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MUSIC, CORPORATE POWER, AND UNENDING WAR

Martin Scherzinger

The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them.

—Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno

INTRODUCTION: IN QUEST OF A NEWER MUSICOLOGY

Sixty years after its original publication, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* resonates uncannily with our times. The central motifs of their bleak and horrifying diagnosis of the culture industry ring as true today as ever. While contemporary critics mostly regard Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of audience demand and reception dynamics as antiquated, this essay argues for the continued relevance of their indictment of culture under the (oppressive) authority of monopoly capital. In particular, the essay traces an emergent *Schulterschluss* between commercial and political power, with a special interest in the involvement of the music industry and the media conglomerates. This is not to say that contemporary America operates under identical rules and constraints as the America of the 1940s. It does not. Nor is it to argue that capitalist America essentially approximates fascism, as Horkheimer and Adorno sometimes imply. The opening arguments of "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," for example, are predicated on this fundamental similarity: "Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system. The decorative industrial management of buildings and exhibition centers in authoritarian countries are much the same as anywhere else" (1997, 120). Though useful as a polemical gesture, this linkage is overdrawn. Unlike fascist Germany, for instance, the

current system operates within a framework of a democracy in the West, and, to a good measure, on the basis of a free market. Still, for all the immediately evident differences, Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis has relevance to the post-Cold War period: a time when the world's music has increasingly come under the control of a qualitatively and quantitatively new kind of corporate machinery.

Due to the extreme concentration of ownership of the mass media in recent years, the culture industry has become a major site of centralized power in the twenty-first century. Recorded music, for example, is the most concentrated global media market today: six leading firms—PolyGram, EMI, Warner Music Group (a unit of AOL Time Warner), Sony Music Entertainment, BMG (a unit of Bertelsmann), and Universal Music Group (a unit of Vivendi)—are estimated to control between 80 to 90 percent of the global market (McChesney 1997, 43). Further consolidation between these firms (such as Sony and Bertelsmann) is currently under negotiation. Most of these companies belong to larger conglomerates, which permits company-wide cross-promotions to bolster sales. AOL Time Warner, for instance, owns magazines, book publishing houses, film studios, television networks, cable channels, retail stores, libraries, sports teams, and so on. Since the passing of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, radio too has become vertically concentrated and horizontally integrated to an unprecedented degree: Clear Channel Communications and Viacom alone control over 40 percent of the U.S. radio market. Today, Clear Channel is the world's largest broadcaster, concert promoter, and billboard advertising firm (Marshall 2003). These companies are also connected to one another in a manner that implies a cartel-like arrangement. For instance, Disney has equity joint ventures, equity interests, or long-term exclusive strategic alliances with Bertelsmann, NBC, TCI, Kirch, Hearst, DreamWorks, Canal Plus, America Online, and so on. So, just as Disney has interests in Bertelsmann, Bertelsmann has interests in Disney and much more.

This essay argues that media cross-ownership and joint ventures tend to reduce competition, lower risk, and increase profits. This, in turn, has forced musical production to succumb to the advertising, marketing, styling, and engineering techniques of increasingly uniform and narrow profit-driven criteria. Far from reflecting the public's choices, Horkheimer and Adorno would link such musical production

with the “technical and personnel apparatus which, down to its last cog, itself forms part of the economic mechanism of selection” (1997, 122). Today this pertains to an unprecedented degree. Under the rubric of various “organizational structures,” “production systems,” and “portfolio management techniques,” corporate strategies provide ever more ways of rationalizing and monitoring the activities of producers and consumers alike (Peterson 1997, 17; Negus 1999, 47). Niche markets formulated in corporate headquarters exert an untold influence on the acquisition policies, the production and distribution practices, and the musical styles adopted by performers. Although (as Keith Negus argues) there has been a concurrent decentralization of many aspects of corporate decision making, today the marketing branch of record companies no longer functions in a merely administrative role. Instead, through intricate applications of management theory—supervising and measuring data—marketers settle priorities, make aesthetic judgments, and select musical forms. Horkheimer and Adorno’s argument anticipates this integration of cultural decision making and corporate ideology no less than the interconnected structure of corporate power. The argument further points out how culture is ultimately subordinated to the demands of the most powerful corporations.

In our age, the objective social tendency is incarnate in the hidden subjective purposes of company directors, the foremost among who are in the most powerful sectors of industry—steel, petroleum, electricity, and chemicals. . . . [Culture monopolies] cannot afford to neglect their appeasement of the real holders of power if their sphere of activity in mass society . . . is not to undergo a series of purges. The dependence of the most powerful broadcasting company on the electrical industry, or of the motion picture industry on the banks, is characteristic of the whole sphere, whose individual branches are themselves economically interwoven. (1997, 122–23)

Predictably perhaps, the chief executives of today’s large record labels often have no musical or cultural background. The head of Universal Vivendi, Jean René Fourtou, was previously in pharmaceuticals; while the head of Bertelsmann, Gunter Thielen, previously managed the company’s printing and industrial operations.

Although some writers recognize the constitutive role of monopoly capital in music’s production, most recent mediation analysis in

musicology has tended to cohere around purely cultural categories such as gender relations, modalities of place, ethnicity, racial labels, age, religious affiliations, political allegiances, sexual codes and sexuality, and so on. Indeed, it is the hermeneutics of music's heterogeneous and much-contested *cultural* arena that buttresses a renewed faith in the progressive political efficacy of musicology's new historicist approaches at the turn of the twentieth century. In other words, this new musicology grounds its progressive claims in the rejection of grand, quasi-evolutionary narratives of music's historical evolution and the concomitant embrace of differentiated histories with their own peculiar temporalities. These localized inquiries into traditionally excluded domains therefore carry a greater burden of passion and public mission than traditional history. For all its success in widening the musical/historical inquiry, however, the net result of the new musicological turn has been to fragment the field into plural dimensions. The high valuation of music's partial histories, minority discourses, and local politics (not unlike the special interest nature of the structures lobbying for influence and profit in the political arena) has failed to prevent a paradoxical new totalization that marches in step with the ideological demands of late capitalism. That is, by rejecting all metanarratives of historical development, along with all totalizing notions of musical value, these nichelike musicological subfields can fail to reckon with the escalating control of unified corporate power on a global scale today. This is not to say these subfields actively serve corporate interests. On the contrary, much of this work is actively directed against the juggernaut of corporate power.

However, where the critical scholarship does acknowledge the constraints placed by the commercial system on the activities of those involved in the making and appreciation of music, it tends to highlight the moments when gaps and fissures appear in that system. These are moments when the circulation of musical commodities, as well as the social valences and meanings assigned to various pieces, forms, and genres, *exceed* those imprinted by the business structures that are their conditions of possibility. Again, this methodological orientation stresses the ways corporate cooptation is not total, noting how the emotional, sensual, and social investments in music *escape* the demands of the commercial sphere. Contemporary theories of mass consumption have therefore increasingly resisted

the apocalyptic determinism attributed to the culture industry by Horkheimer and Adorno. Where the latter diminished the agency of the consumer (who passively identifies with false utopian dreams), contemporary theories elevated it. By insisting on the unpredictable nature of musical consumption—via symbolic revisions and political uses not imagined by the industry—these theories tend to differentiate the scope and authority of the culture industry. While industry attempts to circumscribe the parameters of consumer desire, the argument goes, consumers' purchasing choice in itself also opens space for resistance and empowerment. For example, the politics of rap emerge in a struggle conducted in the field of consumption that lies outside the logic and grasp of any identifiable industry strategies (Rose 1994); or postmodern art music offers challenging new forms that blur the boundaries between the elitist formality of art music and the commercial standardization of popular music (Brackett 2002); or salsa music circulates in a cultural matrix that articulates as much a critique as an embrace of the social conditions (especially the structural racism that marks the limits of American multiculturalism) that created it (Negus 1999); and so on. Although this kind of writing recognizes the mundane mediations of the music industries, it tends to stress strategies of resistance, subjective agency, and musical autonomy that emerge across a broader social field than Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis will permit. In short, for these writers, music in cultural practice cannot be reductively translated and transformed into the logic of commodification. Although the following arguments will not directly refute or even contradict the work of cultural musicology on this issue, I would like to argue that nevertheless Horkheimer and Adorno's scenario accurately captures important new developments in musical production and consumption, developments that, in turn, reflect a mutation in capitalism after the Cold War.

CORPORATE RATIONALIZATION AND THE STABILIZATION OF MUSICAL EXPRESSION

The tendency for mass-produced music to stabilize hegemonic ideologies via stereotypical forms and schematic formulae has undergone

a qualitative shift in recent years. Opportunities for commodification have massively expanded. Given the scope of the problem on the side of *production* today, it is symptomatic that resistance should be confined to the side of *consumption* alone. As a critical praxis, this lopsided condition itself betrays a blocked dialectic. This is not to reduce the politics of consumption to irrelevance. Indeed, the dynamic between corporate desires and listeners' desires is inherently complex and capricious. To cope with this, the music industry, now part of an oligopolistic multibillion dollar mass-culture industry, has differentiated its markets to correspond precisely with the identitarian categories of race, gender, nationality, class, and religion that broadened current debates in musicology and cultural studies. In fact, the pluralism of these collective identities provides a convenient palette of marketing categories for the music industry. Along with innovations in communication technologies as well as flexibility in production and distribution techniques, such co-opted pluralism has led to an explosion of musical variety and productivity. Of course, the variety of music available to the American consumer today is practically immeasurable. Yet, the apparently erratic turbulence of musical production is, in reality, subordinated and contained by awesomely consolidated corporate structures; likewise, its dissemination is hierarchically guided by highly distinctive commercial criteria. As radio stations and record companies merge, for instance, they diversify their holdings by rationalizing their portfolio of labels, genres, and artists by dividing them into discrete strategic business units. This renders visible the cost and the profit of each genre division, which in turn determines the allocation of finances between and within them. Far from opening to genuine complexities and resonances of musical expression, the "diversity" of the culture industry amounts to a matrix of detached indicators used to stabilize, predict, and contain musical production. Concomitantly, from the perspective of the industry, the dynamics of consumption are reduced to the logic of the bottom line. Again, Horkheimer and Adorno envisaged this condition in their assessment of the culture industry: "Consumers appear as statistics on research organization charts, and are divided by income groups into red, green, and blue areas; the technique is that used for any type of propaganda" (1997, 123).

