user who described his playlist: "Fairly eclectic but slightly 80s-leaning mix. I started with the Thompson Twins song, if that helps anyone wrap their head around why the hell I'd put Van Morrisson and Pearl Jam on the same CD".[158] From the perspective of others interpreting and giving feedback on the playlist, certain songs often evoke singular praise or ridicule. As one popular user opined regarding another's playlist, "EXTREME kudos for your Neil Young pick (one of my three or so favorite Neil tunes and such an obscurity, to boot). I also love your Jam (my favorite song by them)".[159] Unlike other lists explored in this thesis, select items in a playlist can disproportionately guide the creation and colour the interpretation of a playlist.

Users on AOTM also describe how the selection of songs can serially guide the selection of other songs in an elaborating pattern. These instances differ from most list creation routines outside of playlists because the overarching selection criteria for a list of songs is usually not as clear and unambiguous as it is with, for

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[157] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=56744&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[158] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=83607&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[159] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=90243&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

example, an encyclopedic list. As important in playlists is the inspiration derived from prior selections, and the overarching theme of the playlist is often settled upon as a result of, rather than a guide to, the selections made. As one user described it:

> Here's one of those improvisational mixes: I started with the Gene Clark track, daisy-chained from thereon & later assembled the individual cuts into some semblance of a flow. As soon as Spiritualized made an appearance, the other 2 Come Togethers became obvious inclusions. The Beatles then suggested Chuck as Lennon's appropriation of the "here come ol' flattop" line was later to cause him all sorts of trouble. That seemed a good place to start & the running-order practically generated itself after that. I s'pose mostly it's a white-kids-meddling-with-gospel-tropes kinda vibe. Testify! [160]

In such instances, an overall theme for the playlist is recognized after the fact of collecting, rather than explicitly guiding the selection process.

Playlist-makers express in describing their own playlists and giving feedback on those of others an ethic of *representativeness* across albums and authors, and they tend to critique the repetition of artists or certain albums on a playlist that is not explicitly themed as a collection from that artist or album. This aspect of playlists calls to mind the completist ethic of encyclopedic lists, but rather than exhausting a category, a good playlist draws from different sources relatively representatively. For example one user described his difficulty in avoiding a particular album: "I'm upset that I still didn't get to include anything from Death of a Ladies' Man, which--as I said on volume one--I really do like a lot".[161] Likewise, another user apologized for repeating artists too much: "Not the most 'technical' of

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[160] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=103526&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

[161] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=87271&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

mixes (too many repeated artists), but it hits the spot for me. I suppose I should apologise for the back-to-back Buzzcocks". [162]

When one user complained of her own playlist that it was "one of those mixes only made good by the songs on it and the theme" because it "has pretty shitty flow and repeats The Faint 3 times", another user offered that "It is always okay to repeat The Faint :)".[163] While non-playlist lists can be considered ideal exemplars when they are complete, or authoritative, playlists are often best when they sample their songs representatively without overly repeating or excluding certain artists or songs.

One aspect of playlist selection that has an effect on the perceived quality of a playlist, as well as the efficacy of a playlist made for a certain event (such as exercise), is the tempo of the songs. Good playlists should not have jarring transitions in general, but specifically drastic changes in tempo, unless planned, are looked down upon. One user's playlist for accompanying spin classes carries the explanation that "I tried to pick songs (off the top of my head) that all had more or less the same tempo. Then, I grouped them into three "sets" which got progressively longer".[164]

Several playlist-makers felt a need for choice in their song selections, and became nervous about playlists that would limit the pool of songs available for the playlist below at least a few albums' worth. One playlist-maker was apologetic

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[162] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=49443&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[163] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=86632&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[164] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=58629&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

about a playlist collecting favourite Sex Pistols songs: "Yes, I know, their recorded legacy (particularly prior to Johnny Rotten's departure) isn't particularly huge…and therefore may not be 'mix-worthy'".[165] When specific selection criteria are specified, playlist-makers prefer to have a large population from which to select their songs.

Playlist-makers were, with some exceptions, generally more dismissive of playlists comprised of popular "hit" songs than they were of those featuring more rarely heard songs. This seems to be rooted both in the forums these playlists are discussed in—those of knowledgeable music fans who like to demonstrate a Bourdieuean "distinction" in terms of deep appreciation beyond Top 40 radio tracks—and an issue more specific to playlist-makers: that playlists ought to have a good reason to exist. A playlist featuring songs torn from Top 40 radio tended to be ignored by users of the site, suggesting that they offered little in addition to other available sources, and presumably that supportive comments might reflect back on them as having poor taste. Similarly, playlist-makers would also often apologize for using popular songs, as did one user who collected songs she was currently listening to the most: " no one is gonna applaud me for using Kelly Clarkson, Unwritten Law, Tom Jones, and the most overused AC/DC song of all time...but…for once, I refuse to be ashamed of anything on here".[166]

In some playlists, however, popular songs are recommended. In a posting asking for help with a playlist for an upcoming wedding DJ gig, several users

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[165] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=97211&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[166] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=88224&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

complimented the experienced and well-respected playlist-maker on his mix-in-progress but suggested that at a wedding, "no matter how carefully you plan the songs, if a song hasn't been heard at least 1,000,000 times - people WON'T dance!", with another suggesting, "I'd say go with a few more all-time classics".[167] In most contexts, however, selections of more rarely heard songs tend to be favoured in making a "good" playlist. On a site like YouTube, however, such canonizations of popular creators and more "distinctive" artists are nascent, and playlists show little of concerns over popularity as do music-oriented sites.

The selection of items for a playlist is a more aesthetic and at times mysterious process than it is for other kinds of lists. Some of the guidelines that users describe include selecting a theme for the playlist, finding some prototypical exemplars that will guide further selections, seeking a representative sample across available artists and works rather than repeating them, and finding groups of songs that make a playlist a unique, personalized collection.

4.3. Order: A Good 'Flow'

The ordering of songs on a playlist is a source of consternation among many playlist-makers who assume there to be some skillset to creating a good order. Aspects related to order in the case of playlists are at times reflective of cognitive science research into "framing effects" that appear when users are confronted with lists. For example, Salant found certain importance of orderings in lists, such as an assumption that the higher up items are in a list, the more important they are (i.e.,

[167] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=89611&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

the "primacy" effect), the last item in a list has a particular importance (i.e., the "recency" effect), items that repeat or include repeating elements may stand out (i.e., the "saliency" effect) (see Salant 2008). Because playlists do not exemplify the neutral ordering of encyclopedic lists, nor the evaluative commensuration of ranked lists, they are free to be ordered by users to different effect, and therefore can become part of the significations available to playlist-makers, which as I will discuss further below, connect aesthetic lists more closely to the territory of creating narratives. Most of all, however, playlists emphasize an ethic of ordering such that songs transition into one another in an aesthetically pleasing way, and that as a result the playlist coheres. Users most often describe this quality of unity across transitions as "flow".

Adhering to a category used by the playlist makers themselves, a preeminent concept in matters of ordering the songs on the playlist is that of flow, most often used judgementally by the playlist-maker him- or herself in a binary mode where the playlist, or parts of it, either does or does not "flow" well. A "good flow" is so important to playlist-makers that otherwise odious selections can be positives in a playlist if they flow, as one user demonstrated when he commented: "Hah. Coldplays ok, for a Radiohead rip. But hey. If it flows…".[168] Another user commended his or her own single-artist playlist for achieving a professional flow: "oh, the sequencing, i am proud of the sequencing. (…) the flow is album-worthy, i'd like to think…".[169]

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[168] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=55584&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

[169] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=94561&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

One AOTM user suggested that flow is largely a matter of the keys in adjacent songs: "Make sure the end of one song blends sonically into the beginning of the next in terms of pitch/key, or that it's close enough so as not to upset the flow of the mix."[170] Another blogger who writes about playlists and mixes affirms that "the essential component of a mixtape, flow, is the hardest to quantify and formalize", but suggested that "(l)oosely defined, a mixtape flows to the extent that each song seems to fit with the previous one…" and that "listening to the beginnings and endings of songs will help to coalesce this somewhat nebulous concept".[171] Interestingly, this blogger suggested that when having trouble finding an appropriate song to follow, he will sometimes "cheat" by looking at the song's source album, finding the following song on it, and deriving the qualities from that song that might make it flow with the problematic one: "if it's a good album, the next track will flow and I'll be able to use something about that next track to inform my search."[172] If problems persist, he continues, playlist-makers can resort to "tricks" such as using a song that begins with only percussive instruments or inserting short transitory non-musical or spoken-word tracks.[173] The concept of flow is a vague term used to describe the continuity among song series in a playlist, and represents an aesthetic dimension associated with cohering the playlist into a work in its own

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[170] http://www.artofthemix.org/community/blog/page/General-Guidelines-for-Making-Great-Mixtapes.aspx (accessed October 17, 2011).
[171] http://tapesbylarry.blogspot.com/2009/05/how-to-make-mixtape-pt-4-flow.html (accessed October 17, 2011).
[172] Ibid.
[173] http://tapesbylarry.blogspot.com/2009/10/how-to-make-mixtape-pt-5-flow-revisited.html (accessed October 17, 2011).

right. The ordering of songs causes particular anxiety for some playlist makers, and is a source of pride for others.

