January 2013

Promotional Ubiquitous Musics: New Identities and Emerging Markets in the Digitalizing Music Industry

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Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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PROMOTIONAL UBIQUITOUS MUSICS: NEW IDENTITIES AND EMERGING MARKETS IN THE DIGITALIZING MUSIC INDUSTRY

(Spine title: Promotional Ubiquitous Musics)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Leslie M. Meier

Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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The thesis by

Leslie Marie Meier

Entitled:

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New Identities and Emerging Markets in the Digitalizing Music Industry

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Date ____________________________

Chair of the Thesis Examination Board
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the intensifying relationship between the digitalizing music industry and corporate brands. It analyzes the ‘crisis’ and recuperation of popular music’s commodity form in the digital era; in an increasingly post-CD music marketplace, it argues, ‘artist-brands’ tied to multiple revenue streams and licensed to brand partners constitute the foundation of music’s capitalization. Contemporaneous with key shifts in music marketing and monetization strategies, advertising firms have taken increased interest in branded entertainment strategies that employ popular music. These colliding commercial dynamics have produced a proliferation of what I term ‘promotional ubiquitous musics’: original music by recording artists used by consumer and media brands with the intent of promoting something other than the featured artist or music. The attendant collapse of popular music into marketing is interpreted through a neo-Adornian theoretical frame: it is argued that the ‘culture industry’ thesis assumes new and important relevance in the digital era, even as the ubiquitous circulation of diverse musics exemplifies post-Fordist flexibility. The instrumentalization of music under this branding paradigm has produced new levels of recording artist subordination and stratification, and has placed firm limits on popular musical expression. Deploying cultural and social theory and political economy, this critical analysis also draws on an interview program with executives at record labels, music publishers, advertising firms, and music supervision companies based in Toronto, New York City, and Los Angeles; rigorous tracking of trade press; and attendance at industry conferences.

Keywords: music industry; digital media; cultural industries; popular music; brands; advertising; promotional culture; digital capitalism; post-Fordism; Adorno
DEDICATION

For Liv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to my two supervisors, Dr. Jonathan Burston and Dr. Alison Hearn. Jonathan’s critical perspective and his tremendous dedication to my work have made my doctoral studies exceptionally rewarding. Alison’s significant contributions and advice have enriched and sharpened my thinking and my approach. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Matt Stahl for his incisive input on my dissertation research and for the opportunity to collaborate with him on related projects in addition. I would like to thank Dr. Norma Coates for her feedback and guidance over the course of my doctoral studies.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canada-U.S. Fulbright Program. This funding enabled me to expand my interview program to New York City and Los Angeles, and in so doing, to greatly deepen my research. I would like to extend my thanks to Dr. Ted Magder and New York University’s Department of Media, Culture, and Communication for my invaluable Fulbright exchange.

I am so very grateful to my family and closest friends. Thanks to my parents, Don and Judy Meier, my brother and sister-in-law, Ian and Karissa Meier, and my grandmothers, Nicki Soiseth and Kay Meier, for their steadfast support. I also want to express my gratitude to Melanie Preston, Jérôme Bertrand, Kerstin Cornell, Allyson Wiemken, and Em Rounding. Thanks also to my cat, Feather, who kept me company as I logged countless hours at home. Most of all, I wish to recognize my partner in all things, Liv Bonli.
My experience at Western’s Faculty of Information and Media Studies has been enriched by the faculty, staff, and students I have met. I wish to thank Dr. Sasha Torres, Cindy Morrison, and the many friends I made: Kyle Asquith, Brian Brown, Trent Cruz, Christopher Cwynar, Michael Daubs, Wendy Daubs, Raul Jose Feliciano-Ortiz, David Jackson, Owen Livermore, Vince Manzerolle, Jenn Martin, Jill McTavish, Henry Svec, and Geraldo Toledo Ramirez. Thanks also to my friends from Simon Fraser University, Naomi Perks and Ben Woo, and to Fulbrighters Maciej Kassner and Visnja Rogosic.

This work would not have been possible without the participation of my interviewees, who generously shared their thoughts, experiences, and time with me. I was provided with a one-of-a-kind education on the music and advertising industries.
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A&amp;R</td>
<td>Artists and Repertoire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCAP</td>
<td>American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2B</td>
<td>Business-to-business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBDO</td>
<td>Batten, Barton, Durstine &amp; Osborn; an advertising agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMG</td>
<td>Bertelsmann Music Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>Broadcast Music Incorporated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>Columbia Broadcasting System; record company division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCT</td>
<td>Consumer Culture Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Compact Disc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD-ROM</td>
<td>Compact Disc read-only memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>Corporate Social Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIY</td>
<td>Do it yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMI</td>
<td>Electrical &amp; Musical Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTC</td>
<td>Federal Trade Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFPI</td>
<td>International Federation of the Phonographic Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMG</td>
<td>International Management Group; a global sports and media business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>Music Corporation of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOH</td>
<td>Music on-hold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOR</td>
<td>Middle-of-the-road; a commercial radio format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP3</td>
<td>MPEG-1 Audio Layer 3; a compression form for digital audio files</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTV</td>
<td>Music Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>NARIP</td>
<td>National Association of Record Industry Professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARM</td>
<td>National Association of Recording Merchandisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>National Broadcasting Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2P</td>
<td>Peer-to-peer</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPD</td>
<td>‘Publishing Price to Dealers’; wholesale price used to calculate royalties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R&amp;B</td>
<td>Rhythm &amp; Blues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCA</td>
<td>Radio Corporation of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIAA</td>
<td>Recording Industry Association of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCAN</td>
<td>Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRLP</td>
<td>‘Suggested Retail List Price’; formerly used to calculate royalties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synch</td>
<td>Synchronization rights for licensing music for use in audiovisual media</td>
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1 POPULAR MUSIC AS UBIQUITOUS PROMOTION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

1.1 Introduction

These big brands want to be ubiquitous. They want to be absolutely everywhere, and because they’re ubiquitous, people don’t react to it anymore…. I think people are becoming more and more and more desensitized to the corporate branding. At the same time, I think that makes the corporation’s job more difficult, because it just becomes background noise. You just tune it all out…. The big corporations, in order to get noticed, … they’re now finding the cool, indie cultural things that have a hip value to them. (I/Danzig 2009)

Music, it seems, to be worth something right now, requires a purpose…. The aesthetic should be free. (I/advertising creative director 2009)

The digital production, distribution, and promotion of media content have thrust both the music and advertising industries into a new era. After years of stalling and deferment, the recording industry has at last embraced the legal digital music marketplace. In the meantime, however, the pervasiveness of peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing has sparked a period of music industry reorganization (Leyshon et al. 2005; Burkart and McCourt 2006). The coupling of P2P with the proliferation of web-enabled smartphones, tablets, and other convergent media devices has triggered a host of changes in listening practices and purchasing habits, forcing the music industry to experiment with new business models. The addition of music streaming services, social media, and online digital media stores (e.g., iTunes) has rendered popular music an exceedingly abundant, instantaneously accessible, and ubiquitously available ‘self-serve’ cultural commodity.

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1 Throughout this dissertation, I use the I/ format to indicate sources drawn from my interview program.
While the recording industry argues that illegal file sharing has contributed to a ‘crisis’ in record company profitability, the emergence of a burgeoning market for licensing popular music and recording artist personae for use in films, television programs, television commercials, video games, and other branding contexts is far less acknowledged. The opening credits to television programs *Weeds* (2005- ) and *Parenthood* (2010- ) are accompanied by Malvina Reynolds’s “Little Houses” and Bob Dylan’s “Forever Young” respectively, while *House* (2004-2012) opens to “Teardrop” by Massive Attack and *Mad Men* (2007- ) to “A Beautiful Mine” by RJD2. Canadian rock band Barenaked Ladies were hired to write and perform the theme song for the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* (2007- ). Popular songs also are woven throughout numerous programs. *Gossip Girl* (2007- ) and *Grey's Anatomy* (2005- ) are notable for their use of original recordings by independent and lesser known artists, and *Glee* (2009- ) and *American Idol* (2002- ) for their cover versions of top hits. In video games, popular music is not only a key feature of music games such as *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, but also many others, such as *FIFA, MLB The Show*, and *Tony Hawk Pro Skater*, which include songs by artists ranging from Johnny Cash to Grandmaster Flash to Gorillaz. Advertisers, meanwhile, have taken a growing interest in the promotional value of popular music and recording artists. According to independent music executive and *Exclaim!* contributor Allison Outhit,

Like so many doe-eyed Jerseys, musicians are the dairy cows of the business…. But one of the most lucrative by-products isn’t the music itself but rather the personality or “brand” of the artist. Musicians are cool. Some of them are mysterious, some sexy, and some just good fun – all emotional values that can be used to sell all sorts of things to all sorts of people. (Outhit 2008)
No longer the sole domain of ‘lifestyle’ brands (e.g., Converse), ‘indie’ artists “are now peddling life’s less-sexy products,” including detergent brand Cheer, health insurance company Cigna, and hardware franchise Lowe’s (Beltrone 2012) among many others.

Unlike the recording industry, advertisers have eagerly followed in the footsteps of consumers who have actively participated in the migration from old media to new—and for good reason. In the words of the Toronto-based advertising creative director quoted above (who requested anonymity), thanks to digital media, advertising today is

much, much more targeted and it’s going to get much, much more targeted, to the point where we’re going to know their name [laughing]. Minority Report is real…. We could always geo-target to a degree, but with the information we gather online, we can tell you exactly who’s living somewhere, … exactly what email you should be sending them, or send them an email when they’re pregnant and send them a different email after they’ve had their baby. So we can target their lifestyle, their behaviour, the music they like, the movies they watch … to a degree we couldn’t really fathom fifteen years ago. (I/advertising creative director 2009)

The branding potential of popular music – online and offline – is a part of this bigger marketing picture. According to Swedish brand communication agency Heartbeats International, which specializes in branding with music,

The same digital technology that changed the music industry is changing advertising as we know it. In a world where everyone is connected all the time and customers are in charge of the remote control, the rules of communication have transformed…. Music branding … offers a strategic way to reach consumers in ways that traditional advertising can’t. (Heartbeats International 2009, 5)

In contradistinction to the self-serve music marketplace customized to individual preferences and tastes, then, there also has been the explosion of music not chosen by audiences, but chosen instead by consumer brands and media properties. The
democratization of musical taste enabled by digital distribution has been mirrored by increasingly invasive tracking, targeting, and, arguably, conditioning of that taste.

In a culture of ‘free’ digital media content, the recording industry has become dependent on business-to-business (B2B) licensing agreements with brand partners to counter-balance declining compact disc (CD) revenues. As a result of these reconfigured industrial dynamics, the music industry has become increasingly intertwined with other cultural industries, especially advertising. This dissertation examines the political, economic, and cultural ramifications of popular music’s subsumption by brand worlds.

1.2 Key Concepts and Terminology: Branded Entertainment, Music Branding, and Promotional Ubiquitous Musics

This dissertation examines how the promotional agreements and partnerships forged between music companies, consumer brands, and various media properties position popular music as a form of branded entertainment or ‘advertainment’, defined by June Deery as “programming designed to sell as it entertains” (Deery 2004, 1). On a basic level, marketers regard branded entertainment as product placement within media texts and branded sponsorship of live events (Elliot 2010a). More grandiosely, they claim it is part of “a fundamental transformation from an intrusion-based marketing economy to an invitation-based model” (Donaton 2004, 3). This decisive shift, advertisers argue, offers “the opportunity to recreate an emotional link with a consumer, for whom the brand has often lost its legitimacy over recent years” (Lehu 2007, 238). Advertiser boosterism aside, content partnerships between consumer brands and
entertainment properties have emerged as a standard component of the marketing toolkit. They reflect a response to changing media consumption patterns and habits, namely the new forms of evading or ignoring advertising messages enabled by digital media and devices. Brands are “hungry for credible content” (I/advertising creative director 2009) and want to be placed “in content … in a cool and relevant way” (I/Tunnicliffe 2010).

The prevalent licensing of popular music is a product of this shift. Today, popular music is seen as an instrument for lending brands cultural relevance and for grabbing audience attention. As advertising executive Mike Tunnicliffe explains,

 BRANDS find it increasingly difficult to reach consumers…. We’re on the computer. We’re on the Blackberry…. We’re not really watching conventional TV commercials anymore…. A very good way to get them [consumers] engaged is to tap into what they’re really interested in, and they’re quite often really, really, really interested … in music. (I/Tunnicliffe 2010)

The licensors of popular music under consideration here do not regard music solely as a device for creating a desired mood or atmosphere within a media text or physical space, as is the case with standard incidental music, film scores, and elevator music – musics typically intended to reside in the background and often specifically tailored to those particular texts or contexts. Instead, the brands examined in this dissertation take the process one step further; they seek to capitalize on feelings associated with popular music by marrying them to targeted marketing strategies. Popular music functions as a device used to make marketing more inviting – even desirable. Brands’ interest in music is rooted in its ability to overcome audience distraction, signify a type of cultural authenticity, and emotionally connect with listeners, and all at a very low price.
One term used to characterize the strategic use of music by brands, as distinct from more conventional uses of music in films, television programs, and video games, is ‘music branding’. Also known as ‘sonic branding’, ‘sound branding’, and ‘audio branding’, music branding refers to the use of music or sound to reinforce a ‘brand identity’: the way a brand wants to be perceived by consumers. Note that while music branding terminology is used primarily by executives who specialize in this practice, it has also penetrated the larger advertising world to a certain degree. While not unprecedented, music branding – in principle if not in name – is becoming a more commonplace and more multi-platform practice. John Groves, a pioneer in this approach, cites 1995 as the first year that he “was paid specifically for consulting and advising about the process of creating a Sound Identity and not just music production” (Groves n.d., 1). In the years since, there has been a growing recognition amongst many marketers that taste in music is related to identity formation, and that this link can be mined in efforts to build and capitalize distinctive brand identities.

Today, music branding is not simply a matter of licensing music for use in advertising campaigns, although this does remain a core component of music-related branding strategies. The strategic music-consulting world is currently advising brands to use particular types of music or ‘sound identities’ as a means of uniting the many platforms used to communicate particular brand identities. While the “emotional powers of audio have long been understood to add storytelling value to a marketing initiative,” audio branding company Elias Arts claims, music’s unique power lies in ability to function as “connective tissue” (Elias Arts 2011). Music in television
commercials, podcasts, retail spaces, and music on-hold (MOH) heard by telephone callers all must be united by a common thread to present a coherent sound of the brand. More than “an audio logo or brand soundtrack,” according to branding specialist Marcel de Bie, “sonic branding is the totality of the sonic experience” (in Khicha 2008). The strategic choice of the popular music inserted within media texts and retail spaces is used to connect virtual and ‘bricks-and-mortar’ brand experiences.

Today, consumer brands and media properties position themselves as curators of playlists. As Anahid Kassabian points out, since the early 1990s, we have seen radical changes to the specific types of in-store music used by retail and coffee franchises:

First of all, it now mainly – though not exclusively – consists of original artists. Second, it often includes percussion and vocal tracks, which were previously considered undesirable in music in retail space. Third, the range of materials has stretched well beyond the local and familiar. Fourth, in the US at least, it has become an important way of advertising brand names, with retail chains from Sunglass Hut to Jiffy Lube … to Victoria’s Secret … producing compilation CDs to sell in their stores. (Kassabian 2004, 209)

By the late 1990s, Muzak, the progenitor and namesake of modern elevator music, had switched from its characteristic use of instrumental arrangements of popular songs to the licensing of original recordings by recording artists (D. Owen 2006). Fashion chains such as H&M and Roots have featured live DJs at their Toronto locations, thereby tightening the links between brand, in-store environment, and sound identity. A similar ‘curatorial’ trend can be identified within television programs, commercials, and video games. Throughout the past decade, in fact, popular music ‘placements’ within

---

2 Amid media fragmentation, we have also seen the rise of ‘audio logos’ – brief aural hooks designed to be “[m]ore concise than a theme song and subtler than a jingle” (Jurgensen 2012). These “memory trigger[s]” (I/Nygren 2009) are typically two- to five-note melodic figures that do not include slogans, as in the case of the one-second Rogers Communications and three-second Intel audio logos.
these media texts have been pitched as the ‘new radio’ – especially to independent and lesser known artists who have been frozen out of mainstream promotional channels, such as commercial radio and MTV (Klein 2009, 59-60).

When placed in advertisements, media properties, or retail spaces, however, popular music assumes a decidedly different role than it does on radio. In many cases, songs are played in abbreviated form, reduced to choruses or ‘hooks’ in order to achieve the maximum ‘catchy’ effect quickly. Furthermore, rather than promoting itself, this music serves a purpose similar to jingles or elevator music. Popular music becomes ‘functional’ music, defined by Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher as

all prerecorded and programmed sound systems used in commercial and industrial contexts. By ‘functional’ music, we mean music used principally to support and encourage some other primary activity, whether the production and consumption of goods and services or the reproduction of social and symbolic order in public spaces. While recognizing that all music has cultural and social functions, we use the term ‘functional’ in this context to apply to music whose primary goals are utilitarian. (Jones and Schumacher 1992, 166; emphasis in original)

When this utilitarian music is used as a means to achieving brand objectives, its raison d’être is promotion. According to Andrew Wernick, promotion is “a species of rhetoric. It is defined not by what it says but by what it does, with respect to which its stylistic and semantic contents are purely secondary, and derived” (Wernick 1991, 184).

If the popular music used in media and commercial spaces, in effect, is promotion, then it is important to ask what such musics do. Jonathan Sterne argues that “[p]rogrammed music in a mall produces consumption because the music works as an architectural element of a built spaces devoted to consumerism” (Sterne 1997, 25). I contend that ‘promotional ubiquitous musics’ function in the same way.
Kassabian uses the term ‘ubiquitous musics’ to describe those musics inserted into films, television programs, commercials, video games, and other media, on phones, and in retail stores, which are “neither chosen by their listeners nor actively listened to in any recognizable sense” (Kassabian 2002, 131). It is fitting that in coining the term ubiquitous musics, Kassabian took her cue from Mark Weiser’s (1991) term ‘ubiquitous computing’; today, ubiquitous listening and ubiquitous computing have merged, with the mobility characteristic of both allowing for seamless integration into everyday life. Drawing on Kassabian, I introduce the term ‘promotional ubiquitous musics’ to designate consumer brands’ and media properties’ use of music by recording artists for the specific purposes of: 1) grabbing the attention, 2) fostering the affection, and/or 3) capturing the affect of ‘desirable’ target markets. The key distinction between promotional ubiquitous musics and ubiquitous musics rests on the instrumental, calculated, and deliberate character of the promotional uses of the musics I examine. Whereas “ubiquitous listening” suggests “a kind of ‘sourcelessness’” (Kassabian 2002, 137), the modes of listening encouraged by promotional ubiquitous musics, in my account, clearly reflect strategic decisions made by a specific source: brands.

The term promotional ubiquitous musics speaks to the pervasive circulation of songs and hooks by recording artists in various promotional contexts, whose ubiquity across media and commercial sites works to erase distinctions between previously discrete musics such as incidental music in television programs, films, and video games, jingles in advertisements, and functional/programmed/elevator/background music in commercial spaces. Promotional ubiquitous musics encompass all of these interlinked
phenomena, and result in the saturation of both media and physical commercial environments by original popular music that abides by a primarily promotional logic.

Note that throughout this dissertation, I use the term ‘popular music’ not to describe a particular genre (e.g., pop music), but rather as an umbrella term that designates all those popular genres (e.g., pop, rock, hip-hop, R&B, country, electronica, ‘world’ music) produced as commodities within the commercial music system. It refers to music that songwriters and performers record as ‘tracks’ and albums, either under contract to record labels or independent of record label participation altogether, with the intent of 1) selling in the music marketplace and/or 2) giving away for free for the purposes of promoting live performances and merchandise. This commercial popular music, as distinct from art and folk musics that remain outside the market system, is the product of an industrial process. As Simon Frith explains, the dictates of industry shape such popular music from its inception: “The industrialization of music cannot be understood as something which happens to music, since it describes a process in which music itself is made – a process, that is, which fuses (and confuses) capital, technical and musical arguments” (Frith 1988b, 12; emphasis in original). I situate the transformation of popular songs into promotional ubiquitous musics not as a simple dynamic of capitalist ‘cooptation’ or incorporation. Instead, coupling Frith’s account of popular music with Tiziana Terranova’s analysis of digital capitalism, I understand such popular cultural forms “as originating within a field that is always and already capitalism” (Terranova 2013, 38).
Amid the music industry’s digital transition, however, this process of industrialization has become miniaturized and unmoored from corporate control. It is now possible for recording artists to independently produce and market recorded tracks from personal laptops or tablets virtually anywhere. In other words, the means of commodification are now more accessible. At the same time, the exchange value of such sound recordings has proven unstable, spurring changes in how music companies think about popular music’s commodity form and, hence, how they extract surplus value from working artists.

1.3 Arguments

The advertising and music industries have begun to merge as a result of the political, economic, technological, and cultural shifts that have accompanied the digitalization of the cultural industries. Changes in media consumption practices have forced both record label executives and advertisers to rethink the ways they conceptualize, appeal to, and monetize (i.e., convert into money) their target markets. As a result, executives at music companies now speak the language of consumer brands, while their counterparts at advertising firms speak the language of entertainment and culture. A key product of these colliding promotional strategies has been record labels’

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3 This merger of business strategies and practices across the advertising and music industries has been facilitated, in part, by the cross-sector migration of knowledge, expertise, and personnel across these industries. Given that music company staffs have been radically slashed in reaction to the recording industry’s ‘crisis’ of monetization, and that cuts to advertising budgets in the wake of the 2008 recession have produced increasingly precarious employment conditions for advertising professionals as well, we have seen employment boundaries become increasingly porous across these industries. Many of my interviewees have experience in both the music and advertising businesses, and while a career trajectory beginning in music and leading to advertising is typical of such executives, I also interviewed executives who first honed their skills as advertisers before finding opportunity within the music business.
reconstitution of the core popular music commodity as an ‘artist-brand’ to be licensed to brand partners, rather than a sound recording.