Today the rationalization of the bottom line via genre containers

has broadened its technological reach to include the electronic monitoring of CD sales, popularity ratings, and radio airplay statistics. Poor performances can involve layoffs, dropping artists, or even closing down divisions. In many cases, the tendency is increasingly to concentrate resources on profitable sectors and then to diminish those sectors to a category of profitable stars (Negus 1999, 47–51). The calculated strategy to reduce risk inevitably reduces investment in those genres and forms that prize unpredictability and experimentation. Divisions whose profitability profile is substandard are either abandoned entirely or undergo a kind of inner metamorphosis to reflect a financial logic produced by statistical data. For example, when in 1989 Warner Music purchased the classical music Tulda label (in Germany) and Erato (in France), Warner divested itself of various genres and artists and concentrated instead on a few lucrative star artists, like José Carreras. As Benjamin Boretz wryly remarks, “To make it in today’s classical music market, you have to be Yo-Yo Ma: I do not mean this metaphorically, but literally!” (private discussion with author, April 28, 2003). Forced to reckon with the financial turnover of popular music divisions, classical music divisions increasingly absorb the promotional characteristics of the former into their products. Thus classical performers are marketed as pop artists (such as Charlotte Church, Sarah Brightman, and Nigel Kennedy) or in crossover collaborations (such as Yo-Yo Ma performing Appalachian melodies with Mark O’Conner or Plácido Domingo singing popular tunes with Dionne Warwick), while classical composers are packaged in collections of “greatest hits” and thematic albums (such as compilations centered around relaxation, gay composers, Christmas, or pop opera). The pop opera band Amici Forever, for example, proudly market themselves with the slogan “Think classical singing with a pop aesthetic” (Ogunnaike 2004, 1). Corporate strategies may appear to be a driving force behind an explosive diversity of musical modalities, but these new marketing slogans are rigidly subordinated to the same logical management of facts, figures, and statistics. Unorthodox and oppositional musical forms give way to niche-based formularism.

In this hypercommercialized setting, advertising becomes the very condition of possibility for music, and, concomitantly, music gradually absorbs the procedures of advertising. According to Horkheimer

and Adorno, these procedures are absorbed into the very structure of the industry's products: "The assembly-line character of the culture industry, the synthetic, planned method of turning out its products . . . is very suited to advertising: the important individual points, by becoming detachable, interchangeable, and even technically alienated from any connected meaning, lend themselves to ends external to the work" (1997, 163). Music's diminished role as a mechanism for product promotion today takes many forms. The most obvious case is the sponsorship of music's institutional space. For example, against a backdrop of shrinking donations from arts foundations to arts groups, the nation's cultural space is increasingly dominated by corporations. Just as the Selwyn Theatre on Forty-second Street, New York, was refurbished and renamed the American Airlines Theater in the 1990s, Jazz at Lincoln Center has named one of its new 140-seat performance venues Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola in return for a ten-million-dollar donation from the soft-drink giant. Although Wynton Marsalis, artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, denies the company will influence artistic choices in the venue, Coca-Cola clearly benefits from the association with jazz. In the words of Charles Fruit, senior vice president of Worldwide Media and Alliances at Coca-Cola, "If you think about jazz and the Coca-Cola Company, each has a dual personality. Each is uniquely American. At the same time, wherever you go around the world, the public views it as their music or their beverage. We saw that interesting parallel between our brand and jazz" (in Pogrebin 2003, E1). Coca-Cola hitches a ride on a shared cultural legacy—an authentic and cherished public scene—so as to infuse its brand with an aura of authenticity. In short, jazz "adds value" to the drink.

Matthew McAllister describes the effects of this mechanism:

While elevating the corporate, sponsorship simultaneously devalues what it sponsors. . . . The sporting event, the play, the concert, and the public television program become subordinate to promotion because, in the sponsor's mind and in the symbolism of the event, they exist to promote. It is not Art for Art's Sake as much as Art for Ad's Sake. In the public's eye, art is yanked from its own separate and theoretically autonomous domain and squarely placed in the commercial. . . . Every time the commercial intrudes on the cultural, the integrity of the public sphere is weakened because of the obvious encroachment of corporate promotion. (McAllister 1996, 221)

Instead of tolerating advertising as a commercial interruption to cultural events and spaces, the structural need for corporate sponsorship is today becoming the norm. Thus, instead of emphasizing the credit Coca-Cola receives for its donation, the cultural community increasingly feels relief and gratitude for Coca-Cola's generosity in getting the Jazz at Lincoln Center project off the ground (Pogrebin 2003, E1). This problem is not one of collective false consciousness as much as it is of censorship and restriction, the ideological consequence of privatizing communal cultural spaces. Naomi Klein, for example, illustrates the point with a case in 1997, when the sponsors of the Du Maurier Downtown Jazz festival in Toronto aggressively removed all critical material from the venue. In Klein's words, "When any space is bought, even if only temporarily, it changes to fit its sponsors" (Klein 2002b, 185). Concomitantly, when the sponsoring corporation no longer benefits from the cultural aura inscribed in an artistic genre or style, it simply cuts its funding. In May 2003, for instance, the fossil-fuel giant Chevron-Texaco unilaterally decided, after sixty-three years, to stop financing its Saturday-afternoon broadcasts of opera from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City (Hoelterhoff 2003). Under the sway of corporate efficiencies and revenue opportunities, the relationship between culture and the corporate sector is rendered inherently capricious.

This is not to say *all* forms of corporate sponsorship compromise artistic autonomy or critical import. Conservative academic defenses of commercial culture maintain that the market economy in fact *generates* creativity and thus contributes to artistic diversity. Tyler Cowen, economics professor at George Mason University, for example, writes, "Material wealth helps relax external constraints on internal artistic creativity, motivates artists to reach new heights, and enables a diversity of artistic forms and styles to flourish" (Cowen 1998, 14). Cowen's argument rests on a number of premises and generalizations entirely beholden to an absolute belief in the goodness of the market economy. The second sentence of his book *In Praise of Commercial Culture* reads, "Artists work to achieve self-fulfillment, fame, and riches" (15). This already disembodied and generalized idea gradually simplifies to the quest for riches ("love of money," "pursuit of profits," and so on) as the book gets underway (15, 18). In support of his theory of creativity, Cowen offers a

faux history of Western music through the essentialized lens of pecuniary incentives and returns. Thus, writes Cowen, “The artists of the Italian Renaissance were businessmen first and foremost”; likewise, “Bach, Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven were all obsessed with earning money through their art”, and, again, “The British ‘punk violinist’ Nigel Kennedy has written: ‘I think if you’re playing music or doing art you can in some way measure the amount of communication you are achieving by how much money it is bringing in for you and for those around you’ (18). As artists driven by pecuniary interests seek to avoid duplicating older styles and media, Cowen ties commercialism directly to “forces for innovation” in music (24). Moreover, argues Cowen, commercial culture encourages political radicalism: “Like Mozart,” he writes, “Beethoven used his financial independence to flirt with politically radical ideas. Mozart had set a precedent with the *Marriage of Figaro*, which lampooned the aristocracy. . . . Beethoven went further with his opera *Fidelio*, a paean to liberty and a critique of unjust government imprisonment” (142). Using the logic of the cultural Cold War, Cowen argues that American rock stands for freedom and individualism: The Soviet apparatchiks (who outlawed rock) “understood that rock was pro-capitalist, pro-individualist, consumerist, and opposed to socialism and state control” (178). While Cowen’s devotion to the market holds out hope for flourishing creative individualism as well as political freedom and even political radicalism in our times, the empirical record suggests otherwise. Indeed, as I will show, Cowen’s position cannot be sustained across the terrain of either music or politics.

It is important of course to acknowledge that musical expression has always been more or less dependent on patronage and financial backing, but it is equally important to acknowledge that the paradigm of music’s corporate sponsorship today is undergoing a qualitative transformation. Popular musicians have long worked closely with the commercial music industry. For example, since the early days of radio, musicians have advertised products, sung jingles, signed deals with sponsoring corporations and record companies, and so on. In the 1980s alone, Coca-Cola recruited a host of stars (ranging from David Bowie and George Michael to Tina Turner and Whitney Houston) to sing in its advertisements. More recently, Sting’s music and Pete Townsend’s songs with The Who advertise

luxury cars. Even John Lennon's Beatles song "Revolution"—a song "filled," in John Densmore's words, "with passionate citizens expressing their First Amendment right to free speech"—is used to sell Nike shoes (Densmore 2002, 35). The payoff can be staggering. Densmore has repeatedly vetoed offers to use The Doors songs for commercial advertising: fifty thousand dollars for "When the Music's Over," from Apple Computers; seventy-five thousand dollars for "Light My Fire," from Buick; three million dollars for "Break on Through," from an internet company (33, 35). Likewise, when it comes to concert productions today, corporate brands have become integrated with the concert experience. The clothing company Tommy Hilfiger, seeking to associate itself with rap- and rock-oriented rebellion, sponsored the Rolling Stones' 1997 "Bridges to Babylon" tour (Klein 2002b, 47). Seeking consumer loyalties that far exceed the product being advertised, companies increasingly co-opt popular culture.