One discussion on AOTM is illustrative of the complexities of order and flow within the aesthetic context of a playlist. When one user created a playlist of Pixies songs, another user objected to the "unoriginal" chronological order of the playlist, which followed the release dates of the albums.[174] The playlist-maker replied that he likes to hear the band develop chronologically throughout the playlist, and suggested both that the concept of flow was "totally irrelevant on a single-artist mix" while, incongruously, affirming that "the flow… is just fine here…Trust me. I've heard this mix and no one else has".[175] As users in this example offer support to the playlist-maker's preference for chronological order, they also offer their own preferences and theories about flow.

Another user suggested that single-artist mixes "have a natural-sounding flow to them" when in chronological order simply by dint of the artist's progressing career, but adds that in some cases he prefers to create his own original order, such as when an artist is particularly consistent in its sound, rendering order unimportant, or when a band is by contrast particularly inconsistent, necessitating more attention to the flow.[176] In another playlist posted on AOTM, the creator suggested that he or she preferred to avoid single-artist playlists because "I don't

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[174] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=49706&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.

like messing with the original order of the songs".[177] Another playlist-maker hedged on his or her strategy: "I tried to get the chronological order of the songs in there, with minor tweakage to improve the flow".[178]

Another important aspect of ordering songs on a playlist is arranging the opening and closing songs. Most playlist-makers suggest beginning with a favourite or particularly upbeat track. A blog post on AOTM suggests this strategy: "The first song is one of the most important; if you want the mix to attract the attention of the listener, the first song has to be one that will set the tone; hook them in and make them want to keep listening."[179] Likewise, Nick Hornby writes in *High Fidelity* that "You've got to kick off with a corker, to hold the attention" (Hornby 1995). Playlist-makers often use the opening track to inspire the playlist itself and its title. For example, one user writes: "Well, I always thought that 'Building Skyscrapers in the Basement' by TL/RX was a great opening track for Hearts Of Oak, so I thought that it would also be a great opening track for a mix. And, since the lyrics are so beautiful, one of the lines from the song is the title."[180] Like their reticence towards using an authoritative ordering of songs from albums, however, playlist-makers show a reticence about using opening songs from albums as openers for their playlists. As one user put it: "i almost opened with frail, i like opening cds with a slow song or a

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[177] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=75728&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[178] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=69831&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[179] http://www.artofthemix.org/community/blog/page/General-Guidelines-for-Making-Great-Mixtapes.aspx (accessed October 17, 2011).
[180] http://www.artofthemix.org/FindAMix/getcontents2.aspx?strMixID=67618 (accessed October 17, 2011).

song that builds up, like liquid, which i almost opened with... but i didn't because that's the first track on their first cd, so that would have been too easy...".[181]

The closing track is also important for supplying a coherent conclusion to the mix, and for creating a suitable "vibe" to linger in the air after the playlist finishes. A coherent conclusion often involves a song that has a particular affinity to the theme of the playlist. One user boasts that "(t)he final track expresses the same sentiment as the opening song, so it's kinda circular."[182] Another user emphasized this bookending technique by using the same song on both ends: "A mix to make me forget it's winter in New England (and it hasn't even got to the really bad parts yet)I started and ended with Boat Drinks because that's how it all starts".[183] More often, a playlist will begin and end with the same artist who captures the theme of the playlist particularly well, or one of the prototypical songs that helped to structure the playlist will bookend it.

> A blogger on AOTM suggested some 'rules' for ending a playlist:
> End strong. Besides the first song, the last song is also one of the most important. This is the lasting impression the mix will leave on the listener. Do you want to end with a bang or with a mellow feeling of finality? That's your choice to make based upon what songs you're working with and what sounds good. Either way, make sure the lasting impression is a good one.[184]

The advice, like all playlist advice, is malleable, but what is clear in playlist-makers' decisions is that closing songs are often singled out as favourites among all the

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[181] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=15200&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[182] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=6135&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[183] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=116158&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[184] http://www.artofthemix.org/community/blog/page/General-Guidelines-for-Making-Great-Mixtapes.aspx (accessed October 17, 2011).

songs on the lists. Many users comment on their fondness for the last tracks, as did this user: "I started the mix with a live Death In June track and ended with a live Cure track which is my absolute personal favourite."[185]

Meaningful Adjacencies

Playlist-makers concern themselves with other issues of song adjacency within a playlist. For example, a playlist-maker voiced the concern about too much similarity in adjacent songs as such: "i'm a bit iffy about the order of the songs, particularly about putting abra moore directly after leona because they're so similar".[186] In providing feedback to a posted playlist, another user voiced similar concerns: "You should move the Bright Eyes song away from Cursive. I dunno, I try to keep things from [the record label] saddle creek away from each other because there is a similarity".[187] When another user noted a surreptitious connection between the first two songs in a playlist based on a real-life romance between the artists, he or she affirmed that musically they nonetheless transition well to one another: "the whole bush-no doubt thing (gavin & gwen) was unintentional, but the songs sound gravy back to back".[188]

Such concerns are common in aesthetic lists that must accept as at least a possibility that reader/listeners will interpret order as semiotically-motivated, and

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[185] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=87895&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[186] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=87721&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[187] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=53156&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[188] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=57691&song=&artist=(accessed October 17, 2011).

must thus also be attentive to aspects of the songs that may be significant to others. This quality of ordering is rendered palpable in a more somber listing context, the listing of names for the deceased written on the walls of the 9-11 memorial in New York. Ordered using a database and algorithm system its makers termed "meaningful adjacencies", names were listed by complex sub-groupings and smaller groupings and pairings based on aspects like similar jobs, common offices, and particular bonds, relationships, or events. As an article in *Scientific American*.com put it:

> At first glance—and even after deep scrutiny—the names on a new memorial to those killed on September 11, 2001, seem randomly arrayed. The names are not arranged alphabetically […] but the memorial's layout is anything but random. The planners of the memorial […] solicited requests from victims' loved ones for "meaningful adjacencies"— names that should appear together on the memorial [and] be grouped with specific colleagues, with family members or with friends who also perished in the attacks. (Matson 2011)

The importance of order to the meaning of the work as a whole, and to those concerned with specific names on the memorial, is brought into relief in this context. The shift from treating the list as an encyclopedic list as I have defined it, featuring a neutral, alphabetical ordering concerned with accurately and functionally enumerating *all* names, to an aesthetic list concerned with fashioning a meaningful work of art and remembrance should not be surprising in the context of this study. The relief between the two approaches is drawn out by Salvo's experiences in visiting the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (Salvo 1999).

For Salvo, even a cursory sampling of the database of several thousand oral accounts bespeaks of there being "much more where that came from", a horrifying

abundance of tales. While traditional narrative cannot convey the immensity of the trauma—in Lyotard's notion of *diferend* it "cannot find the words" – a sampling of the oral accounts together with a recognition of the massive database underneath from which they are being drawn allows a sense of the mass trauma to be conveyed. Salvo remarked that he had listened extensively before realizing, in a moment of encyclopedic reckoning, "I was still listening to tales told by people with the same last name" (Salvo, 1999). Salvo writes of turning towards a "user-ordered representation" mode of experiencing the database that I have described elsewhere as similar to my "playlist" ethic (Joy Parr, Jessica Van Horssen, and Jon van der Veen 2009), rather than, impossibly, continuing through alphabetically.

Salvo draws an analogy between the listener's responsibility to engage with the partial selections and multi-vocality of his or her unique pathway through the database of oral accounts with a responsibility to resist and break through the univocal and totalizing logic of Nazi efficiency. Salvo suggests how humanity is hidden when all is linear, efficient, neutral, and logical. We have a responsibility, Salvo argues, to deal with partiality, different voices, un-introduced characters, and so on, because there lies in such tasks a fundamental human truth that not all in life is logical, and that not all logic is *good.* The playlist can fruitfully be considered in the context of the "user-ordered representation" that Salvo sketches out, as a response to the limits of linearity and authorized connections in the face of such abundance (recall Baudrillard's emphasis on the connection between "response" and "responsibility"). The playlist speaks of a database with an abundance of elements in it on the one hand, and of a personal, situated attempt to make sense of them on

the other hand. For Salvo, by making a series of selections of oral accounts from the database, the listener gets a feeling of having connected with specific stories, but also that he or she is only sampling a few of them, that there is much more where that came from.