This dissertation argues that the marriage of new branding strategies and new music monetization strategies has produced a proliferation of what I term promotional ubiquitous musics: original music by recording artists deployed by brand partners with the intent of promoting something other than the recording artist or music itself. Following Jones and Schumacher (1992) and Adam Krims (2007), I locate the shift from advertisers’ use of homogeneous background music (e.g., Muzak) and jingles to more targeted and diverse musics within the shift from Fordist to post-Fordist capital accumulation strategies, as examined by David Harvey (1990), autonomist Marxists (Lazzarato 1996; Virno 2004), and others. This dissertation contends that a complex interplay of Fordism and post-Fordism is typified in the digitalizing music industry’s capitalization strategies. On the one hand, new talent contracting conventions, such as 360-degree record deals, point to a Fordist tightening of control over cultural production, yet the spread of fragmented niche markets catering to varied musical tastes exemplifies post-Fordist flexibility. I point to two seemingly contradictory, but in fact complementary, logics at work: a decentralization of music’s production process at the periphery and a recentralization of corporate power at the core. While we see considerable music production ‘from below’ in the new recording industry, much of music’s monetization still comes ‘from above’.
The overall purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate how the complex interaction between advertising and popular music under the new music industry model reflects not simply a merger between brand worlds and music worlds, but rather a colonization of the latter by the former. I maintain that the proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics, and attendant collapse of popular music into marketing, affirms the relevance of Max Horkheimer’s and Theodor Adorno’s ‘culture industry’ thesis to the digital era. Inside post-Fordist capitalism, ‘difference’ itself has emerged as a type of cultural currency to be exploited by brands. Musical diversity, I contend, has become a new site of standardization, producing an overall effect of cultural homogenization and flattening. In the words of Horkheimer and Adorno, “Culture today is infecting everything with sameness” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 75) – even if the specific music used may vary. Or, as argued more recently by Steven Shaviro (who, it should be noted, distances himself from Adorno’s theories),

The proliferation of variations, and of consumer choices, is underwritten by a more fundamental homogeneity. Money and credit make it possible for anything to be exchanged with anything else. In the realm of digital media, binary code functions in a similar manner. Everything can be sampled, captured, and transcribed into a string of ones and zeroes. This string can then be manipulated and transformed, in various measured and controllable ways. Under such conditions, multiple differences ramify endlessly; but none of these differences actually makes a difference, since they are all completely interchangeable. (Shaviro 2010, 133; emphasis in original)

With promotional ubiquitous musics, the effect, not the content, is what matters; so long as the overall ‘feel’ complements the brand’s strategy, the music itself is substitutable. Crucially, the brands devise the strategies, select the music, and dictate the rules.
1.4 Theoretical Frame

At the most general level, ‘critical theory’ can be described as knowledge that aims at reducing domination. In contrast to (social) science, which aims at a value-free, ‘objective’ view of the world, critical theory begins with the normative proposition that domination ought to be reduced or even eliminated, and pursues knowledge to that end. (Biro 2011, 3)

The dissertation develops and deploys a neo-Adornian framework to examine the emergence of popular music as promotion. Given the historical distance between Adorno’s culture industry and the digitalizing cultural industries, it may seem counter-intuitive to advocate the relevance of Adorno to the study of the contemporary music industry; he died in 1969, long before the digitization of media content turned the top-down administration of culture on its head. To be relevant to the post-Fordist era, an Adornian framework must be supple enough to account for the undeniable diversity, complexity, and aesthetic merits of capitalist cultural production. By designating my approach as neo-Adornian, I signal the fact that I do not follow a strict, orthodox interpretation of Adorno’s theory and criticism. Instead, my theoretical frame also draws on more recent critical scholarship, especially Andrew Wernick’s (1991) analysis of ‘promotionalism’, David Harvey’s (1990) research on ‘flexible accumulation’, and the ‘cultural industries’ approach to critical political economy, in order to adapt Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s culture industry thesis to the contemporary context.

While the digitalizing music industry looks very different from the music industry examined by Adorno, his scholarship still provides a rich resource for understanding the constraints that capitalism as such places on cultural production. “In regimes of flexible accumulation and just-in-time production,” according to Krims,
“enormous inequalities in power (including but not limited to wealth) may not just be consistent with, but even may depend on, the stylistic, ethnic, and geographic mobility and diversity that pervade the current sphere” (Krims 2007, 102-103; emphasis in original). Popular music studies, he asserts, “must track the profound changes in capital and its urban forms in order to get past the ghost of Adorno into a more versatile, complex, and, above all, contemporary Marxism” (Krims 2007, 126). While I agree with his account of cultural diversity and industrial complexity, in contrast to Krims, I contend that neo-Adornian critique assumes renewed significance under a flexible but volatile capitalism capable of capitalizing on difference. In “Stars Down To Earth,” a content analysis of a Los Angeles Times astrology column, Adorno gestured to the “sales value” of “rare” qualities: “Being different … is integrated into the pattern of universal sameness as an object of barter. Individuality itself is submerged in the process of transformation of ends into means” (Adorno [1953] 1994, 113). Likewise, as popular music is transformed into a means to achieve the end of promotion, difference as such is subsumed by the principle of exchange.

Importantly, the onus is on critical researchers to “try to become aware of the ideological imperatives and epistemological presuppositions that inform their research as well as their own subjective, intersubjective, and normative reference claims” (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005, 305-6). By developing a theoretical frame in the critical traditional of the Frankfurt School, I assume the position not of a ‘disinterested’ researcher, but instead of a researcher invested in examining and ultimately reducing domination, as Biro suggests above. The research questions pursued and corresponding
arguments advanced in this dissertation are tied to these political priorities. The critical analysis I develop, however, is supported by rigorous engagement with accounts provided by music industry and advertising professionals themselves; ‘insider’ insights corroborate and elaborate on the marketing trends central to my arguments.

1.5 Research Methodology

While the collapse of previously perceived boundaries between the logics of capital and those of cultural production has been widely theorized (Jameson 1991; Wernick 1991; Lash and Urry 1994; Lash and Lury 2007), empirical research on the corresponding aestheticization of consumerism has not been nearly as extensive (Lury 1996). This dissertation combines both approaches. Given that the music and advertising industries had been undergoing important periods of change, I sought business executives’ and experts’ accounts of how these shifts were affecting actual business strategies and operations. Thus, my analysis is based on data drawn from 1) interviews with music and advertising industry executives, 2) my attendance at numerous music industry conferences, and 3) a variety of print sources. My fieldwork enabled me to sidestep the unavoidable publication lag time characteristic of the academic press, and to analyze key changes as they were actually happening.

When developing my research plan, I took my lead from the argument put forth by Andrew Leyshon et al., which likewise draws on industry interviews:

[M]usic has become an increasingly important part of the infrastructure of capitalist society, and is now an essential crutch to all manner of acts of consumption. But, significantly, this development has actually served to weaken the music industry as popular music is decreasingly valued for itself, but is,
instead, increasingly valued more for the ways in which it is consumed in relation to other things. (Leyshon et al. 2004, 183; emphasis in original)

The research methods employed enabled me to take this assessment a step further. I demonstrate why and how popular music is routinely consumed alongside other media and sites, and identify root causes of popular music’s unstable monetary value beyond ‘piracy’. Significantly, the data generated also reveal the decisive ways that the major music companies since have responded to the threats posed by digitalization, and have successfully restored healthy profits and, hence, media power.

I first began tracking changes in the relationship between the music industry and branding in my Master’s thesis, titled “In Concert: The Coordination of Popular Music, Youth Practices, and Lifestyle Marketing.” It examines the growth of “pop star conglomerates” who hawk their own fashion and perfume lines (e.g., Hilary Duff) and the emergence of “not-so-struggling independents” who have successfully leveraged choice licensing agreements with advertisers (e.g. Feist) (Meier 2006). I have a Bachelor of Commerce with a specialization in marketing, an educational background that has proven fruitful in my studies on popular music and branding; after observing nascent industry trends, I return to the marketing ideas that inform and motivate them before developing my analyses. When I expanded my focus to promotional ubiquitous musics for the purposes of this doctoral research, however, the causes and contours of what amounts to a vast range of promotional agreements proved more elusive than the more closed set of examples I had previously examined – especially against a backdrop of continual music industry change. I developed a comprehensive interview program
involving those executives who forge these agreements in order to access firsthand accounts of their purposes, structures, and wider implications.

I. Interviews

Between April 2009 and August 2011, I conducted interviews with executives who work for record companies, music publishers, advertising firms, sound branding firms, and music supervision companies (see the recruitment email, letter of information and consent, interview guide, and ethics approval forms in Appendices A, B, C, and D, respectively). Almost all of these executives were based in Toronto, New York City, and Los Angeles – key North American cities that operate at the heart of both the music and advertising industries. I conducted seventeen interviews in the United States and nineteen interviews in English-speaking Canada for a total of thirty-six interviews. Specifically, my interviewees include executives at: major record labels (I/Canadian major record label executive A 2009; I/Canadian major record label executive B 2009), independent or smaller record labels (I/Potocic 2009; I/Yannopoulos 2010; I/independent label licensing executive 2011); artist management companies or divisions (I/Tobias 2009; I/Martin 2010; I/White 2011); independent music consulting firms (I/Grierson 2010; I/Outhit 2009); major music publishers (I/Ferneyhough 2009; I/Campanelli 2010); independent music publishers (I/Beavis 2009; I/Quinlan; I/Jansson 2010); music supervisors (I/Fritz 2009; I/Hayman 2009; I/Coffing); music libraries (I/Kenzer 2010); advertising firms (I/advertising creative director 2009; I/advertising strategist 2011; I/digital marketing project manager 2011; I/Dryden 2011; I/mobile

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4 Music supervisors are those executives responsible for selecting and clearing the rights for music licensed for use in television programs, commercials, films, and video games.
cross-media agency CEO 2009; I/lifestyle advertising account executive 2011; I/Tunnicliffe 2010); music branding firms (I/Nygren 2009; I/Gutstadt 2011; I/sound branding executive 2010); a video game publisher (I/director of licensing at video game publisher 2010); a music magazine publisher (I/Danzig 2009); a digital media marketing company (I/Koren 2009); a public relations firm (I/Kuruvilla 2009); an entertainment law firm (I/Canadian entertainment attorney 2011); a firm that offers legal blanket licenses for digital music content (I/Hoffert 2009); and the CEO of the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada (SOCAN) (I/LeBel 2010). Most but not all of these interviews are cited in this dissertation. The insights I gleansed from each interview, however, have helped me understand the broader industrial context in which music branding agreements are made and the specific dynamics of those business relationships and deals. I necessarily prioritized certain themes over others for the purposes of this dissertation, but will take further advantage of this fertile interview data in future publications.

All interviews were semi-structured in free format, and were conducted face-to-face in all cases but one, which instead involved a telephone interview. I worked from a common interview guide, which I modified slightly, depending on the interviewee’s area of specialization (see Appendix C). I let interviewees expand on the topics of most relevance to their work and their thinking, rather than letting a script dictate how each theme was covered. This decision was a product of my belief that “free-format questioning generates richer data. Interviewees articulate their thoughts and opinions on their own terms rather than in relation to preordained response structures, which
means there is more opportunity to explore complex and sensitive social and personal
issues” (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, and Murdock 1999, 68). I did not want to close
off productive, and sometimes unexpected, areas of discussion and explanation.

I make no claims of developing an exhaustive and representative sample of any
particular business. Rather, my wide sampling of professionals involved with
connecting recording artists and brands provided the on-the-ground perspectives
necessary for me to paint a picture of a larger promotional system comprised of various
interlinking businesses, each with an overlapping interest in popular music. To
accomplish this research objective, I sought breadth; an exclusive focus on one party
(record labels or advertisers or music supervisors) at the expense of the others would
not have allowed me to achieve this wider understanding. Also, when interviewing
these executives, I did not seek to uncover an objective account of the relationship
between popular music and branding per se. Instead, I wanted to understand the
business relationships behind, the work that goes into, and these professionals’
perceptions of these pairings. Such a strategy allowed for the richest data and provided
me with multiple ways into my own analysis of the subsumption of popular music by
brands.

This thesis is not about the interviews. Rather, as experts in their fields, my
interviewees substantiated, explained, and provided key examples of the business trends
central to my research. This fieldwork, in other words, was necessary groundwork. I
recognized that interviews alone would not enable me to avoid receiving self-serving
responses from the above parties, however; selling pitches is one of the tools of the
Therefore, I weighed this interview data against findings drawn from music industry conferences and key trade publications.

II. Industry Conferences

To deepen my knowledge and understanding of the system that produces promotional agreements between recording artists and brands and the logic behind it, I attended numerous music industry conferences that featured panels on this topic. These events served as opportunities for professionals to advocate and exchange business ideas and to network with one another; they entailed knowledge dissemination coupled with self-promotion. I attended the following conferences, whose emphases ranged from the touring business to artist management to popular music used in video games:

- North by Northeast Interactive, June 15-18, 2011, Toronto, ON.
- National Association of Record Industry Professionals (NARIP) Music In Games, March 9, 2011, New York, NY.

I also purchased audio from conference panels hosted by NARIP from www.narip.com and streamed panel discussions hosted by South by Southwest for free at sxsw.com:
• How brands are using emerging music to reach consumers. Conference panel at South by Southwest, March 17, 2011, Austin, TX.

• Advertising IS the new radio! Conference panel at South by Southwest, March 15, 2012, Austin, TX.

• Bringing artists and brands together: Dealmakers speak out. Conference panel at NARIP: Bands, Brands & Beyond, November 15, 2010, New York, NY.

• View from the top: The ad agency angle. Conference panel at NARIP: Bands, Brands & Beyond, November 15, 2010, New York, NY.

My interest in these conferences was twofold: to learn about these businesses based on the information, ideas, and debates featured; and to observe the power dynamics governing different relationships, especially between aspiring artists and the brands, record labels, and music supervisors that offer different business opportunities to artists. I assumed the position of both student and critic. These events, which featured business executives speaking amongst peers and doling out advice to aspiring artists, offered surprisingly candid accounts of the ways that music companies and advertisers view working artists. My third method of enquiry enabled me to crosscheck and expand on my interview and industry conference data.

III. Print Research and Political Economy Analysis

I rigorously tracked and analyzed coverage of music industry and advertising trends in general, and the relationship between popular music and branding in particular, in a wide variety of newspapers and industry, financial, and trade publications. I regularly consulted music and entertainment publications Billboard,
Digital Music News, Rolling Stone, and Variety; technology publication Wired; advertising publications Adweek, Advertising Age, and Media Week; business publications Wall Street Journal, Businessweek, and Forbes; and the New York Times and Time magazine. These print sources offered me important industry figures and details about music licensing and endorsement deals, and interviews, analysis, and commentary on new ideas and opinions about marketing and the monetization of music more broadly.

In addition to examining the use of popular music for the purpose of branding, my political economy analysis investigates persistent dynamics of corporate consolidation inside the music industry, the proliferation of new music products, and changing talent contracting conventions. Along with the sources cited above, this analysis is informed by transcripts of investor conference calls (as published by stock market website Seeking Alpha and CQ Transcriptions, LLC), independent market research reports, and music companies’ own corporate websites, which feature information on investor relations, corporate structures, and various business products. I also consulted legal journals, academic marketing and consumer research journals, and specialist music industry handbooks, such as Don Passman’s All You Need to Know about the Music Business, which features detailed descriptions of royalty shares and rights. Mirroring my interview and conference programs, the breadth of my archive speaks to the diverse range of parties involved in, or affected by, the promotional deployment of popular music.
1.6 Description of Chapters

The primary arguments regarding the recording artist-brand relationship and the emergence of promotional ubiquitous musics, as discussed above, are advanced in the following chapters, which also elucidate a number of additional key arguments. 

**Chapter 2** provides a comprehensive literature review of critical research relevant to the study of popular music’s use as promotion. It surveys and engages with core debates within consumer culture studies, and considers the relationship of this area of research to popular music studies. Promotional ubiquitous musics, in my account, straddle these two distinct but related areas of enquiry.

**Chapter 3** revisits and provides an in-depth analysis of Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s ‘culture industry’ thesis and its legacy within both cultural studies and the political economy of communication. This critical legwork lays out the foundation of the neo-Adornian frame through which I examine promotional ubiquitous musics – a conceptual lens that is further delineated in Chapter 6. These musics are a product of instrumental rationality; popular music’s deployment as promotion is a consequence of its commodity form and, hence, the drive to maximize profits. Similar to the popular music analyzed by Adorno, promotional ubiquitous musics both reflect and reproduce inattentive or ‘deconcentrated’ listening practices. These musics are bound up with the forms of consumption and, hence, cultural homogenization produced by global brands.

**Chapter 4** first contextualizes the music industry’s digital transition by way of a ‘cultural industries’ analysis of the competitive logics and corporate structures that supported and defined the ‘old’ music industries. It then provides an overview of the
sweeping changes that have enveloped the music industry in the twenty-first century. It draws on field interviews, industry conference panel discussions, and trade press coverage to analyze the political-economic and technological conditions that have made licensing agreements with media and consumer brands so important to record companies, music publishers, and aspiring artists hungry for marketing exposure. The chapter makes the central argument that the ‘artist-brand’, not the sound recording, is the core popular music commodity today. It examines the increasing costs of entry associated with music marketing, not music making, in a cluttered marketplace; the explosion of new music products and licensing agreements; the emergence of the artist-brand construct; the institutionalization of 360-degree recording contracts; and an overall wave of industry-wide consolidation, involving recorded music, music publishing, live promotion/concerts, retailing, and artist management. It identifies an unfortunate consequence of the increased access to music recording and distribution technologies that so many have called a ‘democratizing’ phenomenon: more artists are competing for fewer dollars in a market still dominated by the major music companies.

Chapter 5 offers a history and in-depth analysis of the intensifying relationship between recording artists and corporate brands. It draws on marketing literature, the trade press, field interviews, and industry conference discussions to trace early uses of popular music in advertising through to today’s strategic business partnerships. The chapter outlines the rationales behind the use of music as a branding vehicle and documents popular music’s colonization by brands through these ever-tightening promotional arrangements. It then spells out the consequences of these developments
for working artists and for popular musical content itself: brands’ drive for cost-savings actively works against fair remuneration for aspiring and non-star artists; and advertisers’ bias toward happy sentiments and, therefore, upbeat music actively works against popular musical diversity. Overall, the chapter argues that commercials, television programs, and video games do not constitute the new radio, as is often suggested, but instead function as new gatekeepers of music’s promotion. This analysis is by no means intended to suggest that the old music system, which was more fully controlled by major record labels, was more advantageous to working artists. Instead, it identifies the new challenges and dynamics of domination inherent to the brand-driven promotional system; as artists become dependent on corporate brands for revenue and exposure, those brands have the power to dictate the terms of this relationship.

Taking into account the developments examined in Chapters 4 and 5, Chapter 6 argues for the relevance and renewed importance of the ‘culture industry’ thesis to critical analysis of the digitalizing music industry and to promotional ubiquitous musics. It advances a neo-Adornian critical framework that incorporates important contributions from literature on post-Fordist cultural production. Counter to the argument that Adorno’s claims are best suited to analysis of the more rigid industrial/manufacturing capitalism, it argues that the domination produced by commodification per se also applies to a more supple capitalism predicated on the commodification of information, media, and signs. In fact, post-Fordism’s flexible production methods and marketing techniques are even better able to adapt to changing consumer tastes and attitudes than their Fordist predecessors. While popular music is always already industrialized and
commercial, the proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics exemplifies the acceleration and intensifying logic of capital accumulation under neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism. Drawing on Martyn J. Lee’s (1993) terminology, I nominate promotional ubiquitous musics as an ‘ideal-type’ commodity form under post-Fordism. Crucially, the instrumentalization of popular music under the contemporary branding paradigm speaks to new levels of subordination for popular musical expression and creative cultural work. I illustrate these dynamics in a concrete way by examining new music supervision software geared around the classification and targeting of affects.

**Chapter 7** summarizes central research findings and arguments, elaborates on the consequences of the new relationship between popular music, media properties, and consumer brands for working artists and for cultural production, and highlights key considerations for future research.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW: POPULAR MUSIC, ADVERTISING, AND CONSUMER CULTURE

2.1 Introduction

Because ‘promotional ubiquitous musics’ comprise a hybrid and polymorphous research topic, it has been a challenge to clearly delineate which swaths of critical literature are most germane to their study. Popular music’s integration across various mediascapes and brandscapes is a product of changing business strategies in two distinct industries: 1) the recording industry, where an increasing reliance on endorsements and licensing agreements is now viewed as a means of restoring profitability; and 2) the advertising industry, where an increasing interest in partnering with recording artists is now a standard means of insinuating brands more deeply into the spaces of expressive culture. This shift from the more generic sounds associated with ‘muzak’ and jingles to original songs by recording artists spurs numerous analytical questions regarding how this phenomenon ought best to be framed. Should promotional ubiquitous musics be conceptualized as an advertising or popular musical trend? Should collapsing institutional boundaries between the music industry and other cultural industries – especially advertising – be interpreted as a product of the deepening logic of commercialization that has always enveloped industrialized popular music? Should it instead be seen as an instance of the “culture-ification” of the advertising industry (Lash and Lury 2007, 9)? The hybridity of promotional ubiquitous musics does not simply speak to a blending of the cultural and the promotional; although they still operate sonically as music, albeit often in abbreviated and hook-
based forms, their function is primarily as marketing communications. Promotion colonizes culture.

Because promotional ubiquitous musics are commodities whose content is cultural, but whose intent is promotional, I situate them within consumer culture literature. However, I also take into consideration relevant popular music studies literature and the non-critical advertising research that informs marketer interest in popular music. I conceptualize the media and commercial sites now saturated with popular music not as isolated phenomena, but as part of a larger commercial-cultural whole affected by common political-economic shifts. Therefore, I retain Theodor Adorno’s argument that the discrete industries that comprise the ‘culture industry’ ought to be conceptualized as a whole – albeit with some modification, as will be explained in Chapters 3 and 6. It is also important, however, to account for the specificities of distinct cultural industries. The criteria that govern the selection of popular songs suitable for advertisements, for instance, differ from those used in the selection of popular music for film. Therefore, in this literature review, I also direct the reader to literatures specific to the use of music in particular media.

In section 2.2, I begin with a brief overview of accounts of early historical precedents for the promotional deployment of popular music. Then, in section 2.3, I survey literature that focuses on popular music's integration into other media and branding platforms. In order to contextualize this particular phenomenon within larger critical and cultural debates, in sections 2.4-2.7, I introduce the field of consumer culture studies and then review three distinct approaches: 1) neo-Marxian perspectives
on the production of consumption; 2) sociological perspectives on modes of consumption; and 3) anthropological, literary, and historical perspectives on the pleasures of consumption. I also consider theories of affect relevant to the conceptualization of popular music as a branding tool. Given that brands’ interest in popular music hinges on its ability to convey meaning, confer distinction, and signify difference or even opposition, I explore debates regarding meaning making, ideology, and the subversive potential of popular music-driven expressive culture.

2.2  

**Industrial Origins: Commodified Popular Music as Promotion**

Music has assumed varied commercial and promotional functions since the nineteenth century, even before the advent of recording. In the Victorian music-hall era, popular music was produced as a commodity, both as live performances by professionals and as sheet music. Then as now, a star system was central to popular music’s promotion. On the one hand, star music-hall performers were positioned as inaccessible and individual. The glamour and individuality of star personalities, who were “assiduously promoted by impresarios, agents and the press,” were sources of ‘added value’ within this system (Baxendale 1995, 139). On the other hand, popular music still remained accessible, participatory, and communal. Within music-hall, “song was just one element in a mixed bill of entertainment, which might include comedy, juggling, acrobatics, magic, animal acts,” explains John Baxendale, “[b]ut music had a particular contribution to make, through its ‘singalong’ factor, to the general ambience of the halls, which was part of what customers were paying for” (Baxendale 1995, 139). The importance of this ‘singalong’ factor from a music industry perspective was
dictated by popular music’s commodity form as sheet music; the requirement of selling sheet music to the amateur pianist and singer meant that catchy, melodic, and relatively simple tunes were most saleable (Baxendale 1995, 138-39). Hook-based, memorable songwriting, then, has long been seen as a ‘sound’ business strategy.

The cross-promotional ‘piggy-backing’ with star musicians common today also dates back to the Victorian era, when the persona of P. T. Barnum client Jenny Lind (nicknamed the ‘Swedish Nightingale’) was used to brand merchandise ranging from dolls, dresses, and hairstyles to cigars and sausages (Wallis and Malm 1988, 268). During this era, aggressive advertising was a means not only to publicize tours and performances, but also to transform entertainers into celebrities.\(^5\) The marketing savvy of notorious ‘show business’ entrepreneur Barnum is particularly notable; he exploited what marketers now refer to as ‘promotional mixes’ by using a combination of newspaper advertisements, sandwich-board carriers, posters, street banners, and handbills to market his attractions (McFall 2004a, 169). In something of a precedent for product placement, it was not uncommon for music-hall performers to ‘puff’ the wares of particular tradesmen during performances (McFall 2004b, 116).\(^6\)

With the introduction of sound recording, the culture of music consumption shifted away from live performance and, as a result, the relationship between popular music and promotion was also altered. Music continued to assume the role of what

\(^5\) The pervasiveness of the promotion of star singers is captured by the popular musical hall song “Sammy Slap, the Bill-sticker” (a bill-sticker being one whose job was to paste up posters and bills): “There’s Jenny Lind, I’m proud to say, sweet music’s great adorner, I’ve had the honor of posting her in every hold and corner; Alboni, too, so nice and plump, I’ve stuck her up, that’s certain, And I’ve plastered Mrs. Mowatt right on top of Billy Burton” (The Canteen Songster 1866).

