

**Functional Music and Consumer Culture
(Instrumental Version)**

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Abstract

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Terence Dick

Theodor Adorno's critique of regressive listening inspires an examination of non-contemplative musical experience in consumer culture. This requires an analysis of not only the record as commodity but also of music as part of a process which results in what Jean Baudrillard refers to as "consumer ambience." The experiments of composers Erik Satie, John Cage and Max Neuhaus allude to this function of music and its accompanying experience in their failure to induce contemplation in everyday life. In contrast, the programming of the Muzak Corporation demonstrates the successful conflation of music, money and recording technology. The dance club reveals, in a different social context, a similar range of both creative and profitable uses of music. Having entertained, instead of dismissed, a number of questions concerning functional music (and, by association, the function of music), the reader is left with an expanded account of the on-going relationship between commodity and expression in music.

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INTRODUCTION

The industrialization of music cannot be understood as something which happens to music, since it describes a process in which music itself is made - a process, that is, which fuses (and confuses) capital, technical and musical arguments (Frith 1988, 12).

Inadequate music criticism in the twentieth century can in many cases be traced to the mistaken assumption that the meaning of music is in some way rendered "inauthentic" in an environment defined by industry and consumption. In his essay, "The Industrialization of Music," Simon Frith rejects the opposition underlying this argument. Instead of treating commodity and expression as exclusive, he suggests they be synthesized to provide a more appropriate model of contemporary musical experience. John Corbett makes a similar gesture when he proposes to "interdigitate" the sceptical and optimistic evaluations of popular music as a cultural commodity (32-33). The sceptic and the optimist differ in whose needs music serves; respectively, the industry or the consumer. Both writers respond to a critical fallacy in the analysis of music, a fallacy dividing that which is inextricably linked. At the end of

the twentieth century, music cannot be addressed apart from its commodified form; dominated as it is by the figure of the record and the process of mechanical reproduction. Dick Hebdige's Subculture: The Meaning of Style sets a precedent for such a consideration of culture based around "distinctive rituals of consumption" through which identity is conceived and communicated (1991, 102-103). His work reads skinhead and punk communities through their use of commodities. My thesis presents a parallel account to the work of the above critics in the form of a cultural critique. While I makes use of what could be construed as functional sociological analyses to describe the changing semantics of music, my work should not be mistaken for conventional sociology or musicology. The collaboration between commercial function and cultural use (Frith 1978, 57) will be explored through the use of music by and on consumers to reveal the manner in which music plays a significant role in contemporary experience.

While the history of musical production throughout this century will enter into the discussion, the context for my critique is the consumer culture of late twentieth century capitalism. Fredric Jameson identifies a significant change in mass culture with the aftermath of World War Two, declaring the full emergence of consumer society in North

America and Europe by the 1960s. This new social order is characterized by:

New types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society; the replacement of the old tension between city and country, centre and province, by the suburb and by universal standardization; the growth of the great networks of superhighways and the arrival of automobile culture (Jameson 1983, 124-125).

For what follows, the most significant characteristics of consumer culture will be the prominence of electronic media and the expansion of production into the realm of consumption. Henri Lefebvre associates the progress of production with a concurrent progression in the nature of consumption such that an "ideology of consumption" develops to define and perpetuate the consumer's activity (56). As industrialization created the working subject in the factory, late capitalism produces a consuming subject in the everyday world. The aim and objective of what Lefebvre refers to as the "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption" is continued consumer satisfaction. This is accomplished through a manipulation of needs that holds the

consumer in the grip of perpetual expectation and gratification (79).

Needs are required to motivate and justify the consumer's consumption. Mistaken as simple and concrete, they inspire a critique based on the opposition of natural or authentic needs to produced or artificial needs. The former posit a pre-lapsarian subject alienated by the latter. In his essay, "Consumer Society", Jean Baudrillard rejects the division of needs and the accompanying debate about alienation to suggest a version of consumption which treats needs as flexible and ambiguous, not specific and dedicated (1988, 40-42). Consumer needs do not exist in isolation and cannot be considered concrete. They vary and move in a constant process which only makes sense when one considers a "system of needs" as produced by the order of production (42) and mobilized by the consumer economy (1981, 85). In addition to this one essay, I use select elements of Baudrillard's For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (1981) to provide a model of consumer culture that attempts to capture the process of consumption as well as the object of consumption. Used in contrast to Theodor Adorno's analysis of the culture industry, Baudrillard's revision of the Marxist critique of commodities will complement the proposal by Frith et al. to amend the

critique of music.¹

Musical experience in consumer society is not simply alienated, artificial and commodified, nor is it free, authentic and unambiguously meaningful. The use value of music is not concrete and obvious like that of a hammer. Music is not "used up" but its value fluctuates with use. Additionally, music has a great range of meanings depending on where it is located and who is listening. Function and meaning in music are intertwined and will be treated as such. Accordingly, so will the need and desire for music. Rather than interrogate this situation through dissection, I wish to describe a scene where culture (music) in combination with economy enacts a systemic manipulation of all these factors. Thus the meaning/function of music in the context of consumption will not be located in an autonomous object but in an active process.

As suggested in my title, the instrumentality of this account indicates the direction from which I will begin my

¹While I will admit now that I take the matter of Baudrillard's critique of political economy largely for granted, I contend that my work is still valid in its absence. And despite my prominent use of his work, I would not describe my thesis as Baudrillardian. I rely for the most part only on a few concepts taken from his early writings, based in a conceptual schema which does not appear in his later work.

investigation.² John Corbett's essay on popular music as consumer commodity proposes a critique that recognizes the validity of listening pleasure.³ I will take an alternate tact, emphasizing explicit use instead of ambivalent erotic desire. The "functional" music that is discussed does not stand alone; it participates in everyday life alongside other tasks. This is music that is as valued for what it does as what it says. Each chapter in my thesis treats music as accompaniment; to the commodity form, to work, to everyday life, to social dance. In doing so, in concentrating on music as functional, I might de-emphasize pleasure and desire but do not deny it. Pleasure is the antipodean hemisphere of the musical world I describe (the "dark side of the moon" so to speak) and it insinuates itself into my discourse by way of the music's meaning.

The instrumental and expressive dimensions should not be regarded as exclusive either/or polarities, rather they can be conceived as a balance which consumer culture brings together. It is therefore possible to

²Versioning plays a prominent role in dance club music and finds its roots in reggae. Different versions of a single track are released for popular consumption, most commonly b-side dub or instrumental versions (Hebdige 1990, 12-14). This not only puts the "original" track in question, it allows for a multiplicity of perspectives on a single song.

³See Corbett, "Free, Single and Disengaged: Listening Pleasure and the Popular Music Object" (1994, 32-55).

speak of a calculating hedonism, a calculus of stylistic effect and an emotional economy on the one hand, and an aestheticization of the instrumental or functional rational dimension via the promotion of an aestheticizing distancing on the other (Featherstone 1991, 86).

I will use Mike Featherstone's notion of "controlled de-control" to characterize music's role as a functioning sign system that serves economic ends. To treat music as a sign is inevitably disorienting given the immateriality of its form (the sound of music) and the potential abstraction of its content (its inherent meaning). I ask the reader to adapt to the vagaries of my different attempts at capturing this idea.

The two halves of the thesis correspond to the twin figures of modern music criticism; the record and the concert (or performance). I begin with the record as it is both the central figure of musical consumption and the necessary conveyance for all the musics that follow. The first chapter presents a sceptical account of what happens to music when it becomes a consumable thing by emphasizing exchange and reification to the neglect of use and meaning. The following chapter adjusts this account by exploring the production of meaning in the combination of music and

commodity. The record store reveals a consumer "ambience" generated by the profusion of interrelated meanings, values and objects that extend from the musical object. The latter half of the thesis thus moves away from the record as product to record-based performance as process to account for the production of both value and the listener/consumer. Just as the consumer's need does not correspond to the satisfaction of a particular object, the listener is not simply in a linear relationship with the music. Chapter Three ignores the insular art historical narrative of musicology and makes use of the move from product to process in twentieth century concert music to introduce the same move in the commercial function of music. I read Erik Satie, John Cage and Max Neuhaus's challenges to performed music as a movement out of the concert hall and into everyday life. Unfortunately for them, this is the realm of the consumer where music develops its own particular environmental function at odds with their avant-garde ideals.

Chapter Four describes the dominant functional music of the twentieth century through a history and criticism of Muzak. Designed to accompany production and consumption, Muzak is less a product than a social strategy to influence the work, consumption and leisure habits of its listeners.

A similar strategy appears in my final analysis, demonstrating once again the role of music in consumer culture, this time as it functions within the economy of a dance club. My conclusion follows Frith's suggestion at the head of this thesis. (Con)fusing capital, technical and musical arguments, I contend that music lends its expressivity to economic exchange, both motivating and meeting certain consumer needs. Expression and commodity collaborate at the point of consumption rendering consumption a meaningful act.

CHAPTER ONE

MUSIC IS A THING

In the summer of 1991 I worked in the stockroom at the newly opened HMV Superstore in downtown Toronto. Each day I would unload boxes of CDs and cassettes off trucks. These boxes came from the store's warehouse or from independent distributors. Newly released recordings which were expected to sell in large numbers would be taken immediately onto the sales floor and stacked against the back wall. The rest of the delivery went to the basement where it was received, processed and priced. Receiving consisted of tallying the order's bill with the contents of the boxes. Most of my summer was spent processing incoming product. At the time, American record companies were still releasing their CDs in "long-boxes" to accommodate those record stores whose storage and display containers were meant to hold vinyl LPs. The HMV Superstore stocked only CDs and cassettes. Their shelving was designed for those formats. My responsibility was to go through all the product shipped from the U.S. and slice each jewelcase out of its cardboard container. The CDs were then resealed in plastic and priced along with the other new product. Returned but undamaged items were also

resealed and repriced.

All the product in the stockroom was to be moved as quickly as possible onto the sales floor. Some releases were scheduled by record companies for a particular hour. The labels would enforce the exact time when an important new release could be made available by the stores.

Reprisals would ensue if a store sold something before the agreed time. These recordings would be received in the hundreds, if not thousands, the day before their debut. The swift movement of product was also necessary because of the limited storage space available in the stockroom.

Unprocessed boxes stacked up. They were piled for a time up the back stairwells until that was deemed a fire hazard. Some were shipped back to the warehouse. The rest were piled higher, processed or given to the different sales departments for processing.

Working in the stockroom did not require any great knowledge of music. One had to have some familiarity with names and genres, but if this was uncertain, the cover usually supplied enough information to direct the CD to the proper department. In truth, I was not dealing with music in the stockroom, I was moving boxes and sticking price tags on jewelcases. The closest I got to listening to music was when someone returned a CD and I had to decide whether it

was unplayable.

* * *

In 1877, when Thomas Alva Edison invented the first phonograph, music became a thing. This thing was the record. Recording technology allowed for both the retention of music in a material form (first foil, then wax, soon vinyl and now as digital information) and the mechanical reproduction of that form. Freed from its "original" moment of performance, music that had been previously limited to a particular location and time, could now be heard wherever and whenever there was a record player.⁴ Music soon became tied to the record. Mass produced sound recordings appeared in a number of different formats over the years; cylinders, 78-rpm discs, LPs, reels, cassettes, CDs and ever newer digital models.⁵ Apart from the fact that they all retain

⁴This condensed account of the mechanical reproduction of sound should not lead one to jump immediately into Walter Benjamin's critique of the loss of authenticity, authority and aura in cultural objects that lack an original presence (Benjamin 1968). Recorded music establishes a discourse which can be read to include these concepts, as argued, for example, in Goodwin (1990). I will make use of some of Benjamin's distinctions (particularly that of distraction in relation to contemplation), but will refrain from a wholesale adaptation of his largely visual metaphors into the world of sound.

⁵In general, I will refer to material sound recordings as records unless the identification of a specific format is

(as well as generate) music, they are similar in that their materiality allows for the repetition of that music through mass production. The record soon began to be produced as a thing to be bought and sold. A debate that follows music throughout the century finds its roots here. Once music becomes this thing, what becomes of music?

In America the critical moment, the moment at which one might pinpoint the reification of music, was 1906. In that year the Victor company introduced the Victrola, the first phonograph designed as furniture, a console in 'piano-finished' mahogany that retailed at \$200. In the same year Victor's Red Seal line had its first real flowering, with Caruso and Patti heading the list (Eisenberg 1988, 13).

In The Recording Angel, Evan Eisenberg argues that the phonograph is an expressive medium. The marketing strategy of the Victor company in 1906 is a critical moment for him, as well as most music critics, because it represents a significant convergence of music and the commodity form. Music is not simply music, it is an accessory or accompaniment to a new piece of furniture. In this modern

germane.

household, one does not simply listen to music, one listens to a record player. Records are produced and sold by phonograph companies to give consumers something to play on their newly purchased equipment and, as such, take their place among a household's possessions. The critics then argue whether the purchase is a passage to music or if in fact the music is merely an excuse for the purchase.⁶

Still in its infancy in 1906, the modern music industry and its concomitant emphasis on record-making over live music-making established itself by 1945 according to Simon Frith (1988, 19-20). At this same point in time, Fredric Jameson identifies the emergence of consumer culture (1983, 113). Music and money are now inextricably linked in the record as a material object of exchange and profit.⁷ Jean Baudrillard's account of consumption as "the stage where the commodity is immediately produced as a sign, as sign value, and where signs (culture) are produced as commodities" (1981, 147) is required to explicate this unity. While exchange is established in the market, meaning can fluctuate through a number of particular instances. A discourse which

⁶John Corbett's distinction between sceptics and optimists regarding the cultural commodity sums up this debate (1994, 32-33). Both sides agree that music has accrued new meanings as listeners have taken on the role of consumers.

⁷See Attali (1985) for the history of music and capital as it precedes and follows the development of recording technology.

treats musical meaning as autonomous and absolute⁸ damns the commodity form for instituting alienation and artificiality. Following Baudrillard's rejection of "alienist" economic discourses which oppose "natural" and "artificial" needs (1988, 43), I read the meaning of the record as a participant, from the start, in the economic status of the commodity.

Prior to my application of Baudrillard's thought (which will occur in the next chapter), Theodor Adorno's work on mass culture needs to be considered. While he does not reject the record out of hand,⁹ his condemnation of commercial forms seems to implicate record-centred music. His critique encourages a sceptical reflection on music as a consumable good. According to Adorno, music experienced as a commodity is defined within the market.

All contemporary musical life is dominated by the commodity form; the last pre-capitalist residues have been eliminated. Music, with all the attributes of the ethereal and the sublime which are generously accorded

⁸For a critique of this discourse, see Janet Wolff's "The Ideology of Autonomous Art" and Susan McClary's "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year" in Leppert and McClary (1992).

⁹See Levin (1991). The issue of October that contains this essay also includes three short articles by Adorno; each one addresses the record in some way.

it, serves in America today as an advertisement for commodities which one must acquire in order to be able to hear music (1991, 33).

Adorno takes exchange to dominate the commodification of music, resulting in regression, if not exclusion, of use (that is, listening). The music industry makes decisions based on profit, not music, and profit is served more by quantity than quality. As the music industry increases in power and influence, music becomes reduced to its commodity character. It only matters as number of units shipped and sold. The quality of music is in service of maximizing number. And, as seen in the dominance of number (Top 40, 5 stars, dollars earned), quantity becomes the proof of quality.