Playlists and Narratives

In a similar if more pedestrian fashion that retreats from the contexts of major national and cultural memorials, playlists are sometimes created to tell or recount a narrative. All playlists exhibit a narrative function, but in some cases, the form is used more explicitly to chart a relationship or to convey a story. For example, in a relatively trivial if experientially meaningful youthful example in my playlist corpus, a narrative order can simply express a series of significant moments in a relationship, as was one user's playlist which "was recently made for my current boyfriend."[189] This user discussed the playlist "as an attempt to chart the story of our relationship", where "(t)he anticipation is followed with the exhilaration of connecting, and the contentment brought on by the train station reunion".[190] More rarely, narratives describe a non-autobiographical story. As one user put it,

> It's not often that we go into mix-making with an idea or a concept…usually the story … springs from nothingness, a subconscious kind of drive. But we heard Roxy Music's "Chance Meeting" and were struck immediately with the story it lent itself to. … What we have here is the story of a very typical love affair ("Here Today"), beginning in earnest ("Be My Baby," "Dreaming of You"), with the typical highs ("Your Mother Should Know") and the typical

[189] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=126181&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[190] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=126181&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

> doubts ("We Can Work It Out," "Somebody's Been Sleeping") of a pair in love.[191]

I have written elsewhere about the role that playlists can occupy between a database of materials and a linear narrative account, by using the concept of the "playlist mode" (Joy Parr, Jessica Van Horssen, and Jon van der Veen 2009). The playlist mode is positioned between the database and a narrative because it allows creators to make selections and order them as he or she wishes in the service of creating a certain effect based on theme, repetition, timeline of events, interesting comparisons, or any other "quasi-narrative" account that can be conceived using available elements from the database.

In the context of Chaucer's stories, and the lists within them, Barney argued that the lists are jarring when come upon in an otherwise developing narrative:

> A list is extruded from some principle and it intrudes into the story. Hence lists resemble other intruders in stories: digressive matter like parables, inset narratives, prolonged descriptions, homilies and other extended comment, interlaced material froma conjoined story, songs, letters, scientific explanation, apostrophes, historical excursions, complaints, anything that breaks the narrative thread to spin another. (Barney 1982, 190)

Yet he also noted, "A story wholly made of a list would be a special case" (*Ibid.*). Some playlists, arranged with narrative aims, can indeed draw on the pleasures of storytelling while maintaining an ease of creation and contingency towards possible change indicative of lists in a digital context. Some philosophisers of computer-based media in the 1990s and early 2000s took an oppositional stance to narratives, instead privileging the emerging importance of databases and their liberation of our senses from the dominating aesthetic of narrative (e.g., Manovich 2001; Aarseth

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[191] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=68097&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

1997). Manovich considered narrative as a kind of special case of database expression, as the "marked term" of the pair, and as Hayles summarized in a re-consideration of the roles of narratives and databases, he uses conceptions similar to those of Barney in casting narratives syntaxically perpendicular to databases:

> Manovich touches on this contrast when he perceptively observes that for narrative, the syntagmatic order of linear unfolding is actually present on the page, while the paradigmatic possibilities of alternative word choices are only virtually present. For databases, the reverse is true: the paradigmatic possibilities are actually present in the columns and the rows, while the syntagmatic progress of choices concatenated into linear sequences by SQL commands is only virtually present. (Freedman et al. 2007, 1606)

I will quickly note that what Hayles says for the database is perhaps better said of lists; the paradigmatic options arrayed in a list are the items of the list, and although a database can and often does work with lists in its human interfacing, it does not necessarily do so, making lists the better target for Hayles' claims and the database a source of lists, In any event, Manovich playfully characterizes databases and narratives as "natural enemies" (Manovich 2001, 225), while Hayles, on the other hand, searches for ways in which they are "natural symbionts", noting that the places from which we draw our stock of cultural resources can be seen as a database that is drawn from to create a story, and thereafter is enriched as the story is classified and incorporated back into it as replenishing resources (Freedman et al. 2007).

Playlists, I would also add, in some ways represent a material, socially practiced link of the type that Hayles illustrates metaphorically between databases and narrative. They provide a path into a database for new users drawn to a particular collection, and a path out of the database for creators willing to share a

mobile and captivating small collection with others. We can use playlists of sequential content to negotiate meaning in a context of ubiquitous and stable computer memory on the one hand with our narrative capacities and affinities for contingent storytelling and linearity on the other. Playlists can also represent how the digital items we use to create authored collections of all kinds, such as "playlists" of photo galleries (Terras 2010; Terras 2011) that we share on the web, are thereafter incorporated as resources in the database, for others to make use of. As the most "subjective" of the digital lists I explore in this dissertation, playlists allow their creators to fashion narrative-like collections that connect our desires to be guided by another's authority to the potentially infinite encyclopedic expanses of available items on the web and in the subscription services of media databases.

Playlists are treated as artistic acts with respect to order, reflecting neither the neutral ordering principle of encyclopedic lists nor the commensurative rankings of evaluative lists, but rather reflect personal and aesthetic arrangements through a series of songs exhibiting a meaningful progression or flow. As one playlist-maker claims, there can be a "whole philosophy of life on one little CD", where an "arc of music starts out with a set acknowledging that life is an insoluble riddle, then eases into a series of suggestions that we just make the best of it -- you might as well dance."[192]

[192] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=96910&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

4.4. Rhetoric: Contingent Creations

Playlists, like all lists, collect items together in a single site, but especially since the advent of mixtapes, and more so, since the rise of mp3's and digital channels of music, playlists have proliferated as an accessible way to make meaningful new groupings towards various ends. Playlists, which even in the context of radio exemplified different tastes and audiences along the radio spectrum, are further democratised with the advent of the mix tape and digital music, which offer the possibility of collecting as many mixes as one wishes and sharing them relatively easily with others. In this section I will discuss how playlists are personal, partial, aesthetic statements that are rarely framed by their creators as ideal for all listeners or circumstances, unlike, in that last respect, *evaluative lists* are often framed. On that note, I will conclude in a *coda* by examining Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity,* which has inspired several mis-readings, I will contend, based on list-illiteracy: in this case, on a failure to distinguish between *playlists* and *evaluative lists*.

The primary rhetorical voice that playlists exhibit is one of a tension between the playlist as a unique, personal, meaningful artistic artefact in its own right and as a fragmented set of disparate works created by others. Thus, the mix of fragmentation and unity evident in all lists is, in the case of playlists, translates through the artistic and temporal aspects of the songs (or videos) suggests, "together, these say what I would like to say", or "*this* says what I would like to say". Playlists aim to effect a certain message or mood, to recount an event or be part of an upcoming event, where the selections of songs and artists, and their ordering into

a coherent flow, mixes with existing relationships playlist-makers and listeners will have with the artists and songs that make up the selections, and other contextual information around the music so as to re-contextualize it around the intentions of the playlist-maker.

Playlists that adhere too much to either extreme fail to follow the form; a fragmented playlist is a random, or even discordant, collection of songs, while a playlist that eclipses the identity of its constituent songs into the new work is more akin to an original work in its own right, as are for example the sampling-based albums of the artist Girl Talk. In other words, the value of a playlist lies in balancing the competing tendencies for listeners to single out particular songs from the playlist on the one hand, and to speak in terms of the flow of the whole playlist on the other, so that, ideally, a relationship to some songs is mixed with the pleasures of growing by allowing oneself to be guided by the authority of the playlist-maker into the unknown.

Playlists are personal rather than rhetorically universal artefacts, with most playlists on AOTM being framed in terms of significant interpersonal experiences occasioned by the music, and often to effect certain interpersonal or private dynamics. Playlists being gifted to others, or being created to introduce a beloved artist or genre of music to another, or frequently, to accompany one's own activities in different contexts such as the ride to work, exercise, or to soothe a breakup, are common. One user describes creating a playlist upon her departure for college to leave for her sister surreptitiously, knowing it might only be taken up through such

indirect scheming "because that's the way my family works."[193] She laters returns to the site to add the note that, indeed, "apparently they do listen to it everyday on the way to school!!". Faced with a late winter, one user posts a playlist of "summery" songs, adding "I'm dreaming… sigh ".[194]

When another playlist-maker discusses how a playlist reflects the ups and downs of a relationship, she unnecessarily states that "yes, it is a personal mix" before continuing to mysteriously state of the final track that it: "can be taken out if needed to. It's just there for personal reasons. The end."[195] In both his ethnographies of Walkman and iPod listening practices, Bull describes a shift towards personalized listening in terms of "a Western narrative of movement and privatization", where listeners are "spending hours creating playlists for themselves" (2006, 137–147). An often-heard response to a playlist created in the context of a difficult personal experience was that, at least "(y)ou did get a mix out of it".[196] Playlists at times stand-in rhetorically for the very kinds of personal growth that life's challenges can spur.