\(^6\) According to McFall’s research, “Published comment on advertising over-exposure, as well as strategies for cutting through the clutter, can be traced as far back as the eighteenth century” (McFall 2004a, 51).
could arguably be characterized as novelty attraction, however. Indeed, while Thomas Edison’s phonograph, introduced in 1888, was initially conceived of as a dictating device, it proved

more successful as a coin-operated ‘entertainment’ machine, a novelty attraction (like early cinema) at fairs and medicine shows and on the vaudeville circuit. And for this purpose ‘entertaining’ cylinders were needed. Columbia took the lead in providing a choice of ‘Sentimental’, ‘Tropical’, ‘Comic’, ‘Irish’ and ‘Negro’ songs. (Frith 1988b, 13-14)

Recorded music, deemed a means to the end of demonstrating the marvels of this audio hardware, was used as a device to promote Edison’s phonographs and his competitor Emile Berliner’s gramophones. By the 1920s, however, records “ceased to be a novelty” (Frith 1988b, 15). Instead, the record emerged as the music industry’s core commodity, eventually displacing sheet music.

The pervasive circulation of popular music enabled by the phonograph and radio rendered the act of listening to music less novel, special, and significant. Music consumption became ordinary. These technologies “brought the experience of a life accompanied by music to most Americans” (D. Goodman 2010, 38). By converting popular song from attraction to accompaniment or background, they also altered the character of listening; it became less attentive and more “casual” – even “distracted” (D. Goodman 2010, 41). According to Adorno, this industrialized music system bred “deconcentrated listening”: “All that is realized is what the spotlight falls on – striking melodic intervals, unsettling modulations, intentional or unintentional mistakes, or whatever condenses itself into a formula by an especially intimate merging of melody and text” (Adorno [1938] 2002a, 305). This casual mode of listening was particularly
advantageous to advertisers who sought to use musical hooks to grab and then transfer potential customers’ attention to consumer goods.

Indeed, the business world saw the potential for musical accompaniment to add entertainment and ambience to the advertising and shopping experience. In the United States, the use of music in advertising dates back to the dawn of radio broadcasting (Kellaris, Cox, and Cox 1993, 114; Taylor 2012, 2). During the 1920s, corporations sponsored entire musical programs, and in a precursor to the radio jingle, some used distinctive theme songs (Taylor 2012, 26, 74). Initially termed the “singing commercial” during the late 1930s, the stand-alone jingle had become a standard feature of radio advertising by the 1940s, a period during which the jingle also found a home on early American television (Taylor 2012, 80, 90-98). The jingle’s function was straightforward. These upbeat tunes “should be a pleasing and intriguing form of sugar-coating the advertising pill,” in the words of Alan Bradley Kent and Austen Herbert Croom-Johnson, two jingle writers from that era (in Taylor 2012, 99).

In contrast to explicit pitch of the jingle, the music used in retail spaces assumed a more indirectly promotional function. While live music had been used to create desirable (or consumer desire inducing) atmospheres within early twentieth-century department stores, keeping pace with technological change, these stores switched to the ‘canned’ sounds of muzak in the mid-1930s (DeNora and Belcher 2000, 82). The shift from live performance as foreground music to muzak as background music involved a transition from in-store music as “overt ‘entertainment’ to more subliminal ‘ambience’” (DeNora and Belcher 2000, 82). This music circulated in both work and
shopping environments. In David Goodman’s account, the standardized background music produced by the Muzak company, founded in 1934, “played a part in normalizing the experience of background distracted listening to music” overall (D. Goodman 2010, 41). The Muzak formula produced a homogeneous soundtrack: “Muzak’s programs, from their inception, consisted of tight rearrangements of standard popular songs as well as classical and light dance music. Care was taken to remove any unique or potentially distracting rhythmic, melodic, or harmonic features found in the original versions” (Jones and Schumacher 1992, 160). Concentrated listening, after all, might impede the impulse to shop or detract from worker productivity. Effective muzak added ambience whilst remaining largely unnoticed.

As popular music receded into the background in retail spaces and radio advertising, with the rise of sound films (or ‘talkies’), it assumed a new prominence in film. While the film score is designed to be a background accompaniment, the addition of popular songs to motion picture sounds speaks to a complex negotiation between background and foreground, ambience and entertainment; various types of listening and engagement are summoned. By raising the profile of the featured artist among moviegoers, popular music’s inclusion also functions as a medium for marketing music.

Popular music’s cross-promotional link with film was initially forged to bolster sheet music sales. As Jeffrey Paul Smith points out, “Although the term synergy is of more recent vintage, the idea that film music played an important economic function within the industry goes back at least to the early 1910s,” during which time exhibitors featured “song slides and singers as special attractions in their programs” (J. Smith
The tie-in between Tin Pan Alley publishers and Hollywood was gradually formalized between the 1920s and the 1940s, during which time the movie musical – and, hence, film music by the likes of George and Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart – was en vogue (J. Smith 1998, 30-31; Toynbee 2002, 150). Cross-promotion across the music and film industries laid the foundations for the launch of stars such as Rudy Vallee and Bing Crosby – actor-singers whose broad appeal could be capitalized in both industries.

Such cross-media promotion carried on unabated in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1954, *Billboard*'s June Bundy characterized the marketing tactic in the following way:

Publishing firms dominated by motion picture interests have latched on to a new gimmick to push their movie tunes this year, thereby creating some new problems for artist and repertoire men and recording talent. The gimmick, a two-way promotion, calls for a top artist to record the title-tune from a new movie to be used as a prolog to or background for the film. Then, when the picture is released, the diskery is expected to release the record at the very same time. (Bundy 1954, 12)

For the most part, “middle-of-the-road (MOR) artists were used to crosspromote [sic] films and records” (Denisoff and Romanowski 1991, 10). In 1955, however, *Blackboard Jungle*, featuring Bill Haley and His Comets’ version of “Rock Around the Clock,” became the first film to use rock ‘n’ roll in its soundtrack. Returning to a ‘safer’ sound, two versions of Henry Mancini’s “Moon River,” a song written for *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961), cracked *Billboard*’s Hot 100 (Bundy 1961, 2). The viability of this type of cross-promotion overall motivated a tie-up between motion picture companies and radio (Bundy 1961, 2).

In the years since, blockbuster successes have ranged from the *Saturday Night
*Fever* (1977) soundtrack, for which the Bee Gees composed original songs, to Celine Dion’s “My Heart Will Go On” from the *Titanic* (1997) soundtrack, to the rock-filled *Twilight* soundtracks today. While the long held practice of two-way promotion between film and popular music has spanned a wide range of genres and target audiences, from the music industry perspective the logic has remained the same: to increase record sales. A similar motivation is behind the younger trend of inserting original popular songs into television programs, advertisements, and video games. In Chapter 5, I build on the groundwork laid here and provide an historical overview and analysis of these newer practices.

Today, cross-media promotion or music licensing is the ‘common sense’ way of doing business from the perspective of major and many independent record labels alike. “Whereas once [licensing] was perceived as simply gravy and maybe a good opportunity to pursue,” states Toronto-based music supervisor Amy Fritz, “it has actually now become, I think, a part of their core business” (I/Fritz 2009). Mindful of the early historical precedents discussed here, and of David Hesmondhalgh’s advice not to overstate change at the expense of continuity, I situate the proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics as part and parcel of the “extension and gentle acceleration of the long-term process of commodification of culture” (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 301). Cross-media promotion is not a wholly new phenomenon; it is a business practice that has moved from the periphery to the centre.

The identification of historical precedents, however, is no substitute for detailed analysis of the different rationales behind and varied consequences of adopting similar
strategies in different historical circumstances. “Is it new?” is a less compelling question than asking how elements of the current historical context render the relationship between brands and recording artists more significant. Despite the continuities with the past outlined above, I propose that the notably tight contemporary relationship points to more sweeping changes in the current context, wherein:

1. Sales of CD albums and of sound recordings more broadly are declining due, in part, to the mass adoption of digital production, distribution, and promotion methods and corresponding shifts in how people listen to music; and
2. Corporate brands are exploring more emotion-based, cultural, and lifestyle-oriented marketing strategies in an effort to break through promotional clutter, speak to consumer ‘identity projects’, and compete for cool.

Having situated this promotional relationship historically, I now turn to scholarship relevant to the study of popular music and branding in the contemporary context.

2.3 Studying Popular Music as Promotion

Because the topic of music’s integration within other media and physical spaces is of interest to scholars in the fields of communication and media studies, sociology, social and cultural anthropology, musicology and ethnomusicology, and marketing, approaches to the study of promotional uses of popular music vary widely. In the following, I provide a brief survey of work that resides within various disciplinary camps. While at first glance there appears to be a dearth of research on popular music’s promotional functions, by compiling research drawn from distinct scholarly
perspectives and methodologies, I am able to construct and frame a research ‘whole’ relevant to what I conceptualize as promotional ubiquitous musics.

In their mapping of extant research on music (though not exclusively popular music) in television commercials, Danish communication scholars Nicolai Graakjaer and Christian Jantzen observe that advertising music is not only under-researched, but that existing research on the topic is fragmented: “It is striking that new contributions almost never quote previous ones” (Graakjaer and Jantzen 2009, 14). This lack of research continuity, in fact, obscures the fact that a body of research on advertising music – albeit small – has quietly grown over the past half century. Graakjaer and Jantzen identify a total of eighty-four contributions written by English, German, and Scandinavian scholars and published between 1966 and 2008, but observe that because much of the non-English literature has not been translated into English, it is seldom cited within English publications; this, in turn, “generates the impression of a field of research that perpetually starts all over again” (Graakjaer and Jantzen 2009, 14).

Upon reviewing existing literature on music and advertising, it becomes apparent that non-critical marketing research dominates the area (for overviews of existing advertising research, see Bullerjahn 2006; Oakes 2007). Also, in Graakjaer and Jantzen’s (2009) literature review, fifty-one of the eighty-four contributions cited reflect musicological traditions that focus on textual analysis of music’s forms, functions, and meanings. Textual analyses of music in advertising are overrepresented vis-à-vis studies of production, audiences, media, and social contexts. Musicologist Timothy D. Taylor’s (2007, 2009, 2012) work, which bridges musicology with critical perspectives
on the production of consumption, is an important exception to the dominant text-based approach. Given my interest in revisiting Adornian critique, it is notable that “almost all” of the German contributions (Ritscher 1966; Motte-Haber 1972a, 1972b, 1973; Fehling 1980; Schmidt 1983; Gertich and Motte-Haber 1987) Graakjaer and Jantzen cite are critical. Many employ Marxian ideology critique and Freudo-Marxian analysis of ‘false needs’ – a type of research that the authors’ comprehensive survey suggests “apparently went out of fashion in the late 1980s” (Graakjaer and Jantzen 2009, 21).7

After broadening the scope of research from music in advertising to popular music in popular media and physical spaces, a growing critical literature emerges (although these works typically do not employ neo-Adornian critical frameworks). Communication and media studies research examines the integration of popular music, as opposed to music writ large, in the following media and spaces: television advertisements (N. Cook 1994; Graakjaer and Jantzen 2009; Klein 2009); film (J. Smith 1998; Lapedis 1999; Wojcik and Knight 2001; Inglis 2003); television programs (Donnelly 2002; Fairchild 2011); video games (Collins 2008); mobile phones (Uimonen 2004; Gopinath 2005; Wang 2005); commercial or retail spaces (Jones and Schumacher 1992; Sterne 1997; DeNora and Belcher 2000; Kassabian 2004; Lanza 2004); experiential, youth-focused branded events (Moor 2003; Carah 2010); and sonic branding more generally (S. Goodman 2010; Powers 2010). Note that the use of popular music to promote something other than music itself marks a decided departure

7 Interestingly, within musicology more broadly, as opposed to musicological analyses of advertising music, Adam Krims finds much the opposite: “Until the end of the 1980s mainly shunned as overly speculative and reliant on old-fashioned idealist philosophy, Adorno has undergone what must have been one of the most stunning rehabilitations in musicology” (Krims 2007, 89).
from the use of audiovisual media to promote particular singles: music videos (Kaplan 1987; Goodwin 1992; Frith, Goodwin, and Grossberg 1993; Banks 1998; Vernallis 2004); and, prior to the MTV era, live performances and hit parades on television (Wolfe 1985; Hill 1991; Burns 1998).

Consulting literature that addresses not only advertising music, but all popular music that assumes ostensibly promotional functions across mediascapes and brandscapes, results in a large and unwieldy body of research material. Yet, many of the works cited above do not share my emphasis on the critical political economy of communication and cultural labour. Next, by situating the study of promotional ubiquitous musics within the discipline-traversing field of consumer culture studies, I work to bring what is an initially broad and varied literature into sharper focus. After providing an introductory survey here, in Chapter 3 I offer a more detailed discussion of the culture industry thesis and the specific critical tradition on which my analysis draws.

2.4 Introducing Consumer Culture Studies

Consumer culture is probably less a field (which evokes the steady tilling of a well-marked patch of productive land) and more a spaghetti junction of intersecting disciplines, methodologies, politics. (Slater 1997, 2)

Consumer culture studies shares much in common with popular music studies. Both topics fall within, but also extend beyond, the fluid disciplinary boundaries of communication and media studies. The disciplinary tensions between cultural studies and the political economy of communication that colour the study of popular culture also inform the study of consumer culture: political and philosophical disagreements
surface regarding the links between the capitalist production of goods and services (cultural or otherwise), the construction of meaning, and the degree of agency exercised by consumers or participants. Both fields take seriously the possibly manipulative and empowering dimensions of personal and collective tastes, but popular music scholarship is arguably more uniformly sympathetic to audience consumption practices (the diverse body of work that addresses popular music audiences ranges from subcultural theory [e.g., Hebdige 1979] to studies on imaginative fans [e.g., Lewis 1990]). Consumer culture studies, on the other hand, is marked by conflicting perspectives on the relationship between the economic and the cultural, and, correspondingly, the degree of autonomy exercised by cultural labourers and audiences.

First, I would like to underscore Hesmondhalgh’s reminder that the tendency to set up political economy and cultural studies as rival approaches to the study of culture is not only unproductive, but inadequate for the purposes of describing what is, in fact, a more diverse conceptual and methodological terrain – one which also includes radical media sociology, empirical sociology of culture, and liberal-pluralist communication studies (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 44-47). Second, given that the Canadian communication studies tradition as a whole is more amenable to explicitly Marxian perspectives than is its American counterpart, I assert that any tensions between Canadian critical political economy and cultural studies need not be crippling. While critical theory is arguably foundational to both approaches (Babe 2009, 18, 66), Frankfurt School-influenced theories regarding alienated labour, commodity fetishism, and manipulated consumption – or, better, self-deception – are often situated in opposition to
Birmingham School-inspired theories (neo-Gramscian, Althusserian, semiological, and otherwise). Debate pivots on the role of cultural texts and practices in identity formation, meaning making, and everyday life. While the latter body of work typically ascribes considerably more agency to the media audience than the former, it is uncommon to find apologists for the corporate production of culture in either camp.\(^8\)

While we have seen new interdisciplinary approaches and an increasingly global scope within consumer culture studies since the publication of the first edition of British sociologist Mike Featherstone’s *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (1991), his original schematization of the dominant approaches still holds for the most part and provides a helpful framework for guiding the following overview: neo-Marxian perspectives on the production of consumption; sociological perspectives on modes of consumption; and anthropological, literary, and historical perspectives on the pleasures of consumption (Featherstone 1991, 14-26). I will address these approaches in turn.

\(^8\) However, there is a body of work within the broader study of consumer culture that borrows from critical research, but is a champion for big business: marketing literature. Historically, the study of consumer behaviour has largely consisted of applied psychology. The field of motivational research that emerged in the 1950s, for instance, entailed applied Freudian psychoanalysis (Ernest Dichter’s [1960] research was pioneering in this area), and marketing research on the reinforcement of positive and negative product associations continues to cite its debt to B.F. Skinner’s (1938, 1953) behaviourist theories on instrumental/operant conditioning (Solomon, Zaichkowsky, Polegato 2002, 85, 186). Since the mid-1980s, however, interpretivist paradigms that place emphasis on social and cultural factors, including the “experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 868), have gained traction within marketing research. Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson use the term ‘consumer culture theory’ (CCT) to describe a body of marketing research that draws on the research of Arjun Appadurai (1990), Clifford Geertz (1983), Pierre Bourdieu (1990), Mike Featherstone (1991), and other notable sociologists and anthropologists to theorize the relationship between cultural meanings, consumption, and everyday life (Arnould and Thompson 2005). The field of CCT (Holt 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 2002, 2004; McCracken 1986, 1990, 2009; Sherry 1983, 1991, 1998) places complex questions regarding the relationship between consumption, meaning, and identity centre stage, albeit typically non-critically. As Hesmondhalgh rightly cautions, CCT “shows some striking similarities with what I am here calling the dominant conception of music, emotion and self-identity. It emphasises the active reworking by consumers of meanings encoded in consumer products and the use by these consumers of cultural resources to ‘produce’ their own identities” (Hesmondhalgh 2008a, 341).
2.5 The Production of Consumption: Neo-Marxian Perspectives on Consumer Society

The time is past when advertising tried to condition the consumer by the repetition of slogans; today the more subtle forms of publicity represent a whole attitude to life: if you know how to choose you will choose this brand and no other … [Y]ou are totally and thoroughly programmed, except that you still have to choose between so many good things, since the act of consuming remains a permanent structure. (Lefebvre [1971] 1984, 107)

Contrary to the broad strokes with which some of its critics paint this tradition, neo-Marxian perspectives on the production of consumption are far from homogeneous. In this dissertation, I focus on Adorno and the Frankfurt School rather than attempting to account for the breadth of these and other neo-Marxian perspectives. Frankfurt School-inspired perspectives and debates are undergoing somewhat of a revival within cultural theory, social theory, and philosophy (see D. Cook 1996; Nealon and Irr 2002; Gunster 2004; Burke et al. 2007; Holloway, Matamoros and Tischler 2009). Within dominant media and cultural studies approaches to the study of popular music, neo-Marxian perspectives are scant (for a key exception, see Krims 2007), and as such are absent from this overview.

Frankfurt School scholarship conceptualizes capitalist consumption as instrumental and escapist. In this account, the consumption of commodities (cultural or otherwise) works to mollify the exhausted labourer during his or her ‘free’ time and effectively dulls the imagination: “The customers of musical entertainment are themselves objects or, indeed, products of the same mechanisms which determine the production of popular music. Their spare time serves only to reproduce their working capacity. It is a means to an end” (Adorno [1944] 2002d, 458; see also Adorno [1969] 2005a). Under the constraints imposed by capitalist labour conditions, having the time and energy to be fully engaged and to think critically becomes a luxury. Fear of unemployment contributes to social conformity, and, hence, “[a]lienation is reproduced by anxiety” (Adorno [1966] 1973, 190). While the pleasures of popular music or film may alleviate the frustrations associated with workplace exploitation and social
alienation, the release provided by them actually works to stifle and contain dissent. As Adorno argues in “On Popular Music,” emotional music provides “catharsis for the masses, but catharsis which keeps them all the more firmly in line” (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 462). The medicinal function of amusements, in effect, contributes to the reproduction of the status quo (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 462; Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 112-13).

Importantly, for the Frankfurt School, audiences do not consume against their will. Rather, audiences actually call for the type of amusement provided by popular cultural consumption. This demand, however, cannot be read as existing outside the forces and processes of socialization that shape desire:

> [E]ven where the spell loosens its hold and people are at least subjectively convinced that they are acting of their own will, this will itself is fashioned by precisely what they want to shake off during their time outside of work…. Unfreedom is expanding within free time, and most of the unfree people are as unconscious of the process as they are of their own unfreedom. (Adorno [1969] 2005a, 168)

Because popular entertainment provides such a powerful escape, albeit temporary, and as such contributes to the reproduction of the labourer’s working capacity, it need not assume a blatantly propagandistic dimension in order serve the ideological function of legitimating capitalism. Amusement, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, “is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 116).

Frankfurt School thinkers do warn that the ideological content of cultural commodities and advertising messages has the manipulative power to foster a ‘false’ consciousness, however. According to Robert Babe, Adorno’s assessment in “The Stars
Down to Earth” is “as good a definition as any of the common meaning of false consciousness” (Babe 2009, 99). “Various mass movements spread all over the world,” observes Adorno in that essay, “in which people seem to act against their own rational interests of self-preservation and the ‘pursuit of happiness’” (Adorno [1953] 1994, 46). To Adorno, false consciousness is tied to the capitalist principle of exchange: “Barter as a process has real objectivity and is objectively untrue at the same time, transgressing against its own principle, the principle of equality. This is why, of necessity, it will create a false consciousness: the idols of the market” (Adorno [1966] 1973, 190). False consciousness describes the manner in which non-elites are led to believe that they reap the rewards of the capitalist system much as elites do.

The concept of false consciousness has been widely criticized and contested, and for good reason. In One-Dimensional Man, for instance, Marcuse paints a picture of a problematically all-powerful false consciousness:

The means of mass transportation and communication, the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals in more social classes, the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity; it becomes a way of life. (Marcuse [1964] 1991, 12; emphasis added)

Terms such as ‘indoctrinate’ tend to cause the cultural critic acquainted with the complexity and diversity of cultural reception to recoil – myself included. The meanings that cultural commodities hold for audiences cannot simply be read off the texts. A mechanistic interpretation of ideology in a consumer society leaves little room
for agency and overestimates popular media’s imperviousness to criticism and contestation. In such accounts, in fact, ideology is not understood as a set of discourses or material effects, but instead is problematically rendered as an actor with agency.

The Marxian formulation of ideology in many cases marks a point of departure between cultural studies and Marxist political economy. As Stuart Hall explains,

the encounter between British cultural studies and Marxism … begins, and develops through the critique of a certain reductionism and economism, which I think is not extrinsic but intrinsic to Marxism; a contestation with the model of base and superstructure, through which sophisticated and vulgar Marxism alike had tried to think the relationships between society, economy, and culture. It was located and sited in a necessary and prolonged and as yet unending contestation with the question of false consciousness. (Hall 1992, 279)

Critical media theorist Douglas Kellner also problematizes the view that “commodities are alluring sirens whose symbolic qualities and exchange-values seduce the consumer into purchase and consumption” (Kellner 1983, 71). Neo-Marxian perspectives read consumption too neatly as a product of capitalist control and manipulation, in sociologist Featherstone’s account, and have “difficulty in addressing the actual practices and experiences of consumption” (Featherstone 1991, 15).

Interestingly, even Adorno concedes this point. In “Theory of Pseudo-Culture,” he acknowledges that

there is convincing empirical evidence to refute the thesis of the withering of culture as well as of the socialization of pseudo-culture and its hold on the masses. Even today the stratum of middle class white-collar workers is the model of pseudo-culture, and its effects on the real lower classes can obviously be proved with as little confidence as can the standardization of consciousness in general. Judged by the situation here and now, the contention that pseudo-culture is universal is simplistic and exaggerated. (Adorno [1959] 1993, 22)
However, Adorno continues, this theory “does not purport to include all peoples and classes indiscriminately but rather to give shape to a tendency, to sketch the physiognomy of a spirit which also determines the signature of an age, even if its validity is still very limited both quantitatively and qualitatively” (Adorno [1959] 1993, 22). The focus of Adorno’s scholarship, like many neo-Marxian perspectives surveyed here, was not on developing a detailed empirical account. Rather, his work offers critical models and concepts from which to formulate a radical critique of capitalism.