Yet, the relationship between musicians and the products they advertise is gradually shifting. Naomi Klein has diagnosed this trend in her book *No Logo*. For example, the advertisement campaign for the Stones' 1999 "No Security" tour depicted Tommy Hilfiger models in the foreground watching the band in the background. In Klein's words, "The tagline was "Tommy Hilfiger Presents the Rolling Stones No Security Tour"—though there were no dates or locations for any tour stops, only the addresses of flagship Tommy stores" (Klein 2002b, 47). Klein argues that power relations between culture and sponsorship have been dangerously reversed in this dynamic; "the brand is the event's infrastructure; the artists are its filler" (48). Thus, in the summer of 2003, Sean "P. Diddy" Combs (the self-proclaimed master of the remix, integrating styles as diverse as hip-hop, pop, soul, rap, and underground) launched a new product line for Coca-Cola. The new drink was named after a musical technique: Sprite "Remix." Similarly, musicians like the Backstreet Boys, Macy Gray, and Rufus Wainwright are fully integrated with branded aesthetics. For example, Wainwright's sales soared *after* he appeared in a Gap commercial (46). Likewise, sales on Sting's 1999 album, *Brand New Day*, sold poorly until he appeared in an ad for Jaguar singing songs from the album (Seabrook 2003, 48).

Mass marketing and advertising have infiltrated the world of music to an unprecedented degree. Where wholesale branding has

not penetrated the very composition of songs, commercial products are nonetheless promoted through them. Product placement, the surreptitious placement of commodities inside popular songs or programs, has become a burgeoning sector of the economy. In Los Angeles, for example, there are dozens of consultancies linking music and film producers to marketers (McChesney 1997, 29). Laurie Mazur describes the cost of product placement in Hollywood films: "\$10,000 to have the product appear in the film, \$30,000 to have a character hold the product. In *Other People's Money*, Danny DeVito holds a box of donuts, looks into the case and says: "If I can't depend on Dunkin' Donuts, who can I depend on?" (in Graaf, Wann, and Taylor 2002, 151) Product placement is ubiquitous in music videos. Kylie Minogue advertises American Express, Jay Z advertises Range Rover and Rolex, and so on. Products can even generate a song's very substance: In the spirit of Run DMC's "My Adidas," for example, Busta Rhymes sings a tribute to Courvoisier cognac in his song "Pass the Courvoisier"; similarly, Tweet basically presents a lyrical consumer report for Motorola mobile phones in her video "Call me." Erik Parker points out that Verizon recruited Tweet to endorse its wireless services at the same time "Call Me" was being aired (2002, 43). Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that "advertising and the culture industry merge technically as well as economically" (1997, 163) has gathered additional resonance in these times: music videos are gradually becoming interchangeable with commercials. The day artists will need corporate endorsements and advertisements to defray costs of production before they even begin making a video or recording is probably imminent. The reversal of aesthetic priorities matches the reversal of communal priorities in the American social landscape at large. For example, in Louisville, Kentucky, WHAS paid the local community for broadcast rights to a balloon festival during Derby week. When Clear Channel bought the station, it demanded the community pay the corporation instead. Thus, corporate sponsorship and marketing, far from interrupting the flow of autonomous communal or musical activity, becomes the structural condition of possibility for communal events and music making.

This infrastructural reversal is dramatically exacerbated in the context of massive media consolidation. For Adorno, the intimate integration of popular music with such "highly centralized economic

organization" ultimately leads to musical standardization and conformism (2002a, 443). Arguably, this is contradicted by the seemingly erratic proliferation of diverse musical genres today. Yet, new forms of standardization and conformism are emerging precisely in the most consolidated sectors of corporate control. One consequence of mergers and acquisitions is that small, independent, and non-profit labels are forced to compete against overwhelmingly proliferated production and distribution resources and, as a result, routinely shut down. In April 2003, for example, Composers Recordings Inc. (CRI), whose catalogue centers around adventurous recordings by maverick composers, closed its offices. (Some tiny labels, like Hyperion and CPO, continue to thrive, potentially the dialectical backlash to the new corporate centralization.) Another consequence of mergers and acquisitions is that the surviving holdings are subject to considerable rationalization and systematization. In his discussion of imitation in "On Popular Music," Adorno writes:

The most successful hits, types, and "ratios" between elements were imitated, and the process culminated in the crystallization of standards. Under centralized conditions such as exist today . . . standards have become "frozen." That is, they have been taken over by cartelized agencies, the final results of a competitive process, and rigidly enforced upon material to be promoted. The original patterns that are now standardized evolved in a more or less competitive way. Large-scale economic concentration institutionalized the standardization, and made it imperative. As a result, innovations by rugged individualists have been outlawed. (2002a, 443)

Adorno's words may sound exaggerated but they are in fact oddly appropriate today. As companies extend their distributional reach, they tend to promote and encourage musical repertoires with a "general" appeal. As Ann Chaitovitz, national director of sound recordings, American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), says, "radio consolidation has resulted in less variety of music being played on the radio, shorter playlists, homogenization of playlists, and less local music being broadcast" (in Bracey and Toomey 2002). While the appeal to general taste seems neutral and unproblematic at first glance (genuinely popular at best; somewhat bland at worst), music under these conditions is in fact subject to highly distinctive aesthetic codes and cultural judgments. Consider the priorities

articulated by David McDonagh, a senior staff member of PolyGram's International division: "The basic kind of music that has broad appeal internationally is kind of, like, pop music ballads. Ballads always work. It doesn't matter if it's Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Bon Jovi, or whoever it happens to be" (in Negus 1999, 157). Thus, music with a slow ballad structure coupled with a distinctive melodic profile, for example, tends to receive inflated investment and resources. Such songs are easily translated and transformed into megahits across the globe: a condition that bears out Adorno's suspicion in "The Radio Symphony" essay that "the actual mechanization of radio transmission" is constitutively linked to "the quasi expressive ballads with which our radio programs are jammed" (2002a, 252).

Executives in the business often refer to a song's distinctive attention-grabbing moment as the "*money note*." John Seabrook describes the expensive-sounding moment in the context of commercial ballads: "The money note is the moment in Whitney Houston's version of the Dolly Parton song 'I Will Always Love You' at the beginning of the third rendition of the chorus: pause, drum beat, and then 'iiiiieeeeeiiiiieei will always love you.' It is the moment in the Celine Dion song from *Titanic*, 'My Heart Will Go On': the key change that begins the third verse, a note you can hear a hundred times and it still brings you up short in the supermarket and transports you from the price of milk to a world of grand romantic gesture—'You're *here* / There is *nothing* to fear'" (2003, 45). Adorno would refer to these musical moments as "pseudo-individualization," a mechanism to instill "the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself" (2002a, 445). In particular, Adorno would link these kinds of glamorous expressive outbursts with the manipulations associated with advertising, comparable to the "radio barker who implores his unseen audience not to fail to sample wares and does so in tones which arouse hopes beyond the capacity of the commodity to fulfill" (449). Adorno continues, "All glamor is bound up with some sort of trickery. Listeners are nowhere more tricked by popular music than in its glamorous passages. Flourishes and jubilations express triumphant thanksgiving for the music itself—a self-eulogy of its own achievement in exhorting the listener to exultation and of its identification with the aim of the agency in promoting a great event" (449–50).

Adorno connects this kind of manipulative mechanism with the hierarchies of postcompetitive capitalism. Not surprisingly, as my discussion of Clear Channel Communications to follow will show, music with these kinds of standardized ingredients, coupled with glamorous pseudodifferentiations, also gains considerable airplay on radio channels whose ownership is most consolidated. The point here is that, far from reflecting a neutral and general taste in music, this stabilized aesthetic tends to mediate the tastes of a highly particular demographic, namely, the social sector with disposable income: predominantly white, middle-class, heterosexual, eighteen- to forty-five-year-old males. When unfettered economic criteria drive aesthetic decisions, it stands to reason that radio play, media coverage, and sales will be directed toward the most lucrative factions of society. The current popularity of standardized fare, such as diluted “alternative” rock bands like Creed (recently reconstituted under the name Alter Bridge), Puddle of Mudd, Nickelback, and 3 Doors Down, must be understood in this context. Even mainstream publications recognize the monotony of concentrated radio and the need for innovation and diversity on the airwaves. Writing for *Newsweek* in May 2004, for example, Devin Gordon reports, “If you tuned out on rock music a few years ago because you just couldn’t stand to hear another Creed song, it’s time to come back to the flock . . . major-market radio, dominated by Clear Channel and drab rock acts like Nickelback . . . has bored listeners into experimentation” (49). As the trade publication *Variety* observed in 1999, “A huge wave of consolidation has turned music stations into cash cows that focus on narrow playlists aimed at squeezing the most revenue from the richest demographics. . . . Truth be told, in this era of megamergers, there has never been a greater need for a little diversity on the dial” (Stern 1999, 5). A 2002 study by the Future of Music Coalition (FMC) targeting the *general* population revealed that most Americans decisively favor less advertising on radio, less repetition of songs, less music boosted by record companies, more new music, and more airplay for local artists (Future of Music Coalition 2002). Thus, the ideology of unfettered profit extends beyond purely economic analytic criteria into a highly selective ideology of cultural worth and aesthetic taste that is, according to this kind of study, largely out of sync with many citizens’ interests and tastes.