Utility and expression linger as the excuse for purchase; a trace of some purpose or meaning is required to instigate demand. But in the shadow of the music industry, critics like Adorno and Jacques Attali question the authenticity of even these residual qualities.

Mass production erases value-creating differences; its logic is egalitarian, spreading anonymity and thus negating meaning (Attali 1987, 106).

Both Adorno and Attali dismiss as artificial the differentiation of musical commodities by consumers. From

this critical perspective, the value of music on record is tied to quantity and commodity rather than quality and musical character. The record as commodity brings music into the market but music is not a marketable commodity. The record, what is bought and sold, contains music, but its purchase price is gauged on the container not the content. A CD has a standard price that varies according to how new it is, where it comes from, how it is made (for example, if it is a "gold pressing"), but not according to the music inscribed therein.¹⁰

The record industry encourages accumulation and has valorized acquisition from its inception (Eisenberg 1988, 13-14). After purchase, the consumer places each new record alongside many others. Numbers again dominate, especially for the ideal consumer, the collector; number of records, price paid, number of copies available. The record is homogeneous unit, a commodity, and the record collection is its resting place.

¹⁰The pricing of rare or special recordings might imply qualitative variation, but it is again based more on number ("only 500 copies pressed") than quality of music.

BRIDGE

An Eskimo accosted by the ethnomusicologist Christian Leden said, 'My songs are part of my soul, and if the demon in the white man's magic box steals my soul, why, I must die' (Eisenberg 1988, 47).

There is a belief that music, the expression of spirit and will, is rendered inert by mechanical means. The record requires a complex apparatus to momentarily revive this voice, but some might say that playback is merely a simulation of life. In The Magic Mountain, Thomas Mann refers to the gramophone as a "sarcophagus of music." Edison proposed his invention be used to preserve speeches of those who have died.

With the advent of records music's backward metamorphosis, from butterfly to chrysalis, was complete (ibid., 20).

Mass production imprisons music to render it repeatable. Confined by reproductive technology, music gives up certain freedoms in agreeing to be recorded. Musicians resist this dissolution and proclaim on their caskets, "no overdubs" or "recorded live" to attest to and perpetuate the life that went into making the music. Some

records instruct one to "PLAY LOUD," perhaps to rouse the inanimate music from the grooves, from the frozen sequence of digits. Such gestures arise from the fear that the record extinguishes its music, a fear exacerbated by the alienating otherness of a solid circle that somehow produces music.

The production of commodities, however, is a very complex and involved process. One should not isolate the record from the music too eagerly. A record can be both expression and commodity: something to transport and invigorate and revitalize the numbest soul at the same time as it is something to unload off trucks, to carry around in boxes, to sell or to throw out.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MEANING OF THE THING (THAT IS MUSIC)

The sound of music is not extinguished when it becomes a thing; it also does not stand alone. The mechanical reproduction of music results in the production of values which supplement listening pleasure and constitute the meaning of the record as a particular product. In this chapter, the relationship of the record to the consumer will be explored through these additional appreciable qualities. In doing so, I will begin to entertain the larger issue concerning the function of music in consumer society.

When I buy a record, the musician is eclipsed by the disc. And I am eclipsed by my money - not only from the musician's view but from my own. When a ten-dollar bill leaves my right hand and a bagged record enters my left, it is the climax. The shudder and ring of the register is the true music; later I will play the record, but that will be redundant. My money has already heard it (Eisenberg 1987, 20).

Evan Eisenberg's caricature of the record consumer

rings true as it admits that buying records involves a pleasure in acquisition and possession as much as it does listening pleasure. In the consumer's rush to fulfilment, the experience of listening can be momentarily supplanted by that of purchase. The record as thing to be owned displaces the music as thing to be heard. Or, at least, the pleasure in exchange precedes the pleasure in listening. The latter activity becomes enveloped by such a range of more immediate pleasures that it gets pushed further back, taking up less of the experience.

There is something intrinsically pleasurable about the whole process of selecting, buying and playing a record. Indeed the dedicated hi-fi enthusiast probably derives as much pleasure from browsing through his collection, extracting the record from its sleeve, carefully cleaning the surfaces, and adjusting the controls of his hi-fi, as from listening to the music.

-Geoffrey Oord, "Signals Beyond the Dreams of Edison," The Times, 18 April 1977 (Quoted in Chanan 1995, 17).

The material of the reified music object has become a prominent locus of value. The equipment and activities that accumulate around the music provide for great enjoyment and

distract from what one would assume is the heart of the experience. Records provide more than mere music; beside the thrill of purchase, lies the quiddity of the object. Obsessive vinyl fetishists, especially those who collect classical music, cherish recordings pressed on heavy shellac discs. Audiophile record labels service that need. While CDs lack the heft and size of LPs, they compensate with an immaculate mirrored surface and ingenious packaging. Each format contributes in its own way to the music's value. Vinyl adherents may argue the merits of analogue warmth, but the hip nonconformity of the format is also becoming valuable, much like the reel-to-reel recorder and its air of nostalgic but urbane stylishness.¹¹ The sterile machinery of the CD player has its own connotations of urbanity and cool; no matter how old the music, it represents a model of modern efficiency.

Record covers provide another source of interest. Once criticized for their reduced surface space, CDs now include intricately folded posters or small illustrated booklets. Cover art appears in gallery settings and is collected in

¹¹See, for example, Quentin Tarantino's film Pulp Fiction and the reel-to-reel machine that provides musical accompaniment to Uma Thurman's attempted seduction of John Travolta and subsequent overdose. She plays a recording of Neil Diamond's "Girl, You'll Be a Woman Soon" redone by suave alternative rockers Urge Overkill.

books. While Eisenberg warns that the fetishization of visuals can distract from the recorded sounds (55), John Corbett argues that it plays a part in the constitution of the listening experience. He locates an erotic charge in cover art as it articulates the visual lack that defines recorded music; the cover takes part in the construction of consumer desire as does its derivation, the music video (a hybrid of radio and record jacket) (38-40).

The contributions of these extra-musical properties to the meaning of the music have to be judged alongside the consumer who values them. Pressed in the form of a record, music is constantly in danger of falling completely into its commodity character. The transformation of value engendered by the commodity allows the consumer to stockpile and exchange records without the hinderance of use (Attali 1985, 126) or, through a regression of listening, leads the listener to appreciate exchange value as an object of enjoyment (Adorno 1991, 34). The reactions of musicians and music fans to this issue can be found in the popular discourse surrounding music. Accusations of "selling out" and proclamations of "doing it for the music" demonstrate a concern with the influence of the market on musical expression. The consumer's defensive response is to actively engage with the music, emphasizing its expressive

value, thus halting its eclipse by the commodity form. Adorno criticizes the claims made by this active listener.

Whenever [retarded listeners] attempt to break away from the passive status of compulsory consumers and 'activate' themselves, they succumb to pseudo-activity. Types rise up from the masses of the retarded who differentiate themselves by pseudoactivity and nevertheless make the regression more strikingly visible (1991, 46).

The obsessive fan, the radio ham (today's technophile, I suppose), or the connoisseur of the hip and obscure (be it jazz, hip hop or alternative music) are said to simulate difference while perpetuating a passive relationship with the music industry. Adorno blames this kind of regressive listening on the music industry's homogeneous product. Simon Frith criticizes his argument for its simplification of the complex social process that takes place with the consumption of music (1978, 57). Adorno's essential point, that the listening subject is not independent of the market, will be admitted. Rather than agree with his charges of regression or his assertion that freedom of choice is not exercised (1991, 26), I would like to review his analysis of the constraints on the listening/consuming subject and the musical commodity and then evaluate those constraints

positively.

The composition hears for the listener. This is how popular music divests the listener of his spontaneity and promotes conditioned reflexes. Not only does it not require his effort to follow its concrete stream; it actually gives him models under which anything concrete still remaining may be subsumed. The schematic buildup dictates the way in which he must listen while, at the same time, it makes any effort in listening unnecessary. Popular music is "pre-digested" in a way strongly resembling the fad of "digests" of printed material (Adorno 1990, 306).

Popular music¹² does not so much rob consumers of their freedom as it teaches them to give it up. The listener, encouraged to diminish effort, relinquishes freedom in consumption and accepts the standardized product proffered by the record companies untroubled by any complicating critical faculties. This laxity represents, according to Adorno, a regression of listening. The "pre-digestion of music" lies in standardization. Adorno contemptuously

¹²I am in agreement with John Corbett's argument, "all music is now popular" (35-36) and thus equate recorded music with popular music.

displays jazz as evidence of monotonous music that requires little listening effort.¹³ Taking his lead, one could then consider the record the ultimate standardization of music, substituting difficult listening with the ease of purchase while disingenuously professing the value of the music. The record can act as a stand-in for the listener; rather than the composition hearing for him or her, the record does. Digestion is completed by proxy. Once the record is purchased, it can take its place alongside the unopened books of the similarly lazy reader.¹⁴

This standardization is masked by pseudo-differentiation. Consumers are duped into an affirmation of free choice in the open market while in fact they are left with goods which are already chosen for them. The sceptical version of popular music criticism would cite fans of formulaic Top 40 acts (for example, young and sexy vocal ensembles from New Kids on the Block through to the Backstreet Boys) as evidence of a consumer group not really buying what they want, but what the record companies want them to want. Adorno attributes the popularity of

¹³See "Perennial Fashion - Jazz" in Adorno (1967).

¹⁴Nowadays the status of books has been superseded by technology. The regressive technophile acquires home entertainment units and computer systems only to let them collect dust or, at most, perform at their lowest capacity.

homogeneous forms to music fans taught to expect and appreciate standardized goods while they are, at the same time, distracted by trivial variation (1990, 306). Rather than encouraging an active engagement with expressive sounds, the record as the standard carrier of music could be accused of establishing regressive listening practices through its emphasis on quiddity and surface.

The market draws the consumer's attention to pseudo-difference (or supplementary values) in the production of demand. Advertising and the media play an important role here. Adorno argues that homogeneity is concealed through the pervasive media monologue on style and fashion while these spurious differences perpetuate the myth that options on which to exercise freedom are available (1991, 35). Music magazines and music television demonstrate their significant influence on the music market through their pervasive presence and the continued support given to them (through advertising dollars) by the record companies. Musicians also become figures of value (or pseudo-differentiation) as they fall in service of sales and work to maximize the appeal of their music to the consumer. The market value of the "star" relies equally on persona and musicianship (though some critics would emphasize the former). Adorno argues that the adulation of fans results

not from listening but in response to the commands of the media (1991, 31). Working alongside record companies, the media provides a coherent infrastructure to guide the potential music consumer into the record store and from the record carrels to the cash register. Faced with the innumerable pieces of music available, the customer relies as much on an external network of authority as his or her ears when making a purchase decision. Sales charts and hit parades¹⁵ act as a legitimate but external ranking scheme which aids in the differentiation required to make a purchase decision (Attali 1985, 107). Finally, the media influences aesthetic judgements through its pop-critical discourse. Sceptics like Adorno see this and make use of a "music-and-the-junk-that-gets-in-its-way" model for their critiques of cultural commodities.

Rather than exclude these points of (pseudo)differentiation from musical experience, I would like to suggest an expansion of what is recognized to constitute musical meaning. This move is necessitated by

¹⁵In the absence of a universal Top 40 chart, there now appear many micro-charts that indicate sales in niche markets such as local independent releases or records purchased by DJs. International magazines such as Tower Records' in-house publication Pulse or Britain's The Wire reprint sales lists from individual stores.

the massive production of related values that occurs amidst the record store's maze of racks and displays. Customers faced with a multitude of musical objects (whose identities are obscured by the noise of the media's attempt to simulate in each a meaningful personality) devise a complex body of knowledge in order to extract a piece of music. This knowledge is generated among consumers as they interact with charts, releases, magazines, and so on. Neither manipulated from above (by the music industry) nor freely (and thus, I suppose, randomly) purchasing distinct items, the customer takes part in what Baudrillard refers to as a "calculus of objects" (1988, 31). As a consumable object, a record generates meaning differentially. Instead of referring to its meaningful content (the music), a record distinguishes itself within and against the system of signifying values that make up the language of the record store. Defined in this way, it is what Baudrillard cautiously refers to as an "object of consumption" (1981, 64).

Few objects today are offered alone, without a context of objects to speak for them. And the relation of the consumer to the object has consequently changed: the object is no longer referred to in relation to a specific utility, but as a collection of objects in their total meaning (1988, 31).

The consumption of commodities is a significant activity, made significant in the consumer environment.¹⁶ The expressive aspect of music in this location is not stifled but speaks alongside the other objects in the record store. The conversation is about spending money and buying records.

To lament the loss or ruination of expression in this context is to uphold an idealized or mythological conception of the nature of the musical product. When Baudrillard rejects the distinction between artificial and authentic needs, he implies a similar rejection in terms of meaning. In its place there appears a more complex account of cultural consumption, where needs (and signs) are not direct and concrete but flexible, ambiguous and alterable (1988, 41-42). In the record store, the aesthetic significance of music is manipulated for economic reasons. Music as a sign collaborates with music as a commodity. Based on Baudrillard's analysis, both the sign form (in this case, the record) and the commodity (in this case, also the record) function through "a code managing the exchange of values" (1981, 146). The objects that converge at the scene of the record store are read by the consumer in a calculus

¹⁶For Baudrillard, this is the department store. For me, it is the record store. See "Consumer Society" in Baudrillard (1988).

directed toward purchase decisions.

The production of demand does not result in a power struggle between consumer and industry so much as a collaborative manipulation of value. From what has been presented so far, it is evident even to Adorno that in this context the listening subject is transformed into a distracted and inattentive consumer (1990, 310). The possibility of contemplative listening is rejected in favour of a dissociative relationship which he compares to that of football or motoring (1991, 41). The intensity and speed at which music is marketed produces a disciplined disorientation, making it difficult to judge whether it is the music or the listening which is superficial and insubstantial. Walter Benjamin's argument concerning distraction in the reception of mechanically reproduced art (239-241) is particularly suggestive in this context. The consumer's movement through the record store can be compared to a dance where one moves freely within the conventions set by the music. Both activities are mastered when they no longer require direct contemplation and become habitual.¹⁷

No longer tied to a definite function, objects (such as records) participate in a fluid field of signification (Baudrillard 1988, 44). Baudrillard's thesis rejects the

¹⁷See my chapter five for more on dancing and consumer culture.

notion that consumption is the conjunction of particular needs with particular objects. Needs, like functions and signs, are indefinite and as such cannot be satisfied (45). Objective need is replaced by objectless desire. No matter how poor or rich a consumer is, the buying does not stop because the activity itself becomes significant and valuable (and pleasurable). Consumption is not about products, but about process. If consumer society produces anything, it is consumers. Consumer behaviour is not determined by an individual's need for a useful product, but rather "the specifically social function of exchange, communication and distribution of values within a corpus of signs" (46). Needs are induced in the consumer environment to function as a "productive force" (Baudrillard 1981, 82). Department stores (and record stores) enact this ideology by providing "ambience" or designing a suitable "environment" for consumption (29), thus participating in the encompassing "socialization" that naturalizes consumer society (49). Consumption refers to a "collective and active behaviour" enacted by consumers. This social behaviour is intrinsic to an understanding of recorded music.