Evaluation of neo-Marxian ideology critique entails revisiting the orthodox Marxist model of a ‘determining’ base and dependent superstructure, first introduced by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* ([1846] 1998), and the pressing questions it raises. In his letter to Bloch, Engels further clarified the stance he Marx shared: “According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase” (Engels [1890] 1978, 760; emphasis in original). Marx and Engels recognize the ‘relative autonomy’ of the superstructure. Nonetheless, the notion that the forces and relations of labour determine social consciousness in a crude and straightforward manner is commonly, and wrongly, attributed to Marxist approaches in general. Once again, Marxian perspectives are diverse: what is the relationship of art and culture to other ‘superstructural’ elements, such as the law, religion, and politics? Does commodification in and of itself ‘determine’ cultural meaning? The question of
cultural autonomy, or lack thereof, under capitalism is hotly debated in this area of critical enquiry.

Within communication and media studies, the base/superstructure metaphor is widely seen as simplistic and problematically unidirectional. As Raymond Williams points out, “According to its opponents, Marxism is a necessarily reductive and determinist kind of theory: no cultural activity is allowed to be real and significant in itself, but is always reduced to a direct or indirect expression of some preceding and controlling economic content” (Williams 1977, 83). However, against this sweeping characterization, Williams’s non-reductionist conceptualization of “determination” as the “setting of limits” and “exertion of pressures” (Williams 1977, 87) grants a certain degree of autonomy to the cultural sphere. According to critical political economist Nicholas Garnham, “The central problem with the base/superstructure metaphor … is that being a metaphor of polarity, essentially binary in form, it is unable adequately to deal with the number of distinctions that are necessary, in this instance between the material, the economic and the ideological” (Garnham 1979, 127). Indeed, causal binary models lack the nuance required for understanding something as complex, varied, and multi-faceted as cultural production and consumption. The notion that the cultural industries function as ideological weaponry used to maintain ruling-class domination seems especially dubious in the digital age, a period that has witnessed the rise of more decentralized and dialogical modes of communication than could have been imagined by contemporaries of the liberal (Marx) and Fordist (Adorno) eras.
However, the dictates of industry, such as the requirement of profitability, do place limits or constraints on cultural production.

Even Frankfurt School thinkers, writing in the context of Fordist or monopoly capitalism, problematized the orthodox view of the base/superstructure metaphor. According to Garnham, for the Frankfurt School, “under monopoly capitalism the superstructure becomes precisely industrialized; it is invaded by the base and the base/superstructure distinction breaks down but via a collapse into the base” (Garnham 1979, 130). This analysis presages Andrew Wernick’s more recent argument, developed in *Promotional Culture: Advertising, Ideology, and Symbolic Expression*:

> [T]he expanded role of promotion, indeed of the circulation process as a whole, has led to a mutation in the relations between economic ‘base’ and cultural ‘superstructure’ such that the latter has become absorbed into the former – as the zone of circulation and exchange – while the former – as the zone of production – has itself become a major cultural apparatus. (Wernick 1991, 19)

Scott Lash and Celia Lury, meanwhile, provide a more unidirectional account, but identify a reversal in determining roles: “Culture is so ubiquitous that it, as it were, seeps out of the superstructure and comes to infiltrate, and then take over, the infrastructure itself” (Lash and Lury 2007, 4). Precisely which material forces are causing this collapse remains a source of debate and contestation. The matter of determination ‘in the last instance’ is not easily sidestepped.

To Adorno, the base/superstructure metaphor was a relic from another era. In *Negative Dialectics*, he argues that “almost innocuously, it lags behind a condition in which not only the machineries of production, distribution, and domination, but economic and social relations and ideologies are intricately interwoven, and in which
living people have become bits of ideology” (Adorno [1966] 1973, 267-68). Ideology had become generative and lifelike; it was no longer reflective and mechanistic. In a context where ideology reinforces “the seeming inevitability and thus legitimacy of whatever is,” he continues, “a critique that operates with the unequivocal causal relation of superstructure and infrastructure is wide of the mark” (Adorno [1966] 1973, 268).

Frankfurt School scholars conceptualize the capitalist system as all-encompassing, but they also argue that the success of that system is contingent and fragile. It takes considerable effort to convince people of their powerlessness and to sell capitalism as a just system, when it so obviously metes out its rewards unevenly and unfairly. We – audiences, workers, consumers, and members of the ‘public’ – must take on the work of ‘self-deception’:

Present-day mass reactions are very thinly veiled consciousness. It is the paradox of the situation that it is almost insuperably difficult to break through this thin veil. Yet truth is subjectively no longer so unconscious as it is expected to be. This is borne out by the fact that in the political praxis of authoritarian regimes the frank lie in which no one believes is more and more replacing the ‘ideologies’ of yesterday which had the power to convince those who believed in them. Hence, we cannot content ourselves with merely stating that spontaneity has been replaced by blind acceptance of the enforced material…. Rather, spontaneity is consumed by the tremendous effort which each individual has to make in order to accept what is enforced upon him – an effort which has developed for the very reason that the veneer veiling the controlling mechanisms has become so thin. (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 468; emphasis added)

To consume is not necessarily a wholly active or passive act, and to choose to acquiesce is not equivalent to straightforward passivity. Adorno explicitly addresses this issue in relation to popular music consumption:

Complete passivity demands unambiguous acceptance. However, neither the material itself nor observation of the listeners supports the assumption of such unilateral acceptance…. Enthusiasm for popular music requires willful
resolution by listeners…. They “join the ranks,” but this joining does not only imply their conformity to given standards; it also implies a decision to conform. The appeal of the music publishers to the public to “join the ranks” manifests that the decision is an act of will, close to the surface of consciousness. (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 466)

Self-deception requires agency; in this way, Adorno is wrongly accused of advocating the ‘total manipulation thesis’ (D. Cook 1996, 69-70). Nevertheless, it is true that his and other Frankfurt School scholarship neglects important questions about the meanings of particular texts and the complexity of reception.

Sociology and cultural studies, on the other hand, have demonstrated how the polysemic character of texts and the creative interpretative capacities of audiences undermine the notion of a homogeneous mass culture suggested in the Frankfurt School’s account. Indeed, in stark contrast, the sociology of consumption prioritizes the agency exercised by audiences, communities, and publics in symbolic practices linked with consumption. This work foregrounds the question of meaning and explores the relationship of cultural taste to identity formation and the ‘self’, and as such, is a central component of a literature review that seeks to contextualize the contemporary use of popular music as a marketing tool intended to exploit such meaning-making processes. Next, I survey key sociological works and concepts relevant to the study of popular musical consumption and lifestyle-driven marketing strategies.

2.6 The Modes of Consumption: Sociological Perspectives on Consumer Culture

In contrast to neo-Marxian critiques of consumer society, which focus on how we are produced as consumers under capitalism, the sociology of consumption focuses
on the ways social relations are created through acts of consumption. Consumption is conceptualized as a fundamentally social phenomenon bound up with the satisfaction of material needs, the communication of individual and collective identities, and the reproduction of social difference. Sociological perspectives on consumer culture often build on the contributions of socio-cultural anthropology, and may draw on ethnographically grounded research in their investigations of the material and symbolic dimensions of commodities and consumption practices. Foundational work in this area examines commodity-based rituals (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987, 1995) and the roles that consumer taste plays in social positioning (Hirsch 1976; Bourdieu 1984). More theoretical lines of enquiry are also central to sociological consumer culture studies, and include social theories regarding the symbolic significance of commodities, risk, and the ‘reflexivity’ of the self under late modernity (Giddens 1991; Beck 1992; Bauman 1988), forming part of what could loosely be deemed a canon. The following discussion focuses primarily on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, which is foundational to the sociology of consumption and popular music studies, and that of Anthony Giddens, whose scholarship speaks to the tensions between the autonomy and anxiety bound up with consumer choice.

Although it is perhaps better characterized as the sociology of culture than the sociology of consumption per se, the field of subcultural studies also warrants mention here. Though it began at the Chicago School of urban sociology (Park, Burgess, and McKenzie 1925; Cressey 1932; Cohen 1955), subcultural studies flourished at the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. The Marxian
perspectives of Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Antonio Gramsci, and Raymond Williams were highly influential within a body of research on youth subcultures (Hall and Jefferson 1976; Willis 1978, 1990; Hebdige 1979, 1988). Subcultural studies has since generated a new field of post-subcultural studies, which has involved a move away from the neo-Gramscian theoretical frameworks characteristic of the Birmingham School and a return to more strictly sociological approaches: these include those based on Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) concepts of ‘distinction’ and ‘cultural capital’ and Michel Maffesoli’s (1996) notion of urban ‘neo-tribes’ (in addition to philosophical approaches derived from Judith Butler’s theory of gender ‘performativity’ [Butler 1990, 1993]) (see Muggleton and Weinzierl 2004, 5).

Bourdieusian sociological approaches to taste focus on how power relations and social class are implicated in classificatory struggles over what constitutes ‘legitimate’ culture. In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu argues that “[t]aste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (Bourdieu 1984, 6). He reserves a particularly important place for taste in music:

\[\text{[N]othing more clearly affirms one’s ‘class’, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music. This is of course because, by virtue of the rarity of the conditions for acquiring the corresponding dispositions, there is no more ‘classificatory’ practice than concert-going or playing a ‘noble’ instrument (activities which, other things being equal, are less widespread than theatre-going, museum-going or even visits to modern-art galleries). (Bourdieu 1984, 18)}\]

The tastes of elites, musical or otherwise, remain the barometer through which aesthetic merit is judged, in part due to the very social position of those elites. For this reason, popular culture is largely dismissed or disparaged. Bourdieu’s (1984) rigorous surveys
of 1960s French society range from analysis of money spent on food, self-presentation, and culture to examinations of familiarity with particular composers or styles of art, documenting convincing links between taste and social class.

Given the cultural fragmentation and hybridization characteristic of global capitalism, Bourdieu’s ideas require some reworking when applied to contemporary culture. Both popular music studies (Thornton 1996; Frith 1996; Bennett, Emmison, and Frow 1999; Toynbee 2000; Keightley 2001; Regev 2002; Hibbett 2005) and marketing theory (Holt 1997a, 1998) have committed considerable effort to such a project. For popular music scholar Motti Regev, Bourdiesian analysis still has purchase amid what has variously been described as “postmodernity, late modernity, reflexive modernity, the information age, [and a] network society” precisely because this period of change and uncertainty has witnessed “a classificatory struggle over the contents of legitimate cultural capital” – a struggle that has seen certain popular musical tastes emerge as sources of distinction (Regev 2002, 262). If, for Bourdieu, social status and class distinctions are reinforced by taste in ‘high’ culture as distinct from popular culture, in contemporary North America, status is bound up with our ability to make discerning judgments across a hierarchically organized popular culture.

For marketing theorist Douglas Holt, too, Distinction remains particularly germane in the current era, as it “develops a potent analytic tool to plumb the structuring of social class increasingly occluded by the heterogeneity, cultural fragmentation, and boundary transgression of postmodern life” (Holt 1997a, 93). While there is less emphasis placed on the prestige conferred by knowledge of ‘high’ art in
marketing scholarship, Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, as distinct from economic
capital (money and property) and social capital (the influence of our network of
acquaintances), nevertheless remains central in this work. Holt’s (1998) empirical
study of American mass consumption practices demonstrates the ways that cultural
capital structures taste in food, clothing, and furniture, and the reception of popular
cultural texts. Based on his interpretation of interviewee responses, Holt concludes that
the postmodern notion of constructing a self-identity through play with free-floating
signifiers is not as widespread as cultural theory seems to suggest (Holt 1998, 21).
Rather, this style of consumption reflects the concerns and experiences of a specific
group of people – those with high cultural capital: “The pursuit of individual style in the
face of pervasive homogenizing forces is problematic only for HCCs [high cultural
capital] for whom originality and authenticity is a highly valued mark of distinction in
their social milieu” (Holt 1998, 21).

According to Bourdieusian popular music scholarship, the link between the
tastes and (often aspirational) self-identities of youth audiences likewise is governed by
a quest for originality and ‘authenticity’ as sources of distinction. In contrast to
dominant neo-Gramscian perspectives on popular music (namely rock) as rebellion and
resistance, Keir Keightley’s Bourdieu-inflected account of rock culture argues that
“[w]hat is truly at stake in rock culture is the differentiation of taste, not an affiliation
with forms of cultural action” (Keightley 2001, 129). The classificatory struggles over
what constitutes rock and what constitutes pop – and over which is superior and why –
are largely a matter of jockeying for social position within a stratified consumer society.
While Keightley identifies ‘seriousness’ as rock authenticity’s overarching value (Keightley 2001, 131-32), ‘coolness’ also functions as a source of ‘authenticity’ for youth audiences. Popular musical connoisseurship and expertise not only entail the accumulation of specialized knowledge, but also the exclusion of other (ostensibly less cool) tastes (Frith 1996; Thornton 1996). Thus, Bourdieusian interpretations of the social significance of exclusivity feature prominently in studies of youth subcultures. Sarah Thornton’s Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital (1996) – a core text within post-subcultural studies – considers how ‘hipness’ constitutes what she terms ‘subcultural capital’. Echoing Bourdieu’s argument that “tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by … the tastes of others” (Bourdieu 1984, 56), she contends,

Subcultural capital is the linchpin of an alternative hierarchy in which the axes of gender, sexuality and race are all employed in order to keep the determinations of class, income and occupations at bay. Interestingly, the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn’t. (Thornton 1996, 105)

For popular music subcultures, the so-called ‘mainstream’ is often the target of derision.

In a turn away from the privileging of certain genres (e.g., indie rock) over others (e.g., Top 40 pop), however, some scholars observe the emergence of a new cultural sensibility driven by cultural fragmentation and audience interest in the ever new. Following Peterson and Kern (1996), Regev argues that we have seen ‘omnivorous’ taste emerge as the latest site of cultural capital among professionals: “Status marking, the display and experience of distinction, has thus shifted from exclusivity and from what is consumed, to modes of interpretation … – that is, to how
culture is consumed” (Regev 2002, 261; emphasis in original). Today’s ‘self-reflexive’ fan with knowledge of various types of popular music can rescue even ostensibly uncool mainstream pop from scorn by employing interpretative frameworks that reflect ironic posturing, an earnest but self-aware celebration of the uncool, or a stance against rock snobbery. Today, cultural capital involves the ability and authority to invert (sub)cultural expectations. The notion of self-reflexivity is taken up by Giddens.

In contrast to Bourdieu’s argument that tastes are largely socially reproduced and class-based, Giddens’s account creates more space for agency and therefore social mobility. Giddens’s theory of structuration is an attempt to reconcile macro and micro forms of sociology and to resolve the dualism between the ‘individual’ and ‘society’:

“‘Society’ can be understood as a complex of recurrent practices which form institutions. Those practices depend upon the habits and forms of life which individuals adopt…. [S]ociety only has form and that form only has effects on people in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do” (in Giddens and Pierson 1998, 77). In Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, he argues that in a post-traditional society, we as individuals are autonomous enough to produce our own self-identities:

Each of us not only ‘has’, but lives a biography reflexively organised in terms of flows of social and psychological information about possible ways of life. Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, ‘How shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear and what to eat – and many other things – as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity. (Giddens 1991, 14; emphasis in original)⁹

⁹ However, for Giddens, “Agency doesn’t mean that the world is plastic to the will of the individual” (in Giddens and Pierson 1998, 80).
In a similar vein, in *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*, Ulrich Beck argues that “[b]iographies too, are becoming reflexive” (Beck 1992, 131). Key here is how such identities are intricately linked with the ways that we spend our money – how our narratives of self-identity are organized according to lifestyles that are largely, though not exclusively, composed of consumer choices.

While Giddens has been less influential than Bourdieu in popular music studies, his work has informed analyses of the links between popular music consumption and self-identity (DeNora 2000; Kahn-Harris 2004) and aesthetic reflexivity more broadly (Lash and Urry 1994). Significant for the purposes of this literature review are the parallels between Giddens’s analysis of the relationship between the reflexive project of the self and the choice of particular lifestyles (Giddens 1991, 80-87, 197-99), and ‘consumer culture theory’ (CCT) work on *consumer identity projects* (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 871-73). 10 Those marketing theorists who study consumer identity projects focus on the dynamic between such identities and the market mechanisms that bring them to consumers. According to this research,

> [T]he market produces certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can choose to inhabit. While individuals can and do pursue personally edifying goals through these consumer positions, they are enacting and personalizing cultural scripts that align their identities with the structural imperatives of a consumer-driven global economy. (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 871)

Through the lens of marketing theory, identity projects involve play with different subject positions, understood as tantamount to consumer positions.

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10 This body of marketing research makes extensive use of media and cultural studies research. For instance, CCT research on “marketplace cultures” draws on Thornton (1996), Maffesoli (1996), and others (see Thompson and Troester 2002; Kozinets 2001), and research on “mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretative strategies” draws on Fiske (1989), Hall (1993), and others (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 871-74).
Giddens, too, recognizes that biographical reflexivity comes with a twist. “[I]n conditions of high modernity,” he argues, “we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense are forced to do so – we have no choice but to choose” (Giddens 1991, 81). Fashioning and following particular lifestyles may afford opportunities for self-actualization, but because these opportunities for individual development are channelled through consumption practices, more and more aspects of modern social life are conditioned by capitalism. “Market-governed freedom of individual choice becomes an enveloping framework of individual self-expression,” argues Giddens, which renders “[t]he consumption of ever-novel goods … in some part a substitute for the genuine development of self” (Giddens 1991, 197-98). The concept of lifestyles has been particularly useful to the advertising industry: “The very corruption of the notion of ‘lifestyle’, reflexively drawn into the sphere of advertising, epitomises these processes. Advertisers orient themselves to sociological classifications of consumer categories and at the same time foster specific consumption ‘packages’” (Giddens 1991, 197-98). Advertisers attempt to graft particular sets of commodities and brands neatly onto particular lifestyles.

The mobilization of discrete consumer lifestyles renders distinctions between conformist and non-conformist consumption largely irrelevant; all that matters is that one consumes. Significantly, within CCT, the ‘uncritical’ consumer and the more autonomous, ‘critical’ consumer – one who actively forges her own distinct lifestyle – are both viewed as productive for capital. In fact, some argue that the ‘subversive’ countercultural consumer is of even more utility. In Holt’s assessment,
The market thrives on … unruly bricoleurs who engage in nonconformist producerly consumption practices. Since the market feeds off of the constant production of difference, the most creative, unorthodox, singularizing consumer sovereignty practices are the most productive for the system. They serve as grist for the branding mill that is ever in search of new cultural materials. (Holt 2002, 88)

Those consumption choices motivated by the hunt for ‘authenticity’ and personal sovereignty are choice fodder for marketing appropriation (see T. Frank 1997; Gladwell 1997; Heath and Potter 2004; Gilmore and Pine 2007; Potter 2010). To the unruly bricoleur, popular music is one among many cultural resources used in the production of self-identity. Importantly, subversive signifiers do not necessarily subvert capital accumulation; in fact, when emptied of their referents and rendered a cool aesthetic, the actual political content of such signifiers is muddied or erased. What is the message communicated by a Che Guevara T-shirt, for instance? In such cases, the polysemy of the sign works to undermine the radical politics expressed through consumption.

Whether consumer dispositions are understood as the somewhat fixed product of social position (Bourdieu) or as chosen under conditions of relative autonomy and creatively fashioned by individual agents (Giddens), CCT seeks to understand consumer identities in order to sell them. Because strictly sociological perspectives are typically less anti-capitalist than neo-Marxian perspectives, the gap between sociological studies on consumer culture and CTT is more readily breached. For instance, though critical, Giddens holds a somewhat ambivalent stance regarding branding. According to Giddens, the term ‘brand’ is “a way of subsuming trust relationships in a heavily informational world… They’re short-cut information devices to compensate for the loss of passive trust in institutions. So a brand is often a positive thing” (Giddens 2003, 393;
emphasis added). While I agree that brands function as “short-cut information devices,” I make a very different argument: our increasing reliance on brands is a severely limiting cultural force that works against our agentic power. Next, I provide an overview of a broad range of scholarship pertinent to the study of the emotional and affective dimensions of consumption.

2.7 The Pleasures of Consumption: Cultural Studies of the Transgressive Body and the Consumption of Emotion

Like much sociological scholarship on consumer culture, cultural studies scholarship dedicated to the sensual pleasures of consumption takes seriously the meanings people derive from commodities and consumption practices. It is particularly concerned with the radical and subversive dimensions of ‘low’ or popular cultural practices – an area of keen interest among popular music scholars. Largely in response to Adorno’s utter dismissal of the pleasures of popular music, popular music scholarship of this sort often champions the ‘liminal’ excesses and carnivalesque transgressions linked to rock and pop culture (e.g., at concerts and parties and in lyrical themes). Hypersexuality, excessive drinking and drugs, grotesque and dark imagery, and an emphasis on the exaggerated body overall are heralded as non-conformist, transgressive gestures. In what follows, I briefly review key cultural studies literature in this area and then, taking account of the affective turn in cultural theory, provide a sketch of theories of affect, which can also illuminate the issue of consumer desire. I consider the degree to which popular music’s carnivalesque dimensions pose a legitimate threat to the established order and alleviate the alienation experienced by its fans, or, instead, incite potent emotions that marketers gladly mine.
Foundational within literature on the pleasures of consumption are Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World* (1968); Peter Stallybrass’s and Allon White’s *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), which draws on Bakhtin; Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966); Victor Turner’s *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974); and Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984). Key concepts and theories from such works are imported into cultural studies to theorize the ways that the production of identity is linked to the repudiation of ‘low’ culture and social taboos. Bakhtinian cultural studies perspectives have proven particularly influential. Drawing on anthropological, literary, and historical research on the transgressive dimensions of pre-modern festivals, fairs, and carnivals, this research identifies a comparably carnivalesque character in contemporary popular culture, where, it should be noted, a fixation on the grotesque or excessive body is played out in decidedly gendered ways (Fiske 1987, 1989; Rowe 1995). Popular culture is seen as affording opportunities for the symbolic inversion of entrenched social hierarchies – opportunities to temporarily experiment, overindulge, and escape from the authority of the traditional order.

According to Featherstone, the department stores and expositions of nineteenth-century Europe – constructed as exotic, glamorous ‘dream worlds’ (R. H. Williams 1982; Chaney 1983) – can be viewed as “sites of ordered disorder which summoned up elements of the carnivalesque tradition in their displays” (Featherstone 1991, 23). The resistant pleasures afforded by contemporary shopping malls likewise have been applauded in more celebratory cultural studies scholarship. “Shopping malls are open
invitations to trickery and tenacity,” argues Fiske, who cites the cases of “youths who turn them into their meeting places, or who trick the security guards by putting alcohol into some, but only some, soda cans,” among others (Fiske 2000, 309). The key question for consideration here is whether the excesses supposedly represented in such practices hold radical potential, or instead work to contain and commodify dissent – a point to which I will return.

Within related popular music scholarship, areas of enquiry range from the pleasures of the music-hall experience (Bailey 1986) to the symbolic transgression and dis-alienation provided by heavy metal (Halnon 2004, 2006; Kahn-Harris 2003, 2007) to rock culture’s dismissal of women performers and fans as ‘low-Others’ (Coates 1997, 2003; Railton 2001; Meier 2008). Karen Bettez Halnon, for instance, provides a positive evaluation of the empowering dimensions of carnivalesque rock cultures:

[H]eavy metal carnival is a politics of dissatisfaction and a demand for difference from the commercialized mainstream…. It is a demand for community, freedom, and equality and an opportunity to surface, release, and transform everyday frustrations and aggression into wide-awake, focused consciousness and the exhilaration of being alive. (Halnon 2006, 45-46)

The social spaces and cultural practices associated with rock are often seen as legitimately anti-establishment within such literature – if only on a symbolic level. Carnivalesque rock environments need not be liberatory or communitarian, however. The toppling of the cultural codes that govern propriety can also translate into the creation of dangerous and repressive spaces for women in particular. For example, Woodstock ’99 garnered notoriety for the horrific fire starting, fights, and rapes that
occurred on its chaotic festival grounds (and for the greed of its organizers and vendors, who sold mercilessly overpriced water and pizza amid oppressively hot conditions).