THE DIMINISHED AESTHETICS OF CORPORATE MUSIC (WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE CASE OF CLEAR CHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS)

The ideological fallout is not limited to the sphere of culture alone. Indeed, music administered by the extraordinarily integrated culture industry is increasingly co-opted in service of official state policies. In other words, music, compromised by a commercial agenda, tends to become a carrier of political beliefs and values endorsed by the governing elite. This development is connected to various factors, some financial, others overtly political. For example, in the early 1970s a group of ultraconservative millionaires in the United States, seeking to promote right-wing thinking throughout the country, developed a multicapillaried re-education project that included the institution of conservative foundations (such as the Bradley Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the Castle Rock [Coors] Foundation), the founding of national think tanks (including the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, Hoover Institution, and the Cato Institute) and, importantly, the acquisition of mass-media outlets (radio stations, journals, newspapers—including the *Washington Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*) (Lapham 2004, 32, 35, 37; and Alterman 2003b, 249). By the end of the 1990s, conservative views dominated the airwaves. Television networks like Fox News not only raised right-wing thought to radical new heights, but, in tandem with views generated by like-minded think tanks, they also exerted a gravitational pull of conservatism on the entire media spectrum (Alterman 2003, 259).

Speaking more generally, there is often a direct financial interest in biased or false reporting. For example, although it is of vital interest to the citizenry, the five primary broadcasters (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and CNN) rarely, if ever, report on the details of corporate contributions to election campaigns. This is a reasonable omission if we consider, first, that this money is largely spent on those corporations in the form of advertisements and media consultation: Over the past twenty years, spending on political advertisements has increased from ninety million dollars to more than a billion dollars (Lewis 2003). The omission is reasonable if we consider, second, that the benefits derived from such contributions include direct

subsidies and tax breaks. And third, donations to campaigns provide political leverage on policy decisions that favor corporate consolidation (such as the deregulation of the airwaves). Thus, the media empires are often used to promote corporate values and a conservative political agenda. With these corporations profiting directly from the political process that drives campaigns, the media is no longer suitable as a reliable messenger for political messages and information. Take MSNBC's coverage on May 11, 2003: In a context of daily casualties (on both sides) in Iraq, MSNBC ran the winner of the reality-TV show *Survivor* as the lead story. Tellingly, perhaps, both stories (the casualties in Iraq and the *Survivor* finale) operate within a similar ideological field of dialectical tensions, in this case curiously blending the inevitability of virile destiny with the blind chance of a gamble. For the purposes of this argument, however, it suffices to note how the media can overwhelm the public with irrelevant details and lure it into false debates.

Since most major media outlets (radio, television, the Internet, and so on) were pioneered as public services by the nonprofit sector with government subsidies, the general lack of public participation in the debate on media policy in the United States over the course of the twentieth century is alarming. Take the case of radio: The 1934 Communications Act established radio as a public resource managed according to a model of trusteeship by the federal government. Broadcasters received a free slice of the radio spectrum in exchange for serving the "public interest, convenience, and necessity." The Act also included provisions to promote diversity and localism. In 1996, Congress passed the Telecommunications Act to replace the 1934 law. The principal aim of the 1996 law was to deregulate all communication industries. To the extent that the public was informed at all—the media covered the Telecommunications Act as a business technicality instead of a public policy story—it was assured that deregulation would intensify market competition and generate high-paying jobs. There was no public debate. As New York Congressman Jerrold Nadler pointed out at the 2003 Forum on FCC Ownership Rules, even in Congress the radio bill of 1996 received no informed debate; in fact, it was *appended* to a technical discussion involving long-distance carriers (Nadler 2003).

Less than a decade after its passing into law, the effects of the

Telecommunications Act have been extensive. Deregulation led to unprecedented merger activity, corporate concentration, and drastic downsizing. By 2003, two companies, Clear Channel Radio and the Infinity Broadcasting unit of Viacom, controlled almost half the nation's airwaves and industry revenues. Before the passing of the Telecommunications Act, radio ownership was limited to only two stations in any market and no more than twenty AM and twenty FM stations nationwide. Clear Channel, whose radio stations grew from 40 to 1,240 stations in seven years, today reaches more than one third of the U.S. population (110 million listeners) a week and generates more than three billion dollars in revenues annually (<http://www.clearchannel.com/radio>). Thus, instead of promoting it, deregulation has decreased competition. For example, Clear Channel's ownership of stations in the most concentrated markets—KIIS-FM in Los Angeles, WHTZ and WKTU in New York, KHKS in Dallas, WXKS in Boston, WHYI in Miami, and so on—effectively gives a single company control of the Top 40 format.

Likewise, instead of providing jobs, deregulation has encouraged layoffs. Economies of scale produce efficiency by reducing expenses. Jenny Toomey, executive director of the Future of Music Coalition, explains: "Radio runs on many fixed costs: Equipment, operations, and staffing costs are the same whether broadcasting to one person or 1 million. Owners knew that if they could control more than one station in a local market, they could consolidate operations and reduce fixed expenses. Lower costs would mean increased profit potential" (Toomey 2003, 29). Clear Channel developed a reputation in Wall Street for its draconian cost cutting. One strategy for cutting costs is the aggressive elimination of jobs. Robert Unmacht, former publisher and editor of the *M Street Journal*, which tracks radio business, describes the effects of downsizing at Clear Channel: "The pressure is now on to do more with fewer people. Everything needs to show a profit yesterday" (in Boehlert 2001). Clear Channel has saved millions by eliminating scores of DJ positions. John London (a morning host on KCMG in Los Angeles), Jack Cole (a veteran talk-show host at WJNO in West Palm Beach), and various producers from the 460-station AMFM Network in Los Angeles were probably illegally fired when Clear Channel took over their respective radio stations (Boehlert 2001). Clear Channel has centralized its

bureaucratic operations by programming its stations from regional, rather than local, locations. Today a single DJ broadcasts over many stations using enhanced digital editing to create the illusion of a local broadcast. The Clear Channel Radio blurb on the Web, designed to appeal to investors, describes the technology enhancements used to create this illusion: "Clear Channel uses digital voice tracking and in-market feeds to deliver a sound that is live and local. . . . The result: Greater value for both advertisers and listeners" (<http://www.clearchannel.com/radio>). Clear Channel's assumed equivalence of interest between communities of listeners and advertisers is matched by the assumed equivalence between actual radio presenters and virtual ones. The business strategy is to dispense with genuine local broadcasting and actual live DJs and replace them with "a sound" thereof via a "voice tracking" technique. Voice tracking is a computer assisted system by which live radio is replaced by prerecorded voice segments between songs. Announcers, often living far away from the area in which they are being broadcast, are encouraged to pretend they are part of a local community.

Listening to WKTU in New York, for example, can be an illusionistic experience: nameless voices from the "local" public briefly interrupt the endless flow of jingles, hook motives, and effects with flagrantly prefabricated requests, appraisals, greetings, and recorded dedication calls. Also, despite the slick pace and sound of the production, I have not infrequently heard DJs confusing promotional events (erroneously substituting a club party in Long Island for one in Orange County, for instance). The *Wall Street Journal* confirms my experience: "In Boise, [Clear Channel's] KISS FM listeners heard a DJ named 'Cabana Boy Geoff' Alan explain, 'On Saturday night, me and Smooch, we were hanging out at the Big Easy. . . . Just thinking about it, I'm cracking up.'" In fact, as the *Journal* reported, Alan taped the program in San Diego *before* the Saturday in question. He had never set foot in Boise all his life . . ." (Alterman 2003a). Likewise, the *Washington Post* reports that talk-show host Brian Wilson, "sits on his farm north of Baltimore and talks California politics with listeners on San Francisco's KFSO. Wilson wakes up each day, fires up his Web browser and reads the morning San Francisco Chronicle online for the latest news from clear across the country. . . . This is what passes for local radio these days" (Fisher 2003, B1). Clear

Channel's claim to localism is essentially a fraud. In Dayton, Ohio, local Clear Channel stations no longer even report on the weather (Carpenter 2003). Cutbacks in local staffing have resulted in a situation where radio listeners nationwide increasingly hear the same DJs. Randi West's midday show, for example, has aired in Cincinnati, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; Des Moines, Iowa; Toledo, Ohio; Charleston, South Carolina; and Rochester, New York (Boehlert, 2001); while Beverly Farmer has delivered traffic reports under various names (Alex Richards on WMZQ; Vera Bruptley on WJFK; Ginny Bridges; Lee McKenzie, and so on) (Fisher 2003, B5). Consolidation and cutbacks in staff can contradict the function and value of radio. In 2002, a train derailed in Minot, North Dakota, releasing a dangerous cloud of anhydrous ammonia. All six commercial stations in Minot are owned by Clear Channel. Local police tried to notify the citizenry by calling KCJB (the station designated to broadcast local emergencies) but to no avail: KCJB was being run from afar by computer. Three hundred people were hospitalized from the cloud (Fisher 2003, B5). In short, at the expense of responsible local broadcasting, deregulation has cost jobs.