Not limited to the store, consumer ambience influences everyday life. Since economic growth is increased if consumers stockpile that which takes up their time, consumer

society teaches its constituents to enjoy abstinence (Attali 1985, 125). Attali argues that storage or stockpiling becomes a valued activity and motivates the consumer. Disposable hits and timeless collections are top sellers because they provide the most convincing arguments for the abstention of use (101). The demand made by the production of demand is fulfilled in the workplace, where one makes the money required for consumption.

People must devote their time to producing the means to buy recordings of other people's time, losing in the process not only the use of their own time, but also the time required to use other people's time (ibid.).

Baudrillard associates stockpiling with social implosion; mass production is not simply the production of consumable objects but the production of the mass(es) as an indistinct, apolitical and annihilating body (1982, 8-9).¹⁸ The homologous mechanisms of production and consumption order both work and leisure time and thus put the difference between the two into question. The rule of consumer society appears not only in the store, but at work and at home. Music as a locus of both meaning and commodity value is absorbed into everyday life and continues to play a pivotal

¹⁸Baudrillard's views regarding the masses will be touched on in the final chapter of this thesis. See his In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities (1983) for the larger picture.

role in the constitution of consumer society no matter where
it is heard.

BRIDGE

In the consumption of music then, it is the unit of reproduction rather than that of production which is increasingly the source of musical culture and which has become the prime focus of its economic arrangements, influencing the conditions of musical performance (Symes 1997, 83).

In his essay on the incorporation of pop music's promotional strategies by the classical music market, Colin Symes links the new musical practices allowed by technical reproduction (specifically, portability and recontextualization) to the desacralization of the concert hall reception model (be it an actual concert or the use of records as a virtual concert) and the emergent treatment of classical music as functional, rather than aesthetic. This revision of the accepted status of classical music is achieved through the manipulation of packaging and context.

An emphasis on "star" performers and classical hit parades is derived from familiar pop marketing techniques. Magazines, guide books and sleeve notes come to play an instructive role; explicitly aiming to educate the listeners, implicitly indoctrinating new consumers. Thematic collections of musical excerpts (eg. Sensual

Classics, Classic Stressbusters, Gardening Classics) render the music less intimidating to the neophyte and encourage its incorporation into everyday life. These strategies arise with the insertion of the classical music discourse into consumer society and result in not only an emphasis on (musical/commercial) context (stars, styles, hits, etc.), but also a reinscription of the place and function of music. Classical music, particularly in the novelty series mentioned above, becomes "muzak for the home" (91). Symes attributes the music's new meanings (accrued through marketing) and model of reception (distracted rather than contemplative) to the progress of reproductive technology, specifically the appearance of the compact disc. He then concludes, and in doing so anticipates the next step of this thesis; "the current context of musical reproduction is reshaping the nature of musical culture, even in its performance mode, in profound ways" (93). Leaving behind music as a consumer commodity, I will now address the function of music as accompaniment to that consumption.

CHAPTER THREE

MUSIC IS NOTHING TO LISTEN TO

We're chucking this idea ... that music enables one to live in a dream world removed from the situation one is actually in (and so the eyes of the music lovers, closed or reading scores - fortunate for them they're not crossing city streets) (Cage 1967, 44).

Cage's "dream world" rules those musical practices which place an audience before musicians, focusing the former's attention on music to which they are meant to pay attention. Such a space creates an idea of music as object of contemplation; an idea present in any performance, be it a rock concert or a recital, where the audience is there to listen to the music. This practice became dominant in European concert music after the Renaissance. It still influences, if not governs, much of the thinking about music at present. My thesis however is concerned with musical practices that differ from this mode of reception. To introduce that difference, I will accompany Cage on his exit from the "dream world" and listen for the sounds of new music as we takes our place in the "real world."

Christopher Small provides an outline of the assumptions intrinsic to post-Renaissance music in his critique of said tradition (Small 1977). The two that top his list concern the frame and the communicative model (36). The first assumption is that the musical work is a self-contained object of contemplation. As such it is framed spatially by locating the music in a strictly identified place where an audience is arranged in such a way as to focus their attention on the displayed musical source. The frame is maintained temporally by organizing performances according to an exact schedule. Some concert halls will not admit patrons once the performance has started; all announce the time the music will commence. The conclusion of a concert is either foreordained or expected within a reasonable span of time (25-26). These conventions serve to guide the audience toward a particular listening practice.

Small's second assumption explains what the audience is listening for. Music presented in a concert hall is understood to be an expression of the ideas of the composer transmitted through the medium of score and performers (29). Arranged in conjunction with the framing devices, this model of communication creates a relationship between the music (reservoir of the composer's ideas) and the audience. The former speaks with authority while the latter acquiesces.

The musical practice of the concert hall is challenged by works which dissolve the frame and frustrate listening. I will analyze three such works. Erik Satie's Vexations and John Cage's 4'33" are most obviously critiques of the post-Renaissance model. Following them, Max Neuhaus's Time Square will totalize their revolt in an almost nihilistic rejection.¹⁹ By the end of this chapter, the dream world that serves as a refuge for music will be left behind for the clamorous (but still musical) everyday world of consumer society.

Erik Satie is perhaps recognized for his influence and iconoclasm as much as he is for his repertoire. He is famous for his satirical titles, his obtuse performance instructions, and his invention of "furniture music" (see my

¹⁹My treatment of these pieces follows a particular lineage, outside of which, there little to say. Vexations is, for the most part, only of value to composers of experimental music who follow Cage's appropriation of it (Gillmor 1988, 103), as I do here. This same group (including Cage) treats 4'33" as a compositional call to arms (in the manner summed up by Richard Kostelanetz [1970] and explored in detail by Nyman [1974]) and quickly move on to other works. This is the prevalent attitude throughout the literature on Cage and twentieth century classical music (see, for one example, Patterson 1993, 14-15). My summary of positive and negative responses is sufficient. Finally, regarding Neuhaus, I have done my best to collect as much information as I could about his somewhat obscure body of work. I admit that there are gaps, most notably a book of essays and interviews entitled The Inscriptions of Max Neuhaus, which I have seen referred to in passing but not been able to locate myself.

next chapter for more on the latter). However, in confounding expectations, he resists recognition as a (serious) composer and his works are rarely referred to as "masterpieces." Written in 1893, Satie's Vexations consists of a short musical passage that is to be slowly repeated 840 times. Dismissed by most as a joke, John Cage discovered the piece in 1949 and organized the first complete performance (18 hours 40 minutes) at the Pocket Theatre in New York on September 9, 1963²⁰ (Orledge 1990, 277).

Satie's instruction for the performer to prepare in "deep silence and serious immobility," leads music critic David Toop to distinguish two possible interpretations of the piece.

In one respect Satie's preparatory instruction suggests a meditation through which the ability to play this arduous piece will shine through and be rewarded by illumination; in another respect the demands of immobility followed by a need for inhuman self-control and sustained repetitious action suggest an assumption of machine characteristics, a meditation through which the body becomes robot (200).

The first presents an aesthetic based on repetition and

²⁰An incomplete premiere was given in 1958 at the Lewes Grammar School in Sussex by 13 year old Richard David Hames (Orledge 1990, 277).

intensity which is taken up in the work of those composers described in Michael Nyman's book, Experimental Music.²¹ Gavin Bryars and Christopher Hobbs noted during their 1971 performance of Vexations an unexpected musical consciousness sustained throughout the piece (Nyman 1974, 32). My interest lies in the second interpretation; an interpretation which leads Toop to suggest that Satie prefigures a time when machines would assist in the performance of music (1995, 200). This aesthetic of repetition and (industrial) labour will echo through the music to be discussed in the remainder of this thesis. Where my last chapter responded to accusations of regression through the repetition inherent in the consumer's relationship with musical commodities (Adorno 1991, 44), this chapter will address a particular privation of the experience of music in performance.

To be interested in Satie one must be disinterested to begin with, accept that a sound is a sound and a man is a man, give up illusions about ideas of order, expressions of sentiment, and all the rest of our inherited aesthetic claptrap (Cage 1961, 82).

²¹See also Wim Mertens's American Minimal Music (1983).

John Cage finds in Satie, and especially Vexations, a precursor to his own rejection of established compositional practice (Orledge 1990, 259). Satie's initial breach with tradition occurs when he undercuts the authority of the composer through self-mockery. While the instruction to repeat could suggest that the piece is so illuminating it sustains itself over nearly a thousand hearings or it is so rich in ideas that it requires so many, the punch line, at least until the Pocket Theatre performance, was that Vexations was neither. Satie's instruction was ridiculous, the entire piece was dismissed and the composer was deemed an also-ran, if not a charlatan²² (see, for example, music critic Nicolas Slonimsky's insults below). Once the piece was performed, a second musical convention was tested. With a duration of up to an entire day, Vexations challenges the musical frame and through it, the stamina of the listener. That it requires a series of performers (ten at the Pocket Theatre) would seem to confirm the accusation that contemplation of the complete work is impossible.²³ While this might suggest a rejection of listening in general, it

²²Until, that is, late in his career when Satie acquired his certificate in counterpoint from the Paris Scola Cantorum thus, he proclaimed, "authorizing him to engage in the practice of composition" (Small 1977, 83).

²³"One could not endure a performance of Vexations..., but why give it a thought?" (Cage 1961, 78).

in fact alludes to a new mode of reception. Nicolas Slonimsky jokingly included the piece in his new musical category, "punitive music." Identified as the incessant repetition of insipid tunes for the purposes of torturing music lovers and weakening sales resistance, Slonimsky adds:

For an entirely different purpose, Erik Satie, who detested audiences, directed to have his piano piece, pointedly titled Vexations, to be performed 840 times in succession. His punitive design, however, was circumvented by a group of sado-masochists who carried Satie's instructions to the letter and had, on 9-10 September 1963, arranged in New York 840 performances of Satie's piece, played without interruption by a relay of willing pianists who obtained thereby not only a measure of secret gratification but also a great deal of publicity (Slonimsky 1971, 1484).

Eleven years earlier, in 1952, the leader of those sado-masochists premiered a piece that, as one critic wrote, "would not have been possible without Vexations and its initial period of specified contemplation" (Orledge 1990, 259). Cage's 4'33" extends Satie's critique to question the idea of music itself and suggests the possibility that outside the dream world of the concert hall is nothing but

silence. Its first performance, on August 29, 1952, consisted of David Tudor sitting at a piano, playing nothing for four minutes and thirty-three seconds and then leaving. Dismissed by some as a Dada joke, it has also been interpreted as a statement of the composer's authority.

Cage's great achievement... is to claim silence for his own. If one is not listening to anything else, and maybe even if one is, then one is listening to Cage (Griffiths 1981, 70).

This account ignores, however, Cage's attitude toward the role of the composer as well as the fact that the "silent piece" is not silent. What has become the doctrinaire sympathetic reading of 4'33" is found in Richard Kostelanetz's 1969 essay on "inferential art" (in Kostelanetz 1970). Kostelanetz addresses those works which propose a change from the norm in our perceptual and reasoning skills through implicit example rather than explicit instruction (106). By presenting a pianist not playing his instrument, Cage quiets the composer's voice by omitting the musical material which the audience expects to convey his ideas. Random ambient noise is heard in the "silence" and thus constitutes the music of the piece (107). Three ideas follow from this experience according to Kostelanetz. The first is that silence does not exist.

Every rest in a piece of music is filled with accidental sound. The second point is that the contribution of this additional, unintentional sound makes every musical experience unique and unrepeatable. Finally, by introducing accidental sound to the concert hall, Cage puts it on equal standing with the composer's intentional sound, and erases the boundary around what defines music (108). Thus, concludes Kostelanetz (and a generation of composers who follow Cage), 4'33" revises our perception of music such that "we may continually appreciate all the 'music' that is constantly present in our environment" (108). Rather than allocating silence Cage's property as Griffiths does or claiming that all sounds heard "belong" to the piece (107), this conclusion proposes to grant all sound the status of music and thus available to everyone. In four and a half minutes, amid a chorus of coughing and shuffling accompanied by the hum of air vents and passing trucks and beeping watches, Cage demonstrates how fragile are the walls containing music. In doing so, music is heard from beyond the confines of the concert hall.²⁴

²⁴As a recording, 4'33" elicits an equally interesting response. David Toop testifies to being engrossed in the surface noise of vinyl while listening to a recording of the piece (140-141). Thus, in addition to the ambience of the room where playback occurs, the means of reproduction makes itself present.

Analyzing the audiophile's desire for "noise-free"

Despite the creative liberty proposed in Kostelanetz's readings, one should not ignore the obverse interpretation. While some consider it a blank canvas or empty frame (Nyman 1974, 29, 31), Cage's interest in wire sculpture, Marcel Duchamp's Large Glass and the compositions of his contemporaries Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff ("Juilliard Lecture", Cage 1967, 102) suggests a different metaphor. He recounts the story of a performance by Wolff that was drowned out at points by the sounds of traffic. Asked to close the window that let in those sounds, the composer replied that he did not think it was necessary ("How to Pass, Kick, Fall, and Run", Cage 1967, 133). In 4'33", Cage eliminates the music and merely opens the window, allowing the sounds of the outside world to invade the concert hall. In doing so, the definitions of sound, silence and music converge and the roles of composer, performer and audience are complicated. If all that remains of traditional authorial practice is the temporal boundary, Cage admits that the duration is arbitrary. The piece is

recordings, John Corbett takes unwanted sound to foreground both the medium (that is, the record) and the production process of the music (recording and manufacturing) (38). While testing the breadth of our listening, 4'33" leaves one to be distracted by supplementary values such as the surface of the record, jacket art, liner notes, stereo equipment, etc. One might even be lead to contemplate the nature of consumption, possibly through the question, "Why did I buy this?"

present "in all spaces and at all times" (Kostelanetz 1970, 195). Allowing the world to overwhelm music, 4'33" reaches the apotheosis of Satie's challenge to the composer's authority.²⁵ Cage considers composition "a method of controlling people's behaviour" (Wiles, 61); using silence as a means to rid his work of intention (Nyman 1974, 51), he relinquishes his authority to the plethora of accidental sound.²⁶ In its place, he imagines sound free from externally imposed desires. Michael Nyman astutely remarks (though only in passing) that this is "politically a highly dangerous attitude" (23).

Recognizing that Cage's work is as much about social situations as it is music, critic Jill Johnston considers 4'33" a reaction to the Western world's emphasis on "striving." Cage's renunciation of composition is a call for "the necessity of doing nothing" ("There is No Silence Now" in Kostelanetz 1970, 148). Wim Mertens hears in Cage's oeuvre a politics of social nihilism that anticipates "the

²⁵Cage has said explicitly that his work is not concerned with communication but with perception (Nyman 1974, 20). Rather than conveying ideas, he arranges situations. Max Neuhaus, the next composer we look at, specializes in this method of music-making.

²⁶This is not a renunciation of composition, merely of intention. Cage comments: "I wanted my work to be free of my own likes and dislikes, because I think music should be free of the feelings and ideas of the composer" (Kostelanetz 1987, 65).

end of history: the end of economic expansion and political domination and, consequently, the renunciation of the consumer society" (1983, 116). However, the success of Cage's social critique depends on the presence of free agency on the part of the listener.

When [Cage] sits motionless at the piano for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, letting the audience grow impatient and make noises, he is giving back the right to speak to people who do not want to have it (Attali 1987, 136).