While the political and social activities linked to popular music fandom entail transgression from societally sanctioned roles and behaviours in ways that could be perceived as threatening to authorities, as Diane Railton acknowledges, “the freedom of carnival could be seen as a way of maintaining social order by giving people a safety valve that helped them cope with the pressures of day-to-day hard work and deprivation. A similar role can be seen for the carnivalesque of ‘pop’” (Railton 2001, 330; see also Eagleton 1981). This assessment resembles Adorno’s argument regarding the cathartic function of popular music (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 462). John Fiske, in contrast, argues that “we must not write carnival off as merely a safety valve that ultimately allows social control to work more effectively: rather it is a recognition of the strength and endurance of those oppositional, disruptive, popular forces” (Fiske 1987, 203). But, we might ask, just how disruptive are such forces?

The radical politics of a temporary suspension of existing power structures and social hierarchies – one that is followed by an inevitable return to ‘business as usual’ – is decidedly limited. Given that hybrid, unruly, and boundary-transgressing cultural forms and tastes are, in marketer Holt’s (2002) account, the lifeblood of contemporary capitalism and the branding strategies employed therein, carnivalesque popular culture today does little to subvert capitalism, or even ‘mainstream’ culture’s moral standards, as it might have in decades past. By eliding the distinction between pre-capitalist popular culture and corporately produced cultural commodities, research that
underscores the parallels between Bakhtin’s carnival and contemporary popular culture lacks the historical specificity and political-economic analytical precision required to unveil the particular character and specific sites of capitalist containment.

What is peculiar to the current context is the degree to which corporate brands insinuate themselves within the very fabric of pop and rock culture’s mythologies, rituals, and social spaces. As part of ‘experiential branding’ strategies designed to “harness[] the labor of consumers through their meaning-making practices,” for instance, corporations have begun to launch their own branded music festivals (Carah 2010, xix; see also Moor 2003). Such branding strategies are markedly different from straightforward festival sponsorships. In the case of festivals such as Coke Live and Virgin Fest, global brands assume the role of content curators; they have the power to choose who steps foot on the stage. The choices these transnational corporations make are governed by the desired associations they seek to suture to their brands. They often attempt to speak the language of youth rebellion. According to Nicholas Carah, “At Coke Live, Coca-Cola act[s] out mythologies of authenticity and engages with young people’s meaning-making practices. Even where young people set out to be unruly and rebellious, they reinforce the brand” (Carah 2010, 23). Carnivalesque excesses become fodder for marketing.

The type of ‘authenticity’ signified by popular music, especially as it deviates from ‘mainstream’ values, is prized by brands today. The utility of popular music to corporations lies in those signifiers of authenticity that can be harnessed, branded, and sold. Halnon warns that through the commercialization of extreme music, sincere
desire for authenticity is siphoned into commodified dissent: “alienation is transformed into a fetishized commodity” (Halnon 2005, 447). I contend that the capitalist cultural industries allow for the expression but ultimately the containment of frustrations, and that the limitations of commodity-based expressions of dissent are, in the end, a product of their commodity form. The constraints that commodification places on culture will be examined at length in the chapters that follow.

The consumption of pleasure, when purchased from the capitalist cultural marketplace, amounts to the consumption of a type of commodified emotion. As Lash and Lury argue, the “global culture industry” uses “play and mimicry … this emotionality – this affect – for the accumulation of capital” (Lash and Lury 2007, 191). Given that consumer brands are interested in experiential and multisensory strategies designed to capitalize the affective dimensions of popular music (Powers 2010, 288-89), a review of affect theory is necessary.

and affective labour (Lazzarato 1996; Negri and Hardt 1999; Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000; Virno 2004; Marazzi 2011). This approach will be my focus here.

In psychological terms, the term ‘affect’ principally refers to the experience of emotion, and to the bodily expressions linked to specific feelings. For scholars who fall within the Spinoza-Deleuze and Guattari philosophical approach, however, an affect carries a different meaning than a feeling or an emotion:

A feeling is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labeled. It is personal and biographical… An emotion is the project/display of feeling. Unlike feelings, the display of emotion can be either genuine or feigned…. An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential…. [A]ffect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness. (Shouse 2005)

Affect is used to describe “visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 1; emphasis in original), and “refers generally to bodily capacities to act, to engage, and to connect, such that autoaffection is linked to the self-feeling of being alive” (Clough 2007, 2). Because affect is linked to action, it is seen as vital to political life. As Michael Hardt explains, “For Spinoza, the ethical and political project involves a constant effort to transform passions into actions…. [T]he perspective of the affects requires us to constantly pose as a problem the relation between actions and passions, between reason and the emotions” (Hardt 2007, x). From this we might assume, then, that when harnessed by brands, affects can transform consumer passions into consumer actions (e.g., purchases).

My interest in this area of enquiry is bracketed by my focus on how brands attempt to capitalize on the affective dimensions of cultural consumption. There is a
growing body of critical research that examines how post-Fordist accumulation strategies and branding practices work to extract surplus value from affect and desire (Arvidsson 2005; Hearn 2006, 2008, 2010; Terranova 2013). “Building brand equity is about fostering a number of possible attachments around the brand,” according to Adam Arvidsson, “be these experiences, emotions, attitudes, lifestyles or, most importantly perhaps, loyalty” (Arvidsson 2005, 239). Some of these studies specifically focus on the relationship between popular music and brands (Moor 2003; Carah 2010). Popular music – arguably the most affect-laden and portable of cultural products (Moor 2003, 50) – is just one cultural resource being used to enhance and profit from these emotion-based qualities, however. According to Steven Shaviro, media texts overall are machines for generating affect, and for capitalizing upon, or extracting value from, this affect. As such, they are not ideological superstructures, as an older sort of Marxist criticism would have it. Rather, they lie at the very heart of social production, circulation, and distribution. They generate subjectivity, and they play a crucial role in the valorization of capital. (Shaviro 2010, 3; emphasis in original)

The interface of cultural commodities and advertising, then, is fertile ground for brands interested in cultivating and tilling emotional bonds between consumer and product.

For the purposes of studying music branding strategies, I am not concerned with firm definitional and analytical distinctions between affects, emotions, and feelings. Rather, I am interested in how music industry and advertising executives attempt to capitalize on consumer desire. Furthermore, I do not seek to analyze the affective dimensions of popular musical reception, but instead focus on the promotional mechanisms professionals use to profit from associations tied to popular music. Music supervisor software, which I examine at length in Chapter 6, enables brands to search
music catalogues not only by composer, performer, and genre, but also by mood. The self-serve digital music licensing system offered by Olé, an independent music publisher, features the following categories: bittersweet, celebratory, cheeky, cold, dark, distraught, happy, longing, nostalgic, sad, and the list goes on (Olé 2012). I distinguish the affective dimensions of promotional ubiquitous musics from those of popular music more broadly. As Jared Gutstadt, CEO of independent licensing firm Jingle Punks, points out, the distinction between music fans and consumers targeted through advertising is significant:

The fan emotion is really hard to capture, because people … are fickle. Either they like it or they don’t. But a consumer, you’re trying to manipulate their feelings by saying “this commercial should feel sad,” “this commercial should feel happy,” and we’re strictly focusing on how to extract all those emotions from the music that’s sent to us. So we don’t think of music as hit single/not hit single. We think, is this going to end up on a Food Network show or is this going to end up on NBC’s Minute to Win It, and where in the spectrum of emotions, cultural contexts, does all that stuff lie? (I/Gutstadt 2011)

Following Wernick, I am interested in sites, like advertising and television, where “the mobilization of affect through the invocation of values,” or the invocation of various moods or feelings in my analysis, “is strictly a tool, an incidental side-effect of what advertising is instrumental for” (Wernick 1991, 25-26). In a sense, these discourses of marketing and branding not only monetize affect; much as Michel Foucault ([1978] 1990) argues that sexuality is discursively produced, the classificatory systems that attempt to manage and instrumentalize affect at the same time work to produce those forms of affect that are especially productive for capital. Under neoliberal, post-Fordist capitalism, the affects and associations tied to popular music, like music itself, are subjected to the force of commodification.
By developing a neo-Adornian analysis of promotional ubiquitous musics, and, hence, by focusing on ‘top-down’ sites of control, my approach parts ways with autonomist Marxism’s emphasis on ‘bottom-up’ action and resistance. Whereas members of the Frankfurt School view technology as bolstering capitalist power and domination, Nick Dyer-Witheford explains, “Autonomist analysis understands capitalism as a collision between two opposing vectors – capital’s exploitation of labor and workers’ resistance to that exploitation,” and combines analysis of “technoscience as an instrument of capitalist domination” with analysis of “the ways in which struggles against class can overcome capital’s technological control” (Dyer-Witheford 1999, 69). I do not deny the existence of fissures in the capitalist edifice or of viable modes and movements of resistance. However, my analysis focuses on how “[t]he technical antithesis between few production centers and widely dispersed reception necessitates organizing and planning by those in control,” and, hence, considers the ways that “[t]echnical rationality is the rationality of domination” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 95). This perspective is specific to promotional ubiquitous musics and not to cultural production more broadly.

Although concerned with the psychology and sociology of emotion, Adorno’s scholarship does not fit neatly into the affective turn within the humanities and social sciences. He borrowed ideas from psychoanalytic theory in order to examine trauma and political irrationalism as wider social phenomena; his Freudo-Marxism centred on mass psychology. In his account, people were summoned both as ‘rugged’ individuals and as ‘masses’ under monopoly capitalism (Adorno [1951] 2001c, 135). Cultural
commodities played a key role in producing these subjectivities. The culture industry worked “on a depth-psychological level, reinforcing the narcissism of individuals in late capitalist societies and fostering their conformity to the status quo” (D. Cook 1995, 192).

Adorno’s position on Freudian thought, similar to his position on Marxist thought, was not orthodox. What is more, Deborah Cook explains,

Adorno made no systematic attempt to reconcile the two theories. According to Adorno, psychoanalysis and Marxism are incompatible because the particular and the universal are “torn apart”. Individuals seek instinctual gratification within a socio-economic order which often demands the renunciation or displacement of instincts. The task of a critical theory is to understand the nature of this antagonistic totality rather than to conceal or occlude it. (D. Cook 1995, 191)

In a similar spirit, I seek not to reconcile affect theory with my neo-Adornian theoretical frame; I do not attempt to synthesize conceptual terrain that ought to be understood on its own terms. Instead, I consider how this fertile and diverse body of work might – or might not – enrich my analysis of the emotion- and lifestyle-driven marketing strategies that make use of popular music. Such an approach informs this literature review as a whole; I consider the different ways that distinct fields of enquiry tackle the question of consumption. My primary emphasis, however, is on advancing a neo-Adornian analysis, the groundwork for which is further developed in Chapter 3.

2.8 Conclusion

Today, the meanings, rebellions, emotions, and affects used to connect popular music to brands circulate under a complex and expansive, yet nevertheless constraining, promotional apparatus. In this literature review, I considered how neo-Marxian
scholarship on the production of consumption, sociological scholarship on modes of consumption, and cultural studies scholarship on the pleasures of consumption might illumine brands’ tightening relationship with popular music. Given that brand-music pairings are motivated by marketing objectives, I understand promotional ubiquitous musics as a predominantly promotional, and incidentally cultural, phenomenon. The instrumental use of popular music and associated signifiers by brands is precisely why Adornian perspectives retain purchase in the current context. The contributions of sociology and cultural theory to the study of cultural meanings and desires, however, lend analytical rigor to the study of music branding. The relationship of popular music to identity formation, social difference, and pleasure are key factors that inform today’s lifestyle- and emotion-driven marketing strategies.

On the one hand, consumer brands have the power to place firm limits on the autonomy of the cultural sphere, even while they might not entirely extinguish its autonomy. On the other hand, the ever-changing promotional discourses that proliferate today speak to a new dynamism and seem to defy formulas. This tension will be teased out in the chapters that follow. In Chapter 3, I examine Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s ‘culture industry’ thesis and its legacy within cultural studies and the political economy of communication, and in so doing, establish its relevance and suitability as the basis of a critique of promotional ubiquitous musics. In Chapter 4, I switch focus to the contemporary music industry’s digital transition and the new modes of marketing and monetizing popular music that have accompanied the disruption of established business practices. I examine the intensifying relationship between popular music and brands,
and the disconcerting consequences of brands’ increasing hold over popular musical production, in Chapter 5. Finally, in Chapter 6, I return to Adorno and demonstrate the applicability of his conceptual framework and criticism to promotional ubiquitous musics, the digitalizing cultural industries, and post-Fordist capitalism more broadly.

3.1 Introduction

Today the commodity character of music tends radically to alter it. Bach in his day was considered, and considered himself, an artisan, although his music functioned as art. Today music is considered ethereal and sublime, although it actually functions as a commodity. Today the terms ethereal and sublime have become trademarks. Music has become a means instead of an end, a fetish. That is to say, music has ceased to be a human force and is consumed like other consumers’ goods. (Adorno 1945, 211; emphasis in original)

To suggest that popular music is a commodity produced by corporations in pursuit of profit much like other consumer goods is hardly controversial. Indeed, popular music’s commodity form has undergone a radical intensification and expansion in the digital era. The music marketplace has been flooded by digital downloads of songs and live performances (available at iTunes), audio and video streaming sites (e.g., Spotify and Vevo, respectively), music-based television shows, and artist-branded merchandise ranging from perfumes to iPhone music ‘apps’ (e.g., Glee Karaoke and ‘I am T-Pain’ brand auto-tuner), in addition to records, concerts, and more traditional merchandise (T-shirts and souvenirs). What is more, original songs are woven throughout television programs, films, advertisements, and video games. Today, popular music is not simply a consumer good as Theodor Adorno observes; it is also a property to be licensed to various business partners. In light of such developments, when the question of revisiting the ‘culture industry’ thesis is posed, most critics do not focus on the issue of commodification per se. Instead, debate centres on how cultural consumption is distinct from the consumption of other commodities, or on how the
Internet frustrates the top-down production of culture and capitalist relations of domination analyzed by Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

In sections 3.2 and 3.3, I introduce and examine the ‘culture industry’ thesis and key works by Adorno on the commodification of music. I then consider Adorno’s legacy in cultural studies and the political economy of communication in sections 3.4 and 3.5, respectively. In section 3.5, I argue that marrying an Adornian critique of commodification with key ‘cultural industries’ scholarship offers a productive and holistic lens through which to examine capitalist cultural production. Indeed, while many cultural industries scholars (along with their colleagues in cultural studies) identify a need to move beyond the limitations of the culture industry thesis and its wide-reaching purview, I contend that there is analytic value in viewing the cultural industries as a whole, even while tending to the industrial logics unique to each distinct industry. Following Shane Gunster, I make a distinction between commodification and industrialization in the way that I deploy Adorno:

As rhetorically productive as the term industry might once have been… the governing logic of the culture industry for Adorno and Horkheimer is provided not by the organizational structures or techniques of industrial production per se but rather the capitalist social relations in which they are embedded. In other words, it is commodification – not industrialization – that lies at the heart of the culture industry thesis. (Gunster 2004, 9; emphasis in original)

Horkheimer and Adorno “attribute general significance to the commodity form as analytically distinct from questions of ownership” (Angus and Jhally 1989, 13; emphasis in original). While popular music’s specific commodity form has undergone profound changes in recent years, its constitution as a commodity remains constant.
Drawing from Fredric Jameson, I see the culture industry thesis as a theory of “the commercialization of life” rather than a theory of culture *per se* (Jameson 2007, 144). I do not engage with Adorno’s theory of aesthetics or make aesthetic claims about the popular music used in advertising; I do not label promotional ubiquitous musics as inferior to seemingly more autonomous popular music. Instead, I use the culture industry thesis to understand the relationship between the commodification of culture and the collapsing boundary between popular music and advertising. While by no means inevitable, I argue that the use of popular music as a marketing tool is an expected outcome of its commodity character. As such, I assert that a neo-Adornian framework is uniquely suited to conceptualizing promotional ubiquitous musics, an argument further developed in Chapter 6.

### 3.2 The ‘Culture Industry’ Thesis: Philosophical Background

When Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno introduced their culture industry thesis in one of the Frankfurt School’s defining texts, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the pairing of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘industry’ was polemical and intended to shock. In the text, they argued that capitalist relations and instrumental rationality had invaded the ostensibly autonomous realm of cultural production; culture had been commodified. As objects of exchange and commercial calculation, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, “the irreconcilable elements of culture, art, and amusement have been subjected equally to the concept of purpose and thus brought under a single false denominator: the totality of the culture industry” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 108). As Gunster explains, “the culture industry thesis strives to answer two questions: What specific properties
does culture develop when it is produced and sold as a commodity? And what must human beings become in order to maximize the meaning and pleasure taken from cultural commodities?” (Gunster 2004, 10). In the following sections, I introduce and examine Adorno’s critical framework in order to frame my argument that the growing business-to-business market for music licenses and the attendant proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics are products of the logic of commodification and the profit motive on which it rests.

The culture industry thesis unfolds from Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s critical analysis of the self-destruction of enlightenment. The Dialectic of Enlightenment and Horkheimer’s Eclipse of Reason are born of a specific historical moment and the atrocities that era witnessed: the terror of National Socialism and the Holocaust. Horkheimer and Adorno conceptualize the rise of fascism and genocide in relation to a wider “prognosis regarding the associated lapse from enlightenment into positivism” and “the identity of intelligence and hostility” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, xii). They examine the dialectic of domination that had accompanied the progression of ‘rational’ thought in the modern era and conclude that capitalism had facilitated the emergence and formalization of instrumental reason. As Horkheimer explains, there has been a shift from ‘objective reason’, which is concerned with ends, to ‘subjective reason’, whose focus is on means: “Ultimately subjective reason proves to be the ability to calculate probabilities and thereby to co-ordinate the right means with a given end” (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 4). ‘Subjective’ in this usage makes reference to how this form of reason “serve[s] the subject’s interest,” whilst “attach[ing] little importance to
the question whether the purposes as such are reasonable” (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 3).

The formalization of self-interest as the basis of reason renders reason itself an instrument (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 14). Used solely in this way, reason can produce and problematically justify fundamentally irrational outcomes. As J. M. Bernstein explains, however, “the key to instrumental reason is not means-end logic, but the primacy of the abstract over the concrete, the universal over the particular” (Bernstein 2001, 239 n. 3).

Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s critique is rooted in the ways that the particular and universal are treated as commensurate under ‘identitarian thinking’. As a result of the shift toward instrumental reason, Horkheimer argues, concepts themselves “have been reduced to summaries of the characteristics that several specimens have in common” (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 15). The subsumption of varieties of objects under such abstract concepts works to highlight sameness at the expense of difference; the singular object or thought is problematically rendered equivalent to some universal that it is imagined to represent: “[C]ognition of non-identity … seeks to say what something is, while identitarian thinking says what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself” (Adorno [1966] 1973, 149). Identitarian thinking fails to account for the ‘remainder’: that which is unique to the individual and is not captured by the concept used to represent it. As it becomes a mere example of abstract concepts, that which is ‘other’ and incommensurable is assimilated. Adorno criticizes the subsumption of particulars under universal categories on ethical grounds for its links to domination (A. Stone 2008, 54-55). For instance, the type of
‘ticket thinking’ that results from this reinforces stereotypes and produces hostility to difference (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 172). Ticket thinking, for Horkheimer and Adorno, is a product of “the universal reduction of every specific energy to the one, identical, abstract form of labor, from the battlefield to the studio” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 172).

Under capitalism and instrumental reason, even thought itself conforms to industrial models. According to Horkheimer, “It is as if thinking itself had been reduced to the level of industrial processes, subjected to a close schedule – in short, made part and parcel of production” (Horkheimer [1947] 2004, 15). For Adorno, “Thinking in equivalents is in itself a form of production in so far as it produces the commensurability of all objects along with their subsumability under abstract rules” (Adorno [1960] 2001a, 110-11). The capitalist principle of exchange is the paradigmatic form of ‘thinking in equivalents’ and an overpowering force of rationalization and domination; the commodity form and its social relations work to assimilate difference.

The culture industry thesis argues that culture is no longer exempt from these forces of rationalization and homogenization. As Gunster points out, Adorno’s “attack upon ‘sameness’ within mass culture must … be located within the broader philosophical critique of identitarian thinking that lies at the core of his work” (Gunster 2007, 297). It is with the intellectual background surveyed above in mind, then, that we must interpret a central tenet of Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s ‘culture industry’ thesis: “The conspicuous unity of macrocosm and microcosm confronts human beings with a
model of their culture: the false identity of universal and particular. All mass culture under monopoly is identical” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 95). Horkheimer and Adorno do not use the term identical to suggest that cultural commodities are exactly alike in terms of content. Rather, they argue that as commodities, different cultural products and practices are treated as equivalent regardless of their content. Capitalist relations, not cultural creators, produce the false unities of mass culture, where the detail stands in for the whole.

This critical perspective informs my thinking about the means-end logic that frames music companies’ and consumer brands’ interest in popular music. Music companies use recording artists and songs as instruments for revenue generation in the consumer and business-to-business music marketplaces, and brands use recording artists and songs as instruments to build distinctive brand identities. Various popular musics are positioned as equivalent insofar as they are subsumed under the abstract principle of exchange.

### 3.3 The Purpose of Culture as Commodity: The Dominance of the Capitalist Principle of Exchange

Horkheimer and Adorno introduce the term ‘culture industry’ to signal the processes of standardization, rationalization, and massification they see as inherent to commodified culture. The claim that cultural commodities are largely uniform and homogenizing does not simply speak to the way the culture industry reduces individuals to stereotypes and forces cultural forms into “frozen genres” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 107). More broadly, it signals how cultural commodities are rendered
commensurate by virtue of their exchangeability on the market. Horkheimer and Adorno draw on Karl Marx’s analysis of the fetish character of the commodity to argue that the fetish character of the cultural commodity is a product of the subsumption of use values by exchange values. ‘Mass culture’ serves a purpose:

In the demand for entertainment and relaxation, purpose has finally consumed the realm of the purposeless. But as the demand for the marketability of art becomes total, a shift in the inner economic composition of cultural commodities is becoming apparent…. What might be called use value in the reception of cultural assets is being replaced by exchange value… Everything has value only in so far as it can be exchanged, not in so far as it is something in itself. For consumers the use value of art, its essence, is a fetish, and the fetish … becomes its only use value. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944 2002, 128)

For Adorno, the commodification of culture is particularly troubling because culture’s critical potential had resided precisely in the individual artwork’s singularity: “Culture is the perennial claim of the particular over the general, as long as the latter remains unreconciled to the former” (Adorno 1960 2001a, 113). As a commodity, however, “culture – no matter what form it takes – is to be measured by norms not inherent to it and which have nothing to do with the quality of the object, but rather with some type of abstract standards imposed from without” (Adorno 1960 2001a, 113). Capitalist cultural production must reside within the confines of (economic) value creation.

While the culture industry thesis was first formally introduced as such in the chapter entitled “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” in Dialectic of Enlightenment, many of the core ideas first surfaced in Adorno’s “On the Fetish

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11 Adorno recognized that art had been subordinated to different sets of interests throughout history (e.g., the Church, nobility), however (Adorno 1959 1993, 20). The culture industry focuses on culture’s subsumption under market logics during his lifetime. In a sense, in Adorno’s usage, the term ‘use value’ stands in for all values that lie outside or exceed the logics or mechanisms of capitalist exchange.
Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” (1938). It is here that Adorno examines the fetish character of commodified music in particular:

If the commodity in general combines exchange-value and use-value, then the pure use-value, whose illusion the cultural goods must preserve in completely capitalist society, must be replaced by pure exchange-value, which precisely in its capacity as exchange-value deceptively takes over the function of use-value. The specific fetish character of music lies in this quid pro quo… *The more inexorably the principle of exchange-value destroys use-values for human beings, the more deeply does exchange-value disguise itself as the object of enjoyment.* (Adorno [1938] 2002a, 296; emphasis in original)

As an example of music’s exchange-value masquerading as the source of its enjoyment, Adorno points to the case of the concertgoer, who, he argues, “is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket” (Adorno [1938] 2002a, 296).