Finally, instead of promoting diversity, deregulation has promoted bland and homogenized fare. It is true that judgments of musical taste are, practically by definition, considered subjective and relative. Furthermore, in recent debates describing the negative effects of corporate consolidation, the prevalence of music is frequently invoked as a litmus test indicating a decline in public-interest broadcasting *per se*. In other words, as a style-based medium built by advertising, music on corporate-owned media tends to cluster virtual communities that cannot be equated with physical communities serving a public sphere. Consumers' taste is not identical to citizens' interests and needs. In short, music—figured in terms of entertainment and lifestyle choices alone—diverts attention from issues of social interest and thus generates political apathy. News coverage on Clear Channel stations, for instance, has practically disappeared in recent years, giving way to predominantly music-based programming. Is this an attempt to manufacture disinterest in public affairs? James L. Winston, executive director of the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters, notes a similar tendency on Black Entertainment Television (BET). Winston points out that, since Viacom

took over BET, the single African American cable channel, there has been a marked decline in public-affairs programming and an increase in music videos (Winston 2003). In *No Logo*, Naomi Klein, too, isolates music on MTV as the consummate site of fully branded media integration (45–50). Yet, what Klein’s analysis precisely reveals is the dramatic extent to which music in the age of synergy-driven production has been co-opted, exploited, compromised, and coerced to a commercial agenda. Therefore, far from sliding on the slippery slopes of subjective relativism, the matter of musical *quality* on the airwaves, free of commercial content, requires urgent attention.

Still, musical taste cannot be readily captured by the kind of “quantitative analysis” such as the “empirical data” and “metrics” demanded (by FCC chairman Michael K. Powell) of interest groups presenting their cases to the FCC (Powell 2003). In this context, it is no small irony that, in defense of the content of their playlists, the music industries routinely invoke precisely the musical tastes and interests of their listeners as if these were established empirical facts (see, for example, comments by Lewis W. Dickey Jr., chief executive for Cumulus Media, in Schwartz and Fabrikant 2003; or Martin D. Franks, senior vice president of Viacom, Inc., in Franks 2003). Despite the obstacles, the empirical record, in fact, points in a different direction from that portrayed by the industries. Consider Michael Powell’s redundant proconsolidation question: “Common ownership can lead to more diversity—what does the owner get for having duplicative products?” (quoted in Toomey 2003, 29). While it makes common sense at first glance, this viewpoint cannot be generally sustained: The enormous financial success of Starbucks Coffee, for instance, derives far less from its diversified product range than from its enormous horizontal reach. To demonstrate their interest in localism and diversity, media giants frequently cite quantitative figures on program formats. For example, David F. Poltrack, executive vice president of research and planning at CBS, indicates that the public is served by deregulation because of the sheer increase in television channels in the last decade (Poltrack 2003). Similarly, Dennis Swanson, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Viacom Television Stations Group, maintains that media consolidation has *increased* the actual number of minutes of programming devoted

to local news (Swanson 2003). While this may be quantitatively true, it is essential to place in context the quality of that programming.

An obsession with hyperrationalist commercial discourse (which predictably eliminates qualitative assessments) besets the debate on diversity and localism in the music industries. The tendency toward bland and formulaic repetition is particularly pronounced in the domain of music. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the advent of radio brought with it a democratic impulse that “turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to the broadcast programs of exactly the same” (1997, 122). Industry advocates frequently point to format variety on the airwaves, such as “rock,” “classical,” “hot adult contemporary,” and so on, as the quantifiable indicator of programming diversity. The number of formats provided by radio stations increased in all markets between 1996 and 2000. Adorno recognized the tendency in the music industry to proliferate categories: “The types of popular music are carefully differentiated in production. . . . This labeling technique, as regards type of music and band, is pseudo-individualization, but of a sociological kind outside the realm of strict musical technology. It provides trademarks of identification for differentiating between the actually undifferentiated” (2002a, 446). As if to bear out Adorno’s analysis, a recent study by the Future of Music Coalition shows that the quantitative focus on formats alone hides from view the interconnections between formats:

The format variety is not equivalent to true diversity in programming, since formats with different names have similar playlists. For example, alternative, top 40, rock, and hot adult contemporary are all likely to play songs by the band Creed, even though their formats are not the same. In fact, an analysis of data from charts in *Radio and Records* and *Billboard’s Airplay Monitor* revealed considerable playlist overlap—as much as 76 percent—between supposedly distinct formats. If the FCC or the National Association of Broadcasters are sincerely trying to measure programming “diversity,” doing so on the basis of the number of formats in a given market is a flawed methodology. (Toomey 2003, 29)

While finely tuned to segment their audiences on their advertisers’ behalf, Clear Channel’s formats are in fact nearly indistinguishable:

“AC” (Adult Contemporary) is contrasted with “Hot AC,” while “CHR” (Contemporary Hits Radio) is contrasted with “CHR Pop,” and “CHR Rhythmic” (Sharlet 2003, 41). When the historically mandated values of diversity and localism are distorted to reflect the formulaic equations of industry rationalization, they frequently manage to conceal precisely the opposite tendency: less broad-based musical diversity and less actual promotion of local artists. The rationalization of the debate through concept-metaphors like “formats,” “metrics,” and the like becomes a case of what Horkheimer and Adorno call “false clarity”: “False clarity is only another name for myth; and myth has always been obscure and enlightening at one and the same time: always using devices of familiarity and straightforward dismissal to avoid the labor of conceptualization” (1997, xiv).

Ratings-based coverage has resulted in standardized, homogenized programming with diminishing playlists coming out of corporate headquarters, where they have been decided on the basis of profit revenues alone. When record executives promote new artists, for example, corporate interests explicitly overshadow aesthetic ones. Consider the criteria used by Jason Flom (a senior promoter at Warner Music Group) to promote a new singer, Cherie, as reported by John Seabrook:

Cherie’s music fits almost perfectly into the adult-contemporary format, radio’s largest; Flom thought that Cherie was tailor-made for New York’s WLTW 106.7 Lite-FM, the city’s most popular music radio station, which is owned by Clear Channel. . . . With luck . . . Cherie’s first single would be a hit and would cross over from the light-FM stations to the Top Forty stations. At that point, Lava would release the second single, a ballad. (in Seabrook 2003, 48)

Thus executives readily admit the latent conformism of their aesthetic choices, no less than the (fraudulent) crossover potential of their favored genres.

Yet, the censorious dimensions of unfettered commercialism are routinely overlooked. In fact, there is a widespread belief in the West that censorship and restrictions on artistic expressions are properly pernicious only when they are imposed directly by the state. Herman and McChesney point out that the “U.S. First Amendment protection of free speech is addressed solely to government threats to

abridge that right" (1997, 6) It is as if today's economies of power—corporations—lie beyond the scope of the First Amendment. But, from the perspective of independent musicians, the market imposes censorship every bit as insidious as that imposed by the state, and from the perspective of listeners, the market imposes limits on choice and quality as insidious as a cultural agenda imposed by the state. The market may seem to be a value-free and neutral measure of consumer's tastes and interests, but this is not so. Just because consumers enjoy a particular song, does not mean their enjoyment is informed by a real choice. Horkheimer and Adorno cynically describe the mechanics of consumer choice thus: "The industry submits to the vote which it has itself inspired" (1997, 134). Transposing this thought to the field of advertising proper, just because a Hummer makes its drivers feel sexually attractive and sophisticated, does not mean that buying the car accurately reflects the consumer's top choice for satisfying his natural need for sexual attractiveness and sophistication. Adorno describes the mechanism of consumption through the psychological categories of mimetic adaptation: "The culture industry piously claims to be guided by its customers and to supply them with what they ask for. . . . Its method is to anticipate the spectator's imitation of itself, so making it appear as if the agreement already exists which it intends to create" (Adorno 2002b, 200–201). Cultural critics may be skeptical of Adorno's description of the culture industry, but business executives are acutely attuned to it. In fact, the aggressive manufacture of consumer demand today exceeds the manufacture of apparent "agreement" (to which Adorno alludes) to the manufacture of consumers apparently dictating to industry. On marketing tactics for teenage girls, for example, *Fortune* magazine advises, "you have to pretend that they're running things. . . . Pretend you still have to be discovered. Pretend the girls are in charge" (Munk 1997, 137). In this manipulative play of imagined choices, consumer demand is, at most, but *one* factor among many in production. As the March Hare in *Alice in Wonderland* explains, "You might just as well say that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like.'"

Thus, the media's horizon of choice conforms less to any natural audience demand than to managerial imperatives and corporate politics. Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that "there is the

agreement—or at least the determination—of all executive authorities not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all themselves” (1997, 122) is strikingly pertinent today. The content of what is produced must be within the ideological range and political interest of its producers. Purely market-based media naturally tend toward political conservatism. Consider the role of advertising. Advertisers routinely complain about contentious content and politically charged news coverage. Proctor and Gamble, for example, explicitly prohibits using its advertisements alongside programming “which could in any way further the concept of business as cold, ruthless, and lacking all sentiment or spiritual motivation” (quoted in McChesney 1997, 7). Likewise, S. C. Johnston & Co., for example, specifies that its advertisements “should not be opposite extremely controversial features or material antithetical to the nature/copy of the advertised product,” just as De Beers stipulates that its advertisements should not appear alongside “hard news or anti-love/romance themed editorial” (quoted in Klein 2002b, 39). When the media is beholden to the demands of advertising, it will favor programming that adds value to the advertised products. Basketball coverage sells sports drinks and running shoes, soap operas sell clothing and bathroom products. Horkheimer and Adorno recognized the dangers of advertising-based programming:

Today, when the free market is coming to an end, those who control the system are entrenching themselves in it. It strengthens the bond between the consumers and the big combines. Only those who can pay the exorbitant rates charged by the advertising agencies, chief of which are the radio networks themselves; that is, only those who are already in a position to do so, or are co-opted by the decision of the banks and industrial capital, can enter the pseudo-market as sellers. (1997, 162)

This logic applies equally to corporate-controlled music. As a Clear Channel executive who runs twenty-six stations in the Washington, D.C. area said in the *Washington Post*, “Every issue we discuss, every decision we make comes down to a simple test: Will it increase ratings and revenues? If it doesn’t let’s move on” (quoted by Gonzalez 2003). Lowry Mays, Clear Channel’s CEO, sums up this point of view: “We’re not in the business of providing news and

information. We're not in the business of providing well-researched music. We're simply in the business of selling our customers products" (<http://www.mediareform.net/fcc.php>). Just as tabloid news and entertainment is given preference over informed political discussion and debate, cost-effective and undemanding music is given preference over music designed to challenge. Music broadcast under the directives of cost and benefit calculations, seeking to optimize sales and the delivery of affluent audiences to advertisers, is not likely to include certain kinds of musical experiences and expressions. One fairly obvious example: lengthy pieces, which encourage sustained engagement, are unlikely to make the cut. Horkheimer and Adorno make the point in the context of the boredom/pleasure nexus: "No independent thinking must be expected from the audience: the product prescribes every reaction. . . . Any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided" (1997, 137). Likewise, musical programming encouraging listeners to make their own music outside of the commercial structures will be ignored. Musical literacy, in other words, does not add to commercial media income and hence will be discouraged under competitive market circumstances.

