

# Cyberspace memes

Dr. MLADEN MILICEVIC

Loyola Marymount University, Recording Arts, 7900 Loyola Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90045-8230, USA  
E-mail: MMilicev@lmu.edu URL: <http://www.lmu.edu/acad/personal/faculty/mmilicevic/>

**This paper addresses the issues concerning the impact of music on cyberspace globalization. It points out that the Internet access is limited to only 1% of the wealthiest human population. It, also, looks into the future of cyberspace music and predicts that most of the cyberspace activities are going to be the unleashing one of many of humanity's predispositions**

**. Cyberspace represents a perfect medium for concealing a person's identity and for the masking of any of the responsibility that is expected from so-**

**n-  
pirated software and the trading of MP3 files. The paper also focuses on commercial music whose economic impact on the development of music technology allows "academic musicians" to appropriate most of the tools that otherwise would have not been developed for "academic" use.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term cyberspace literally means "navigable space" and it is derived from the Greek word *kyber* (to navigate). In William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, the original source of the term, cyberspace refers to a navigable, digital space of networked computers accessible from computer consoles; a visual, colorful, electronic datascape known as "The Matrix" where companies and individuals interact with, and trade in, information. Since 1984 the term cyberspace has been reappropriated, adapted and used in a variety of ways that all refer to the computer-based conceptual space within information and communication technologies

The term meme used in the title of this paper was coined by the biologist, Richard Dawkins. Memes are tunes, ideas, catch phrases, and their ilk; and just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in a cultural meme pool and leap behaviorally from person to person. The important rule for memes, as for genes, is that they must constantly replicate. This replication is a mindless process not necessarily for the good of anything; replicators that are good at replicating flourish for whatever reason. Meme X spread among the people, because X is a good replicator. (Dawkins 1976)

Dawkins states that the primary difference between the human species and others is our reliance on cultural transmission of information, and hence on cultural evolution. If we decide to fully exploit the applications of the term meme, it would reveal its truly powerful role in our underworld. What is

the way it affects  
memes in a particu-  
lar environment. The mind  
of memes, and they  
exceed their capacity. I  
limited ability for  
therefore, there  
"evolution" among me

minds as possible. This competition is the major selective force in the infosphere, just as it is in the biosphere.

But, before I concentrate on what kind of music-related memes flourish within the cyberspace, let me make one additional clarification. Speaking about "Music without Walls" one inevitably begs the question of cyberspace globalization and the music-world within that setting. However, it is important to be truthful about the whole framework in question.

## **2. CYBERSPACE GLOBALIZATION**

Globalization has become the most important economic, political, and cultural phenomenon of our time. This process is reshaping the world economy, creating new social classes, and reordering the lives of thousands and thousands of people. The word globalization stands for all kinds of different things depending on who uses it. It could stand for the so-called progress and modernity of western culture, or American domination of world culture or the arrival of world wide hypermodern

sition and see how globalization and music viewed may be viewed from that narrow perspective. To make the entire pursuit even more bizarre and remote from the conference's focus, I will primarily look at the commercial music venues. This is because the vast majority of tools that are used in production and distribution of so called "academic music" are exclusively created for commercial music purposes. Pro Tools and MP3 were invented with commerce in mind and then, later on, appropriated by non-commercially inclined academic music experimenters. Now, let's see how all this came about.

Looking into the cyberspace let me concentrate on what kind of cultural memes are being exchanged through the Internet. There are three kinds of memes that travel most frequently from one computer to another and cause all sorts of Internet trouble and lost bandwidth. The best known is Internet porn, which is beyond the scope of this paper; the other two are the distribution of pirated software (warez) and the trading of MP3 files. So, let's see why MP3 files and warez are so successful as cyberspace memes.

### **3. WAREZ**

Pirated software (warez) has been around

www.mp3.com, are virtual jukeboxes stuffed with hundreds of thousands of recordings downloadable for free. "Ripping" the CD tracks, placing and exchanging them on the web in MP3 form, is a breach of the copyright laws and is legally considered a theft. Not surprisingly, there are more people committing these web criminal acts than those who don't. Napster software provides users with centralized index of MP3 files that are downloadable from other users' computers. Gnutella skips the index and allows users to find MP3 files directly from users who are also using the Gnutella software. Pirate ships the downloading process all together by allowing its users to play the content directly from other users' computers. These new "distribution" methods are sending shock waves through the music industry, because they lack the means for content originators to collect royalties and to protect copyrights on music.

All this means that the Internet has altered how music will be distributed. Consumers are now able to bypass the traditional distribution network by eliminating the intermediaries involved in the music industry supply chain. Under the old industry model, the music artist would produce a CD and the record company would use its distribution network to reach the retail stores and ultimately the customers OR THE consumers of music. Under the new (Internet altered) music industry model, the artist may entirely bypass the record labels reaching the music customers directly via E-commerce website and the Internet. Without having to sign a record contract, artists have an incentive to provide MP3 files for free download, in exchange for exposure. This makes perfect sense because most of the artists do not make any significant income from their CD sales anyway.

For example a typical major record label deal would include giving about \$200,000 to the artist for the production of the album and set aside another \$300,000 for promotion, making a total bill of

\$500,000 to the artist. In order to recoup this amount to the record label, the artist would hope to sell as many copies of CD as possible. How about a 1,000,000 of CDs sold? Obeying all the clauses in his/her contract that pertain to: packaging deductions and giveaways, 90% breakage rule, 3/4 royalty on CDs, returns, reserves and cutouts; the artist would still be around \$100,000 in the hole. The record label would cover all its cost after only 125,000 records sold, but the artist would be still recouping even after 1,000,000 records. For that reason most of the artists earned

g i r y p 0 using the Gnutella software. Pirate ships the downloading process all together by s i h t

particular CD and pay the full price even if they wanted to hear only one or two music selections on that CD. Now, customers may logon to CDnow site and select any 12 songs from their song library and have them burned onto a CD for \$15.99 plus shipping and handling. This is the usual retail price of a CD at the local record store, but the major difference is that consumer actually selected all 12 hit songs for which, under the traditional marketing scheme, IT would be necessary to purchase 12 separate CDs, a value of \$191.88. Even though, by burning a custom CD, no copyright laws get broken and both record label and the music artist get their profit share, neither side is interested in catering to the consumers this way. All kinds of lame excuses were put in place in order to undermine customized CDs, such as ruining a concept of an album, or missing the graphic design that goes on the cover of the original CD. The essence is that both, the record labels and the music artist, were more than usually selling on a single CD 20% of listenable goods and 80% of ballast that nobody wanted to hear. For that