If 4'33" induces the disappearance of the concert hall as "the commercial site of music", freeing musical production from the restrictions of frame and compositional authority (ibid., 136-137), we cannot assume that "the people" will spontaneously seize the means of production. As shown in the last chapter, the production of demand creates a consumer who finds expression in commodities and actively participates in consumption. In the concert hall, the consumption/contemplation of music is a desired, meaningful, and pleasurable activity. When Cage silences the composer, a hundred do not rise to replace him; they wait for four and a half minutes until the next piece. And when they leave the concert, they do not contemplate the sound of traffic; they tune out the distracting noise of our media saturated

environment.

4'33" is not a negation of music but an affirmation of its omnipresence (Nyman 1974, 22).

Despite the idealism of Nyman, Attali, Mertens et al., 4'33" is not the gift of musical agency to all. Music is negated when it is omnipresent. By eliminating the authority of the composer and his work, Cage relinquishes the protected status of music. For four and a half minutes, Cage takes music out of its privileged sanctuary and places it indistinguishably among the noises of life. An unidentified New York newspaper reviewer grasped the consequences of this gesture at the first performance:

The difficulty to judge John Cage's 4'33" is that it is impossible to tell what music has not been played (Burbank 1984, 270).

All music and no music has not been played. Resolution is impossible because Cage has supplied us with a musical paradox: a piece of music with everything to hear and nothing to listen to. Where is the value in that for the listener? Composers might find 4'33" inspirational, but most return to the work of producing new music, just as the audience returns to the concert hall.

Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we

ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating ("The Future of Music: Credo", Cage 1961, 3).

John Cage continued to compose until his death. In 1966, he is quoted as saying he no longer needed 4'33" (Nyman 1974, 2). That same year, Max Neuhaus began performing Listen. By 1977 however, noise was no longer fascinating and Neuhaus turned his attention towards ignoring it. I will treat the change in his work from 1968 to 1977 as an analogy for the insurmountable challenge made by consumer society to the contemplative reception of music outside the concert hall. At this point, it sounds awkward to refer to a composer or a piece of music. Exiting the concert hall, Neuhaus dives headlong into the street and leaves the listener very much alone in the world. In doing so, he both enacts and realizes not only his own crisis as a "composer", but a critical change in the meaning and function of music. To explain how this came about, we need to go back to 1966 when Neuhaus was known largely as a performer of experimental and avant-garde music.²⁷

As a percussionist I had been directly involved in the

²⁷See Rockwell (1997) for a succinct summary of Max Neuhaus's work.

gradual insertion of everyday sound into the concert hall, from Russolo through Varèse and finally to Cage where live street sounds were brought directly into the hall. I saw these activities as a way of giving aesthetic credence to these sounds - something I was all for. I began to question the effectiveness of the methods, though. Most members of the audience seemed more impressed with the scandal than with the sounds, and few were able to carry the experience over into an appreciation of these sounds in their daily lives ("Listen" in Lander & Lexier 1990, 63).

Neuhaus' dissatisfaction with the passivity of audience response lead him to create Listen, a work many consider to be the successor to 4'33" (Nyman 1974, 88; Sutherland 1994, 163). Performed between 1966 and 1968, Listen consisted of a series of field trips or walks where Neuhaus would collect his audience outside the advertised location of the event, stamp their hands with the word "Listen", and silently start walking. The audience would eventually get the idea and follow his lead. Also ostensibly "silent", Listen differs from 4'33" in three significant ways. First, the work emerges from the concert hall and is played out on the street itself. Second, the audience is told what to do. Third, the composer maintains some control over what gets

heard by leading the walk (Nyman 1974, 88). Neuhaus is very much the composer of this piece. He is didactic. He provides a lesson in listening. And despite its abandonment of the concert hall's spatial frame, Listen was subject to the same inability of the audience to perpetuate their actively creative role in the performance. Like the four and a half minute window, Listen would end: when the walk was over, when the stamp wore off, when the audience returned to their everyday lives.

Possibly as a response to the persistence of frame and authority in concert hall and composer-associated musical events, Neuhaus started to concentrate on sound installations. He had already organized two public participation pieces (Public Supply [1966] and Drive-In Movie [1967]) that made use of radio transmissions to present a continual and communal listening experience (Appleton & Perera 1975, 297), but in the seventies he began insinuating site-specific sound-producing devices into public places. No longer instructing or leading, Neuhaus simply waited to have his music listened to.²⁸

²⁸The reviews of Village Voice music critic Tom Johnson (collected in Johnson 1989) provide an overview of Neuhaus's work between 1973 and 1980. Johnson was extremely conscientious about being as objective as he could in his appraisal of musical experiments. I rely greatly on the integrity of his accounts.

In 1973, Neuhaus installed a "sound discoverable" in a New York subway station. A soft electronic beeping varied by weather conditions, it garnered an indifferent response from those who worked in its vicinity. In reviewing it, Tom Johnson expressed his hope that the regulars might eventually become attuned to its function and that the passing general public might, at least, be induced to open their ears (83-85).

In 1974, Neuhaus toured Water Whistle; a selection of whistles strung throughout a swimming pool which produce sounds when water passes through them. This piece is exceptional because of its implicit commentary on the nature of the reception. Instead of allowing the public to stumble into the midst of his sounds as with all the other installations described here, Water Whistle forces the listener to enter a rarefied world not unlike the concert hall. In order to hear it properly, the listener must be underwater and thus isolated from the incidental sounds that invade most listening experiences (120). One is also isolated from the other listeners; a situation which replicates the prohibition of talking during a concert. While the performance is going on, interpersonal communication is obstructed by the water. In any case, to make the most of the work, one needs to concentrate on the

sounds because, and this is another significant feature, the listening stops when one runs out of breath (121). Water Whistle dramatises the lessons learned in 4'33" and Listen about the audience's attention span (a framing device that is not so easily altered) by making a joke of that which captures the music lover's attention: this piece is unarguably "breath-taking".

In 1976, Neuhaus placed two circles of beeping speakers in a public rotunda in New York as an installation called Round. Curious as to how the tones were organized, Johnson talked with him about it. Neuhaus explained but added that, with his work, he preferred an intuitive response to analysis (257). He hoped to avoid distracting the listener from the untrammelled experience of the piece by hiding away the machinery which created the sounds and avoiding the use of program notes. Keeping in mind Neuhaus's debt to Cage, one can detect here the persistent hope for a listening experience unhampered by the composer's intentions. Neuhaus maintains that

aesthetic experience is natural to the human being, a phenomenon of living, and further that it is highly unique to each individual (Neuhaus 1989, 235).

He goes on to condemn the limited mode of perception instituted in concert situations, considering it a harmful

influence on everyday aesthetic experience. Leaving the concert hall, Neuhaus wished to liberate this natural and unique aesthetic understanding.

The impetus for the first sound installation was an interest in working with a public at large, and inserting works into their daily domain in such a way that people could find them in their own time and on their own terms. Disguising them within their environments in such a way that people discovered them for themselves and took possession of them - lead by their curiosity into listening (ibid.).

The difficulties that ensue however, reveal Neuhaus to be living in a dream world of his own. The climate-controlled subway installation of 1973 was abandoned because too many people thought it was a "weather gimmick" (242). Despite his attempt to hide like the Wizard of Oz behind a curtain, Neuhaus is asked for directions regarding Round by Johnson. No one simply listens, and the delicate balance between the listener's freedom and the composer's diminished (but always authoritative) presence is difficult to achieve. Neuhaus has taken on a paradoxical task in his sound art: to create environmental sound that is neither natural nor purely functional, to induce listening without demanding it, to capture and sustain the timeless suggestion to "listen".

Rather than ignore the inherent contradictions of his work, Neuhaus applied them in his next piece. In 1977, a 24-hour electronic sound generator was installed beneath a subway grate on a pedestrian island in Times Square, New York City. By all accounts, it is still there today. According to Johnson, several thousand people walk over it everyday, but "no one seems to actually pay any attention" (308).

The music is drab and unattractive, and blends right in with the other unattractive sounds of Times Square (ibid.).

The normally enthusiastic and supportive Johnson (who once wrote a glowing review about the sound of snow [268-270]) finds the piece disappointing and doubts he will ever deliberately listen to it. The inaudibility of Times Square is corroborated by other critics. Robert Morgan notes how one needs to "strain to hear" the work (453). Ihor Holubizky, in his essay "Very Nice, Very Nice," finds that the sound becomes "an integral part of the continuous sound environment" (Lander & Lexier 1990, 244). He attributes this to the "visual anonymity" of the piece. Once again hiding his musical mechanism, Neuhaus continues his now characteristic method of composition.

Intrinsically non-visual, most of Max Neuhaus's works

exist on the threshold of perception - sound sources are placed so that they cannot be seen and the sounds become a natural element of the space - ever-present yet almost imperceptible.

-Catalog description from a 1982 sound art exhibition (Quoted in Toop 1995, 254).

However, this can no longer be considered merely a means of effacement, a way of diminishing the forces of the composer's desires and thus freeing the listener. Lacking any visual features and barely audible, Times Square even tests the ears of Neuhaus's champion, who gives up in frustration as the sounds become "lost in the hubbub" (Johnson 1989, 446) of the city.

To make sense of the connection between Neuhaus's early work and this case of perversely contrary music-making, we need to go back a couple years to what he refers to as his largest version of Listen; a 1974 newspaper editorial criticizing the bureaucratic ostracization of noise pollution. In reference to it, Neuhaus notes:

The basic point being that by arbitrarily condemning most man-made sounds as noise, they [the bureaucrats] were making noise where it never existed before. The most tragic result of their meddling is the people one has seen blasting their ears out (quite literally) with

'Walkmen' while riding the subway, convinced that they are protecting their ears from the subway sounds which are, in fact, much less loud ("Listen" in Lander & Lexier 1990, 65).

The veracity of his argument is less interesting than the evident categorical change that has occurred from 4'33", a scored (albeit radically) and performable composition, to this latest "version" of Listen, no longer a lesson in contemplation but a call to confront noise. Neuhaus is no longer acting as a composer or even a sound artist; he is a "sound environmentalist" or "sound ecologist." Joseph Lanza designates him a high-art "sound designer" (for those too sophisticated for "elevator music") whose

noise control devices [...offer...] a continuous hum for pedestrians sensitive enough to lend an ear against the competition of car horns, portable stereos, and incoherent ranting (1994, 228).

Neuhaus could not have been ignorant of the futility in subtly offsetting the continuous overpowering noise of Times Square traffic with a barely audible tone generator. If he was still trying to capture a contemplative space for free listening, an idealized space where sound could be sound, the streets of New York City presented an insurmountable challenge. And if this was as obvious to him as it seems

here, then Times Square does not represent the continuation of Listen, but illustrates the defeat of contemplative listening. Johnson comes to this conclusion when he decides that the piece is aurally disappointing because it is a statement about our "sound-calloused culture" (308).

If 4'33" presumes to provide a momentary window onto a world of liberated sound, Times Square acts like aural wallpaper on the walls of constant noise that fill the city; indistinguishable and unnoticed amid the circulation of everyday traffic. Music is no longer preserved in the safeguarded concert hall; free from the constraints which compose it, music becomes subject to the discord of the modern world where sound is not governed by rules of harmony and tradition, but dominates through volume, persistence and prevalence. Like the tones generated in Times Square, music is still with us; it is just harder to hear.

BRIDGE

In the Autumn 1990 issue of Musicworks magazine, Eric de Visscher interviews Max Neuhaus, now working through visual art galleries and no longer referring to himself as a musician, and reviews his most recent work. Installed in a busy city square in Switzerland, Time Piece consists of a slow building tone that never gets so loud as to be overpowering but whose sudden termination every half hour throws the ambient sounds into relief for the attentive listener. I imagine those who do not have the time to concentrate merely feel some unidentifiable emptiness in the air ever so often. Neuhaus was inspired by the idea of a "silent alarm clock" to create a piece that marks out time through the absence of sound.

"A common moment in the community" is thus created, not through the existence of sounds, but through silence, through the removal of sound (52)

Like Times Square, Neuhaus has once again brought together city life, its circulating inhabitants and imperceptible sounds. Time Piece modifies the earlier work to include an ordering principle; the community is constituted through a subliminal rhythm. No longer an idealistic herald of freedom, Neuhaus has succumb to the strictures of the clock.

CHAPTER FOUR

MUZAK IS NOTHING TO LISTEN TO

The concert hall provides a frame to contain, direct and protect a particular musical experience. Without that refuge, music is absorbed by background noise. It does not disappear however, it participates in another sort of framing. Ambiguously present, music provides a context for sociality in a number of different ways. Musical accompaniment to human action can be heard throughout history²⁹, but, in combination with the mechanism of sound reproduction, music as background reaches a powerful apotheosis with the development of Muzak.³⁰ This

²⁹This could include court music, music for dance, film music, work music, ceremonial music, music for relaxation, military music, and so on.

³⁰There are very few works on the subject of Muzak. Of the three I most relied on; MacLeod (1979) is well written but brief, Barnes (1988) is extensive but marred by shoddy scholarship (hence the lack of dates with some of his citations), and Lanza (1994) adds little new information to the first two. As I did not search out the Muzak Corporation's promotional literature and scientific studies myself, I rely, for the most part, on the above for their account of these primary sources. One exception being the short "manifesto" "The Ergonomy of Music," printed in the Radiotext(e) collection (Neill Strauss, ed. 1993) and credited to "Muzak." Other than small articles in popular magazines (which generally quote identical promotional statements) and the review of the background music business in Krasilovsky and Shemel (1994), Hildegard Westerkamp's essay and performance

trademarked "music service" demonstrates yet another aspect of the transfiguration of musical practice in the twentieth century. As with the convergence of listening and consuming described in Chapter Two, the means by which music as background becomes something less than worthy of our direct attention is technological. Jacques Attali refers to the gramophone as a "sound diffuser" which reproduces more music than we have time to hear (101); that excess of music plays on throughout the contemporary soundscape, not wanting for listeners. Rather than convey a message, background music employs a strategy; conceived by those who use it, exercised on those who are used by it. The story of Muzak illustrates this deployment of music.

If Erik Satie can be said to have preceded the departure of Cage and Neuhaus from the concert hall, he can also, with his invention of musique d'ameublement or "furniture music", be said to have foreseen the creation of Muzak. Inspired in part by Henri Matisse's dream of "an art without any distracting subject matter", comparable to an

piece (1990) provide my only other resource. I have since been informed that Westerkamp did her graduate work on Muzak.

One other reference that has come to my attention but I have not had the chance to locate is: "Muzak: On Functional Music and Power" by Jones and Schumacher, in Critical Studies and Mass Communication #9, 1992.

armchair (Orledge 1990, 222), Satie envisaged a composed but non-intrusive accompaniment to everyday activities and conversation; a music that would be functional rather than artistic (Nyman 1974, 31).

Furniture music creates a vibration; it has no other goal; it fills the same role as light and heat - as comfort in every form (Satie, quoted in Nyman 1974, 31).³¹

For some, this proposal represents the composer's persistent iconoclasm. Forgoing the creation of sonorous oratories aimed at an enrapt audience, Satie continues what Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson refer to as his crusade against impressiveness (Copland 1968, 57). Critical of such a stance, Copland questions the feasibility of sustaining such an aesthetic. Nicolos Slonimsky echoes these concerns in his typically dramatic manner when he dismisses furniture music as exemplary of Satie's "sustained effort to degrade music and reduce it to a menial level" (1449).