Negus points out, for example, that experimental or avant-garde music, along with jazz and classical music, are generally considered a bad investment, even if they are sometimes retained for the purposes of prestige and morale (Negus 1999, 48–49). *The Washington Post* reports, "in the last few years, Washington listeners have lost far more music choices than they have gained . . . jazz (WDCU was sold to C-SPAN, which uses the frequency as a prototype of a satellite-delivered national audio service); bluegrass (WAMU dropped much of its local music programming to serve up more news and talk produced for a national audience); and classical (WETA dropped some daily music offerings to simulcast news programs already heard on WAMU)" (Fisher 2003, B5). *The New York Times* reports that the days when unusual music or unknown bands might gain airplay through their own initiatives are over:

This sort of thing was still possible in the early 1980's, when an unclassifiable band out of Athens, Ga., called R.E.M. became hugely popular while barnstorming the country in a truck. R.E.M. forced itself onto the air without conceding its weirdness and became one of the most influential bands of the late 20th century.

Radio stations where unknown bands might once have come knocking at the door no longer even have doors. They have become drone stations, where a once multifarious body of music has been pared down and segmented in bland formats, overlaid with commercials. As record companies scramble to replicate the music that gets airplay, pop music is turning in on itself and flattening out. (Staples 2003, 12)

The illusion of multiple formats notwithstanding, therefore, the consolidated music industry is excluding swaths of possible music.

Also excluded are materials that the audience might choose to hear but that might stir controversy objectionable to advertisers. When Nathalie Maines, lead singer of the Dixie Chicks, announced at a concert in London in April 2003 that she was ashamed President George W. Bush came from her home state of Texas, KRMD, part of Cumulus Media, organized a CD-smashing rally in Louisiana. The radio chain then blacklisted the Dixie Chicks from its playlists (Marshall 2003). Two DJs at KKCS in Colorado were suspended for playing a Dixie Chicks song (Solomon 2003, 22). Prominent Clear Channel stations joined Cumulus Media in banning the Dixie Chicks from their playlists in April 2003 and simultaneously sponsored a series of pro-war rallies in various cities. (Following threats to themselves and their families, the band eventually made a humiliating public apology.) Clear Channel's intimate ties to the current Bush administration—CEO Lowry Mays is a personal friend of former president Bush, for example, and Vice Chair Tom Hicks is a member of the G. W. Bush Pioneer Club for elite and generous donors—exacerbate the inherent conservatism of the radio giant. Through veiled threats and invective directed at dissenting voices, Clear Channel promotes a conservative ideology and bullies its artists into acquiescence. Relatedly, the “catalogue value” of certain forms of rap music—with an antiassimilationist, aggressive post-civil rights stance—is generally considered short in comparison with conventional songs (Negus 1999, 93). The more adventurous and critical rap is thus steadily marginalized commercially as the genre gains market share (with marketable stereotypes like Nelly, Jay-Z, and Ja Rule). In other words, if music becomes too experimental or socially critical or its appeal falls too far outside of a narrow moneyed demographic, then its commercial production becomes precarious and unstable. Even rap

music is dependent on this demographic: sales figures indicate that 75 percent of rap albums are purchased by white male teenagers (Whalen 1994, 12).

Commercially driven controls on music making obviate experimentation and risk taking in the service of a simplified world of music. The economically calculated inclination toward stability, predictability, and containment results in stabilized, predictable, and contained musical commodities. It is true that musical production is a dynamic process, which often crosses aesthetic and demographic borders. It is also true that a degree of genuine novelty and stimulation is required to sell any musical product. In fact, music companies are vigilant about avoiding the inertia of an overly narrow focus on predictable hits. The demand for permanent renewal of musical styles feeds the commercial machine. As a result, edgy street styles (like the hip-hop of Run DMC), trendy psychological attitudes (like the ironic postmodern detachment of Beck), progressive causes (like Moby's endorsement of the basic rights of animals and homosexuals), and even antiestablishment political stances (like the Chomsky-inspired rage of Rage Against the Machine) have become lucrative investments in their own right. They have also become lucrative sites for mass-produced products. Moby, who licensed every track from his 1999 album *Play* for advertising use, advertised Levi jeans on painted walls in New York City; Rage Against the Machine publicly endorsed Wu-Wear, a clothing company and accessory company established by the Wu-Tang Clan (Negus 1999, 100); and, most famously, Run DMC's 1980s hit song "My Adidas" practically launched a new line of Adidas shoes—"designed to be worn without laces" (quoted in Klein 2002b, 75). The branding of independence and dissent has even become the subject of recent rock music. In the song "That's How Grateful We Are," Chumbawamba ironically proclaims, "They sell 501s and they think it's funny. Turning rebellion into money" (quoted in Klein 2002b, 77). This seeming proliferation of adversarial perspectives surely suggests a healthy "free market of ideas," but closer inspection of the evidence suggests otherwise.

First, their popularity notwithstanding, the "progressive" artists outlined above are relatively marginal in the world of commercial music. Chumbawamba or Rage Against the Machine, say, are not marketed and distributed with nearly the same financial resources

as, say, Britney Spears or Creed (now Alter Bridge). Second, record companies and radio stations tend to seek out “edgy” styles and ideas to systematize production on a mass scale, i.e., to manufacture cost-effective standardized versions of those styles for mass consumption. The trendy “buzz” on the street thus serves to endow bland and conformist music with an aura of authenticity, a new sound, a fresh set of values, an attitude. Once again, cultural critics may be uncomfortable reducing the politics of consumption to the acquiescent dimensions of a herdlike mass, yet this is precisely the way company executives think about their consumer base. Marcus Morton, vice president of rap promotion for EMI describes the process: “You have to have the DJs and the people that are the trend-setters. They kind of herd the sheep around. . . . And everybody else—y’know, if you look at the people that programme the cross-over stations, nine out of ten of them think that they are the hippest thing on the planet, but in reality they are not. They listen to somebody else” (quoted in Negus 1999, 98). Using well-developed mechanisms of persuasion, the music industry thus concocts a demand for ever-renewed pseudoindividualized sensation. Adorno explains:

[The industry] must arouse attention by means of ever new products, but this attention spells their doom. If no attention is given to a song, it cannot be sold; if attention is paid to it, there is always the possibility that people will no longer accept it, because they know it too well. This partly accounts for the constantly renewed effort to sweep the market with new products, to hound them to their graves; then to repeat the infanticidal manoeuvre again and again. (Adorno 2002a, 459)

The culture industry thus aims to optimize an ever-increasing cycle of commodity production and destruction. While changes in fashion are sometimes grounded in genuine sociocultural needs, most of the music produced in the ensuing style cannot answer to these needs. Necessarily, such music is drained of musical or social values that may transcend the contingencies of that style. So, musical expressions that encourage the discipline of imaginative concentration, for example, will not be marketed or promoted. The more deeply satisfying and rewarding to listeners such music turns out, the less it is in the interest of the commercial industry to produce

and promote it. With its exclusive focus on maximizing turnover through rapid-fire stylistic shifting, the industry favors music that will perish soon after it has been purchased. This is the mechanism that Horkheimer and Adorno called the “built-in demand to be discarded after a short while,” or, speaking more generally, the mechanism that Slavoj Žižek calls the “capitalist logic of waste and planned obsolescence” (2002, 6). Paradoxically, therefore, far from turning out musical novelty or transforming musical paradigms, the industry’s changing styles offer pseudonovelty—musical sensations contained in the rigid and uniform schemata of formatted music.

Obvious examples of musical bands conceived as prefabricated brands include the Backstreet Boys, ‘N Sync, the Spice Girls, All Saints, and so on. Of course, formulaic music is not itself a new development, as the example of Tin Pan Alley songs should suffice to attest. Nor is current music newly commodified. Instead, the current moment, while rooted in the past, elaborates new forms of commodification, which permeates the sound of *quality* musical acts with equal force. The new formulaic mediocrity on centralized mainstream radio is characterized by musical conformism increasingly integrated with conservative values. The Christian rock music circuit, for example, has flourished in recent years, especially in Texas. Columbia Records signed the Christian grunge band Switchfoot in June 2003; Chevelle was on Ozzfest 2003 (the summer hard-rock tour led by right-wing rocker Ozzy Osbourne); Evanescence’s album *Fallen* reached number three on the *Billboard* charts in early 2003; and Creed’s songs repeatedly appear in the Top 40 charts (Strauss 2003). Likewise, music that endorses conservative government policies gained considerable airplay in the years 2001–2004. Take the sound Clear Channel radio stations promoted during the Bush administration’s various antiterror campaigns following September 11, 2001. Radio playlists increasingly featured music conforming to the conservative agenda of the Bush administration, such as Darryl Worley’s “Have You Forgotten,” and “Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)” by Toby Keith, both of which explicitly promote administration-friendly politics (Nichols 2003b). This conservative promotional effort encourages musicians to conform to the demands of ruling-party politics. In the words of Bruce Springsteen, “The pressure coming from government to enforce conformity

of thought concerning the war and politics goes against everything that this country is about—namely, freedom” (in Nichols 2003b).