Playlists are also partial, rarely representing the totality of a user's listening habits, nor likewise being framed for others as ideal for all contexts. Bull found in examining both Walkman and iPod practices that "no music was better than the "wrong" music, by which they meant music that did not correspond to their current

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[193] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=58923&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[194] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=45069&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[195] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=72249&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[196] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=57703&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

mood" (2005, 344). So powerful was the need for multiple contingencies in music listening for Bull that his iPod users often characterized the fundamental change from tapes to digital files on the iPod as being one where the contingency of aural desires finally found a technological fix in the deep database of the iPod's memory (2005, 344–345). Many users on AOTM created dozens if not hundreds of playlists, featuring different aspects of their listening practices and creating different works for others to comment upon.

I would now like to relay a recent short exchange involving the *New York Times* media journalist Brian Stelter as a way of illustrating the unique position held by playlists as contingent, highly personal collections that exist within a commercial logic of copywrited content. Stelter began by announcing on Twitter that he had just created a playlist to accompany his "first all-nighter of the year," and followed it up with a tweet sharing his playlist: "'Stay Awake Stelter': my new Spotify playlist to get me through the night. spoti.fi/MlIWg3".[197] The situation was a common one in the case of playlists: a personal, emergent event; a playlist created quickly to accompany it; a gesture to share it with others to register and discuss the moment. The responses on Twitter too followed much of what has been discussed above: one said "Looks like we're in this all-nighter together!"; another added a suggestion with "Good list! You should add Wiz Khalifa's 'Work Hard, Play Hard' for good measure, though"; another commented on a double-appearance of an artist and suggested a symmetrical sharing, writing "a double dose of Robyn! I've got a good go-to-sleep-

[197] Twitter timeline for Brian Stelter @brianstelter, May 22, 2012.

Adalian mix if you ever have the opposite problem".[198] And, following the exchange, prepared as I was for exclusion knowing that the Spotify subscription service was not available in Canada, I clicked the link to the playlist and was brought to Spotify's paywall advising me that "To open this link, you need Spotify".

Such is the reality of playlists in digital web capitalism: the features enabled to help users explore and share more of the content on a site premise "sharing" and "exploring" on the spreading and upgrading of paid subscription services, and follow moreover closely users' choices in what are for them also "meaningful adjacencies." The personalized, partial and multiple nature of playlists distinguish them from the other types of lists, and those who share with them often take a sympathetic and constructive tone in responding. In activating the experience of digital files, however, many of which are copywrited and sold online, playlists also create a relationship between playlist creator and audience that is intermediated by commercial interests and legal implications, creating a setting for user-creation to be mobilized as marketing and analyzed as market research.

Many playlists are framed by their creators as being particular to certain moods, times of day, audiences, locations, and so on, for example suggesting that "I listen to this when I'm really down or I need to mellow out,"[199] or that "I listen to this when i'm feeling disconnected from my generation's shitty music".[200] Playlists encourage the relatively easy and quick creation meaningful, artistic works, but

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[198] Twitter timeline responses for Brian Stelter @brianstelter, May 22, 2012.
[199] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=117897&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[200] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=72127&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).

these works are fragmented in that their constitutive parts, the individual songs, videos, and photographs often created by other artists and commercially released, are possessed of their own persisting attachments, artistic identities, and commercial implications. This is in fact part of the draw of playlist creation for amateurs—that the creation of the playlist is so intimately bound up with the pleasures of fandom—but it finally limits the form as a source of finer-grained artistic expression. The playlist ethic exhibits an aim to resolve this paradox by evincing a maximal contingency to an immediate and undeniable personal context, such as an ongoing events, certain moods, relationships, times of day, activities, the weather outside, and so on.

Playlist Ethic: music lists and *High Fidelity*

A frequent source of discussion about the role of playlists has been centred around the reception and critiques of Nick Hornby's 1995 novel *High Fidelity,* as well as of his autobiographical account of music criticism *31 Songs* (Hornby 1995; Hornby 2003; for critiques see Keskinen 2005; Laing 2005; Shuker 2004; Faulk 2007). *High Fidelity* follows a record store manager named Rob who frames his social, romantic, and career crises through the filter of pop music, specifically music-related lists such as Top 5 lists of favourite songs (and other Top 5 lists such as "worst breakups"), the creation of mixtapes, and the curation of a record collection. In what follows, I want to introduce a distinction between the different kinds of lists the novel invokes throughout the protagonist's journey, particularly those of mixtapes/playlists on one hand and the Top 5/evaluative lists on the other, to argue

that the different kinds of music-related lists signal different relationships Hornby/Rob creates between his work, music, and relationships and which can be used to explore more closely the claims some critics have make about the texts.

Shuker (2004) is critical of Nick Hornby's self-assessments of the period in which he took a turn as pop critic of the *New Yorker*, which were published in his non-fiction collection *31 Songs* (Hornby 2003) (Shuker draws on *High Fidelity* as well, avowing to "the hypothesis that both Rob [the character in *High Fidelity*] and Nick [Hornby, the autobiographical author of *31 Songs*] are products of Hornby's sometimes underpowered imagination") (2004, 269). Particularly galling for Shuker is Hornby's "narcissism" and "consumerist attitude" towards the evaluation of music:

> This narcissistic approach colours much of what follows in *31 songs* as Nick indicates that what he mainly values in songs is how far they mirror his own moods, feelings and situation. Jackson Browne's Late For The Sky is 'perfect accompaniment to a divorce' while The Avalanches are criticised for an excessive use of samples and told that they should try harder to create music to 'fit the moods we know'. (Shuker 2004, 270)

These approaches of Hornby—finding songs that are suitable to particular personal events in his life, of that fit particular moods—are of course those we recognize as occurring within the playlist ethic of compilation. What is "narcissistic" or indicative of "fan culture" also allows Hornby to connect music to his own life—and by an ethic of mixtape sharing—to readers, through the lens of sharing compilations that had particular personal relevance.

Faulk (2007) is particularly interested in the political dimension of Hornby's/Rob's emphasis on music-related lists. He critiques in *High Fidelity* a conservative, bourgeois, managerial approach to music by virtue of "the codification

of rock into something to rank, evaluate, historicize" (154) and the "overleaping" narrative closure of Rob who finally takes advantage of his musical knowledge to demonstrate "the right managerial stuff" (163). Faulk worries that listmaking in *High Fidelity*, exemplified by Rob's and his friends' constant refiguring of Top 5 records, favourite dance tracks, worst breakups, and so on, "fix a specific relation between art and history, privileging past over present", which "can be fatal to experimental, innovational activity in the arts and life" (167).

Such critiques by Shuker and Faulk conflate different kinds of listmaking into one activity, presumably because they all carry the whiff of being somehow or another "listmaking" and "musical." The Top 5 desert island records, however, as well as all Top 5, Top 10, or other *evaluative lists* are different from *playlists*, even when the *evaluative lists* are ranking music. Just as a playlist on AOTM called "Artists that are Jewish"[201] exemplifies the *encyclopedic list* by virtue of attempting to accurately and fully record a category of interest in an encyclopedic context, so too does a playlist such as "Top 10 Picks of 2010 (So Far)"[202] exemplify the aims of the *evaluative list*, from its framing as a site for debate (the user adds, "Now what's yours? Feel free to talk about it in the Forums…")[203] to its clear numerical evaluative sequencing. But all music-related lists are not created equal.

When read with a literacy for different kinds of lists, *High Fidelity* tells a different story than the return to narcissism for Shuker, and of the extreme

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[201] http://www.artofthemix.org/findamix/GetContents2.aspx?strMixid=58698&song=&artist= (accessed October 17, 2011).
[202] http://www.artofthemix.org/community/blog/page/Top-10-Picks-of-2010-%28So-Far%29.aspx (accessed October 17, 2011).
[203] Ibid.

conservatism for Faulk. Rob exhibits a transition in the final scenes of the novel from the perspective of an *evaluative-list* perspective that had been framing his interactions with others, towards, finally, a *playlist*-perspective. Faulk particularly misreads the pivotal final moment, when Rob's on- and off-again partner Laura shows a familiarity with—and endorses—his Top 5 records list, as a denial by Hornby that, finally, any alternatives are admissible to Rob's own evaluative lists of "proper" rock (167). But, importantly, Rob had recently shifted affections back towards Laura, and away from a new female reporter who specifically asked for Rob's *Top 5 records;* this occurs in a passage that marks the very transition away from the *evaluative lists* of Rob's "rules of rock," and towards the ethic of the *playlist:*

> When Laura hears the opening bars she spins round and grins and makes several thumbs-up signs, and I start to compile in my head *a compilation tape for her*, *something that's full of stuff she's heard of, and full of stuff she'd play*. Tonight, for the first time ever, I can sort of see how it's done. (Hornby 1995, 145; emphases mine)

The *playlist* mode features not the canonical commensurations of the Top 5 songs of all time, but the ethic described in this chapter of engaging in personalized collections for specific moments, moods, loved ones, events, and so on, which are partial and multiple rather than contested and singular.