This particular desire to diminish music derives from practical circumstances in the composer's life. After being driven out of a restaurant due to the volume of the

³¹Nyman connects this idea to Cage's proposed erasure of the line between life and art and subsequent call for a creative listening practice (31-32). As in the previous chapter, I differ from Nyman's interpretation.

establishment's orchestra, Satie hypothesized a music which would form a relationship with ambient noise rather than overpower it. He is quoted to have remarked to his dining companion:

You know, there's a need to create furniture music, that is to say, music that would be a part of the surrounding noises and that would take them into account. I see it as melodious, as masking the clatter of knives and forks without drowning it completely, without imposing itself. It would fill up the awkward silences that occasionally descend on guests. It would spare them the usual banalities. Moreover, it would neutralize the street noises that indiscreetly force themselves into the picture (Gillmor 1988, 232).³²

The idea of a music that retreats, quieting the house band as it staves off street noises and kitchen clamour, in order

³²John Cage's 1958 essay, "Erik Satie" makes use of the same quote with a number of slight variations in translation which, in light of the topics to be discussed, hold some interest: "Nevertheless, we must bring about a music which is like furniture - a music, that is, which will be part of the noises of the environment, will take them into consideration. I think of it as melodious, softening the noises of the knives and forks, not dominating them, not imposing itself. It would fill up those heavy silences that sometimes fall between friends dining together. It would spare them the trouble of paying attention to their own banal remarks. And at the same time it would neutralize the street noises which so indiscreetly enter into the play of conversation. To make such music would be to respond to a need" (Cage 1961, 76).

to allow for easy expression, carries with it a dream of unrestricted discourse. Satie's neutral music would serve as an aid to dialogue, filling in the silences which interrupt conversation and masking the noise which disrupts it. But this noise, an incessant monologue with which we struggle to be heard, tests the composer's theory. In addition, the successful application of a furniture music depends on a complementary musical (that is, listening) practice to guide the audience.³³ It will be shown that Muzak institutes its own particular model of reception. In Satie's case, he was, once again, thwarted by inappropriate listening.

The first performance of musique d'ameublement occurred at the Galeries Barbezanges in Paris on March 8, 1920. During the intermission of a play by Max Jacob, an ensemble of piano, clarinets and trombone, positioned throughout the room, quietly repeated musical phrases from familiar compositions of the time. Much to Satie's dismay, the

³³It is not altogether accurate to speak of "listening" and "audiences" when discussing background music, but, for the sake of simplicity, I will often do so. One should not, in this case, think of a concert hall audience who listen contemplatively. Background music is often not even registered (MacLeod 1979, 24-25). The model of musical experience that I am trying to define in this thesis might be more accurately referred to as "distracted listening" (Benjamin 1968) or "unconcentrated incidental listening" (as suggested by Helmut Rösing [1984], but not necessarily including his entire taxonomy).

theatre audience silently focused its attention on the music. He is said to have rushed around the room, insisting they ignore the music and talk amongst themselves (Lanza 1994, 18; Toop 1995, 198). Established musical practice dictated a particular response from the audience despite the composer's attempt to disengage it. Avoiding the temporal frame by trading narrative development for repetition and the spatial frame by rearranging the participant positions, furniture music was confronted by the early twentieth century addiction to the concert hall experience, a model of listening carried out into the lobby.

Although Satie's pioneering efforts would not be realized until later in the century, by this time the foundations for contemporary functional music had already been laid. In his history of Muzak, Joseph Lanza associates the creation of furniture music with the evolving consumer culture of nineteenth century Paris (1994, 20). With the appearance of department stores and a new breed of transient shoppers, background music gained both a home and an audience. It lost, however, a certain ritual significance. Music journalist Evan Eisenberg credits Protestant and Enlightenment thinking for the deprecation of music's ceremonial value (21-22). Lacking this traditional protection, background music was appropriated by the rapidly

developing music industry to accompany new ceremonies.

[I desire to] compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to Muzak Co. It will be 3 or 4 1/2 minutes long - those being the standard lengths of "canned" music - and its title will be Silent Prayer.

-John Cage, addressing the National Inter-Collegiate Arts Conference, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, 28 February 1948 (Cage 1992, 15)

An anecdote taken from another lecture by Cage, presented in 1966 at a symposium on "The Changing Audience for the Changing Arts" (Kostelanetz 1970, 77), provides one last introductory comment before I begin my analysis of Muzak. On discovering both an Indian musician explaining her tradition and an English text from the sixteenth century declare that the role of music is "to quiet the mind thus making it susceptible to divine influences", Cage suggests that divine influences include the environment in which we live and a quiet mind is one in which "the ego does not obstruct the fluency of the things that come in through our senses". Now, though its influence is certainly not divine, Muzak provides a similar silent service in the modern environs of worship and ceremony; the factory, the office

and the shopping centre.

Around 1948, when the Cold War was just starting, the Soviet government wanted to discourage the Czechs from tuning in to the German bands. It started the Brno Radio Orchestra to attract audiences and sell the Stalinist party line. Brno became one of the finest light music orchestras in Europe, rivalling the BBC groups. Since Muzak merely replaced Red propaganda with propaganda from the Ford Motor Company or Budweiser, I figured they were ideal.

-Rob Baum, Muzak programming consultant (Quoted in Lanza 1993, 103).³⁴

Two years after the first performance of musique d'ameublement, General George Owen Squier retired from the U.S. military and set out to apply his knowledge of communications systems to a commercial music service. In 1934, he coined the term, "Muzak" (a combination of music and Kodak) for his product. Since that time, Muzak has evolved from a radio service wired directly into private

³⁴Regarding the mechanical reproduction of art, Benjamin writes, "the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice - politics" (224).

residences and retail shops to become a generic term of unanimous dismissal when referring to any music that is deemed unlistenable. Select aspects of its history will be addressed here.³⁵

In the early 1970s, Muzak was available in Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, the United States, Canada and Israel. It was installed in the White House, on Polaris submarines, on the Apollo mission, and in 43 of the world's top 50 industrial companies (Lanza 1994, 149). By 1988, 143 of the U.S.'s 150 largest corporations were Muzak clients (Barnes 1988, 8). Some reports claim that as many as 90 million people are exposed to Muzak each day (Lanza 1994, 5). These figures do not include any of the many other companies that are in the business of providing what the applicable BMI public performance license describes as "unobtrusive accompaniment to work, shopping, conversation, dining, and relaxation" (Krasilovsky and Shemel 1994, 121). Because of its historical and discursive prominence, Muzak will serve as the paradigm for our survey of commercial background music.³⁶

³⁵For a more detailed history, see Barnes (1988), MacLeod (1979) or Lanza (1994).

³⁶Also known as functional music, music-as-environment (Westerkamp 1990, 229), or programmed music (MacLeod 1979,

Captive audiences are a fact of life due to Muzak's general acceptance. It has a symbolic meaning: where it exists and prevails, it is something everyone accepts as a standard, if not prominent feature of our life (Barnes 1988, 64).

A distinct product available only from the Muzak Corporation and meant not for general consumption but to service the general populace, Muzak has been distributed by means of satellite broadcasts since the early eighties. Subscribers pay for receivers and speaker installation³⁷ and then tune into one of a number of specially designed channels programmed with music from the company's own recordings. Traditionally, Muzak consists of re-orchestrated popular tunes with concise melodies, typically strophic form, and no vocals (MacLeod 1979, 23). The arrangements eschew solos, the minor key, and suggestions of jazz or classical music (Barnes 1988, 6). Anything which might draw attention to itself, like unique rhythmic, melodic or harmonic features, is excised (MacLeod 1979, 23). Finally, the music is engineered within a limited dynamic range. Every aspect of this compositional method serves to

19).

³⁷In some instances, commercial background music is sold on custom-made tapes which play on special tape decks supplied by the company.

make Muzak unworthy of contemplation. If someone does direct their attention to it, the uniform familiarity of the music will not draw the listener in and thus not interrupt his or her ongoing activity (Barnes 1988, 88). Muzak programmers ensure the continued success of their work by removing from circulation any arrangements that are requested or commented on by subscribers (ibid., 6).

The particular channel to be broadcast depends on the type of location the company is serving. The Muzak Corporation offers three distinct services: office, factory and public area. The latter, which includes retail and service oriented businesses like stores, restaurants, banks and waiting areas, will be addressed in a later section under the rubric of Consumer Muzak. Office and factory programs will be considered together in the next section.

Workplace Muzak

The Muzak Corporation developed its programming strategy from a number of scientific studies conducted throughout the 1930s and 40s which were concerned with the effect of music in the workplace (see Barnes 1988, 72; Lanza

1994, 42-43, 48).³⁸ They all clearly demonstrated that musical accompaniment can result in better work, increased production and the reduction of both fatigue and resentful attitudes among employees. After examining these favourable worker responses, the type of music played and order in which it was played, the Muzak Corporation initiated a theory of functional music called Stimulus Progression by the late 1940s.³⁹

Workplace Muzak is designed to combat the lapses in productive ability that occur throughout the average office or factory worker's day. Rated according to tempo, metre and size of orchestra, the company's individual arrangements are organized into fifteen minute progressions of increasingly stimulating music. These fifteen minute units are then sequenced in a daily progression which mirrors the worker's fatigue curve. The desired result is to maximize production by counteracting the boredom and exhaustion which distracts workers and makes them less efficient.

³⁸See Barnes's chapter on ergonomics (1988, 11-15) for a discussion of human engineering in the workplace.

³⁹Subsequent studies would show that background music, and specifically Muzak, improved alertness among radar personnel at U.S. nuclear missile sites and calmed down cattle before they were to be slaughtered (Lanza 1994, 150-152). The majority of this research was conducted or requested by the Muzak Corporation and is presented in their own reports and promotional literature. Lanza provides a reference list (265).

Factory Muzak is louder and more rhythmic than the office program, but other than that, it follows the same principles. In fact, they are both broadcast along the same signal. Each hour of workplace Muzak is divided into alternating quarter hours of office and factory progressions. While the factory music is playing, the receiver in the office broadcasts only silence. The opposite is true of the office music. The periods of silence are necessary because, according to research, continuous music does not sustain a effective influence on workers (MacLeod 1979, 20). Uninterrupted music results in complaints; silence provides a respite (Barnes 1988, 88). Because of the subtlety of the arrangements, the regular silences contribute to the program flow rather than stop it. These breaks are not disconcerting like Cage's 4'33", instead they merely provide a rest, momentarily relaxing the stimulation that will inevitably return.

Marketed as a corrective measure for the decline in production caused by boredom and alienation among workers, Muzak itself does not increase production; that increase occurs when music relieves the monotony of work (Westerkamp 1990, 226). In a factory environment, where simple tasks are endlessly repeated, fatigue from boredom is expected. Muzak is designed to subtly combat this while, at the same

time, not distract the worker from his or her job. In an office, Muzak masks distractions other than fatigue but has the same goal: to circumvent obstacles to production.⁴⁰

Critics of Muzak take the company to task for "improving" the work environment by changing the context rather than the content of the production process. Bruce MacLeod and Stephen Barnes accuse the service of treating the symptoms rather than the causes of an inefficient workplace (MacLeod 1979, 27; Barnes 1988, 21). Hildegard Westerkamp concurs when she argues that in masking noise, Muzak masks "problems that underlie a stressful work station" (Westerkamp 1990, 231). They all agree that the service subjugates the normal physical and psychological responses to job stress.

The Muzak Corporation acknowledges these accusations. They represent one of its many selling points. The struggle against office routine and monotony figure highly in the company's management studies and in their promotional

⁴⁰Muzak works on the same basic principles throughout different production environments. Though the Fordist assembly line worker seems to be its archetypal target, a similar routine fatigue and monotony through increased division of labour also appears in office and clerical work and thus justifies its use there. See Grint (1991, 294-306) for a review of Fordist, neo-Fordist, and post-Fordist workplace structures. Grint's account is most interesting (in the context of this thesis) for its discussion of the Fordist emphasis on the production of demand.

literature (Krasilovsky and Shemel 1994, 123). Since the 1970s, Muzak has been marketed to business owners and administrators not as entertainment, but as a "management tool", an "efficiency tool", an "environmental tool" or a "capitalist tool" (MacLeod 1979, 26). Their advertising copy elucidates: "managers ... are discovering that people, along with machines, need to be programmed" (Barnes 1988, 18). As a means of social engineering, to make the workplace more efficient, to improve worker conditions and therefore production, Muzak is candid and explicit about its function.

Muzak's musical sound is a way in which humans negotiate various relationships - with other humans, for example, and with equipment and facilities, and all sorts of scales of human organization.

-from "The Ergonomy of Music" by Muzak (1993, 176)

Addressing the Muzak Corporation's Scientific Board of Advisors in 1967, Dr. James Keenan declared that "Muzak promotes the sharing of meaning because it massifies symbolism in which not few, but all, can participate" (Lanza 1994, 150). According to the company's literature, this correlates with the optimising of social relations and the

facilitation of dialogue. The same source proclaims Muzak an expression of goodwill, "care, love, belongingness, harmony, common history, and folklore" (as well as an aid to creativity and the development of personality) (Muzak 1993, 176-177). Lastly, one company representative is quoted as saying that their service provides a sense of unity for office staff by "giving individual employees something in common" (Barnes 1988, 11).

Muzak is applied to manipulate the constituent relationships of the workplace: between workers, between workers and management, between workers and product; but it is not unanimously accepted as a harmonious influence. The company proposes a vision of their service as soundtrack to a pre-Babel utopia. Such a stance ignores the underlying power relationships in the workplace that already interfere with the dream of unity. Stephen Barnes criticizes Muzak for instituting "mechanical pseudo-interaction" under an illusion of shared meaning (133), replacing social expression with service to the commodity. In the workplace, music becomes merely another tool of production (44). As with any production process, Muzak alienates the worker by sacrificing human needs to the demands of production. Such a dismissal however, does not explain the immense popularity of the service according to studies cited by MacLeod (24)

and its continued presence in the world.⁴¹

Keeping in mind the Muzak programmer's emphasis on tempo and metre, it is not surprising that the manner in which music exploits the worker is through the imposition of a sense of time. Evan Eisenberg calls Muzak an "architecture of time on a titanic scale - the free-world equivalent of totalitarian radio" (65). Hildegard Westerkamp also associates Muzak with totalitarianism, claiming that it "laid the foundations for the domination of one sense of time over all other senses of time" (229). The Muzak Corporation is presently in a superior position to manipulate workers in this manner because its programs are satellite broadcast. The rigorous schedule set by Stimulus Progression proceeds at the same rate in every subscribing workplace. Once installed, the schedule cannot be changed. Workers are forced to internalize a time concept based on the same generalized "rhythms of mechanical production and the industrial workday" (Barnes 1988, 28). Those workers are united by their subjection to this singular, regulated

⁴¹"As an analyst of music, as a purveyor of music, as a composer, you can't possibly appreciate the consumer, because your whole view of music is totally different." -Jane Jarvis, vice-president of the Muzak Corporation, in response to criticisms of her company's service ("I am certain that Muzak is the single most reprehensible and destructive phenomenon in the history of music," remarks composer Roger Reynolds) at The Phonograph and Our Musical Life conference (Hitchcock 1980, 16).

system of control.⁴²

Muzak dominates not only through rhythm, but also by means of volume or presence. By being imposed on a community (rather than generated by the community), Muzak suppresses individual voices in favour of an exclusive song cycle. In the workplace, talking, gossiping, and social interaction among employees impedes production (Barnes 1988, 130). Muzak discourages these activities through the institution of silence.