THE SOUND OF CORPORATE MUSIC: AN ADORNIAN ANALYSIS OF A RECENT HIT

Mainstream radio playlists increasingly feature homogenized, sanitized songs that sound more like they are created by carefully crafted public opinion polls than by an artist. The Website <http://hitsongscience.com> even offers a computer-based program that gauges a potential hit according to certain technical features. Recall the analyses of data from the charts conducted by the Future of Music Coalition. These indicate considerable playlist overlap between seemingly discrete formats. That study singled out the band Creed as an example of a band featured on many formats, including rock, hot adult contemporary, Top 40, alternative, and so on. Yet Creed’s musical and political sympathies reflect a fairly narrow conservative agenda: a certain brand of organized religion, mainstream family values, and patriotism. The acknowledgments on their *Human Clay* album, for example, begin by thanking God and their families; the Web page for the “With Arms Wide Open Foundation,” founded in October 2000 to nurture the wellbeing of children, sports an American flag blowing as if in a breeze, with the insignia “Our thoughts and prayers are with our American troops in Iraq . . .” (<http://www.witharmswideopen.org/default.cfm>). Creed’s conservatism cannot be reduced to institutional forces alone; nor can the aesthetic value of their music simply be reduced to commercial pressures. The authentic Christian origins of the band are well known, and few would deny the high quality of their sound. The analysis to follow is an attempt to demonstrate what *kind* of musical beauty is given pride of place in the consolidated media structures and to mark its aesthetic limits.

Adorno opens his essay, “The Radio Symphony: An Experiment in Theory,” with an aim to investigate “what radio transmission does musically to a musical structure” (2002a, 251). What are the structural features of Creed’s most popular songs? Musically speaking, Creed’s conservatism is neatly integrated with corporate values. Their massive 2000/2001 hit “With Arms Wide Open” (from the album *Human Clay*), for example, conforms precisely with the basic slow ballad

pattern articulated by David McDonagh of PolyGram as a recipe for success: two verse/chorus segments, a short guitar solo followed by a final verse, with more vocal intensity and less melodic contour, and a final chorus which dissipates the tension by withdrawing the musical instruments and focusing on the open-ended simplicity of the words of the title. The lyrics of the song also conform to the demands of record executives. Paul Moessel (producer at Warner Music Group) explains: "If you are writing an artistic song, you write from inside yourself. You say, oh, I don't know, 'My dog died today,' or something like that. But if it's a commercial song you look for uplifting things" (quoted in Seabrook 2003, 53). Thus, to a succession of regular chord changes in "With Arms Wide Open," the narrator (unambiguously male) sings of his tears and prayers at hearing the news that his wife is to give birth to his child (again, unambiguously male):

Well, I just heard the news today
 It seems my life is going to change
 I closed my eyes, begin to pray
 Then tears of joy stream down my face

and so on. The predigested structure of the song seamlessly undergirds the predigested representation of human relations, marked by idealized personalities in an idealized situation, with which the listener phantasmatically identifies. What rhythmic interest the song provides (in the form of a pronounced offbeat in the snare drum—mostly anticipatory, sometimes delayed—recurring around the second beat of each line) functions as the pseudodifferentiation that merely confirms the basic time. Conformist throughout, the song paints a procreative Christian scene, a story of a man and a woman, whose unsullied wish emerges in the predictable folds of the song's ballad structure. This happy embrace of form and content reassures the listener and affords him or her a temporary glimpse of an emotional-erotic-religious idyll. If we weep, however, it is probably because these ideal qualities are mostly missing in real life. Adorno likens this "emotional type" of musical response to the psychological operation of wish fulfillment: When audiences of sentimental music "become aware of the overwhelming possibility of happiness, they dare to confess to themselves what the whole order of contemporary life ordinarily forbids them to admit, namely that they actually have

The problem with this kind of musical detail, for Adorno, is that the “whole is never altered by the individual event and therefore remains, as it were, aloof, imperturbable, and unnoticed throughout the piece”; likewise, “the detail is mutilated by a device which it can never influence and alter, so that the detail remains inconsequential. A musical detail which is not permitted to develop its own potentialities becomes a caricature of its own potentialities” (2002a, 441). Indeed, pseudodifferentiating details permeate the textures of the entire song. The introduction, for example, sets forth a reassuringly familiar progression in steady primary chords: four beats of tonic, four beats of dominant, four of subdominant, and four of tonic again. Then the progression repeats. While the plagal, cadential character of the introduction probably conjures the spirit of Protestant hymnody, the unique affective dimension of this otherwise banal progression lies in the details of the melodic patterning. The offbeat meandering of the lead guitar in measures 1 through 4, that is, offers up a host of passing and neighboring tones, all of which are immediately resolved to their felicitous chord tones. While it is noteworthy that the melodic wandering generally avoids the root notes of its supporting harmonies, it is equally noteworthy how inconsequential this meandering turns out to be, how the nonharmonic tones obediently dissolve into and become harmonic ones. Thus one may speak of the diminished aspirations of the nonharmonic tones, or how the differentiations are resolutely contained by the demands of the ruling harmonies. In “On Popular Music,” Adorno describes this kind of situation in the context of commercial music’s “standard scheme”: “This scheme emphasizes the most primitive harmonic facts no matter what has harmonically intervened. Complications have no consequences. The inexorable device guarantees that regardless of what aberrations occur, the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced” (2002a, 438).

Where the song *does* break out of its controlling apparatus, in contrast, the music sounds strangely gratuitous. Take the way the guitar compensates for the awkward move from tonic back to tonic as the progression repeats (measures 4 and 5) by introducing a short sixteenth-note value on the first beat of measure 4. This reverses the basic note values of the hitherto thematized dotted-note figure. This

small reversal is marked by the *appoggiatura* effect—the first non-harmonic note in the song that falls on a strong first beat—and has brutal consequences in the sudden *fortissimo* power-chord syncopations of measure 8. Dynamic changes that come without warning turn out to contribute significantly to the music’s dramatic-emotional makeup, as we shall see. In measure 8 the stepwise feminine melodizing suddenly bursts into the unwarranted bravado of masculine power leaping to the tonic (from the relatively odd scale degree four). The unwarranted ferocity presents another side of the syncopation introduced in measure 4, as if the “same” rhythmic turn is abruptly caught, against its will, by the brute force of intensified desire. For all its blatant effort to contrast with the surrounding melodiousness, however, it simply hammers out more of that awkward tonic chord. Violence lurks beneath the surface veneer. This is the sound of frustrated desire, a doomed attempt to break out of a prepatterned progression through blind force alone. Interestingly, it is almost hurriedly withdrawn as the song moves into the verse in measure 9, like the raising of a clenched fist.

♩ = 72

When dreaming ... [etc.]

Although the harmonies in the verse then reduce to repeated oscillations between I and IV (measures 9 through 20), the contours of the singing voice, which recall the opening melodic meanderings of the guitar, lend the verse fluidity of movement. The potentially static harmonic situation is further offset by the avoidance of the root of the tonic in the melody of the verse, a mechanism that propels the melody onward. (Where the tonic root note does sound in measures 10 and 14, for example, it does so in the context of subdominant harmony.) There is a moment in the verse where the root note *is* supported by tonic harmony. This moment is, in fact, rather emphatic: as he sings of his “longing to escape” (from the life he

leads when he's awake [measure 17]), Scott Stapp's voice not only momentarily sounds the root of the tonic chord, but it reaches up to a higher register to do so. It is a strangely closeted moment: a brief vocal escalation, explicitly announcing a desire to break free, but paradoxically fastened to the security of the tonic's root. It is as if the music's gestures of release are shoehorned into the reassurance of ultranormativity.

♩ = 72

'Cause there's a hunger, a longing to escape ... [etc.]

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line. It consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The time signature is common time (C). The tempo is marked as ♩ = 72. The lyrics are "'Cause there's a hunger, a longing to escape ... [etc.]". The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, an eighth note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The bass line consists of a whole note F#3 in the first measure and a whole note G3 in the second measure.

What follows is another sudden shift into the deliberate rhythmic regression of a heavy-metal *topos* in measures 21 through 24. In Adorno's words, this passage would count as one of those "semi-independent episodes, organized mainly by their chronological succession" typical of radio music (2002a, 262). The prechorus passage, itself functioning to pseudodifferentiate the banality of the verse/chorus structure, recalls the blunt hypermasculinity of measure 8. Through the sound of power chords on repeated notes, first on F#, then on G, then back on F#, and so on, the singer's perspective shifts from longing to assertion, from "longing to escape" to "let's go there." Thus, dreaming becomes action by way of manly heavy-metal pounding, whose insistence finally gives way to the climactic chorus, a stirring sing-along outpouring of joy. The familiar I-V-IV-I progression is now telescoped into two measures—a device, once again, that promises variation (this time through the quickening of harmonic rhythm) but results in more of the same—and the vocal escalation turns around the tonic's root—a device, once again, that sacrifices a figure of liberation into the reassurance of the ultrafamiliar. It is in this paradoxically charged context of restrained freedom that the guitar elaborates the aforementioned pseudodifferentiating riff on the leading note: the music's "money note."