Likewise, in Faulk's reading of another event in the same scene, where Rob's co-worker Barry plays at an event in Rob's honour, Faulk mistakes for an intransigent musical conservatism what is again a transition from a *evaluative list* ethic to that of a *playlist*. Barry's band is characterized up to that point as progressive and experimental, but in a surprising turn, Barry acquiesces from his own progressive sounds, and demonstrates surprising vocal skill as he sings one of

Rob's favourites. For Faulk, "Barry is compelled to sing the same R & B standards Rob loves. The logic of the choices made by these characters suggests that Hornby honors the imperatives of a managerial class" (170). A reading more consistent with Rob's own final turn is that Barry has endeavoured to shift from the purity and polemics of personal rankings that dominated the interactions of the two co-workers up to that point, and in the context of playing at Rob's event, has engaged with a mixtape of sorts oriented to Rob, a set of selections appropriate to that context—thirty-somethings who have come with an expectation of hearing Rob's brand of music.

While Shuker finds fault in Hornby's "narcissistic" *playlist* approach to music, preferring a more critical, politically-engaged approach consistent with canonical *evaluative lists*, Faulk critiques Hornby's *evaluative list* approach to overcoming personal and career crises, which always return to a conservative, canonical past consistent with the repeating Top 100 lists. What neither critic appreciates is a transition the characters make by virtue of Hornby's final shift of approaches to the music lists; from an obsession with the agonistic discourse around the evaluative "Top" lists to an appreciation for the multiplicity and personal contingency of *playlists*.

A playlist on smartplaylists.com illustrates the playlist ethic, and how it differs from the singular and constraining list indicative of *evaluative lists*; the user calls it the "family harmony playlist":

> As our family often rides in the car, and everyone wants to hear some of "their own" music, I've made [playlists] for each family member, one hour long each. Then, depending on who is along for the ride, I select the

> appropriate [playlists] and dump them [into a shared playlist]. Everyone's happy![204]

You cannot make all of the people happy all of the time, especially in the aesthetic realms of the arts—"there's no accounting for taste." The playlist, however, speaks rhetorically of an appropriateness to certain people, tastes, occasions, experiences, and moods, a personalized contingency, and it carries with it an ethic that seeks to amplify relationships rather than to point to "the good life." In the next chapter, I will conclude with an overview of listmaking as I have discussed it across my three sites of interest, and suggest how the form can be used beyond the sites I have explored here.

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[204] http://smartplaylists.com/comments.php?id=648_0_1_0_C (accessed December 8, 2010).

Chapter 5

Conclusion

> Is there a new dialectics of seeing allowed by electronic information? … If so, will this database be more than a base of data, a repository of the given?
> --Hal Foster, "The Archive Without Museums"

In a paper presented at Oxford University in 1948, Innis suggested a linkage between the rationalization and massification of communication and the quality of "discontinuity": "the printing press and the radio address the world instead of the individual. (…) The pervasive influence of discontinuity (…) is, of course, the characteristic of the newspaper, as it is of the dictionary" (Innis 1948b). Unlike later scholars who would build from his work but draw distinctions along the alphabetic/print and aural/oral sensory lines of communication, notably McLuhan (McLuhan 2005) and Ong (Ong 2002), Innis allied the communication technologies that speak to the masses, whether they emerge as dictionaries or newspapers from printing presses or the news broadcasts or popular programming from radio towers, with the expansionist and mechanized "quantitative pressure of modern knowledge" (Innis 1948a). I wish to draw on correlations between the "discontinuities" inherent in the list forms I have explored and the impulse to interact with and through collections of strange people, things, and words.

While my aims in this dissertation have not been fundamentally historical in terms of establishing genealogies, nor sociological in terms of characterizing consistent institutional, organizational, or community practices within my

listmaking settings, I have attempted to establish a set of tools with which one can approach a published list as a unique *kind* of text—a *way of seeing* lists. I emphasize the *processes* of listmaking that, in stark contrast to Hal Foster's haunting eulogistic phrase for the closed-world database that lifelessly repeats its data—the "repository of the given"—might be called *participatory listmaking*. Rather than view lists in literary, journalistic, or artistic traditions questioning the nature and positions of a text's authorial voice, integrity, cohesion, originality, or any other number of markers of textuality, I argue that we can look to the co-ordinates of *participation*, *selection*, *order*, and *rhetoric* in various listmaking sites amidst shifting media environments to raise question such as, why this is a list instead of a single, coherent textual construct? Who created it or is able to contribute to it? On whose grounds are these items collected? How is the selection of items determined or constrained? What is being represented by the ordering? What does such as list "say" or "do"?

Looking into the grand aims of the encyclopedic projects of the 18th century through to Wikipedia, I describe how *encyclopedic lists* emphasize a mode of amateur *participation* aimed at completing the list in an expanding and proliferate world, a specific tenor of objective, authoritative *selection* that seeks to discern "proper" topics and list items, an eschewing of the systemic closure of thematic orders of knowledge as used in classical and medieval works in favour of a neutral, objective *order* that encourages flexibility and the ease of updates of new or changed knowledge, and a paradoxical *rhetoric* of totalization and fragmentation that it aims to resolve through an ethic of "completism." These encyclopedic works are rooted in large projects, which require funding, incorporation of much distributed

expertise, organizational programs, as well as, typically, a smaller, committed group at the core who have a high amount of influence on determining which lists are viable as *encyclopedic lists*.

Exploring the rise of widespread literacy and periodical publishing through to popular online magazine and blog-based features, I describe how *evaluative lists* demonstrate a unique model of *participation* responsive to and dependent on the experiences of its readership; how the co-ordinates of *selection* and *order* are combined into one measure characterized by what I term "tacit commensuration" to draw in participants; and how evaluative lists evince a *rhetorical* stance that paradoxically combines both the fragmentation resulting from the masses of individual "subjective" experiences and the more authoritative aims of the genres to act as "arbiters of taste" by recommending readers towards a singular choice. The roots of evaluative lists I locate in commercial periodical publishing, where a diversity of periodicals were vying for readership and information about a diversity of formative groups of in a more and less literate, and mysterious, reading public.

Finally amidst the increasing personalization of various broadcast, analog, and digital practices of playlist creation and sharing in the 20th century, I explore how *playlists* tend to engender a model of *participation* that emphasizes personal expression, which may welcome discussion and suggestions from others, but where more passionate or authoritative interventions by others onto the sovereignty of the artist/listmaker are treated as antithetical to the form; how *selection* emphasizes a spirit of artistic endeavour with several loose aesthetic guidelines such as variety and novelty, how *order* emphasizes the quality of unity across transitions as the

concept of "flow"; and how the form is pulled *rhetorically* towards its pretentions of reflecting an artistic work in its own right by exhibiting the tastes, aesthetic talents, and thematic or narratival messages of its creator on the one hand, and towards a fan-perspective emphasizing the individuated identities and social existences of its constituent commercial-aesthetic objects on the other hand. I suggest that this tension prompts an ethic of *contingency* in an attempt to secure an artistic authorial coherence, if only fleetingly and tentatively, through highly personal and contingent contexts guiding the playlist creation and communication.

While the titular modifiers of an encyclopedic list are those of absolutes ("The Complete…", "Authoritative…", "The Full..", etc.), those I locate in an evaluative lists tend towards the superlative ("Top", "Best", "Worst", "Greatest", etc.), while the modifiers for playlists usually emphasize the personal and relational (e.g. "*My* Favourite…", "*For* Megan…."). Similarly, the modes of address within playlist discourse tend towards the personal pronouns of "I", or "He" or "She", reflecting specific relationships, while those of evaluative list texts tend to utilize the mode of address of the inclusive pronouns ("we" or "our staff" or "you the readers"), and those of encyclopedic lists emphasize pronouns pointing to objects in the world (i.e. "It", "The"). The different lists also reflect different periodicities , for while the size and completeness required of a good encyclopedic list makes new, competing or alternative lists relatively rare, evaluative lists reflect the topical regularities of perishable interests, and can be created and returned to periodically with different contributors and arguments, as in the case of yearly Best-Of lists. Meanwhile, playlists tend towards a periodicity that reflects the immediacies and irregularities

of daily life, of which any events in relationships, trips, moods, activities, changing filiations, and so on, can be causes for a quickly-created playlist.

Towards a Typology of the "Functions" of Listing

I have argued that lists are best understood by analyzing how and why they are made. The lists I have explored, by their definition as lists, enumerate each of their items amidst the possibility of collapsing them instead into some signifier or, for that matter, into any number of descriptive passages or works that could stand in for the listing of items. Yet, the question that lays out the path towards understanding these different sites of listmaking is, "why list the items?" Taking a cue from Wikipedia, in which users described three main "purposes" of lists on Wikipedia in similar terms,[1] I suggest we can locate three different but interrelated functions of the *listing* of items, each of which functions is present to some extent in all of the sites of listmaking I have explored: *referential*, *indexical*, and *developmental*. With these three functions, I attempt to collect and apply some analytical pressure to the different aspects involved in participating in a list, whether as a list reader/listener/viewer or as a listmaker.