The silence heard in the workplace is much like that heard in the concert hall. The restriction of the right to speak coincides with a monologue of power; beneath both hums the perpetual noise of industry.⁴³ Attali blames mass production for the "programmed, anonymous, depersonalized workplace" which imposes silence beside the "monotonous and repeated noise of machines" (121). Muzak renders that environment habitable by smoothing over and masking not just the noise and the monotony of production, but also the anxiety and the struggle of the worker. The service

⁴²While the rhythms of the post-industrial workplace might not be mechanical, I will assume they also produce fatigue.

⁴³"[Music for entertainment] seems to complement the reduction of people to silence....[,] people moulded by anxiety, work and undemanding docility" (Adorno 1991, 27).

triumphs through its inherent ambiguity. As a monologue of power, when the one voice of Muzak speaks, its "audience" remains silent. However, as we know and the Muzak Corporation works diligently to achieve, this concert is not meant to be heard. Thus, in addition to its restriction of speaking, Muzak discourages listening. The worker, left without even the means to experience other voices, internalizes the silence.

Barnes compares this domination by sound to imperialism. By rendering workers silent, that is, voiceless, they become "nonentities" (Barnes 1988, 44). No longer speaking subjects, workers become objects or mere tools of production, indistinguishable from the machines on which they work.⁴ In the absence of noisy industrial machinery, there is the possibility that office workers might be found speaking or listening. Muzak, under the guise of relieving monotony, maintains the silence.

As industry, commerce and commercial relations come to dominate everyday life, Muzak has spread, to replace background noise and facilitate the circulation of capital (Attali 1985, 111). Moving out of the arena of production (the factory and the office), Muzak invades stores, banks,

⁴Cf. Baudrillard (1988, 69): "Encompassed by objects that function and serve, man is not so much himself as the most beautiful of these functional and servile objects."

restaurants, and hotels. Wherever money is exchanged, Muzak hums in the background; improving the environment, relieving stress and monotony, silencing distractions, and always working to maximize consumption.

Consumer Muzak

Consumer Muzak refers to programmed music installed in public places for the benefit of the general public rather than employees and workers. This includes all places of consumption, whether it be of commodities or services; even waiting areas (doctor's office, public transit, etc.) use some form of programmed music to please customers. It differs from Workplace Muzak because its "audience" is constantly circulating and changing. Without the guarantee of constant exposure, the manipulation of Stimulus Progression is rendered ineffectual. Instead, the service broadcasts constantly stimulating music without breaks. Ironically, employees of the service industry are punished by this situation. According to complaints, they suffer job stress and monotony through the constant presence and repetition of Muzak (MacLeod 1979, 27).

As in the factory, the music masks any unpleasant and disruptive sounds. These are most often natural to the

business environment: the noise of shopping carts, cash registers, refrigeration equipment, kitchen work, dishwashing, etc. The distraction of internal alarms such as bad moods, critical thinking and economic anxiety ("How much can I spend?") are also quieted by the blanket of Muzak (Barnes 1988, 27-28). With these aural irritants smothered, the untroubled consumer is likely to spend more time and thus more money in the business.

Once again, Muzak's potency lies in its ambiguous presence. The company's broadcasts knowingly tread a fine line between imperceptibility and recognition. It was suggested as far back as 1949 that Muzak had a direct effect on consumption. In that year, Billboard magazine claimed that "workers fed daily musical diets become potential record and sheet music customers" (Barnes 1988, 79). Today, record companies supply music services with new music in the hopes that the background airplay will lead to record purchases (Breen 1995, 52). The Muzak Corporation is aware that song identification leads to moments of attentive listening. The psychology of this attachment will be touched upon at the beginning of my next chapter. For now, I will concentrate on the social reaction to imperceptible music.

The indirect, unconscious and habitual reception of

Muzak reinforces unconscious and habitual consumption.⁴⁵ Hildegard Westerkamp identifies this as an appropriation of the cultural need for participatory music. In terms of popular pastimes, Muzak replaces music-making with shopping (228). The listener's relationship with music has again been replaced by the consumer's attachment to commodities. Like the music industry, the Muzak industry is involved with increased consumption. In addition to location, layout, and lighting, the retail outlet now adds a soundtrack to maintain the shopper's focus and subtly encourage purchases.

The matter of Muzak's subtlety becomes complicated in the 1980s when the company changes its traditional strategies and introduces a "foreground music" service. Rather than the customary in-house arrangements, this new format uses original songs by their original artists.⁴⁶ Vocals, once considered too distracting, are now common and the whole broadcast is generally louder.⁴⁷ Marketed in opposition to stodgy "elevator music" (that is, traditional

⁴⁵John Corbett compares Muzak to subliminal motivation tapes. Both are behaviour modifiers whose underlying goal is greater efficiency; the latter differs only in that it is self-inflicted (100).

⁴⁶Though, according to Stephen Barnes, they concentrate on unfamiliar songs, new artists and album tracks by hit artists (82).

⁴⁷Volume varies according to which consumers are targeted. Youth markets tend to get louder music.

Muzak), foreground music is, according to one recent article, the current trend in establishing consumer identification with a store's "image classification" (Chiose 1997). However, from Led Zeppelin in the pool hall to Frank Sinatra in the men's businesswear department, the strategy and the goal have not changed.

In the background music context, the listener is kept in a passive listening stance because the music moves quietly in and out of silence. In the foreground music context, the listener is kept in a continuous state of stimulation because the fast pace never changes. The end result is not that different (Westerkamp 1990, 233).

Both services establish and maintain a perceptual stance. The facility with which the louder and more aggressive foreground music takes on this role can be traced to the adaptation of listening to years of background music. The change in programming strategy represents to the sceptic a significant regression in listening practice; to the realist (I will not go so far as to say optimist) it represents an accomodation to music's presence in the everyday world. Where it once had to be imperceptible in order to effect subliminal manipulation, Muzak now asserts itself in a continual, pervasive blare. The limited dynamic range and

carefully composed subtleties are replaced by increased volume and a driving rhythm. This is no longer distracting because it only matches the speed and density of the contemporary urban soundscape. Businesses must compete with the clamour of Times Square to lure shoppers into their stores. To move those bodies, the soundtrack must be louder, more intense, and faster.

Above all, background music means you don't have to listen. No silence surrounds and insulates it; it seeps into the hum of conversation (Adorno, 1995, 303-304).

Writing about the use of music, "pressed to the margins of existence" (303), in coffee houses, Theodor Adorno describes the dire consequences as background music moves from the store, where consumption is directed towards an object (the commodity), to a social setting where the object of consumption is less obvious. The strict convention that regulates silence, music and conversation in the concert hall, is upended in the coffee house. For Adorno, silence is eliminated and the synchronous presence of music and talk creates a clamour that engulfs meaning. The music is not listened to, it does not address the patrons, instead it becomes "an objective process which goes on between and

above them" (304). The isolated individuals, who have to shout to be heard, are distinguished by a coldness, an estrangement, a distance that "is certainly not transcended by the music but captured and frozen" (ibid.). Writing in 1934, Adorno rejected the use of background music at the same time as he anticipated the future marketing strategy of the Muzak Corporation.

In 1942, the lunchtime selections of the Workplace Muzak schedule were revised in order to curtail open conversation for fear it would lead to complaining about work. Sing-a-longs were encouraged (Barnes 1988, 73). The Army Map Service study of 1947 found that "conversation decreases and employees invariably take a kindlier view of each other" with exposure to Muzak (Lanza 1994, 48). However, one company executive has also emphasized the benefit of his product by claiming it gave workers "a sense of privacy by masking conversation" (Barnes 1988, 11). Based on these contrary conclusions, one needs to decide whether background music has produced social cohesion or isolation (or, somehow, both) in its silent audience.

Free speech and privacy are also, not coincidentally, the company's most contested claims. The legal status of background music in the United States was decided after the D.C. Public Utilities Commission was taken to court in the

early 1950s. They were accused of violating the constitutional rights of free speech and privacy by installing a broadcast service on public transit busses. The final ruling was in favour of the service, claiming that background music did not "interfere substantially with the conversation of passengers" and that the right to privacy does not apply as stringently in public places (Lanza 1994, 50-51).⁴⁸ In 1969 however, an opposing conclusion was made when the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations's General Assembly of the International Music Council addressed the issue of our "right to silence." Their final report denounced

unanimously the intolerable infringement of individual freedom and the right of everyone to silence, because of the abusive use, in private and public places, of recorded or broadcast music (Lanza 1994, 153).

I will refrain from interrogating this pronouncement and move on, only to ponder for a moment how the resolution might have changed if instead of Yehudi Menuhin, John Cage or Max Neuhaus had sat on the Executive Committee.

⁴⁸The case was closed in 1952 when the American Supreme Court ruled against the plaintiff, whose testimony included accusations that background music could lead to mind control. Interestingly, this declaration does not figure prominently in the Muzak Corporation's promotional literature. See Barnes (48-64) for a summary of the action.

In response to the condemnation of their service, the Muzak Corporation argues that the complainants, generally musicians and music lovers, are not the intended audience for their product. Furthermore, their minority opinion represents less than ten percent of those exposed to Muzak. The majority claim to enjoy it. A research manager for the company identified the members of this minority. He included:

elderly spinster ladies, just-plain-contrary people, individualists who won't accept any music that others have chosen for them, and folks who think that, because they know something about music, they know about Muzak (MacLeod 1979, 24).

The trouble these people have with Muzak can be traced through their age, education and experience, to the use of an inappropriate listening practice.

Outspoken critics of background music are a diminishing minority. As the use of Muzak (and services like it) spreads, the acceptance of its rule and influence on listening prevails.

The more of it there is, the less it is listened to; the more its presence suggests a musical status quo in the soundscape, the less we tend to use our own voices to make our own music (Westerkamp 1990, 228).

Westerkamp's argument reiterates the same sceptical conclusions made earlier about the commodification of music. In this case, Muzak, the fusion of commerce and music in the public sphere, is criticized for replacing communal, participatory music-making with a commercial symphony to commodity exchange (228). This is accomplished by habituating the masses to a constant, but imperceptible soundtrack that is difficult, if not impossible, to escape. Where the concert hall provides a frame to enforce listening, Muzak itself, through ubiquity and conditioning, now frames consumption.

With the appearance of this idea of background music, the meaning of music changes. Music has always been used for mood and as accompaniment to ceremony.⁴⁹ The production and distribution of Muzak, however, relies on this century's development of recording technology, the consolidation of the music industry and the commodification of music. The meaning of Muzak in this equation can be divined through its relation to silence. Satie's furniture music was meant to fill in awkward silences in conversation. One of the advertised benefits of Muzak is that it "fills in the deadly silences" (MacLeod 1979, 28). Bruce MacLeod quotes surveys which indicate that businesses use Muzak to combat silence

⁴⁹See Attali (1985) and Small (1977).

in their stores. He attributes its popularity to society's fear of silence (ibid.). In light of 4'33" and Times Square, however, we must revise this point. The fear is not of silence, but of noise, particularly the noise of commerce. Muzak masks this sound and distracts us from it, so we can enjoy our work and our shopping. It distracts us from our investment in these activities, distracts us from thinking about the time we spend on them, distracts us from reflecting on our absorption in the production process.

Muzak's power to placate our fears is most evident in its use by hospitals. For a performance piece, Hildegard Westerkamp surveyed a Muzak-serviced medical centre waiting room. Despite the noticeably diverse range of people there, none of them objected to the music. They were absorbed with medical anxieties, waiting to be diagnosed, trying not to think about possible test results; Muzak united these patient patients and ameliorated their limbo with its palliative charm (225). As in the workplace, it distracts from an unappealing situation. A study conducted in the preoperative holding area of a Nebraska hospital confirms this.

[Nursing staff] reported the patients who had heard Muzak were more visibly calm and resigned, less worried and depressed. With the Muzak group, the staff noted

fewer patients asking many questions, trembling, fidgeting and making nervous movements, perspiring and showing startle reactions. The patients who heard Muzak were three times more likely to make positive statements about the holding area (Barnes 1988, 112-113).

Muzak placates workers, shoppers and patients, quieting their anxiety by masking it. Filling in those four and a half minute pauses when we hear the world anew, silencing our doubts, concealing the banalities and faults of our everyday lives with a blanket of song, Muzak, from imperceptible beginnings to its present clamour, has (as shown by its almost 100 percent renewal rate [Barnes 1988, 12]), become indispensable.

BRIDGE

As reported in Joseph Lanza's 1994 history of Muzak, the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City changed its subscription from the traditional music-by-Muzak format to the company's classical music program with the hope that it would keep away drug dealers and homeless people (227). In 1992, 7-Eleven convenience stores in Southern California used the same music to disperse loitering teenagers (230). Rather than focus on the inability of certain disenfranchised groups to tolerate classical music, one should note in these cases the claims to space that the deployment of music enforces as well as its power to instigate the movement of bodies. These aspects of background music will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DANCE TO THE MUZAK⁵⁰

According to Stephen Barnes, the use of familiar tunes by the Muzak Corporation serves to "subliminally remove the listener to another emotional state" (124), a state removed from the banality of the labour process. Muzak relieves worker fatigue through the pleasure of musical experience. The identification of a particular song, however, should not interrupt the work. To ensure that Muzak "remains 'felt' and not heard," song lyrics are removed (123). If a tune is recognized, it is only registered peripherally or momentarily. The music conjures up a vague mood that is absorbed by the environment (Westerkamp 1990, 230). Joseph Lanza acknowledges that this indistinct ambience relies on "a kind of diluted emotion" as one imperceptibly registers a particular song (Ffytche 1995, 34). Song identity and the listener's emotional and psychological response are thus intentionally ambiguous in functional music and, as demonstrated by Stimulus Progression programming guidelines,

⁵⁰An early (and significantly different) version of this chapter was presented as "I Can't Hear You: Volume and the Inhibition of Social Space" at the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (Canada) conference, Voice, Space and Time (McGill University, Montreal, November 1996).

subservient to rhythm. The conscious identification of discrete songs is a momentary reaction which distracts from but does not disrupt work. The rhythm of the music maintains the intensity of that activity, be it, as in this case, production or, in another, consumption. In the following analysis of dance music and the economy of the dance club, a similar use of music will be described.

In her book Club Cultures, Sarah Thornton contrasts the role of music in youth-oriented social spaces with the use of Muzak by the 7-Eleven convenience store chain to discourage loitering teenagers (20). The "uncool" programmed music makes the environment inhospitable for a certain age group. Dance clubs create communities of that same age group by playing approved or "cool" music. Muzak and dance music work on different demographics, but they profit in the same way from the moving bodies of distracted listeners. While the interest in capital might be more emphatic and direct with the former, it is certainly not absent in the latter. Dance music, a record-based and thus mechanically reproduced form, could be dismissed as effectively "deritualized" (Attali 1985, 69; Benjamin 1968, 224) in the process of commercialization. I, however, am going to treat popular dance as a ritual of "bureaucratic

consumption" (to borrow Lefebvre's phrase), an enactment of the consumption of leisure services. As such, it falls within the ongoing narrative of the collapse of music and money, commodity and expression, consumption and production. Dance music involves a number of supplementary values which help constitute its meaning. These meanings are navigated by a community of dancers with the same "controlled de-control" Mike Featherstone identifies in the modern consumer:

It needs discipline and control to stroll through goods on display, to look and not snatch, to move casually without interrupting the flow, to gaze with controlled enthusiasm and a blasé outlook, to observe others without being seen, to tolerate the close proximity of bodies without feeling threatened. It also requires the capacity to manage swings between intense involvement and more distanced aesthetic detachment (24).

