Art to Commerce: The Trajectory of Popular Music Criticism

Steve Jones ([sjones@uic.edu](mailto:sjones@uic.edu)) Thomas Conner ([thomashconner@gmail.com](mailto:thomashconner@gmail.com))

UIC Distinguished Professor Graduate Student

of Communication Department of Communication

University of Illinois at Chicago University of Illinois at Chicago

1007 W. Harrison St., m/c 132 1007 W. Harrison St., m/c 132

Chicago, IL 60607 Chicago, IL 60607

USA USA

ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of a content and textual analysis of popular music criticism from the 1960s to the 2000s to discern the extent to which criticism has shifted focus from matters of music to matters of business. In part, we believe such a shift to be due likely to increased awareness among journalists and fans of the industrial nature of popular music production, distribution and consumption, and to the disruption of the music industry that began in the late 1990s with the widespread use of the Internet for file sharing. Searching and sorting the Rock’s Backpages database of over 22,000 pieces of music journalism for keywords associated with the business, economics and commercial aspects of popular music, we found several periods during which popular music criticism’s focus on business-related concerns seemed to have increased. The article discusses possible reasons for the increases as well as methods for analyzing a large corpus of popular music criticism texts.