The *referential* function of lists describes the most obvious role of listing, which is that a list is used to communicate which items have been placed or are to be found within a list. This role of listmaking emphasizes why we select and order items within a list towards the ends of thereafter having them be *experienced* within

[1] Wikipedia describes the three purposes of lists across its site as: "information", "navigation", and "development". "Wikipedia:Manual of Style", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_guideline (accessed August 12, 2011).

that context, including being read, looked at, listened to, debated, learned, etc., as being part of the listed category. To find a certain bird listed as indigenous to Canada in an encyclopedic list, to look for a favourite movie listed on a critical Top 10 movies list in an evaluative list, or to include a long-forgotten song within the context of an "old favourites" playlist are all examples of valuing a list of items in terms of the experience of placing and locating elements within the collection. These same referential activities apply not only to single items, but also to multiples, or to finding items *excluded* from a collection, or to the reading, viewing, or listening of *all* the items in the list, and so on. The *referential* function of listing emphasizes many of the most familiar contexts in which lists act as texts that inscribe and communicate a certain category, including for *pedagogical* purposes, such as the ancient Mesopotamian vocabulary lists found by Goody (1977, 84), or for more general *reference* purposes, as in many of the contexts looked at throughout this dissertation where lists are valued for the information and pleasures inherent in reading, creating, or listening to them.

The *indexical* function of lists emphasizes rather how the listing of the items often inscribes each item on the page in order to establish an indexical link to an expanded site of interest related to that item. This is the logic of the book index, of the menu list, of the table of contents, but also, of the commercial links for example in periodicals and websites that hyperlink list items to correlates at advertisers/affiliate sites such as Amazon, who may pay the listmaking sites for sales resulting from clicks made on list items. The same principle applies to playlists, which are often connected on a song-by-song basis to sites where the

songs can be purchased, and information about the users gathered. Or, a similar indexical role is prominent when lists collect other articles on the web, listing them so as to encourage those sites to reciprocate in the future by creating content that links to their own sites, and thereby encouraging the valuable web commodity of incoming links.[2] Yet this aspect of lists is not particularly nascent with the web; I have already alluded to how alphabetical indexes added value to different kinds of reference works (Blair 2010), how consumer guides funded by advertising could risk their reputations, as *Good Housekeeping* did, by linking their endorsements to paying advertisers (Zukin 2004, 176), or in a similar manner, how the songs that made it into the radio playlists associated with the "payola" scandals of the 1950's and 1960's reflect the value these playlists held in terms of directing listeners to corresponding items in other sites of commerce.

The *developmental* function of lists refers to the role of lists as grounds for the additions, subtractions, and re-arrangements of elements within a tentative whole—a strength of the list form that I have described in several of my sites. This development is often carried out in order to move towards stabilizing the collection into an agreed-upon category or foreclosing the set into a coherent concept. This function of lists is closely related to the *referential* function, since all collections are sites of contestation that may, over time, stabilize into agreed-upon taxonomical or canonical sets or be disturbed by new formations of knowledge or novel entities. Yet it also captures the distinctive quality of modularity in lists that encourages

[2] Interview with Peter Smith, April 24, 2012. Smith described list articles collecting "the best lists" from around the web for the past year as, among other aims, encouraging reciprocal linking in later articles from those sites listed in the article items.

tentative additions, re-arrangements, and deletions of potential items. It is the *developmental* function of listing that Eco describes in his exploration of the discovery of the platypus and the resulting listmaking of its properties that scientists engaged in when they could not coherently describe it by means of a definition (Eco and McEwen 2000). This function of listing is evident especially in the encyclopedic listing of items in contested or developing topics, in evaluative voting, commenting, and argumentation in general which aims to work towards establishing the conception of "the best", and in playlists when participants engage in each others' lists to suggest items, or use the playlist as a site to register and continue to work on a collection.

I find it helpful to distinguish these three functions of listing because they provide complimentary answers to the question, "why create a list of items rather than describe or name a concept?" These answers are:

(a) To make individuated *references* to "each and every" of the elements in its place within the collection;

(b) To create opportunities for list users to *indexically navigate* to many expanded or related sites of activity elsewhere from a single, ordered site; and,

(c) To delineate a space to tentatively collect, arrange, and re-work elements towards *developing* a more stabilized category or collection.

The lists I have explored in this chapter have suggested that each of these functions of listing contributes to the role of lists and listmaking. Yet each function also reflects a different aspect of the fragmentation inherent in lists.

Lists on the web draw amateurs from far and wide to collaborate more highly on the encyclopedic lists I looked at, to descend upon in great numbers to participate in the popular evaluative lists I explored on magazine and various blog sites, and to organize and share novel aesthetic playlist collections across different content sites, but in each case the resulting lists are limited in what they could "say." These limitations obtain by virtue of a list's constitution as both the many individuated items in the list as well as the singular ground on which they all reside, which confer upon the list form both its participatory qualities and its granulated semiotic capacities. How this ambiguous constitution limits these participatory forms of media, and the strategies used to overcome these limitations, shed light on how web culture is being framed as a "participatory culture."

Listmaking, the Web, and Participatory Cultures

I suggest that there are several affinities between the kinds of listmaking I have explored, the rise of the web since its initial development, and some recent conceptions of web-based collaboration in "participatory cultures". The roots of the web, the internet, and digital computation have been located by media scholarship largely in the milieu of military ventures. Kittler's media theory, for example, links developments in media technology to war, including radio technology to the coordination of forces in WWI and computation to the code breaking of WWII,

which accounts for his conclusion that entertainment media constitutes "an abuse of army equipment that adapts ears and reaction speeds to World War" (Kittler 1999, 111). However, there are complimentary histories of the internet that emphasize instead the roles of inventory systems, inter-departmental communication, automated reports, human-resource management, and so on, that emerged from government and corporate needs and resulted in considerable advances in documentation, database, and storage technologies (see e.g. Bashe 1986; Ceruzzi 2003; F. Turner 2006; Kirschenbaum 2008).

Kirschenbaum, for example, highlights the role of IBM's development of random-access storage disks with the RAMAC in 1957 as pivotal in creating a material substrate for computation that enabled the distributed "reading" and "writing" of data to a common site of inscription (Kirschenbaum 2008, 77). The result was that a "data base" could be created that united different and geographically distributed institutions or offices on common texts, adding and deleting items, reconfiguring categories, and computing reports (Neufeld and Cornog 1986, 185; McGee 1981, 507). Accompanied by equally important developments in database technology that separated the addressing of the records on the disk itself from the *logical* aspects of how records were associated with each other and which categories they were put into—pivotal in E.F. Codd's development of the ubiquitous *relational model* of database management software—databases began to be sold to diverse constituents, prompting some to argue that during the period 1975-1980, "no longer were most databases scientific/technical in content,

but many were covering the social sciences, humanities, and general interest or popular topics" (Neufeld and Cornog 1986, 186; Codd 1970).

A decade later, Tim Berners-Lee designed the protocols of the web such that it would reflect a "common space" for the equivocal and democratic collection of documents:

> So long as I didn't introduce some central link database, everything would scale nicely. … The abstract document space it implied could contain every single item of information accessible over networks… Every node, document—whatever it was called—would be fundamentally equivalent in some way. Each would have an address by which it could be referenced. They would all exist together in the same space. (Berners-Lee and Fischetti 2000, 16).

At both the level of the relationship between documents, which stand on common ground with one another in terms that each has its own "address", and at the level of the documents themselves, which, with notable contributions from Marc Andreessen and the Mosaic browser team, collect the various forms of text, image, and later, video and sound "elements" on a webpage as modular items within a common document space, the web was created as a flexible system of documentation that did not enforce any particular overarching organizational schemas beyond the encapsulation of content into its specified elements (Berners-Lee and Fischetti 2000, 16). I wish to emphasize the web as understood through these tropes, of creating the ground for a common space of documentation that each department or user could add, modify, and remove independently page-by-page, or element-by-element, following both within the document and between the documents an emphasis on arranging and re-arranging the elements in a common space.

The web reflects the contexts of its development within CERN. Berners-Lee describes an environment of mixing groups of scientists from around the world, where divergent research goals, research programmes, computer programs, computer languages, and indeed, human languages often collided together, and where the idea of creating and implementing a unifying—even hypertext-based—system of documentation intended to mitigate the issues of interoperability among groups and systems was neither rare nor, in prior attempts, successful (Berners-Lee and Fischetti 2000, 14–17). From its inception through to its quick growth in popularity since the early 1990's, the collection of relatively "equivalent" sites, pages, and document elements indicative of the web prompted web users to create new websites that selected and organized the somewhat mysterious totality of web content "out there." This may explain why the first webpage was comprised of a list that Berners-Lee maintained of all the other websites in existence (that he knew about, in any case); why the very first "real information" on the web consisted of CERN directory listings; and why many of the most well-trafficked websites of the 1990's were the so-called "portal" sites, such as Yahoo!, that consisted essentially of directory lists of other sites (Berners-Lee and Fischetti 2000, 3–32). As database-backed "content management systems" and newly-responsive "Web 2.0" webpages began to be widely used in the early- to mid-2000's to create and coherently maintain proliferating blogs, posts, media collections, and user-created content and feedback, an ethic of collaboration arose that combined the impulse to collect and order websites "out there" on the web with the capacities and flexibility of content "within" the databases.