To be effective and efficient profit-generating properties, cultural commodities must be at once familiar (and therefore a safe investment for capitalists) and different (and therefore worth the purchase for consumers). Adorno captures a marketing dynamic that continues to inform business thinking inside large media corporations:

The publisher wants a piece of music that is fundamentally the same as all the other current hits and simultaneously fundamentally different from them. Only if it is the same does it have a chance of being sold automatically, without requiring any effort on the part of the customer… And only if it is different can it be distinguished from other songs – a requirement for being remembered and hence for being successful. (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 448)

New popular songs must both provoke attention and seem ‘natural’ (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 444). The profit motive translates into a reliance on those formulae that are most likely to lead to commercial success; past successes are typically used as predictors for future successes.
Because the culture industry favours those cultural commodities that will ‘sell themselves’, marketing and promotional considerations shape the types of content that companies produce. As Andrew Wernick points out,

implicit in Horkheimer and Adorno’s account, though they do not consider it as an independent factor, is that one of the ways in which commodification has been a culturally homogenizing force is through the similar ways in which the products of the culture industry present themselves to us as objects and sites of a promotional practice.… It is not just that such diverse vehicles of symbolic expression as pop records, political candidates, philosophical texts, art galleries, news magazines, and sporting events, are all intensively advertised.… The marketing imperative feeds back into their actual construction. (Wernick 1991, 187)

The primacy of marketability places finite limits on cultural expression (it caps the range of works in which capitalists will invest) and influences the act of creation itself.

As a result, various cultural commodities are only superficially different from one another, despite audiences’ apparent desire for difference. What Adorno terms ‘pseudo-individualization’ or ‘pseudo-individuation’ works to mask the standardization characteristic of capitalist cultural production. In “On Popular Music,” he argues that popular music is standardized in terms of structure, styles, and details. The “detail has no bearing on the whole” (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 441), yet “the listener becomes prone to evince stronger reactions to the part than the whole” (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 439). The ear is drawn to seemingly novel ornaments, hooks, and themes divorced from a broader musical context; these details become fetishes. According to Gunster,

The description ‘pseudo-individuation’ has often been attacked as signifying an elitist disposition because it seemingly requires the superior judgment of a critic to distinguish between ‘true’ and ‘false’ difference. However, Adorno proposes this term less as a strategy of cultural critique and more as a means of defining the structural pressures that commodification imposes on all forms of cultural production. (Gunster 2004, 25)
Commodification imposes the need for cultural products to reproduce what has been ‘market-tested’, whilst gesturing (albeit often on a surface level) toward originality. Pseudo-individualized distinctions lend a “halo of free choice” to the consumer choosing from the industry’s vast menu of “pre-digested” music (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 445).

The homogeneous character of cultural commodities is, for Horkheimer and Adorno, a by-product of “the standardized mode of production of the culture industry” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 124). They draw a parallel between the illusory differences found across different models of cars and those found in the films of the time, noting that in both cases such differences had “nothing to do with … the meaning of the product itself” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 97). The substitution of a new hood ornament or of a different actor in an otherwise predictable melodrama offers only a veneer of originality or individuality. While Horkheimer and Adorno consider the “controlled manner” in which the culture industry’s products are assembled to be “factory-like” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 132), they also acknowledge the limits of the assembly-line metaphor:

Though all industrial mass production necessarily eventuates in standardization, the production of popular music can be called “industrial” only in its promotion and distribution, whereas the act of producing a song hit still remains in a handicraft stage. The production of popular music is highly centralized in its economic organization, but still “individualistic” in its social mode of production. (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 443; emphasis added)

Individual composers are still required to write songs, and they do so with some creative control. However, because the industrial organization of cultural production and distribution shapes the range of cultural commodities marketed, there is a flattening
effect overall. Amid cultural sameness, the promotional pitch of ‘difference’ has sales value. Adorno draws a parallel between Tin Pan Alley jazz and English detached family houses, “which even standardize the claim of each one to be irreplaceably unique, to be a villa of its own” (Adorno [1981] 2001d, 78-79).

Horkheimer and Adorno also were early observers of cross-media promotion. The culture industry thesis argued that an interlocking web of cultural industries was “infecting everything with sameness. Film, radio, and magazines form a system” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 94). A handful of music publishing, film, and radio giants had an inordinate amount of control over what was produced, how widely it was distributed, and how aggressively it was promoted. What is more, “Provided the material fulfills certain minimum requirements, any given song can be plugged and made a success, if there is adequate tie-up … between publishing houses, name bands, radio and moving pictures” (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 447). Horkheimer and Adorno argue that by working together, these distinct sectors launched hits.

This cross-sector, hit-making system was reinforced by a star system. The use of star performers and commercial formulas reflected a business strategy designed to leverage the promotional value of celebrities, maximize profits, and manage financial uncertainty. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the culture industry “rejects anything untried as a risk. In film, any manuscript which is not reassuringly based on a best-seller is viewed with mistrust” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 106). Eventually, audiences react to the stars featured or the hit status of the work:
The reactions of the listeners appear to have no relation to the playing of the music. They have reference, rather, to the cumulative success which, for its part, cannot be thought of unalienated by the past spontaneities of listeners, but instead dates back to the command of publishers, sound film magnates and rulers of radio. Famous people are not the only stars. Works begin to take on the same role. A pantheon of best-sellers builds up. (Adorno [1938] 2002a, 293-94; emphasis in original)

The effects of commodification, however, extend well beyond the narrow range of hits.

For Adorno, the capitalist system and the role of the culture industry therein must be analyzed as a whole. The culture industry thesis is not intended to be applied to some popular cultural forms or genres (e.g., pop) and not others (e.g., jazz). After all, even ‘serious music’ has been touched by the logic of commodification under monopoly capitalism. As Adorno explains in a letter to Frankfurt School colleague Walter Benjamin, both autonomous works of art and so-called mass culture “bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change… Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up” (Adorno [1936] 2007, 123). Serious and popular music, then, must not be understood as isolated phenomena: “The diverse spheres of music must be thought of together…. [T]he neat parcelling out of music’s social field of force is illusionary” (Adorno [1938] 2002a, 292). For instance, Adorno argues that radio programs impose a process of trivialization onto symphonic works that, in effect, produce a type of “quotation listening” (Adorno [1941] 2002d, 263-64). This ‘quotation listening’, in turn, stifles audience members’ capacity to listen to serious music: “Do they listen to a Beethoven symphony in a concentrated mood? Can they do so even if they want to?” (Adorno 1945, 209). Notably, Adorno also criticizes as “fiction” the view that “inducing people to listen to Beethoven symphonies, read Milton
and gaze upon Raphael madonnas is equally ‘progressive’ and humanistic at all times” (Adorno [1941] 2009b, 462). Cultural production and reception are shaped by historical context.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, the commodity character of art in and of itself is not new, but they are specifically concerned with “the fact that art now dutifully admits to being a commodity, abjures its autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumer goods” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 127). Adorno suggests that the shift from aristocratic patronage to market mechanisms during the bourgeois era offered a brief window during which artists could achieve unusual degrees of autonomy and independence from society and its institutions. He does not provide a simple chronicle of cultural decline or a glorification of the past, however, but instead argues that “[c]onsciousness goes immediately from one heteronomy to another. The authority of the Bible is replaced by the authority of the stadium, television and ‘true stories’ which claim to be literal, actual” (Adorno [1959] 1993, 20). Aside from that brief and anomalous liberal era, cultural production has always lacked autonomy. In fact, the case of Beethoven reflect the paradoxes implicit even in the liberal art market:

The mortally sick Beethoven, who flung away a novel by Walter Scott with the cry: “The fellow writes for money,” while himself proving to be an extremely experienced and tenacious businessmen in commercializing the last quartets – works representing the most extreme repudiation of the market – offers the most grandiose example of the unity of opposites of market and autonomy in bourgeois art. (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 127)

The ideal of autonomy, then, is a hope – something to strive toward and not part of an elitist cultural reclamation project as so many critics contend. According to Adorno, “The restitution of the past is not desirable, nor has the critique of it diminished in the
least. Nothing has befallen the objective spirit today that was not already there in the heyday of liberalism or was not at least recompensed for an old debt” (Adorno [1959] 1993, 22). “What is at stake,” for Horkheimer and Adorno, “is not conservation of the past but the fulfillment of past hopes” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, xvii).

The culture industry thesis offers a critique of the capitalist principle of exchange and associated forms of domination. For these thinkers, technology is one such form. While technology aids in the production and administration of commodified culture, the effect of technology on culture remains contradictory, however, as Adorno and Hanns Eisler argue in Composing for Films: “Technology opens up unlimited opportunities for art in the future… But the same principle that has opened up these opportunities also ties them to big business” (Adorno and Eisler [1947] 2005, lii-liii).

The key problem with the use of technology inside the culture industry is not that it has contaminated ‘purer’ models of cultural production, but rather that it enables the ambitions of culture to be ever more regulated by and subordinated to corporate rules and interests. When controlled by big business, real constraints are placed on cultural production. The cultural content produced, in turn, has ideological effects.

The culture industry thesis suggests that commodified culture curbs audience members’ ability to imagine different and more just worlds by offering representations of a seemingly preordained present. Horkheimer and Adorno do not contend that audiences are wholly ignorant regarding the motivations of particular media messages, but focus instead on the fact that “[i]n any sound film or any radio broadcast something is discernible which cannot be attributed as a social effect to any one of them, but to all
together” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 100). Cultural commodities work as a whole to impede the audience’s ability to see capitalism not as natural or inevitable, but as a product of history. Ideology, for Adorno, is not simply the false opposite to truth: “[I]t is not ideology in itself which is untrue but rather its pretension to correspond to reality” (Adorno [1967] 1983, 32). Critique entails the negation of the given and the culture industry relays images of a perpetual present. By picturing the world ‘as it is’ and by giving the impression that things could be no other way, the culture industry legitimates the status quo and, hence, capitalism itself.

Adorno’s form of ideology critique considers how capitalist consumption as a whole works to frame capitalism as a just system and an inevitable reality. Cultural commodities need not function as explicit capitalist propaganda in order to valorize capitalism as such:

Radio music’s ideological tendencies realize themselves regardless of the intent of radio functionaries. There need be nothing intentionally malicious in the maintenance of vested interests. Nonetheless, music under present radio auspices serves to keep listeners from criticizing social realities; in short, it has a soporific effect upon social consciousness. (Adorno 1945, 212; emphasis added)

As Horkheimer and Adorno note of the “captains of the film industry,” “their ideology is business” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 108-109). It is not that the culture industry has the power to make people believe things that are untrue or that it tells the audience what to think. Rather, working in concert with the larger political-economic and social system, the culture industry convinces people that they lack the power necessary to resist that system and affect substantive change (see Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 113). This conceptualization of ideology cannot be reduced to a
crude account of class-based indoctrination, conspiracy theory, or ‘hypodermic needle’-based media effects theories.

For Adorno, the culture industry serves a pacifying function in a rigidly conformist society. However, fleeting escape is desired not because people are cultural ‘dupes’, but rather because workers are wearied and dulled by the labour conditions under which they toil: “[E]ntertainment is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 109). According to Adorno, “Distraction is bound to the present mode of production, to the rationalized and mechanized process of labor to which, directly or indirectly, masses are subject” (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 458). Yet, as Gunster explains, the ‘cultural dupe’ argument is often used to sum up Adorno’s perspective in cultural studies, working to “construct[] a self-constitutive, disciplinary boundary, one that effectively trumps any desire or obligation to examine, discuss, or even adequately refute the culture industry thesis” (Gunster 2004, 172).

While Adorno’s contributions to aesthetic theory are vast, my focus here has been on the commodity character of culture and not its aesthetic value. As Jameson points out, with their culture industry thesis, Horkheimer and Adorno “are closer to having a theory of ‘daily life’ than they are to having one of ‘culture’ in any contemporary sense” (Jameson 2007, 144). Adorno makes problematic assumptions about the aesthetic merits of cultural commodities, and the harsh and dismissive language that he uses to describe these products “gets in the way of the substantive claims he makes” (Gunster 2004, 24). Not surprisingly, the culture industry thesis is
questioned and contested within cultural studies. Consideration of some of these key criticisms will serve to further my development of a *neo*-Adornian critical framework.

### 3.4 Foundational Text or ‘Negative Lesson’? Adorno, Cultural Studies, and Popular Music Studies

“The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception” is a canonical text in cultural studies and popular music studies. While its inclusion in the pages of discipline-framing anthologies would seem to suggest that it is a point of origin for much other work, cultural studies often positions the Frankfurt School as “a kind of negative or naïve moment, as that which has to be overcome” (Nealon and Irr 2002, 3; see also Szeman 2002, 61). Jeffrey T. Nealon provides a brief overview (followed by a critique) of the standard criticisms of Adorno’s problematic assessment of jazz:

> We all know the song, so just let me hum a few bars for you: Adorno has a tin ear for jazz, which he reads as a wholly commodified form; his Eurocentric high-culture biases – and, by extension, his latent anti-black racism – make him unable to hear jazz’s obvious abilities to be precisely the sort of challenging music that Adorno champions in his essays on atonal composition. If he weren’t such a snob or closet racist, he’d be giving it up for Monk or Bud Powell in the same breath as he’s praising Schönberg. (Nealon 2002, 135)

While criticism of Adorno’s Western art music biases is warranted, I assert that the tendency to cite Adorno’s inadequate engagement with jazz as a reason to “indict[] the culture-industry thesis in its entirety” (Gunster 2007, 11) ought to be challenged.

Within the diverse and complex field of cultural studies, work ranging from the subcultural theory of the Birmingham School’s Dick Hebdige (1979) to the affirmative popular culture studies of American John Fiske (1987, 1989) directly confronts the question of the commodification of culture and its effects, and typically comes to very
different conclusions than Adorno; in these accounts, the interpretative faculties of audiences and (potentially) subversive dimensions of consumption are recognized. According to Adam Krims, within popular music studies in particular, Adorno’s critiques of standardization, pseudo-individualization, and the regression of listening are considered a foundational trauma in the discipline…. Adorno’s presence in popular music studies seems most often to resemble that of a pinball bumper, against which scholars all at some point fling themselves in order to bounce somewhere else with renewed energy and theoretical momentum but always with the horrifying threat that gravity will bring them back down in the same direction. (Krims 2007, 91)

The field of popular music studies takes seriously the artistic merit of popular music and examines “classificatory struggle[s] over the contents of legitimate cultural capital” (Regev 2002, 262). In stark contrast to Adorno, popular music studies analyzes the pleasures experienced by and creativity of popular music fans (Chambers 1985; Lewis 1990), and emphasizes how the cultural significance and meanings of popular musical texts and communities cannot simply be read off the commodity form itself (Grossberg 1992, 1997; Lipsitz 1994). Culture is not simply a commodity like any other. It emerges from and is implicated within wider cultural, social, and political processes. Furthermore, commodification does not directly lead to popular musical uniformity, as is evidenced by the diversity of styles and texts available today.

The availability of a vast range of cultural commodities does not undermine Adorno’s argument regarding the instrumental logic behind the use of culture as

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12 Far from a unified field, cultural studies spans neo-Marxist and liberal pluralist perspectives, and draws on approaches such as cultural materialism, neo-Gramscian hegemony theory, Althusserian ideology critique, psychoanalytic cultural theory, semiotics, ‘uses and gratifications’ theory, and ‘active audience’ theories.
revenue-generating property, however. Interestingly, as Nealon points out, Amiri Baraka’s “Swing: From Verb to Noun” chapter of *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* offers an argument very similar to Adorno’s, except that it focuses on the commodification and packaging of jazz for white audiences (Nealon 2002, 135-36). The jazz examples Adorno cites, after all, are largely swing acts, such as Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey, intended for white audiences. To Nealon, it is important to clarify that by ‘jazz’ Adorno meant the popular music he heard on the radio and not atonal, ‘free’ jazz (Nealon 2002, 136). In a similar vein, Jameson contends that Paul Whiteman is “the proper reference for what Adorno calls ‘jazz’, which has little to do with the richness of a Black culture we have only long since then discovered” (Jameson 2007, 141). Adorno undoubtedly failed to grasp the complexity, diversity, and cultural significance of black expressive culture and of popular music more broadly. In fact, he even denied the black-American origins of jazz: “For Adorno … jazz was a white man’s music” (J. Robinson 1994, 13). Nonetheless, it is crucial to remember that Adorno was attempting to examine the conditioning effects of commodification and market relations on cultural production as a whole. Thus, for Adorno, “not even legitimate jazz is allowed to partake of a claim to artistic status as it has constantly been co-opted by the entertainment industry” (J. Robinson 1994, 3).

For his critics, one of the shortcomings of Adorno’s approach is his insistence that commodification utterly nullifies cultural autonomy. According to David

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13 Although Adorno lived until 1969, he failed to comment on rock ‘n’ roll, as Bernard Gendron points out: “Adorno never veered from his construction of popular music as nothing more than Tin Pan Alley or some jazzy derivative of it” (Gendron 1986, 18).

14 According to J. Bradford Robinson (1994), Adorno’s writings on jazz reflect his early exposure to a derivative variant of jazz produced by Weimar Germany’s commercial music industry.
Hesmondhalgh, Adorno requires art to “aspire to impossible levels of autonomy and dialectic” (Hesmondhalgh 2008a, 341). What is more, Adorno displays “seeming contempt for everyday cultural consumption in modern societies” (Hesmondhalgh 2008a, 341). Georgina Born contends that Adorno’s scholarship lacks “a sense of the potential autonomy – even in popular cultural production – of the aesthetic from the economic and institutional” and “a place for agency” (Born 1993, 241). The argument that Adorno pays insufficient attention to the matter of agency is key. Unfortunately, these valid criticisms are often couched in simplistic language that suggests that Adorno sees consumers as “uncultured and easily influenced zombies” (Klein 2009, 10). As we have seen, the culture industry thesis suggests a far more complex stance on consumption, ideology, and the passivity of audiences.

Adorno does not lament the loss of artistic autonomy for anti-populist reasons. As Andreas Huyssen observes, this is a major distinction between the elitism attributed to Adorno and the dismissiveness of conservative critics of ‘mass’ society: “Critics such as T. S. Eliot and philosophers such as Ortega y Gasset saw the masses as threatening all culture from below. Adorno’s insistence on autonomy, however, is the logical result of his analysis of mass culture as the intentional integration of its consumers from above” (Huyssen 1975, 8; emphasis in original). As Gunster explains,

[F]or conservatives the commodification of mass culture generally stands as an empty signifier for a variety of other faults, such as standardization, banality, and lack of cultural tradition. For Adorno, … it is the commodity form itself that is the root problem. Moreover, … his objective is hardly to replace ‘low’ with ‘high’ culture, since he thinks that both have been corrupted by capitalism. He indicts the totality of capitalist society and culture, and his theoretical objectives are far more radical than a simple return to a bourgeois past. (Gunster 2004, 175; emphasis in original)
Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s critique of the top-down domination born of capitalist relations and the illusion of freedom reinforced by the culture industry is related to a larger project of democratization. In *Towards A New Manifesto*, Horkheimer argues that “[f]reedom is not the freedom to accumulate, but the fact that I have no need to accumulate” (in Adorno and Horkheimer [1956] 2011, 23). This message is diametrically opposed to the sentiment promulgated by advertisers within a consumer society. In fact, for Horkheimer and Adorno, “the triumph of advertising in the culture industry” is “the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 136). People see through the pitch, yet obey it all the same.

To be sure, Adorno’s critical analysis of capitalist cultural production pays insufficient attention to the artistic merits of popular music and to the meaning making processes of audiences. While the commodity form cannot determine the specific details of cultural content, I contend that Adorno’s claim that commodification places real constraints on cultural production must be retained. Because media corporations view cultural commodities as value-generating properties first and foremost, they invest in market-friendly ‘difference’ at the expense of more radical or unsalable expressive culture. Next, I consider the role of the culture industry thesis in the political economy of communication.
3.5 From ‘Culture Industry’ to ‘Cultural Industries’: Adorno and the Political Economy of Communication

Given that a handful of transnational, synergy-producing conglomerates dominate the global markets for film, television, print, and music, and exercise an inordinate amount of power across these cultural sectors today, one would expect that media political economists might engage with the culture industry thesis in order to consider the ways that these industries, though distinct, function as a ‘totality’. However, within the critical political economy of communication, as in cultural studies, Adorno’s arguments serve as a point of critique and departure. The ‘cultural industries’ approach in particular draws direct lineage from the culture industry thesis but makes significant modifications to that theory. As Hesmondhalgh points out, the shift from ‘culture industry’ (singular) to ‘cultural industries’ (plural) “is revealing and surprisingly significant”: it signals how “complex the cultural industries are,” how “[t]he commodification of culture … [is] a much more ambivalent process than was allowed for by Adorno and Horkheimer’s cultural pessimism,” and how the cultural industries are a “contested … zone of continuing struggle” (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 16-17; emphasis in original). While I assert that the culture industry thesis offers an apposite framework for conceptualizing the effects of commodification on culture, the cultural industries approach lends necessary empirical and analytical precision to the study of different sectors of capitalist cultural production. As such, this body of scholarship contributes in important ways to my neo-Adornian critical framework.

In Cultural Studies and Political Economy, Robert E. Babe suggests that while Adorno’s scholarship is foundational to cultural studies (even if as a foil), it is often
overlooked altogether within the political economy of communication (Babe 2009, 18). In Babe’s account, however, the culture industry thesis laid the foundation for both fields of analysis; Marxist/neo-Marxist approaches to political economy (which he distinguishes from the non-Marxist/“institutionalist” approaches derived from Harold Innis) can be traced back to the interventions of the Frankfurt School (Babe 2009, 18-21). “In terms of volume, if not necessarily importance,” Babe observes, “[Adorno’s] writings on aesthetics do indeed dwarf his contributions to political economy,” yet the influence of his and Horkheimer’s analysis of the links between capitalist domination and the culture industry serves as a corrective to this imbalance (Babe 2009, 18). In The Cultural Industries, Hesmondhalgh provides a somewhat different roadmap of political economy approaches, and makes a helpful distinction between the scholarship of Americans Herbert Schiller, Noam Chomsky, Edward Herman, and Robert McChesney, and the European cultural industries approach inaugurated by Bernard Miège (1989), Nicholas Garnham (1990), and others (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 34-37). I direct my attention here to the latter approach, which shares an explicit connection to the culture industry thesis.

In The Capitalization of Cultural Production, Miège dedicates his foreword to a critique of the Frankfurt School conception of ‘culture industry’. According to Miège, the notion of a culture industry in the singular “misleads one into thinking that we are faced with an unified field, where the various elements function within a single process…. The same model is said to be at work, leveling out the different modes of creativity and imposing common standards” (Miège 1989, 10). The various spheres of
cultural production, in fact, are marked by industrial complexity and diversity. Miège argues that the publishing model (books, records), flow model (radio, television), and written press model (newspapers, magazines) operate according to different logics and accumulate capital through different methods (Miège 1989, 12). Miège also criticizes Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s “rigid idea of artistic creation” and the fact that their approach “is only incidentally concerned with the production process, the extension of the division of labor to the conception of artistic products, and the resulting production relationships” (Miège 1989, 10-11). Adorno does not provide a detailed political economic analysis of specific cultural industries or of cultural labour.