Race, sexuality, gender and class, acting as loci for personal and communal experience, play a role in the constitution of particular club communities.⁵¹ Based in part on my own experience of the business-like attitudes

⁵¹See, for example, Dyer (1990), Goodwin (1999), Thornton (1996) and Harley (1993) for discussions of dance music that include some of these issues.

among dancers and DJs in the club scene, this chapter will present an overall model of the role of music in the economy of the dance club.

Thornton traces the history of dance club cultures⁵² from the record hops of the 1950s and the discotheques of the 1960s through 1970s discos to 1980s clubs and raves (1996, 28-29).⁵³ The narrative thread of this story follows our progressive habituation to the presence of records as musical objects until dance music, now a distinct genre found in its own section of the record store or in specialty stores, becomes an almost exclusively studio based production (28). As with Muzak's foreground format, any type of recorded music, including classic or alternative rock, can work in a dance club. However, and again like Muzak, dance music is designed for a particular purpose, constituency and location, and will thus remain the focus of this chapter. It originates in the 1970s with disco and divides, with disco's decline, into an ever growing number of subcategories, from house to techno to 'ardkore to garage

⁵²"Cultures which revolve around a specific institution (discotheques), a central activity (dancing) and a principal cultural form (recorded music)" (Thornton 1990, 90).

⁵³See Thornton (1990) for a reflection on the methodological difficulties in researching and recounting this history.

to hi-NRG and so on.⁵⁴ These styles came into existence in particular locations (techno in Detroit, garage at the Paradise Garage club) before they entered the international dance-music community (Straw 1991, 381). The speed at which styles change from regional to global level⁵⁵ makes it appropriate, if not necessary, to jump around from scene to scene (each of which has its own significant material, historic, geographical and demographic determinants) in the following general survey.

Muzak, which is programmed by human-factors engineers to produce maximum worker efficiency, is also dance music, though tamer and aimed at an older audience (Eisenberg 1987, 64).

Dance music is programmed by club DJs to produce and guide the dance experience. Evan Eisenberg compares their use of music to Muzak's environmental stimulation (80); both

⁵⁴See Sanjek (1988) for a history of disco that emphasizes the crucial contributions of vinyl and the DJ. See Fikentscher (1995) for a similar history of "post-disco underground dance music" (specifically house music). Sections on house, techno, and freestyle in Weisbard and Marks (1995) might help in distinguishing the subcategories of dance music, as might the review sections in magazines such as Streetsounds or Mixmag which are organized according to genre. I will treat them all as falling indistinguishably within the same general "dance music" family.

⁵⁵See Harley (1993, 224-226) regarding the variability of location in the production and consumption of dance music.

avoid silence to supply an uninterrupted flow of music which maintains a constant intensity and creates a sense of movement through tempo. The other musical elements, such as instrumentation or melody, sustain the rhythm by complementing it at the same time as they distract from its repetition and constancy.

The history of disco coincides with the rise of the DJ, the creative technician who establishes a social ambience by "decomposing songs into modular and interchangeable fragments" through the manipulation of vinyl recordings (Toop 1995, 43).⁵⁶ The introduction of the twelve inch single in the 1970s (Thornton 1996, 59) allows for this combination of flow and song decomposition. First produced to accommodate DJs, these extended versions of dance tracks were essential to "sustain the momentum of the dance floor" (60). Cutting back and forth between records, isolating and repeating climaxes, extending the duration of particularly effective cuts, the DJ works to keep the dancers in a state

⁵⁶This use of records is preceded and paralleled in the studio-based reggae music industry. For more information, refer to Dick Hebdige's history of Jamaican sound systems (1990). The DJ mix has also been treated as postmodern pastiche, collage or mosaic; see Langlois (1992, 237), Krasnow (1995), Kureishi and Savage (1995, xxx, 535), Reynolds (1990, 170) and, regarding hip hop, Baker, Jr. (1991). For a critique of this position see Straw (1995, 254) and Goodwin (1990) (This latter concentrates on the digital sampling technology that becomes essential to DJ oriented music.).

of constant activity, responding to the ebb and flow of participant enthusiasm with increasingly stimulating music.

Created through the programming skills of the DJ, the atmosphere of the discotheque is governed by a "romanticisation of escape" (Toop 1995, 43). Much like in the workplace, a false sense of time is imposed to stave off a harsh reality. The dance club, as with the entire leisure industry, provides an encompassing, though temporary, respite from the everyday world. This utopianism appears in all types of dance music, from house music's inheritance of disco's escapist "fabulousness" (Weisbard and Marks 1995, 185) to the futurism of techno and the nihilism of 'ardkore.⁵⁷ Originating in the black housing projects of Detroit, techno is inextricably associated with "mass production, mass consumption and the human-machine interface of Henry Ford's assembly line" (Toop 1995, 214). Despite the contemporary ruin of that birthplace, the music represents an optimistic dream of future technology (McCready 1991). 'Ardkore, a more recent variant of techno found in Britain, creates "an endless succession of nows" (Reynolds 1992, 37) through the acceleration of tempo thus abandoning the obligations of narrative and, by association,

⁵⁷For a critique of this utopianism in terms of gender issues, see Bradby (1993).

the "real world."⁵⁸

Precedents for the alliance of this escapist tendency to dance can be found earlier in the twentieth century. In his essay on the commodification of music and the regression of listening, Theodor Adorno, dismissing "light music" and commercial jazz as merely accompaniment for conversation and dancing, notes, "again and again one encounters the judgement that it is fine for dancing but dreadful for listening" (1991, 43). I realize that Adorno is referring to a performed music with a very different context of reception, but will include his commentary because of its relevance to and influence on critiques of contemporary dance music. I would most like to emphasize the wording of his descriptions. The "unabating jazz beats" which drive the dance resemble a "machine music" based on the rhythm of industry. And just as the alienated worker is subject to the machine, the dancer renounces his or her feelings to conform to the music (1990, 313).⁵⁹ This "rhythmic

⁵⁸Cf. Jameson (1983, 125), regarding the connection between consumer society and "the perpetual present" of postmodern culture.

⁵⁹Andrew Goodwin works around Adorno's inability to accept the sexual rhythms of dance when he suggests a romantic combination of machine and body in dance music's use of electronic rhythms for a communal, natural experience (1990, 263). Will Straw argues that the appeal of such sounds lies in the efficiency of technology (1995, 253). Both of these accounts make the necessary transition from Adorno's

obedience" is the sole recourse of the hopeless worker and is announced in a declaration of pleasure and agency where there is in truth none.

Thornton alludes to the root of Adorno's criticism when she distinguishes between the role of dance at a club and at a rock concert. While early rock and roll bands did provide musical accompaniment for social dancing, by the late 1960s, rock music gained a privileged status which demanded serious listening. Moving to the music became secondary to the fundamental response of contemplation.⁶⁰ This attitude was epitomised by recordings designed to be listened to with headphones and resulted in the stigmatization of dance-oriented music as "uncritical and mindless" (Thornton 1996, 71).

Critics most often damn dance music and the dance club for maintaining the dancer's apolitical and superficial idealism. As Hildegard Westerkamp castigates foreground music for creating a "false womb," an engulfing environment that excludes the problems of the real world and creates an

machine/industry context to the electronic/post-industrial world of digital music technology.

⁶⁰While I am not suggesting that no one dances at a rock concert, I will draw a connection between this hierarchy and the restriction of movement in the concert hall. Neuhaus's literal move out of that space provides an interesting counterpoint to dance.

illusion of a safe, exciting and novel cultural system (228), Evan Eisenberg damns disco for upholding a fake and shallow society based on appearance and wealth (80).

Thornton also describes the popular media's disparagement of discotheques in the 1970s as "artificial environments offering superficial and manufactured experience" (1996, 43).

The underlying problem of the discotheque is what Evan Eisenberg sees as the irresolvable contradiction between the simulated freedom of the dance floor and the dictatorial control of the DJ (80). Adapting to the demands of the rhythm, the dancer relinquishes his or her independence and assumes a mantle of "fabulousness" to hide from an unpleasant social reality.

People seem more comfortable dancing and courting to mechanical music. The charitable interpretation of this is that it lets them be alone with each other.

The other interpretation is that it lets them be alone (81).

As with Muzak, dance music is criticized for instituting isolation (or pseudo-participation) in an allegedly social sphere. Jacques Attali goes so far as to accuse the music of imposing silence through its high volume. However, this restriction is not enforced from above. The dancers are

themselves culpable; lacking the desire to speak, they use the music as a pretext for avoiding conversation (118). Attali considers this forfeiture of communication characteristic of the political economy of the late twentieth century. Isolated and alienated subjects succumb to silence, deafened by the monologue of capital. The all-pervasive sound is the noise of commodity exchange and it is what has come to constitute the locus of sociality for the masses. Conversation is quieted and replaced by consumption and the consumer's relationship to the commodity. If this is the case, the dance club, with its absorption in superficial music, fashion and community, is representative of a consumer sociality where people are not so much interested in each other as they are in each other's "stuff."

According to the sceptic, the dancer finds a reprieve from this alienation by valorizing as pleasurable passivity and obedience to machine rhythms. Adorno condemns this type of industry-endorsed affirmation as an example of "pseudo-activity." The dancer's professed pleasure is merely an imitation of sensuality, the dance a stylized ecstasy (1991, 46). The frantically dancing jazz fan is a figure of vilification for Adorno, eagerly abdicating individuality in a failed attempt to escape compulsory consumption.

They call themselves "jitterbugs," bugs which carry out reflex movements, performers of their own ecstasy. Merely to be carried away by anything at all, to have something of their own, compensates for their impoverished and barren existence. The gesture of adolescence, which raves for this or that on one day with the ever-present possibility of damning it as idiocy on the next, is now socialized (1986, 128). These "vague, inarticulate followers" imagine they defy passivity through ecstatic transcendence when, in fact, their bliss is empty. The lack of meaningful content to this simulated community is eclipsed by an obsession with surface, style and the moment. Pleasure is imposed as a superficial gloss; fetishizing insignificant nuances of style, the dancer maintains a pretence of difference while receiving a standardized music. The fictitious variety is matched by a pretence of individualism which appears in accordance with the disappearance of the individual (1991, 35). To sustain this contradiction and not have to account for its fraudulent claims, the dancer escapes through ambiguity and rage (1992, 51).

Critic Simon Reynolds makes explicit connections between Adorno's jitterbuggers and 1990s rave culture (1996, 26). He describes the stuttered twitching dance of the

'ardkore raver as a mechanistic reduction to "autistic bliss" and "amoebal frenzy" (1992, 37). Reynolds considers this scene the latest expression of working class leisure; an escapist, anaesthetic, and amnesiac holiday that revels in moments of "fugitive bliss."

Amidst the socio-economic deterioration of Britain well into its second decade of one-party rule, where alternatives seem unimaginable, horizons grow ever narrower, and there's no constructive outlet for anger, what else is there left but to zone out, to go with the flow, disappear? (1992, 39).

This "disappearance" suggests the incomprehensible refusal of political order by Baudrillard's "silent majority" (1983). In this text, Baudrillard suggests that withdrawal could be "a direct defiance of the political, a form of actively resisting political manipulation" (39).⁶¹ Whether it is the jitterbug's ecstasy, the disco dancer's eroticism or the raver's inchoate fury, the tensions of everyday conflict are exorcised in these moments of retreat. Dance music has consistently provided an escapist release throughout this century.

⁶¹Echoing Baudrillard's conflation of consumption and annihilation (1982, 9-10), Andrew Ross equates the unconsidered conspicuous consumption of post-War America with the nihilistic zeitgeist of (Atomic) Bomb culture (1989, 88).

Writing "In Defence of Disco," Richard Dyer associates this experience with romanticism as a mode of leisure.

Given that everyday banality, work, domesticity, ordinary sexism, and racism are rooted in the structures of class and gender of this society, the flight from that banality can be seen as a flight from capitalism and patriarchy as lived experiences (417).

The value of this respite from routine is the introduction of alternatives and the transgression of the limits of experience. Regarding the reception of this liberatory music, Dyer suggests that it requires a move from

"disembodied" listening to a whole-body eroticism (413).

Walter Benjamin's distinction between concentration and distraction as modes of artistic participation is again useful here.⁶² He opposes painting, on which we

concentrate, to architecture, of which the distracted mass makes use (239). Architecture is "mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation" (240).

Concert hall music, which demands contemplative listening, can be seen to correspond to concentration while dance music (and, by association, functional music) obviously makes use of a distracted audience.

In his essay on the cultural economy of the post-disco

⁶²This is my suggestion. Dyer does not appeal to Benjamin.

club scene (1995), Will Straw accounts for the gradually mastered habits of the dance floor and "the significance of an acquiescence to rhythm which appears effortless" (251) through an analysis of "hip" as a measure of social value. Straw outlines the construction of what is hip beginning with the transformation of eroticized cultural practices into "disembodied knowledges and terms of judgement."

Hip then reinscribes knowledge and judgement back onto the body where they settle into the posture of an elusive and enigmatic instinctuality (251-252).⁶³

This contraction of cultivated knowledge and instinctual ability is acted out in the participants' fashion, dance and social behaviour.⁶⁴ To be hip, a clubber must keep up to date, dress and act properly, yet not appear too studied. The successful subject is one who discretely acts out all the right social manoeuvres while appearing to disregard their function.

This strategy is more distinctly and rigorously enacted by the DJ. To earn authority and maintain a cachet of credibility, he (the overwhelming majority of DJs are male) must strategically deploy a laboriously acquired body of

⁶³This process might best be understood in terms of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "embodied cultural capital" (244).

⁶⁴Following Straw's suggestion, I also point to Ross (1989) for a concentrated discussion of "hip."

knowledge (regarding the vicissitudes of the record market, the mass psychology of the dance floor and the economy of the club scene) in a manner which subtly but insistently moves bodies (252). Locked away in a booth, playing customized remixes and the latest white labels⁶⁵, never announcing songs, rarely speaking, protective of his talents and reluctant to discuss his skills, the DJ is posed beside and against the club clientele. Following the implicit guidelines of his manipulative craft, the DJ works not only with but on the dancers to create a successful (that is, pleasurable for the dancers and profitable for the club owners) leisure environment.

According to Straw, this inherent tension between dancers and DJ, between moving bodies and manipulating mind, is essential to the maintenance of dance music's credibility in the decline of disco.

Out of the deeply ingrained sense that disco's unravelling resulted from its dispersion into a stagnant pluralism, arises dance music culture's efforts to surround its logics of historical change with an aura of secrecy and a sense of relentless movement (250).

⁶⁵These are pre-release pressings distributed exclusively to Djs.