It was in the context of mid-2000's web culture that Shirky distinguished between several different kinds of emerging online participation on blogs, Wikipedia, and photo sharing sites, among others, arranging them according to the (increasing) amount of coordination required create participatory works: *sharing*, *cooperation*, and *collective action* (Shirky 2008, Location 627). Shirky argued that while *sharing* emphasizes processes where, for example, a collection of photographs is selected, arranged, and posted to a site such as Flickr for other users to view, comment on, and sometimes to incorporate into their own collections, *collaboration* "creates more of a sense of community than sharing does," and, for Shirky, results in singular new texts: "In collaborative production at least some collective decisions have to be made. The back-and-forth talking and editing that defines Wikipedia results in a single page on a particular subject" (Shirky 2008, Location 672). Shirky emphasized that *collaboration* is more difficult to maintain, noting for example that it is even "famously difficult to keep online conversations from devolving", continuing:

> Collaborative production can be valuable, but it is harder to get right than sharing, because anything that has to be negotiated about, like a Wikipedia article, takes more energy than things that can just be accreted, like a group of Flickr photos." (Shirky 2008, Location 672).

Yet the sites I have explored in the chapters above have collapsed such distinctions between "collaborative production" and, as Shirky suggested, "things that can just be *accreted*, like a group of Flickr photos" (*Ibid.*, my emphasis). From the Wikipedia lists that reflect the encyclopedic aims of the ordering of the world's knowledge, to the suggestions, votes, and argumentative comments of evaluative list sites, to the compilations, discussions and re-workings of personal playlists, the "texts" being

created in collaborative production on the web are also "collections" being accreted to and shared in the form of lists. This is a slippage between our generic textual expectations of singular works and our desires to bring into the fold a variety of mysterious contributors and their unknowable contributions by means of the participatory and combinatory schemes of listmaking. We turn texts into lists because we are committed to encyclopedic completion, evaluative commensuration, and aesthetic contingency.

Meanwhile, Henry Jenkins coined and largely elaborated upon the concept of "participatory cultures", in an effort to characterize the collaborative spaces opened up by the web and related digital cultures (2012; 2009; 2006a; 2006b; see also, e.g. Jarrett 2010; Mittell 2009; Lih 2004; Shifman 2012; Delwiche and Henderson 2012). Examples of what Jenkins and others have in mind as participatory cultures include: the online textual forum-based discussions and elaborations of fictional worlds such as those of *The Matrix;* the playing of massively multiplayer games and social games such as *I [Heart] Bees;* the creation and posting to video sites of "Harry Potter" fan-created music and video remixes; and generally, the creative activity emanating from fan-created "trans-media" storylines that often transgress the commercial, legal, and imaginative limitations imposed by the corporate owners of such properties (Jenkins 2009).

Jenkins framed the concept of participatory cultures against what he described as the more "business-oriented" concept of participation via the web of "Web 2.0" (see Jenkins 2012; for Web 2.0, see O'Reilly 2006; O'Reilly 2005). Participatory cultures are defined as having the following characteristics:

1. Relatively low barriers for engagement
2. Strong support for sharing creations with others
3. Informal mentorship
4. Members believe their contributions matter
5. Care about others' opinions of self and work

(Jenkins 2012; Jenkins 2009, xi)

My list sites exhibit many of the characteristics of "participatory cultures" that Jenkins enumerates. First, the "low barriers for engagement" I found as a result of a list's item-level addition, subtraction, and general semiosis, which allows amateur participants to make valid contributions to a list by simply contributing at least one example drawn from their own partial and situated knowledges, experiences and tastes, as well as the low barriers implicated in writing and submitting that example. The second characteristic, "strong support for sharing creations with others" I found first in how lists tend to provide many items of potential interest to readers (recalling Barney's dictum of lists that "if one dart fails to hit the opponent, another may" (Barney 1982, 209)), and secondly in how they provide an opportunity to integrate the contributions of those masses of participants, through either of the *completist*, *commensurative*, or *contingent* ethics I described in the prior three chapters. Furthermore, I showed how lists internalize a logic of distributing work among a group of website collaborators by dividing up tasks item-by-item. Jenkins's fourth characteristic that "members believe their contributions matter" is part of this same process whereby participants see their contributions to the list evident according to the listmaking combinatory mechanisms at work in the different lists.

On the one hand, Jenkins's approach to the issue of digital participation is valuable to my own aims, such as when he demystifies the epidemiological figure of

the "viral" video, noting of the popular reception and circulation of the *Kony2012* video that emerged in the Spring of 2012 that: "It doesn't look like infection. It looks like a series of choice points where people have decided which content to pass along and how to frame it in an ongoing conversation" (Jenkins 2012). Or consider his opening salvo in that talk:

> The struggles of the 21st century are going to be struggles over participation. Who gets to participate? How do we get to participate? How do we extend participation? Those are the core struggles we are battling as communities at the present moment. (*Ibid.*)

Yet, Jenkins also appears to include to some degree within the rubric of participatory cultures the many creative traditions that have defined Western culture. Consider this discussion of the role of "remixing" to participatory cultures:

> Homer remixed Greek myths to construct *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*; Shakespeare sampled his plots and characters from other author's plays; the Sistine Chapel ceiling mashes up stories and images from across the entire biblical tradition. Many of the forms of expression that are most important to American youths accent this sampling and remixing process, in part because digitization makes it much easier to combine and repurpose media content than ever before. (Jenkins 2009, 56)

While the first notion spins a pre-history of the "remix" and participation invested with the luminaries of Western culture, the second notion allies them all with youth-oriented software that digitally combines elements onto a common page or sequence.

Along the same lines, in a passage suggestive of instances of encyclopedic and evaluative listmaking as I have described them in preceding chapters, consider an introductory excerpt from the *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*:

> Our world is being transformed by participatory knowledge cultures in which people work together to collectively classify, organize, and build information… We engage with this form of participatory culture each time

> we seek guidance from collaboratively updated websites that review books, restaurants, physicians… [or] exchange advice on programming, cooking, [or] graphic design… It is hard to believe that, for most of recorded history, human beings were unable to instantly find answers to questions such as 'How long can I safely store cooked chicken in the refrigerator?' (Delwiche and Henderson 2012, 3–4)

The authors go on to ask whether "the illusions of participation in this brave new world cloaks fundamental passivity" (Delwiche and Henderson 2012, 4), but I would suggest that a more fundamental set of questions to be asked of these participatory cultures are under which conditions have we always sought to classify and organize knowledge, to share best practices about managing food stores, and to express ourselves through drawing and writing in collaboration with others? How have our media technologies, practices, and generic forms, with which we inscribe and share these "ritualized colocations" with others (Gitelman 2006, Location 145), shifted to differently accommodate and represent different aspects of these processes? Perhaps most importantly to those committed to the *digital* participatory cultures, what questions are we asking today, and to whom are we asking them, such that the popular answers include item-level suggestions of facts, books, doctors, restaurants, and standardized time periods? The approach to listmaking that I describe in this dissertation can, for its sites of interest, suggest some ways of accounting for the negative spaces left by the unasked questions of participatory cultures.

Although not all participatory texts exhibit the qualities of lists, I contend that participatory listmaking as I have explored it in this dissertation can clarify some linkages between the participatory mechanisms involved in combining onto a common textual space many distributed contributions, which account for things like low barriers of entry and an emphasis on sharing in participatory cultures, with, on

the other hand, the ways in which the resulting texts can be semiotically and rhetorically limited in comparison with the more singular texts in their respective domains. I suggest that participatory listmaking provides as a novel capacity the ground onto which its many potential items can be collected for referential, indexical, and developmental purposes. Yet, if documentary filmmaker Ken Burns suggested that "story is 1 + 1 = 3" (Baldegg 2012), participatory lists have difficulty transcending their own lineage as mathematical tables; their parts always referring, pointing, and potentially being recalculated as aggregates of individuated items in the text rather than cohering together into an indelible new whole.

The encyclopedic text in the case of Wikipedia encourages listmaking towards diverse indexical, categorical, and accretive ends, and all are founded on a model of encyclopedic democratization that insists that the multiplicities of users and contributions be somehow integrated towards the aim of collecting the totality of human knowledge, but Wikipedians have shown a discomfort with the resulting fragmentation of lists, asking that prose be written instead. The convenience with which an encyclopedic list can be updated with new or changing knowledge is one side of the coin; but instead of the windfall of millions of Francis Bacon's working together on a systematic "picture" of the world, we have an encyclopedic text that grows by accretion.