Miège, Garnham, and other scholars who fall within the cultural industries approach (Ryan 1991; Hesmondhalgh 1996, 2007; Toynbee 2000) all argue that the commodification of culture embodied in these industries is a far more complex and ambivalent process than is suggested by Horkheimer and Adorno. For instance, although Horkheimer and Adorno do recognize that financial risk plays a role in the choices made by media corporations, they neglect to elucidate just how unpredictable the market for cultural commodities can be. As cultural industries scholarship points out, cultural sectors face a number of challenges to profitability; cultural commodities involve high production costs (but low reproduction costs), are rarely destroyed in use (which places limits on monetization), and are particularly risky investments (Garnham 1990, 160-61; Hesmondhalgh 2007, 18-21). The cultural industries approach involves detailed critical analysis of the specific business strategies employed to mitigate or surmount such obstacles. Briefly, the cultural industries develop large catalogues of
cultural products and pursue strategies of corporate integration to minimize the overall impact of commercial failures; limit audience access through the manufacture of artificial scarcity; use the star system and genre formats to foster market predictability; and adopt loose-tight control of the creative process vis-à-vis distribution and marketing (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 22-24; see also Garnham 1990). These scholars also stress that creative cultural labourers are granted far more autonomy than is found in other industries (Hesmondhalgh 2007, passim). To a certain degree, corporations necessarily recognize the inherent tension between creativity and the dictates of commerce.

Cultural industries scholarship asserts that cultural commodities are distinct from and similar to other commodities. As Miège explains, “Cultural commodities develop according to specific conditions and modes of production; however they are also commodities like any other because they constitute in essence a new field for the expansion of exchange values, a means used by capital to maintain a given rate of accumulation” (Miège 1989, 36). This complex dual character is often misunderstood:

Either artistic creation ... is considered as being totally separate from industrialization ..., or one simply refuses to acknowledge that the cultural industries possess any distinctive characteristics, and merely observes that things are now the same in this area as in others: market standardization and production concentration have gained total control. (Miège 1989, 40)

The cultural industries approach accounts for ways that cultural commodities cannot be equated with other consumer goods. Cultural value and meaning cannot simply be read off the commodity form. The term ‘cultural industries’ loosens the ‘culture industry’ from its associations with elitism, cultural pessimism, and a particular variant of Marxist economics (Garnham 2005, 18).
For Garnham, however, “the main problem with the Frankfurt School analysis [is] not its cultural pessimism so much as the superficiality of its economic analysis” (Garnham 2005, 18). The Frankfurt School position, he asserts, offers an “insufficient[] … account of the economically contradictory nature of the process they observed and thus … see[s] the industrialization of culture as unproblematic and irresistible” (Garnham 1979, 131). The issue is not whether or not capitalist relations play a structuring and limiting role in cultural production, as Garnham agrees they do; rather, the problem lies in the fact that Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s critical framework lacks detailed political economic analysis and concrete class analysis (Garnham 1979, 131).

While cultural industries scholars distance themselves from many of the claims made by Frankfurt School scholars, I argue that these critical perspectives are not incompatible. Much as Horkheimer and Adorno contend that “[f]ilm, radio, and magazines form a system” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 94), Garnham observes that “the cultural sector operates as an integrated economic whole,” at least insofar as the different cultural industries compete with one another for skilled labour, advertising revenue, consumer disposable income, and consumption time (Garnham 1990, 158). In a manner comparable to Adorno’s analysis of the audience demand for difference (albeit within sameness) (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 448), Garnham stresses the importance of novelty within the market for cultural commodities (Garnham 1990, 160).

A central argument made by Garnham, which I retain in my analysis of the digitalizing music industry, emphasizes how “[i]t is cultural distribution, not cultural
production, that is the key locus of power and profit…. The cultural process is as much, if not more, about creating audiences or publics as it is about producing cultural artefacts and performances” (Garnham 1990, 161-62; emphasis in original). Notably, ‘creating audiences’ is actually the work of marketing and not distribution per se. Marketing and distribution continue to dictate profitability inside the contemporary music industry, as we shall see.

3.6 Conclusion

The culture industry thesis offers a convincing theoretical framework for conceptualizing the constraints that commodification necessarily places on culture; as properties used to generate profits, varied cultural texts and practices are subsumed under the common denominator of exchange. However, I agree with key criticisms offered by scholarship within cultural studies and the political economy of communication; cultural commodities are more complex, contradictory, and meaningful than the culture industry thesis suggests, and the degree to which particular cultural commodities will resonate with audiences and, hence, become profitable remains unpredictable. Because the culture industry system certainly is not as seamless as Adorno assumes, the cultural industries approach serves as an important and necessary complement to any effective reformulation of the culture industry thesis. By bringing together these two approaches in this chapter, I began to build the critical foundation of my neo-Adornian framework – a process that culminates in Chapter 6, where I combine David Harvey’s (1990, 2005, 2006, 2010) scholarship on neoliberal and post-Fordist processes of capital accumulation with Adorno’s critique of commodification.
Inside the music industry, in a manner consistent with Adorno’s analysis, the primacy of marketability influences which recording artists are signed by record companies and which material is recorded, released, and promoted. In Chapter 4, I draw on the cultural industries approach in order to provide an in-depth examination and comparison of specific commercial pressures and industrial dynamics characteristic of the ‘old’ and the digitalizing music industries. Turning to the use of popular music by consumer brands and media properties, Chapter 5 documents and analyzes the intensifying relationship between recording artists and brands. In so doing, it provides empirical support for the cogency of neo-Adornian critique and bridges concerns regarding popular music’s commodity form introduced in Chapter 3 and 4 to Chapter 6, where I advance my argument that the proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics under post-Fordism reflects the triumph of the means-ends rationality so definitively delineated by Adorno. The merger between popular music and advertising, which was only in its infancy when Horkheimer and Adorno developed their critical analysis, has been fully realized in recent years, largely as a result of the digitalizing music industry’s changing marketing and monetization strategies and brands’ increasing interest in the promotional value of recording artists and popular music. Popular music’s intensifying merger with advertising, television, and film under the emergent music branding paradigm suggests that, now more than ever, the “individual branches are similar in structure or at least fit into each other, ordering themselves into a system almost without a gap” (Adorno [1967] 2001b, 98).
4 THE DIGITALIZING MUSIC INDUSTRY: ‘CRISIS’ AND RECUPERATION OF THE COMMODITY FORM

4.1 Introduction

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the recording industry was overcome by a tidal wave of change. Following the launch of Napster and the subsequent mass popularization of various peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing services, the technological change that had long enveloped the commercial production of popular music was especially rapid and persistent. The recording industry’s core bases of profitability and power – sales of physical album ‘units’ and top-down dominance over radio and music video promotion – were radically destabilized by the proliferation of unauthorized downloading, on-demand streaming media, and the growth of a consumer (rather than professional) market for digital recording technologies. The music industry reached a ‘tipping point’ (Leyshon et al. 2005, 181). In fact, it has been widely held that this period of ‘crisis’ initiated the demise of the major music companies altogether.

On the contrary, this surface appearance of music industry-wide decentralization has rendered nearly invisible the decisive ways that major record companies and music publishers have successfully responded to the crisis in popular music’s commodity form. In its December 19, 2009 issue, Billboard analysts and contributors collaborated to provide a list of the “Top 10 Trends of the Decade,” paraphrased below:

1) The recording industry’s failure to keep pace with new digital platforms;

2) Consolidation across recording, music publishing, live performance, retailing, merchandising, and artist management companies;
3) The transformation of ticketing companies such as Ticketmaster into marketing/sales companies;

4) The collapse of the music retail system;

5) The popularity of music reality television programs;

6) The surge in licensing and brand partnerships and the decline in the perception of “selling out”;

7) The transformation of music videos from free promotional medium to monetized content made available online in exchange for licenses;

8) The increase in the independent sector’s market share;

9) The advent of the 360 degree or multiple rights recording contract; and

10) Wall Street investment in music publishing catalogues.

The trend listed at number one, the recording industry’s futile attempts “to put the MP3 genie back in the bottle” (Billboard 2009), has dominated industry and popular press. The popular perspective that major record labels are out-of-date ‘dinosaurs’ destined for failure has dangerously overshadowed the ways the music industry has adapted to this new business climate by some of the very means highlighted further down Billboard’s list of trends, among them: deepened corporate consolidation; increased and expanded music licensing; the monetization of new music commodities, including music videos; and the institutionalization of all-encompassing ‘360 deals’.

Against overwrought claims about a radical break in major music company hegemony, the following three chapters examine how the music industry, in the words of Keir Keightley, is instead “merely mutating to maintain its ability to extract surplus
value from musical labour” (Keightley 2010). I make three key arguments of my own regarding the specifics of this mutation. First, in this chapter, I argue that the sharp decline in Compact Disc (CD) sales in the digital era has forced the recording industry to reconfigure popular music’s core commodity form: ‘artist-brands’ now constitute the foundation of capitalization. These artist-brands are monetized through digital music products and services (e.g., downloads, music videos, audio and video streaming sites), music licenses and other rights, endorsements, merchandise, and live performances. Central here is the growing significance of marketing and of the burgeoning market for business-to-business (B2B) licensing deals. As we shall see, the ‘top down’ monetization of recording artists and popular music works to offset the threat to profitability posed by digital change, and to reinforce already unequal power relations between working artists and music companies. Most notably, the 360 deal, a new talent contracting convention, plays a decisive role in deepening recording artist vulnerability to music companies and alienating artists even further from the products of their own labour (on which also see Stahl 2010; Stahl and Meier 2012).

In Chapter 5, I argue that record companies’ and recording artists’ deepening reliance on business-to-business music licensing and endorsements has vested consumer brands and media properties with power as new music industry gatekeepers – another trend with worrisome consequences for working artists and for content creation itself. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I take into consideration the evidence presented in Chapters 4 and 5 as I weigh Adorno’s analytical framework against critical analyses of post-Fordist cultural production (Harvey 1990; Lee 1993; Lash and Urry 1994; Krims 2007; Lash
and Lury 2007). I contend that the proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics, and the attendant transformation of popular music into advertising, affirms the relevance of the culture industry thesis to the digitalizing music industry. Even more than in years past, “Advertising and the culture industry are merging technically no less than economically” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 133).

4.2 The ‘Old’ Industrial Model: A Record Business

For the music industry the age of manufacture is now over. Companies (and company profits) are no longer organised around making things but depend on the creation of rights. In the industry’s own jargon, each piece of music represents ‘a basket of rights’; the company task is to exploit as many of these rights as possible, not just those realised when it is sold in recorded form to the public, but also those realised when it is broadcast on radio or television, used on a film, commercial or video soundtrack, and so on. Musical rights (copyrights, performing rights) are the basic pop commodity. (Frith 1988a, 57; emphasis in original)

There was no clear break that unambiguously divided the ‘old’ music industry model, which was anchored by sales of physical sound recordings, from its digitalizing successor. In fact, the sound recording’s digital origins can be traced back to the introduction of the CD format, which enabled the storage of digital data, and CD-ROM drives, which made CDs playable on computers (J. Morris 2010, 6, 68). The shift from the production of records toward the exploitation of rights, too, was set in train long before the MP3 era, as Frith suggests. Nevertheless, in my usage of the term ‘digitalizing’ music industry, I refer specifically to the increasingly post-CD period sparked by the ability to easily store digital music files on personal computers and upload or download such files via P2P file sharing services. We need to evaluate the character of this digital transformation in order fully to understand the emergence of the
artist-brand paradigm. This means pinpointing key patterns of change and continuity between the pre-digital and post-CD industrial models. To begin, it is necessary to examine how, exactly, businesses generated profits from the commercial production, distribution, and exchange of music under the old model. Which sectors and types of organizations were involved? What was popular music’s core commodity form? The question of monetization turns out to be key.

Popular music’s commodity form has long been dynamic and subject to change. As discussed in Chapter 2, throughout the early years of music’s industrialization, sheet music and live performances constituted popular music’s core commodity forms. Then, during the age of sound recording and radio, the record emerged as the primary popular music commodity. A recording industry emerged alongside the existing music publishing and live performance sectors, but importantly did not displace them. While music publishers remained dominant well into the 1940s (Passman 2009, 217), the recording industry was the central hub of music industry activity, profit, and power for the remainder of twentieth century. The record, however, did not by itself “sustain pop meaning, which has always had to draw on other forms – including posters, teen magazines, live performances, film, radio, and TV” (Goodwin 1992, 26). The sound recording, music publishing, and live performance sectors largely worked in unison, although their interests did not always align.

Given the dominance of the physical recording-centred model until very recently, it is not surprising that the recording industry is commonly conflated with the music industry. According to John Williamson and Martin Cloonan, the use of the term
‘music industry’ in the singular is misleading overall; in addition to its imprecise use as a synonym for the recording industry (a sector often over-privileged in academic and policy writing), reference to a music industry also gives the impression of a single, unified industry, which, they argue, can work to “disguise[] conflict within the industries” (Williamson and Cloonan 2007, 316; emphasis in original). In their account, the plural ‘music industries’ provides a more precise characterization of the set of discrete sectors engaged in selling recordings, compositions, performances, and associated merchandise (Williamson and Cloonan 2007, 305). After all, the recording industry has long been flanked not only by the music publishing and concert promotion sectors, but also by management agencies, music retailers, and merchandisers.

Williamson’s and Cloonan’s music industries argument echoes important contributions from the ‘cultural industries’ literature (Miège 1989; Garnham 1990; Hesmondhalgh 2007) reviewed in Chapter 3. As Miège points out, “contrary to widespread opinion, the present situation of the cultural industries is not characterized by a sole and unique logic” (Miège 1989, 12). Rather, the cultural industries are marked by heterogeneity, industrial complexity, and, at times, competing interests. In response to Williamson and Cloonan, however, Dave Laing convincingly argues that the interlocking web of recording, music publishing, live performance, and merchandizing businesses within the commercial music system nevertheless function as “a unitary business sector, albeit one in which sub-sectors have a relatively autonomous relationship to each other” (Laing 2009, 15). While I agree with Laing’s assessment, I also maintain that analysis of industrial complexity serves as an important counterpoint
to Adorno’s overly rigid and sweeping conceptualization of a uniform and monolithic ‘culture industry’. Consistent with Adorno, I assert that commodification as such does place limits on cultural production. However, I also contend that enquiry into the particulars of that commodification helps to reveal the character of those constraints. Indeed, while sound recordings, compositions, and live performances are all marketed as products available for purchase, each commodity form is a product of distinct industrial dynamics. With this in mind, next I draw on cultural industries scholarship to delineate modes of monetization found inside the pre-digital recording and music publishing industries – sectors that have been affected by digitalization in distinct and consequential ways.

Both the recording and music publishing industries, past and present, produce what Miège classifies as *highly reproducible products* compatible with industrial mass production processes (Miège 1989, 12). In their twentieth century iterations, these industries conformed to a *publishing logic*, under which “products generally issu[e] from the materialization and reproduction of artistic work (whose creators are paid by a system of royalties and reproduction rights), and sold direct [sic] to consumers” (Miège 1989, 12). With this dynamic in mind (and to anticipate nomenclatural confusion), it is worth emphasizing here that, for Miège, the sale of records follows this *publishing* logic. Both record labels and music publishers generated profits from the sale of sound recordings to end consumers under the old system: the former through unit sales of albums or singles and sound recording (phonogram) copyrights, and the latter from mechanical reproduction rights for individual songs (musical compositions and lyrics).
recorded on tapes or CDs (Passman 2009, 220; Price n.d.). Following this logic, music publishers were likewise in the record business.

Then as now, however, the music publishing industry generated revenue from numerous additional sources. Music publishers exploited print rights for sheet music and lyrics, performance rights for television broadcasts and radio airplay, and synchronization (‘synch’) rights for the use of compositions in other audiovisual media (e.g., films, television programs, advertisements). The recording industry also profited from such music-media pairings, because the insertion of original master recordings of songs (not cover versions or re-recordings) into television, film, and advertisements requires a ‘master use’ license from the owner of the master recording (typically the record label) in addition. Importantly, synch and master use licenses – revenue streams central to the digitalizing music industry, as we shall see – fall under a sales model distinct from the ‘direct to consumer’ publishing model identified by Miège. They entail business-to-business sales: instead of selling a unit to an end consumer, the music company sells a license to another company, which can add value to that brand or media product.

Under the old business model, however, recording industry profits generally came from the consumer market for sound recordings. Thus, capitalization strategies reflected the distinctive economics that underpinned the record business. First, the production of full-length albums entailed high production costs and low reproduction costs. The first copy of an album could be likened to a prototype, for which substantial

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15 In the music publishing industry, the term ‘exploit’ describes the conversion of copyrights into revenue.
investment was required. Once a record company reached the ‘break-even’ point for its investment in that album, however, very few additional variable costs accrued as sales increased (Garnham 1990, 160; Hesmondhalgh 2007, 21). Because the costs associated with pressing and distributing additional physical albums (units) were minimal, profit margins escalated dramatically once the record company had ‘recouped’ the fixed costs associated with producing the first copy. Second, because the preferences and tastes of the popular music-buying public were unpredictable, the recording industry was marked by financial uncertainty (Garnham 1990, 161; McCourt and Rothenbuhler 1997, 201-202; Negus 1999, 32; Frith 2001, 33; Hesmondhalgh 2007, 18-19). It was commonly claimed that only one out of every eight recording artists signed to a label sold enough records to break even – a figure that was “hard to verify and as mythical as it is statistical,” but remains at the very least “an indication of how staff within the music industry perceive their daily plight” (Negus 1999, 32). Investment in unproven talent was seen as a gamble.

To mitigate this risk and capitalize on the marginal costs of reproduction, major record labels favoured the promotion of the most commercially viable stars over investment across a broader range of smaller-scale acts. By focusing on stars, they aimed to achieve “audience maximization” – an approach that “favours large corporations with deep pockets who can employ economies of scale” (Garnham 2005, 19; see also Garnham 1990). Indeed, as Jason Toynbee explains, inside the recording industry, “the logic of production prefers the general – the largest possible category” (Toynbee 2002, 155). While the major labels did sign a range of new artists, it was
done with the hope of acquiring a handful of stars. Because the likelihood of producing a ‘hit’ was higher for those companies that released more new music (Garnham 1990, 161; Hesmondhalgh 2007, 22), record labels adopted the so-called ‘mud-against-the-wall’ strategy, which entailed “throw[ing] out as much product as possible in the hope that some of it [would] stick” (Negus 1992, 40); the mud in question was generated mostly by stars and, occasionally, by less established talent. While commercial failure was “the norm” for individual releases (Frith 2001, 33), revenues from the handful of blockbusters that did ‘stick’ enabled the major record labels to reap substantial profits overall.

Smaller-scale and independent record labels also could be profitable in the old industrial system. Since its inception, the recording industry “has been organized according to small-scale productions and selling to changing niche markets alongside the creation of big hits and blockbusters” (Negus 1999, 17). Because profits accrued much more quickly from mass markets than niche markets, however, the larger companies that produced blockbuster albums were more profitable by design. There was considerable financial incentive to capitalize on international markets, which could provide “extra income for proportionately less additional investment” (Negus 1999, 155). In fact, international commercial success was typically a prerequisite for profitability (Buxton [1983] 1990, 438). Major record labels with large distribution networks at their disposal were better equipped to capitalize on these markets.

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16 There have been periods during which the hegemony of the major record labels has been tested. This was the case in the mid- to late-1950s, which saw the influx of independent labels that produced early rock ‘n’ roll (Peterson and Berger 1975, 164; Gillett [1970] 1996; Burkart and McCourt 2006, 24).
The corporate strategies and structures that anchored the old industrial model reflected the major record companies’ response to the huge benefits of high sales volumes and the punitive consequences of commercial failures. These corporations deployed strategies of integration in order to capitalize on available economies of scale (thereby aiming at audience maximization) and to decrease competition (toward effective risk management). Such strategies included: *horizontal integration* (acquisition of companies across different sectors in an effort to capture market share); *vertical integration* (acquisition of companies involved in different stages of production, distribution, and exhibition in the same sector); and *internationalization* (acquisition of or partnership with companies based in other nations) (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 22; Richeri 2011, 131-32). Additionally, major and independent record labels routinely agreed to various joint ventures and licensing and distribution deals (Negus 1999, 35), effectively combining more than one of each of these strategies in any given instance. Within the wider commercial system, the majors sat at the centre of this matrix of strategies and smaller labels sat at the periphery.

Strategies of corporate consolidation helped the major music companies shore up their industry-wide dominance. Indeed, counter to a straightforward argument for industrial complexity, wherein a multiplicity of players are involved in the various commercial music sectors, only a handful of transnational corporations were at the helm of both the recording and music publishing industries under the old system. Between 1980 and 2004, the ‘Big Six’ record companies – Capitol/EMI, CBS, MCA, Polygram, RCA, and Warner – shrank to the ‘Big Four’: Universal, EMI, Warner, and Sony BMG

Under the old industrial system, these overwhelmingly anti-competitive market conditions allowed for the entrenchment of a highly controlled, top-down system of marketing and distribution. Garnham’s argument, quoted in Chapter 3, bears repeating here: “It is cultural distribution, not cultural production, that is the key locus of power and profit” (Garnham 1990, 161-62; emphasis in original). In interview, Don Grierson, former vice president of Artists and Repertoire (A&R) at Capitol Records, EMI America, and Epic Records, spoke to this previous reality by underscoring the shift away from controlled promotion and distribution in recent years:

Up until the Internet, there was a system controlled basically by the majors, and … there was traditional distribution. You had retail stores all over the place, and … you get airplay and you get MTV exposure, and once you got the exposure then … the sales people would get that music into the stores and then hopefully the public bought it… In the heyday of our business, … the majors were rolling. (I/Grierson 2010)
The major record companies benefited from unparalleled access to the distribution network of major record retailers (e.g., HMV, Sam Goody, Tower Records, and Virgin Megastore) – corporations that were “so big that they wouldn’t bother with small players” (Passman 2009, 84). In addition, the majors wielded unrivalled programming influence over commercial radio and music video promotion – media businesses also subject to oligopolistic market conditions. Major label dominance over marketing and distribution resulted in high barriers to market entry (Burkart and McCourt 2006, 26).

Returning to the matter of industrial complexity and heterogeneity posed at the beginning of this section, it is evident that the dominant industrial dynamics found inside the old system actively worked against, but did not entirely extinguish, such possibilities. The relatively closed system charted in the preceding pages provides important context for understanding the crisis in popular music’s commodity form triggered by the music industry’s digital transition. Under the new system, the major record companies have shifted their focus away from controlling the near defunct CD retail system’s marketing and distribution channels. The “death of retail” (Billboard 2009), however, has worked to tighten the majors’ grip over whatever physical retail sales remain. According to Grierson, “There’s very few places where you can actually go and buy music. And if you go to the Walmarts or the K-Marts or the Targets, they

17 Continuing a process that had begun in the 1980s, the U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996 further relaxed restrictions on radio ownership and removed the national ownership cap altogether (Prindle 2003, 281). From 1996-2002, this mass deregulation ignited a 33.6 percent reduction in the number of owners; the two largest companies, which had previously owned just 65 stations between them, quickly bought up in excess of 1,400 stations (Prindle 2003, 306). Although the rhetoric of deregulation is founded on competition and consumer choice, it is apparent that such policies, in fact, constitute “government regulation that advances the interests of dominant corporate players” (McChesney 2004, 19-20; see also Murdock 1996 on ‘re-regulation’). Music video promotion, meanwhile, was monopolized by MTV in the United States and by MuchMusic in Canada.
only carry the main titles or the main artists. They don’t carry deep catalogue and they don’t really support the developing artists” (I/Grierson 2010). While a record business anchored by unit sales proved far more manageable than its digitalizing successor in many ways, in what follows, I contest claims about the radical challenge that the evolving digital music model purportedly poses to the major music companies.