The backlash against disco did not represent a decline in popularity but of credibility. The DJ appears as a locus of this ambiguous but valued quality; serving as a conduit between the music's source (record companies) and audience, measuring out a considered flow of sounds that is always hip and thus effective in attracting people to the music and the club. Crises occur when this relationship becomes congested; when DJs lose control of the flow of music, their scene succumbs to a pluralism and a populism which is, according to Straw's analysis, stigmatized as vulgar (250). This vulgarity, the absence of hip credibility, represents an economic threat to DJs, clubs and music.⁶⁶ Pierre Bourdieu warns of the dangers of delegitimation in the use and, especially, the concentration of embodied cultural capital (245). Straw attributes the decline of the Montreal disco scene and the survival of Toronto's to the former's populism and the latter's diffidence (249). There is a profitable stability in exclusivity.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Straw identifies the point of disco's crisis with the revelation that people listened to disco in the same way as they would Beautiful Music radio (1995, 250). For more information on the Beautiful Music format and its connection to Muzak, see Lanza (1994, 167-182).

⁶⁷The popular awareness of this business sense is confirmed when Straw points out that critiques of 1970s Canadian disco centred less on sexual expenditure and more on "mindless" investment of time and "the risky exploitation of fleeting fads" (1995, 249).

Essential to any environment that refers to itself as a "club" is the regulated deployment of resources played out through a dialectic of exclusion and inclusion. Sarah Thornton remarks on the prevalence of this attitude in her history of record-serviced public dance spaces, a lineage characterized by each successive generation claiming revolutionary status.

'Discotheques,' 'discos' and 'clubs' were all meant to be both exclusive and egalitarian, classless but superior to the mass-market institution that preceded them (1996, 55-56).

An "ideology of social mixing" is habitually present in dance clubs despite whatever implicit or explicit demographic boundaries are in place.⁶⁸ This is often accompanied by an insistence on "authenticity" whereby an original population distinguishes itself from pretenders.⁶⁹ The possibility that contemporary rave culture makes a break with this contradiction is entertained by some (Tagg 1994, Eshun 1992), but Thornton's damning critique of the

⁶⁸See Eshun (1992/1993) for a comparable micro-history of 80s and 90s British clubbing.

⁶⁹See, for example, Andrew O'Hagen's "Passing Poison" (1995) and its report on the Scottish rave scene in the early nineties. Older clubbers distinguish between the "good" drugs of the past and the new drugs which have been connected to a number of club-related deaths.

symptomatic utopianism of dance includes even this most recent "revolution." Her research reveals the participants' coherent but denied or suppressed knowledge of the routines required for accessing different clubs. In doing so, she demythologizes the liberatory rhetoric with evidence of their command of the particular rules which govern events like raves (how to find out about them, knowing where to go, how to get past security, and so on). There is an implicit understanding at work in their choice of dress, music and dance club. As with any sub-culture, the participants arrange themselves in terms of this common body of knowledge that defines, prescriptively as much as restrictively, who is included and who is excluded (1996, 99).⁷⁰

Straw demonstrates the rigour by which these rules are attended in his analysis of the politicization of dancing in the post-disco, post-punk, "industrial" dance scene.

The project of investing dance with militancy has much to do with the fear of falling: of giving in to gestures of expressive openness which would evoke other kinds of dance clubs and other musics. One need not romanticize this openness to see in its refusal the

⁷⁰Will Straw confirms this critique with his own analysis of the distribution of cultural capital on the dance floor (1991, 379-380).

sign of a boundary diligently maintained (1995, 253).⁷¹ Order is again instituted as a reaction to and a defence against the populist vulgarity of disco. Accompanying the disciplined dancers is a music which defines itself through an insistence on electronic rhythms.⁷² These were appealing, according to Straw, because of their "pragmatic efficiency" (253). Straw dissociates these sounds from their acoustic counterparts and instead attributes their value to the similarity between the "dense and tightly-woven textures" of the music and the "all-pervasive impenetrability of contemporary forms of social control" (252). Straw then identifies a "symptomatic ambiguity" in the relationship of dancer to music whereby the latter acts as both prison and refuge for the former (253). In doing so, the music constructs a space of retreat which isolates the dancer while sustaining his or her sense of credibility,

⁷¹In the context of my comparison of Muzak and dance music, I should point out the connection between Straw's conception of the dancer's "fear of falling" and the origin of the term "elevator music" (a colloquial synonym for Muzak). The latter was introduced as a public relations campaign by the first elevator companies to diminish riders' fears of plummeting to their deaths (Lanza 1994, 39).

⁷²While Straw concentrates on industrial music, I contend that electronic rhythms play a similar role in all dance music. This generalization can be defended on the grounds of the historical connections and family resemblances that link industrial music, hip hop, electro, techno, house, garage, acid house, electronica and all the other sub-categories of dance.

his or her identity.

Following Straw's analysis, I am lead back to Featherstone and his scepticism regarding those who link consumer culture to the (fictional) transgressive freedom of festivals or carnivals. In response to such suggestions, he emphasizes the discipline that must be exercised by the participants.

The imagery may summon up pleasure, excitement, the carnivalesque and disorder, yet to experience them requires self-control and for those who lack such control there lurks in the background surveillance by security guards and remote-control cameras (25).

The prison/refuge of the dance club is equally maintained by an army of bouncers, doorpersons, security teams and crowd spotters who protect the investments of dancers, DJs and owners.

The symptomatic ambiguities that are present throughout the dance scene, from dancer to DJ to club to the music itself articulate the controlled de-control of the on-going alliance between music and commodity, or, in this case, music and capital. The relationship between the club and the outside world, representing the opposition of leisure to work, is equally ambiguous. The work world is constructed as a threat in order to vindicate the leisure industry, yet

the former is required to sustain the latter. This subversive denial once again serves functional, that is, economic ends. The contradictory declarations of dancer, DJ, and music, represent a carefully maintained balance which, like the idea of leisure, translates into something both meaningful and valuable, in the present case, hipness or credibility. Those who pay money for such a thing, who consume the dance club's ambience assume the fiction of a minor aristocracy formed by the select few who can navigate the club's particular codes (Baudrillard 1981, 119). This distinction, both produced and consumed by the dancers, is an illustration of Baudrillard's assertion that "consumption is instituted on the basis of the exchange of differences, of a distinctive material and thus of a potential community" (119). At each level, the consumer economy of the dance club functions through a system of signs. Just like the club, "the sign is discriminant: it structures itself through exclusion" in order to garner exchange value (149). Just like a sign, dance music is designed for a discriminating audience.

CONCLUSION

Nothing produced or exchanged today (objects, services, bodies, sex, culture, knowledge, etc.) can be decoded exclusively as a sign, nor solely measured as a commodity (Baudrillard 1981, 147-148).

The nature of music particular to consumer culture requires that one follow Baudrillard's advice. Unless one treats dance music as intimately involved in the economy of the dance club, the music will remain a mystery. Music's power of expression, its power as a sign, is seized as a profitable investment by the dance club clientele. The consumer ambience of the record store captures that capital and invests it around the record. The concert hall often does the same with prestigious composers and musicians. Max Neuhaus attempts with his sound installations to personalize this production, leaving sounds to be enjoyed in themselves. He is unsuccessful because musical value (and therefore meaning) arises differentially, in relation to other sounds and signs. Neuhaus's sounds are doomed to compete with the sounds of the environment. The Muzak Corporation's human engineering department understands this and institutes its own functional musical ambience, playing the pleasure of

music off against the labour of production and consumption, thus socializing its listeners to economic ends. Deployed in different settings and for different audiences, these examples have a common stake in consumer culture. As consumption functions through differences and social activity (choice and shopping), its corresponding music must as well.

The strategies of consumption are enacted through the sign form. The traditionally conceived notion of musical content (e.g., the meaning of the song) appears as an alibi or distraction while the sound itself engages in an exchange of signs, the circulation of which integrates and mobilizes consumer communities (Baudrillard 1981, 147). This regulatory model of sociality functions in the record store, the concert hall, the workplace, the shopping centre and the dance club. In these instances, musical content is secondary to setting and proper use; Muzak does not work in a dance club, dance music does not work in an office. This, in part, explains the absence of a discussion of the music qua music (that is, the content and composition of the music) in my thesis. Appropriate to my distraction from typical musicological analysis, the dominant mode of reception (and, by association, use) with this music is not contemplative but distracted. When the listener is not

directly attentive reception becomes habitual and the social strategy of the music as an instrument (rather than a message) begins to make its influence on behaviour.

Music in this sense is not strictly a product but takes part in a process of "culturalization" (1988, 32). The particular strategy of music in consumer society corresponds to a distinct reception of music and mode of sociality.

As the wolf-child becomes the wolf by living among them, so are we becoming functional. We are living the period of the objects: that is, we live by their rhythm, according to their incessant cycles (Baudrillard 1988, 29).

Unlike Cage and Neuhaus's failed attempt to produce listeners, consumer culture successfully produces consumers. Muzak is perhaps the most insidious instance of this, explicitly a method of human engineering designed to render people functional, to dominate by rhythm, to institute its own cycles. Once this occurs, consumers must continuously participate in consumption, or run "the risk of being satisfied with what [one] has and of becoming asocial" (1988, 48). The social model that Muzak inculcates is troublesome because, by making use of musical pleasure to focus distracted attention on objects, it is inevitably isolating. Consumer culture results in one being both

socially engaged and isolated. Baudrillard deflects this criticism when he suggests, "a consumer is never isolated, any more than a speaker" (1981, 75). Comparing consumption to language, Baudrillard argues that it is a "structure of exchange contemporaneous with meaning itself" (ibid.). Like language, and now like consumption, music acts as a system that establishes social relations. This presents a notion of sociality ruled through and by commodities, whereby the purchase, exchange and use of commodities has social meaning, leaving one to conclude that meaningful discourse can and does happen through objects like records and in places like record stores.

This mode of sociality plays on an ambiguity between sound and silence. Music is defined differentially against silence. This dialectic is tested by Cage in a way that threatens one definition of music at the same time as it suggests another. Exploiting the play between music and silence, Cage encourages a revision of the social roles and relationships that dominate compositional practice. In an almost diametrically opposed manner, the Muzak Corporation imposes social roles and relationships through an imposition of both music (Muzak) and silence (the interior silence of a music not contemplatively heard and the exterior silence of an audience absorbed in music). Muzak's intentions in this

are explicit. The intentions behind dance music, functioning in a number of ways similar to Muzak, are much less unified and thus more interesting.

Read as both prison and refuge, the music/silence between dancers in the dance club provides an environment of retreat or refuge, where one is momentarily distracted in the throes of dance. There are as many reasons for this need for escape as there are dancers, but there is also a unifying spirit among them as a social group, albeit a quiet one. The dance club meets their need by generating, with the help of both music and the dancers, a meaningful and valued space.

The need for distraction or escape represents a shared social understanding and a profitable market. From the failed interventions of Neuhaus to the successful deployment of Muzak and the popular strategies of the dance club, music functions in response to a need. I would like to suggest that it is a need to placate fear. Big business makes a lot of money from playing on consumer fears: germs, smells, lack of sexual appeal, silence. However, as shown by Cage, this last fear (and, in fact, all the others) is often simply a bogeyman designed to keep us quiet and content.

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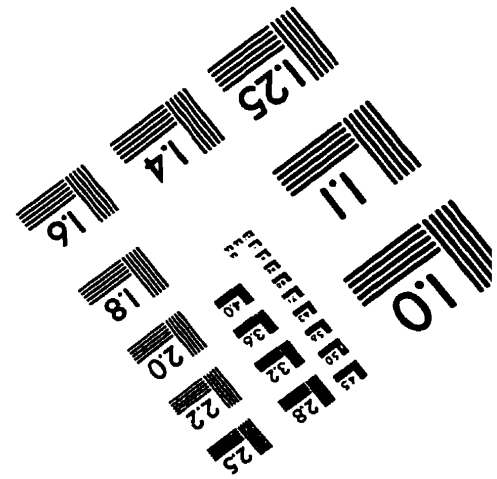
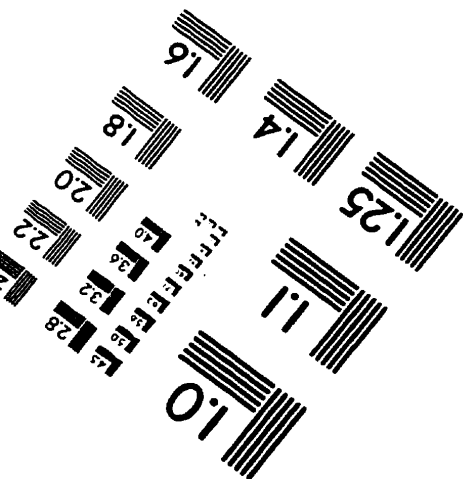
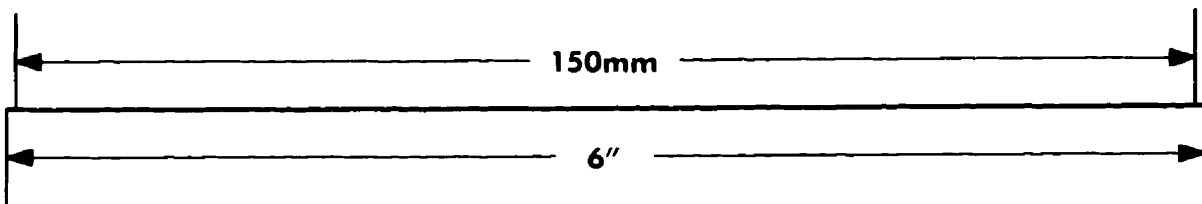
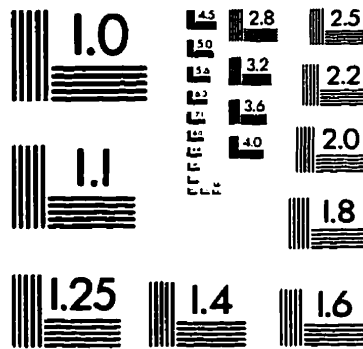
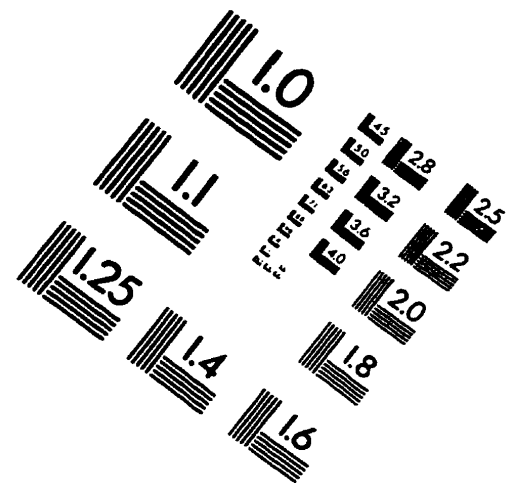
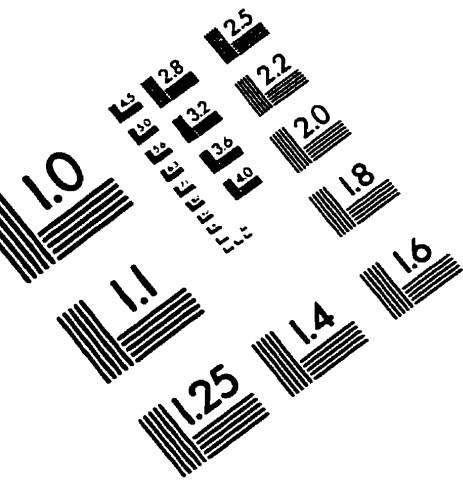
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