The limitations caused by the fragmentation of the evaluative list are such that, again, a coherent overarching evaluation never quite takes place, and users must trust that the multiple responses from contributors will, in a "wise" commensuration of the crowd, provide a helpful evaluation. Profit potentials for

many lifestyle and general interest sites lead them to draw in these masses with an item or two of particular interest in order to engage them into the content. But the limits of list-based evaluations raised when David Simon lamented the lack of coherent consideration in these "critical-industrial complexes" of the core messages of his show are the same ones that emerge in the vapidity of End-of-Year lists that suggest that the best way to understand the prior twelve months is to collectively elect the most important "events" of the year. What is missing in these aggregations is a voice that could engage not as one among a mass of competing amateur evaluators, but in a sustained and learned reflection that draws its objects of evaluation together into its own argumentative arc, as I demonstrated with an evaluative essay by A.O. Scott. When many participants are collected to establish "the best" in an area of interest, rather than itself rise to the level of a great work, the final text can at best point, multiply, to a "good list".

Playlists, as we saw, are framed as acts of artistic creation in their own rights, but they are finally and undeniably possessed by the identities, meanings, and attachments of the individual songs, videos, or photographs that constitute them. Amateurs can easily and quickly create professional-sounding (and looking) "derivative wholes" from a large database of items, and indeed can demonstrate considerable skill, taste, and artistic aptitude through such creations, which undeniably can carry significant meaning. Yet the very affiliations of fandom that make these individual works valuable to play, and play with, for particular users, also coarsens the granularity of their proverbial brushes, and helps to fix the potential meanings of any new semiotic figures into which they are incorporated.

The ease of adding a song's potent affects to a playlist series draws a particular user to the form, while those particular affects persist across the contingencies of moods, events, activities, weather, and moreover of different listeners, always limiting the uniqueness of the artistic semiosis of the whole playlist; always making it, if "the most widely practiced American art form," an art form indicative of a jukebox's sonata (O'Brien 2004, 108).

Umberto Eco emphasized the "topos of innefability" in Homer's preamble to the *catalogue of ships*: an appeal to the Muses to speak by way of a list of a quantity which cannot be described (Eco 2009, 49). The distant Muses may not seem so distant to web users, however, for whom an addressable group that is out there "in all places" and can "see all things" too numerous for any single one to comprehend is a common if still discomforting position we find ourselves in. The singer lamented that even if he "had ten tongues," he would not be able to gloss the volumes he has in mind, but a busy web list has hundreds or thousands of wagging tongues, and they still do not combine into the transporting enunciation of the ineffable that eluded Homer's singer. Yet, we know that, as Minchin (2001) describes, travelling singers performing the *Iliad* used the poem's catalogue of ships section to fold in local place names and events, in order to engage with the particular knowledges and interests of strange new audiences, and to remind them of their places and purchases in the names and events of their shared culture. So too does participatory listmaking in the sites I explore provide a structured yet flexible way of engaging strangers onto a common textual space. We may wish to identify with Harold Innis's discomfort towards print, broadcast, and, one can presume, now digital media that

address themselves to the masses of strangers by incorporating the strategic "discontinuities" characteristic of lists (Innis 1948b). Or, we may find in these lists familiar continuities of the cultural commitments practiced throughout modernity in state-funded, commercial, or community contexts of gathering and sharing knowledge, experiences, and art. Or, in the context of online "participatory cultures," we may celebrate the novel prominence of these activities in digital forms, and ask new questions about our rights and accessibilities to these shared texts, and about their new rhetorical capacities. I suggest that we take all three approaches to participatory listmaking.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Wikipedia Data: List and Non-List Pages

Page title	Length (in words)	References	Edits	Links	First Edit	# Users	Edits/User	Users/Word	Edits/Word
List of best-selling books	3318	219	2657	1447	August 22, 2005	1089	2.4	0.3282	0.8008
List of search engines	1312	6	3109	583	January 13, 2004	1434	2.2	1.0930	2.3697
List of emotions	499	4	796	328	December 24, 2002	490	1.6	0.9820	1.5952
List of conspiracy theories	14116	68	2380	1334	November 8, 2003	1354	1.8	0.0959	0.1686
List of economists	1489	0	1345	1016	November 11, 2001	694	1.9	0.4661	0.9033
List of Diets	297	0	621	267	September 12, 2002	365	1.7	1.2290	2.0909
List of amendments to the United State	1019	1	2051	380	August 26, 2004	1146	1.8	1.1246	2.0128
List of Prime Ministers of Canada	1853	31	1235	1055	July 1, 2003	504	2.5	0.2720	0.6665
List of Top Gear episodes	5385	3	5662	1042	May 10, 2006	2208	2.6	0.4100	1.0514
List of geographic information systems	1260	3	624	221	May 12, 2005	328	1.9	0.2603	0.4952
List of alloys	1019	0	652	474	September 10, 2003	327	2.0	0.3209	0.6398
List of Apollo astronauts	2010	5	707	485	October 24, 2002	353	2.0	0.1756	0.3517
List of mental disorders as defined by tl	1258	2	683	360	April 7, 2002	368	1.9	0.2925	0.5429
List of Nazi concentration camps	1098	9	580	550	November 26, 2004	322	1.8	0.2933	0.5282
List of The Simpsons episodes	6546	31	7327	955	October 26, 2002	2014	3.6	0.3077	1.1193
List of National Monuments of the Unit	6231	110	395	1498	April 2, 2006	123	3.2	0.0197	0.0634
List of 2010 Winter Olympics medal wir	3185	9	173	1218	February 13, 2010	45	3.9	0.0141	0.0543
List of Icelandic artists	418	1	156	162	June 2, 2004	87	1.8	0.2081	0.3732
List of political parties in Latvia	405	0	88	282	December 10, 2003	53	1.7	0.1309	0.2173
List of popes	8754	8	2272	1316	July 11, 2002	953	2.4	0.1089	0.2595
Lists' Totals	3074	26	1676	749		713	2.2	0.4066	0.8152

References per Word: .0085
Links per Word: 0.244

Article data

Page title	Length (words)	References	Edits	Links	First Edit	# Users	Edits/User	Users/Word	Edits/Word
Bestseller	3386	13	321	280	December 23, 2004	184	1.7	0.0543	0.0948
Web search engine	2320	16	1722	469	February 13, 2006	800	2.2	0.3448	0.7422
Emotion	4475	32	2625	832	January 12, 2002	1334	2.0	0.2981	0.5866
Conspiracy theory	5796	39	5326	806	November 12, 2001	2108	2.5	0.3637	0.9189
Economist	1903	15	748	373	June 15, 2002	382	2.0	0.2007	0.3931
Dieting	4550	36	2332	527	September 15, 2001	1283	1.8	0.2820	0.5125
United States Constitution	8109	94	7648	1933	October 15, 2001	3573	2.1	0.4406	0.9431
Prime Minister of Canada	2951	55	2446	945	July 31, 2001	1061	2.3	0.3595	0.8289
Top Gear (2002 TV series)	6609	82	4369	1076	September 9, 2007	2028	2.2	0.3069	0.6611
Geographic information systems softwa	382	2	22	78	December 4, 2006	14	1.6	0.0366	0.0576
Alloy	1968	16	1496	336	July 27, 2001	189	1.8	0.0960	0.7602
Apollo program	8028	45	2897	1438	September 24, 2001	1305	2.2	0.1626	0.3609
Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Me	4616	62	1342	544	September 24, 2001	687	2.0	0.1488	0.2907
Nazi concentration camps	1905	19	2517	650	March 9, 2004	1411	1.8	0.7407	1.3213
The Simpsons	7808	226	11467	2159	October 2, 2001	4940	2.3	0.6327	1.4686
National Monument (United States)	1130	1	235	232	February 5, 2003	146	1.6	0.1292	0.2080
2010 Olympic Village	875	14	192	230	March 7, 2007	65	3.0	0.0743	0.2194
Icelandic art	542	4	40	310	July 20, 2007	25	1.6	0.0461	0.0738
Politics of Latvia	2680	8	172	394	February 25, 2002	108	1.6	0.0403	0.0642
Pope	12256	111	4687	2335	November 9, 2001	2365	2.0	0.1930	0.3824
Articles' Totals	4114	45	2630	797		1200	2.0	0.2476	0.5444

References per Word: .011
Links per Word: 0.194

Appendix B Evaluative Lists Corpus Bibliographic Listing

Top 10-style lists:

"1. These Were Found by Site:digg.com 'Top' Date Range of 2008-2011. I Did Quar", n.d.
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"10 Top Cheesecakes of the World | Top Travel Tips, Destination Guides & Deals - Dealchecker Blog", n.d. http://blog.dealchecker.co.uk/2010/11/10/10-top-cheesecakes-world/.
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"Note: See Orginal List in This Category)) Top 10: Highest-Paying Jobs In The U.S. | MintLife Blog | Personal Finance News & Advice", n.d. http://www.mint.com/blog/trends/highest-paid-jobs-12032010/.
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