This is the sound of corporate music. Exuding an air of masculine bravado, photo-ready performers issue forth a formulaic pattern and, along the assured way, polish small bits of (expensive-sounding) fool's gold. In order to triumph in the market, therefore, a hit tune must combine a standardized formula with some arousing feature that makes the song seem new—a distinct rhythm, motive, an ornament. In the words of Adorno, “to be plugged, a song hit must have at least one feature by which it can be distinguished from any other, and yet possess the complete conventionality and triviality of all others” (2002a, 447). In truth, such music is an imitative echo of a predetermined message housed in a clichéd form. In “Higher” the deviations from the standard large-scale form merely function to prove the law of standardization. Instead of unleashing the usual guitar solo after two verse/chorus segments, for example, the song dramatically withdraws back into the femininity of the opening. Likewise, in the second half of the song, the chorus gradually takes pride of place as if to compensate for the formal ruptures through rapturous repetition. This is the pseudoshuffling of formal elements, the drama of the deviations made possible precisely by the rule of the standard structure. Relatedly, the technical polish of the production betokens the music's planned, predigested and already-integrated nature. Like the canned applause accompanying the commercial sitcom, such music “does the listening for the listener” (Adorno 2002b, 201).

It is ironic, but not coincidental, that Creed's highly constrained music gained extensive airplay across so many ostensibly diverse formats. Horkheimer and Adorno would call this “the semblance of competition and range of choice” (1997, 123). Far from reflecting the broad cultural expressions of different sectors of society, musical “diversity,” construed in terms of corporate formats, largely reflects a sound that squeezes the most revenue from the richest demographics, namely, the upper-middle-class male social sector. Far from freeing the musical imagination, such music sets the viewer's thinking straight. Thus, music's innate power to expand original thought is reduced here to an ideologically useful hook. As the media oligarchy's control of the world's sounds and images increases, the discipline of imaginative speculation required for musical concentration,

along with the antagonistic and diverse viewpoints required for genuine public debate, withers.

CONCLUSION: ON RESISTANCE

Yet there is mounting resistance. Independently minded musicians have attempted to move into unbranded cultural space. After encountering Klein's *No Logo*, for instance, Radiohead adopted a debranding strategy to release their album *Kid A* and thus performed in big tents without sponsorship (Klein 2002b, 47). Relatedly, to circumvent the bureaucratic stranglehold of the industry, a variety of artists wrote songs (including The Beastie Boys' "In a World Gone Mad," John Mellencamp's "To Washington," Ani DiFranco's "Self Evident," System of a Down's "Boom," and DJ Spooky's remix of Saul Williams's "Not in My Name") to protest the war in Iraq and made them freely available on the Internet (using MP3s and Real-Video streams). Many musicians seem to endorse musical distribution systems that are disconnected from the industry's fanatical devotion to the profit motive. Shawn Fanning, cofounder of the Napster Website, maintains that, with the exception of a few artists (Eminem and Neil Young, for example), the music industry overhyped popular musicians' antipathy toward free music downloads. On the contrary, Fanning claims, "almost all—maybe 99.9 percent—of [his] interactions with artists were positive" (Tapper 2002). Yet, following a lawsuit, the Website no longer provides free music and the industry aggressively clamps down on new file-sharing networks (like Grokster, Morpheus, and KaZaA). Students operating "mini-Napsters" on local campus networks, for example, were fined in April 2003 by the recording industry's trade organization (Harman 2003). Faced with increasing on-line piracy, the world's largest record companies are now financing the development of software programs that would sabotage the computers and Internet connections of people who download pirated music (Sorkin 2003). At the time of this writing, the Supreme Court accepted pleas from recording and film industries to decide whether on-line services that facilitate file sharing (Grokster and StreamCast) were themselves liable for copyright infringement (Greenhouse 2004).

Musicians are also voicing their concern about media consolidation. For example, in June 2003, the FCC approved new rules that permit still more media consolidation, including raising the cap on television station ownership (one company could now reach 45 percent of the nation's TV markets, and one company could now own more than three TV stations in one city) and lifting restrictions on cross-ownership between newspapers and broadcast stations. The American Federation of Musicians as well as the Future of Music Coalition voiced their disapproval. Scores of the nation's most well-known musicians—Ellis Marsalis, Patti Smith, Billy Joel, Neil Diamond, Jackson Browne, Tom Petty, Tom Waits, Bonnie Raitt, Thurston Moore (of Sonic Youth), Ray Manzarek (of the Doors), Michael Stipe (of REM), Don Henley (of the Eagles), Stevie Nicks (of Fleetwood Mac), Pearl Jam, and the Indigo Girls, to name a few—signed a letter to the FCC insisting that the commission delay enacting the six new deregulation rules in June 2003 (Nichols 2003c). DJ Professor even named his June 2003 show at the Beauty Bar in New York "Clear Channel Sucks!" Likewise, country singer Merle Haggard's recent song "That's the News" is a scathing attack on the role of corporate media in upholding instead of questioning the administration's position vis-à-vis the war with Iraq. As Tom Petty sings in his recent song "The Last DJ," "There goes your freedom of choice / There goes the last human voice / There goes the last DJ."

This view seems to be in sync with the population at large. Following an official hearing in 2003, for example, thousands of citizens condemned the FCC's proposed changes. In fact, of the eighteen thousand electronically filed public statements, 97 percent opposed more media consolidation (Nichols and McChesney 2003). In an ABC interview with Michael Powell, George Stephanopoulos questioned the commissioner about the broad public opposition to the new rules. Powell personally agreed with the public on how the public airwaves should be controlled. Yet, he cast his official tie-breaking vote against his personal position (Herbert 2003). Although the FCC ignored this tide of opposition and instead pressed forward with legislation that would further erode rules designed to prevent the growth of media monopolies, the enormous public outcry (punctuated by hosts of musical events protesting the decision), effectively pressured the Senate to reverse the FCC rulings in late 2003. Musicians

continue to voice their opposition: in December 2003, for example, artists including Billy Bragg, Tom Morello, Steve Earle, Lester Chambers, and Boots Riley performed in Washington to protest the monopoly in media. In early 2004 Congress advanced a 39 percent “compromise” ownership cap hidden in an omnibus bill, which was ultimately stalled a few months later when the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, in Philadelphia, ordered the FCC to reconsider its relaxation of such rules. To date, the issue remains hotly contested.

As can be seen, strategies of resistance are numerous: through a series of campaigns and drives, grassroots organizations have built coalitions and communities of dissent, which, in turn, have alerted the mainstream public and concerned politicians to the dangers of corporate consolidation of the mass media. These efforts are directed not only at state and local governments but also at the federal government. The 2004 pre-election period produced a range of musical activity in quest of political change. Especially noteworthy were the “Vote for Change” concert tour, sponsored by MoveOnPAC and spearheaded by Bruce Springsteen, along with REM, the Dixie Chicks, Pearl Jam, and others, to encourage young people in swing states to vote (and to vote against George W. Bush) as well as the “Vote or Die” campaign featuring musicians Sean “Puffy” Combs, Queen Latifah, Fifty Cent, and others. In 2003 and 2004 various rock musicians also contributed musically to independent documentaries critical of the mass media and other political developments: For example, Don Henley and Danny Kortchmar donated “Dirty Laundry,” and Eric Clapton and Jim Gordon donated “Layla” (performed by Derek and the Dominoes) to the makers of *Outfoxed* (a critical documentary about Fox News produced and directed by Robert Greenwald).

Furthermore, changing technologies of production and dissemination, no less than various intracorporate struggles, considerably complicate the Adorno-like “rhythm of the iron system” I have outlined above (Horkheimer and Adorno 1997, 120). The open-ended mobility of the Internet, for example, has produced new opportunities for musical production, distribution, and consumption, as well as new sites for political organization. Unorthodox, decentralized, Internet-driven

distribution methods are radically reshaping the music industry today. Hence, new legitimate on-line music services are constantly appearing as the record labels scramble for new business models. In 2003, for example, sales for record labels fell dramatically: Worldwide sales for Universal Music Group were down by 22 percent (Leeds 2003, C4), while on-line music sales, such as Apple's iTunes Music Store offering songs for ninety-nine cents, soared. Dozens of companies, including Sony and RealNetwork, opened on-line stores in 2004. At the same time, countless musicians use the Internet to get their music heard; Websites like www.besonic.com, www.dmusic.com, www.ragga-jungle.com, www.smart-music.net, www.classiccat.net, to name a few, offer musicians space to place their music on-line. Likewise, technological transformations have their impact: Blogging (whereby users share observations and opinions at a Website) has the potential to approximate a virtual forum or public space. Podcasting (whereby users share files from events, lectures, original music, and so on) has the potential to approach the condition of cost-free radio on demand. And satellite radio, although still not widely used or understood, has the potential to offer tailored stations for diverse musical expressions, as well as commercial-free news and information, to a global audience.

Still, these developments in the industry do not allay the silting of corporate power in various prominent quarters; thus the problem of music's ideological circumstances in the context of the mass media. FM radio, for example, remains America's most widely used medium for listening to music. Nothing in earlier history matches the scope and power of the cartel-like integration of corporate and governmental groups to permeate the social fabric of American society. With the technological capacity to surround most citizens with controlled images and sounds, the new state-corporatist oligarchy has the power to transform the cultural and political agendas of the United States and, increasingly, the world. The notion that unfettered commercial values are politically neutral must be contested lest commercial values retreat into mere carriers of political ideology. Concomitantly, while consumption involves a degree of subjective agency (liberated from the dictates of church, state, and so on), a focus on consumption alone as the site of agency must be

contested lest the increasing centralization of control in the arena of production triumphantly compel consumers to hear the right messages and buy the right products “even though they see through them” (Horkheimer and Adorno 1997, 167).

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