4.3 The Digital Music Model: The Centrality of Marketing

It used to be that the record company would decide when the single went out, when the promo tour went out, when the … publicity hit, and how the consumer was exposed to music. Now, because everything’s digital and online, the consumer sees that almost instantaneously and actually they ‘pull’ it. They’re the ones drawing it…. We don’t control the machine anymore. We used to have to push the engine to get it going … Now it’s pulled. (I/Canadian major label executive B 2009)

Continuing my analysis of key patterns of continuity and change, I now turn to the dynamics of disruption and recuperation that have contributed to the transformation of the old record business into a marketing-oriented industry focused on the monetization of artist-brands. The music industry’s digital transition has been widely heralded as a democratizing music revolution. Unprecedented access to the technological means of recording, distributing, and promoting music has opened up an overwhelming number of new avenues to the recording artist interested in working outside the long-entrenched recording industry oligopoly. Today’s music audience, meanwhile, has access not only to an abundance of musical content, but also to a range of digital audio/media players (e.g., smart phones, MP3 players, tablets) and content delivery methods (e.g., digital downloads, music streaming services). In a remarkable reversal, the audience can now choose what to listen to and when. Even the decision
whether or not to pay for a recording is voluntary, although non-payment may come with the threat of legal action.\footnote{According to statistics reported by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) (a worldwide recording industry lobby group), due to unauthorized downloading, “[t]he trade value of recorded-music sales has fallen from about $7 billion in 2005 to $4.6 billion in 2009” (in Peoples 2010b). Specific recording industry statistics should not necessarily be taken at face value, however; lobby organizations and trade associations such as IFPI and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) have an obvious interest in perpetuating the idea that the recording industry has been unduly harmed by ‘piracy’ in order to pressure governments to police unauthorized online distribution of music.} In the new industrial system, television based music video plugging largely has been displaced by streaming video services (e.g., YouTube, Vevo), and social media platforms have emerged as key sites for the sharing and promotion of music. Independent recording artists can enlist digital ‘direct-to-fan’ sales and marketing companies (e.g., Bandcamp, Nimbit, Topspin) to assist with online ‘fan management’ and ‘brand management’. Recording artist popularity is evaluated in terms of Facebook friends, Twitter followers, and YouTube views, not simply Billboard charts.\footnote{In fact, in December 2010, Billboard introduced a new chart, the Social 50, reflecting the importance of social media to gauging recording artist popularity today.} Although the locked down industrial system has been pried open in many ways, major music companies still profit most from the digital model due to the growing importance of marketing and market-making.

Amid vast popular musical abundance and diversity, the blockbuster approach central to the old recording industry model is increasingly seen as antiquated. Among independent record label executives and small-scale music producers in particular, the popular belief that the digitalizing music industry is an open field freed from the dictates of the major record labels is largely anchored in the notion of the ‘long tail’ – an idea developed by Chris Anderson, former Editor-in-Chief at *Wired*. The term refers to the graphical representation of a demand curve for which a handful of hits generate
the majority of sales (the ‘head’) and numerous non-hits are sold in much lower volumes (the ‘long tail’). Taking inspiration from the case of online film and television aggregator Netflix, Anderson argues that the Internet has allowed for unprecedented profitability for low-volume, niche media products, including music, which can now coexist healthily with blockbuster hits:

> These millions of fringe sales are an efficient, cost-effective business. With no shelf space to pay for – and in the case of purely digital services like iTunes, no manufacturing costs and hardly any distribution fees – a niche product sold is just another sale, with the same (or better) margins as a hit. *For the first time in history, hits and niches are on equal economic footing.* (Anderson 2006, 24; emphasis added)

In Anderson’s account, falling costs of distribution have reconfigured media content profit models. It is no longer necessary to produce, distribute, and retail physical media products, ostensibly a source of considerable cost savings.

A business model derived from the “1,000 True Fans” blog post written by Kevin Kelly, founding executive editor of *Wired*, is also highly touted among independent labels and producers. In Kelly’s formulation, a small-scale recording artist can “make an honest living” off the cultivation of 1,000 “True Fans” “who will purchase anything and everything you produce” (Kelly 2008a). Kelly arbitrarily assigns the number of $100 per year to each “True Fan” and argues that “if you have 1,000 fans that sums up to $100,000 per year, which minus some modest expenses, is a living for most folks” (Kelly 2008a). He adds the caveat that this figure only works for solo artists; more band members necessitate more fans.

The widely circulated claim that ‘hits are starting to rule less’ serves as an apt starting point for analysis of the digitalizing music industry, because if true, such a
fundamental shift would upend the foundations of the old model. In reality, the surface appearance of popular musical democratization created by the wealth of music available today works to obscure the fact that the major labels’ star system has not been toppled. While digital distribution undoubtedly has loosened major record label control over the distribution of recordings, as they can no longer determine where and when which recordings are available, the question of what makes for cost-effective and profitable business under the new system is an entirely different matter.

It behooves us to remember that the costs of pressing, shipping, and retailing physical CDs were not burdensome to major record companies under the old system. As Garnham points out, “the cost of each record pressing is infinitesimal compared to the cost of recording” (Garnham 1990, 160). According to Ari Martin, Vice President of Artist Management at Nettwerk Music Group, even today “the bulk of the costs are the marketing and A&R and recording, and payments to the artist and publisher…. The CD production, … saving that cost is not … that big of an effect” (I/Martin 2010). Digital distribution has not reformulated the distinctive economics of the recording industry; the substantial investment remains tied to the costs of producing and marketing the now virtual or polycarbonate plastic album, not in reproducing and distributing copies of that album.

If the advent of digital distribution has not substantively altered the basic economics of the recording industry, have falling costs of production reconfigured the bases of profitability? Indeed, the rapid expansion of a consumer market for (relatively) affordable digital recording technology has translated into unprecedented access to
high-quality recording equipment for the aspiring recording artist. As *Audiophile Review* editor and recording engineer Steven Stone points out, “Now for under $50k US anyone can assemble the tools for a top-flight multi-channel DIY recording set-up” (S. Stone 2011). If a high-end set-up lies outside a recording artist’s price range, “Music production packages such as Cubase, ProTools, and Ableton Live deliver a professional end product and are within the financial reach of the amateur” (Young and Collins 2010, 344). In fact, Gorillaz founder Damon Albarn recorded the album *The Fall* (2010) in its entirety on his iPad while on tour.

While the costs of producing an album have fallen for amateur producers, the major record companies have also benefitted from these cost-savings. Furthermore, individual recording artists who choose to work entirely independently of the record label system must personally assume what can amount to considerable financial risk in exchange for the creative autonomy gained. As recording artist David Lowery (of alternative rock bands Camper Van Beethoven and Cracker) – a former champion of new business models enabled by digital distribution – cautions, “The artist pays for the recording, the artist pays for all publicity, promotion and advertising…. The artist absorbs the costs of touring…. [T]he new model makes the artist absorb all the risk” (in Resnikoff 2012). Even with more affordable recording options, the costs associated with purchasing the required hardware and software, a computer to operate them, musical instruments, microphones, and so forth, in addition to the costs associated with touring, are not insubstantial. The time and labour invested in writing music, practicing, and honing one’s craft also figure into the cost of performing and recording
music. So, while the costs associated with recording may have fallen, recording artists still face considerable costs tied to producing and promoting albums that consumers are increasingly hesitant to purchase.

A myriad of factors, then, complicate Anderson’s and Kelly’s optimistic assessments. Importantly, Anderson’s declaration that hits and niche products are subject to the same profit margins (Anderson 2006, 24) is simply inaccurate in the case of music. Album pricing may be somewhat standardized (although increasingly less so), but the recording contract terms that dictate record label profit margins and recording artist remuneration are not. The album royalty rate for new artists (those who have never had a record deal or sold over 100,000 albums) is typically 13-16 percent of the ‘published price to dealers’ (PPD), whereas the typical rates for midlevel artists (previous album sales of 200,000 to 400,000 copies) and superstars (previous album sales in excess of 750,000) are 15-17 percent of PPD and 18-20 percent of PPD, respectively (Passman 2012, 88-89). Royalty rates are stratified and stratifying.

Alternatively, an artist might choose to sign a ‘net profit deal’, a type of recording contract commonly offered by independent record labels. While premised on the 50-50 sharing of net profits, under these contracts “the label doesn’t have to pay the artist anything (including, under many contracts, even mechanical royalties) until the label has recouped all costs fronted by the label,” according to entertainment attorney

\[\text{The 'published price to dealers' (PPD) is the wholesale price. Note that a 'suggested retail list price' (SRLP) of $18.98 USD, minus a 25% 'packaging charge', was formerly used as the base for calculating recording artist royalties (Passman 2009, 74). As of 2012, however, “most top-line CDs sell for a wholesale price of $9.00 to $10.00, and the wholesale price of digital downloads is 70% of the retail price (Passman 2012, 89). This means that record labels typically calculate their royalty rates from a base that roughly $4.25-$5.25 USD lower than under the former system. The recording artist’s share has not grown at a proportionate rate.}\]
Bart Day (Day 2009). Even with a higher percentage of recording revenues, many independent recording artists will not achieve sales figures sufficient to pay off the initial investment required to produce an album, especially amid declining album sales. Lastly, unsigned, self-produced recording artists may receive the greatest cut of recording revenue, but they must also bear all expenses and forego the marketing budgets that record labels use to drive sales. Not only revenues, but also costs, factor into profit margins.

Absent from the accounts provided by Anderson and Kelly is the decisive role that marketing plays in the hypercompetitive marketplace for digital cultural goods. The ability to circumvent entrenched music industry gatekeepers has translated into a flood of new recordings, and as such, marketing costs can be prohibitively high. In stark contrast to the 4,000-5,000 new albums typically released per year during the 1970s and the fewer than 2,000 released annually during the 1980s recession years (Frith 1988b, 18), Nielsen SoundScan reports that there were 60,000 new albums released in 2005, 105,000 in 2008, and 98,000 in 2009 (in Peoples 2010b). As Billboard’s Glenn Peoples observes, the “abundance of tools and low barriers to entry has created an inconvenient truth: More artists are chasing after less money” (Peoples 2010b). This assessment rings true, notwithstanding Peoples’ incorrect assessment of low barriers to entry. It is increasingly difficult for non-star recording artists to stand out and be heard, not to mention being remunerated in some way.

Indeed, marketing arguably assumes an even more central role in production of commercial success today than in years past, and is a cost that, in effect, keeps barriers
to entry higher than is conventionally assumed. According to Ian Rogers, CEO of e-commerce and music marketing platform Topspin, “Technology has allowed the cost of production to come down, and the cost of distribution has come down… But the cost of marketing has come up, because you have empowered consumers and unlimited choice” (Resnikoff 2010). Kathleen Ripley of market research firm IBISWorld reports that “marketing is the largest expense for the industry, accounting for 26.3% of industry revenue” (Ripley 2011a, 25). A lower break-even point in terms of recording costs, then, is arguably offset by increased marketing costs, and the major record companies still boast the largest marketing budgets. Despite high levels of technological change, barriers to entry remain high (Ripley 2011a, 28).

To be fair, Anderson’s argument that “millions of fringe sales are an efficient, cost-effective business” (Anderson 2006, 24) is not intended to suggest that the ‘long tail’ is good for the individual artist. Rather, it rests on the idea that these sales are profitable in aggregate; hence his focus on Netflix and not the individual filmmaker – a point overlooked by many music industry executives involved in smaller-scale and independent music production. Nevertheless, Anderson’s theory has been refuted on the basis of actual sales data (see Gomes 2006; Elberse 2008; Page and Garland 2009). Online retailers’ sales, in fact, closely mirror the Billboard charts (Gomes 2006), and the “extremely low demand for the large array of products in the tail means that simply recovering the costs of producing them will be challenging” (Elberse 2008). Put simply, in the recording industry, the head may simply be too big and the tail too small.
Meanwhile, Kelly conducted follow-up research on his “1,000 True Fans” model and his findings appear to support this more sobering conclusion. He conceded “that while investigating the data for my thesis, I was unable to find much that could convince me that anyone is actually supporting themselves with 1000 or even 5000 True Fans now” (Kelly 2008b). For example, Kelly contacted Robert Rich, an ambient musician who fits his model of ‘microcelebrities’ who deal directly with fans via their websites. Rich offered the following assessment:

If I can make about $5-$10 per download or directly sold CD, and I sell 1,000, I clear a maximum of $10,000 for that year’s effort. That’s not a living. Let’s say, after 20 concerts I net about $10,000 for three to four months worth of full time effort…. I can augment that paltry income through some of the added benefits of ‘microcelebrity’ including licensing fees for sample clearance and film use rights, sound design libraries, and supplemental income from studio mastering and engineering fees. So, I make about as much money as our local garbage man; and I don’t smell as bad after a day of work. (in Kelly 2008c)

In spite of these problems and shortcomings, positive assessments of both the ‘long tail’ and ‘1,000 True Fans’ live on, often unquestioned, among small-scale music producers.

Complicating matters further is the fact that recording artists are often encouraged to give away their digital music for free in order to make money elsewhere, especially from touring and merchandise sales. For many established recording artists who have opted out of restrictive major label contracts, this has been a commercially viable approach. Freed from label control and still able to generate substantial touring revenues, Radiohead, for instance, was in a position to offer a ‘name-your-own-price’ digital download self-release of In Rainbows (2007), and Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails was able to offer free digital self-releases of his recordings (Harding and Cohen 2008). These recording artists were already stars, however. “How do you do the In
Rainbows release?” posed independent music publisher Neville Quinlan. “The first trick is to become Radiohead” (I/Quinlan 2009). Or, in the words of digital music analyst Susan Kevorkian, “For bands who have worked with labels over the years and who have developed followings, the technology is in place to reach their fans much more directly without needing labels’ marketing expertise. But for emerging groups to leverage the same technology to attract a following is a long row to hoe” (in Sandoval 2007). After all, Peoples points out, “An unknown band is no less unknown because it gives away its music” (Peoples 2010b). While the viability of smaller-scale touring is considered in section 4.6, it is worth observing here how established and aspiring recording artists remain on unequal footing, despite the new opportunities available.

Evidence suggests, then, that technological changes to the tools used to produce, distribute, and consume sound recordings have not fundamentally disrupted the distinctive economics of the old recording industry system. This being so, it is also true that the CD is no longer seen as the primary basis of popular music’s monetization. How, exactly, is music monetized in the digital era? What is the core popular music commodity? These key questions will be addressed in the following sections, as I analyze the recuperation of popular music as a commodity, albeit in new forms.

4.4 The Transformation of the Core Music Commodity: The ‘Unbundling’ of the Album and Proliferation of New Products

The decline of the CD format has triggered a radical transformation across what was formerly, first and foremost, a record business, even as those records became polycarbonate discs and then MP3s. Indeed, from roughly 1985 to 2000, the popularity
of the CD album sparked strong year-on-year sales growth: it was a “golden era” in recorded music profitability (Leyshon et al. 2005, 177). Between 2005 and 2010, however, CD sales in the United States dropped by 20.4 percent annually, according to Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) figures – a period during which digital download sales grew at a rate of 34.8 percent per year (Ripley 2011a, 8).21 According to market research company NPD Group’s statistics, “Close to half of all U.S. teens did not buy a single CD last year [2008], while consumers ages 36-50 drove what sales there were. Since the latter group tends to prefer time-tested artists, the major labels have shied away from signing and promoting new acts in favor of relying on already-established performers” (Gardner 2009). These risk-averse record companies “tend to bet their marketing money on the already established” (Kulash 2010), arguably even more so than in the past. As such, stars remain central. However, music companies monetize recording artists in a host of new ways. Under the digital music model, the business-to-business market for music licenses is paramount. Overall, the exploitation of new and expanded products, rights, and markets, coupled with intensifying corporate consolidation, enables maximum capitalization.

Today, the consumer market for sound recordings is predominantly a digital singles business. The unit sold is a digital track. Although digital singles sales continue to grow, these revenues have not compensated for the decline in album sales. ‘Analog dollars have been replaced by digital pennies’ is a common refrain inside the recording industry. As an executive at a Canadian branch of a Big Four record label explains,

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21 Full-length CDs nevertheless generated 54 percent of U.S. recording industry revenue in 2010 (Ripley 2011a, 8).
“We’ve gone back to people buying tracks and that’s another reason why the industry’s … had to look for … alternative revenue models.... You were selling a $15 CD. Now you’re selling a 99¢ track, but you’ve got to sell fifteen of them to make up for the revenue” (I/Canadian major record label executive B 2009). Contradicting the argument that hits matter less today, the economics of the digital singles market, in which record labels seek to compensate for lost album revenues, provide an even stronger business rationale for the production of blockbusters. The new blockbuster model, however, is not anchored by album sales, but a host of revenue streams, only one of which is digital singles. “Don’t radically alter blockbuster resource-allocation or product-portfolio management strategies,” advises Harvard business professor Anita Elberse, as “a few winners will still go a long way – probably even further than before” (Elberse 2008). As independent music publishing executive Quinlan claims, in today’s music business, “big singles – big artists make all the money … and that’s who you need to be associated with” (I/Quinlan 2009). Major label reliance on star recording artists has actually intensified.

Because the revenue from digital singles alone is not able to compensate for declining revenues from CD sales, revenue streams previously seen as merely ancillary have become central to the recording industry. According to one major record label executive,

You have to maximize all ancillary revenue. And the industry, as it evolved, was really about the primary source of exploitation, which was the album sale, and there was a second squeeze of the orange, where you … made compilations and that’s about it. And now, of course, there’s, like, fifteen squeezes of the orange, because the first squeeze isn’t enough to live on. (I/Canadian major record label executive A 2009)
In fact, major record label complaints about the fragmentation of the album into the digital single belie the fact that the same process of ‘unbundling’ has translated into a proliferation of new digital products and rights (Ripley 2011a, 16). What is more, the growing use of popular music in advertisements, films, television programs, and video games generates substantial master use revenues for record labels. The range of music commodities for which record companies are remunerated has multiplied.

The decline of the CD has not had nearly the same impact on business-as-usual across the music publishing industry, because these companies’ core bases of monetization have not been similarly disrupted. “The business of selling music in my world hasn’t changed,” Universal Music Publishing Canada’s Jodie Ferneyhough explains. “I’ve always sold music. The record companies have always sold a disc. They’ve always sold a product. They’ve never sold music… Those products happen to contain music” (I/Ferneyhough 2009). More precisely, the music publisher’s job has always been the exploitation of song copyrights and the protection of that intellectual property, not the selling of units. Popular music’s commodity form inside the music publishing industry, then, has not changed.

In fact, the recent proliferation of music licensing agreements with other business partners, and hence music synchronization (synch) revenues, has been a boon to the music publishing industry. While advertisements and television placements (as opposed to the more established market for film placements) were not a significant source of revenue ten to fifteen years ago, they now comprise a bulk of Universal Music Publishing Canada’s revenues (I/Ferneyhough 2009). According to John Campanelli,
Vice President of Marketing at Sony/ATV Music Publishing, “Every year we’ve done better … for the past five years … in terms of the money that we’ve made. It’s more volume…. The prices are going down, but the amount of opportunities is going up” (I/Campanelli 2010). While individual licensing fees for non-star artists have plummeted, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, licensing sales in aggregate continue to grow. Furthermore, Sony/ATV continues to garner “good fees” for “catalogue songs” (I/Campanelli 2010); this catalogue features music by the Beatles, Billy Joel, Jimi Hendrix, and Elvis Presley. Indeed, music publishing and licensing accounts for 19.5 percent of global music industry revenue (IBISWorld 2012, 13). Many independent music publishers are also flourishing in the music licensing-oriented music marketplace. Toronto-based executives at Olé and Peermusic report a healthy financial standing, even amid declining license fees (I/Beavis 2009; I/Quinlan 2009).

Today, music videos, too, are monetized products and also chiefly fall under business-to-business licensing models. In contrast to independent record labels and artists, which often give away music in order to generate marketing exposure, major record labels now view the model of offering music for free in exchange for promotion – the basis for the MTV promotional system – to be obsolete. In the words of one Canadian major label executive, “What is exposure? Exposure’s trying to sell more music. But we’re not about selling music anymore. We’re about … multi-faceted revenue streams, so that isn’t our priority anymore” (I/Canadian major label executive A 2009). Therefore, what was formerly a promotional medium is now a commodity in and of itself. Unlike under the MTV system, the major labels now have easy access to
highly trafficked video channels, such as YouTube and Vevo. In fact, the world’s two largest record companies now own a video channel; Vevo is a joint venture owned by Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group, and Abu Dhabi Media. EMI struck a video licensing agreement with VEVO and Warner Music Group forged a business partnership with MTV.com, but all the major labels have licensing agreements in place with the company at the helm of the new music video oligopoly: Google’s YouTube.22

Record companies monetize digital music videos in four key ways. First, and most straightforwardly, music videos are available for consumer purchase on iTunes, which is one notable exception to the dominant business-to-business approach. Second, Universal and Sony sell advertising around Vevo content; the online video market is seen to provide “valuable advertising real estate that supports strong monetization” (comScore 2012, 15). Third, record companies sell product placement (or brand ‘integration’) opportunities within the videos themselves.23 Vevo CEO Rio Careff positions the site as “a conduit between the world’s largest music companies and brand marketers” (in Plambeck 2010). As reported by the New York Times, research conducted by firm PQ Media suggests that revenue from product placements in music videos was in the range of $15 million to $20 million in 2009, more than twice the figure reported 2000, and is expected to grow (in Plambeck 2010). In the words of PQ

22 YouTube is the overwhelming market leader in online video streaming overall. In the month of December 2011, for instance, “Google Sites, driven primarily by video viewing at YouTube.com, reigned at the top of the leaderboard with more than 21.9 billion video views, representing half the total video market. VEVO ranked a distant second with 801 million content videos streamed (1.8 percent)” (comScore 2012, 15; emphasis added).
23 Product placement in music videos can be seen as an extension of product placement in lyrics, a trend that began before the recording industry’s digital transition was fully underway. The lyrics of at least eight Top 20 singles on Billboard’s 2004 hip-hop chart included references to the brand Pepsi-Cola, for instance (Schmelzer 2005).
Media chief executive Patrick Quinn, “That real estate – getting into the content itself – has become that much more valuable” (in Plambeck 2010). Lady Gaga’s “Telephone” (2010) music video was apparently seen as particularly valuable real estate given the abundance of product placements it features, including Beats brand headphones and laptops, Chevrolet, Diet Coke, Miracle Whip, Polaroid, Virgin Mobile, Wonder Bread, and PlentyofFish.com. This pervasive trend extends well beyond pop superstars, however. Indie rock outfit Florence and the Machine (now signed to Universal) have an agreement with Piaget, for example, and feature that brand’s luxury watches and rings in their music videos for “Shake It Out” (2011) and “No Light, No Light” (2011).

Fourth, record companies profit from licenses extracted from streaming video sites. YouTube remunerates all the major record companies by way of compensation rights per stream (I/Canadian major label executive A 2009). Specific figures for YouTube rates are not made public, but *Rolling Stone*’s Steven Knopper reports that a top-selling artist “might make $1 per 1,000 video plays” (Knopper 2011). Such a rate provides meager revenues for lesser known recording artists, whose work is typically streamed in lower volumes. However, as one Canadian label executive put it, “When you start adding millions and millions of views, … it does add up as a significant revenue stream” (I/Canadian major label executive A 2009). In 2012, social media data analytics company Starcount Squared reported that Universal artists Lady Gaga, Rihanna, and Justin Bieber had each received over two billion YouTube views, collectively accounting for 6.77 billion of Universal’s 6.91 billion total YouTube views (Starcount Squared 2012). For superstar recording artists and their record labels, the
volume-driven music video streaming business is profitable indeed. Overall, according to Tom Freston, former CEO of MTV Networks and Viacom, the revenue generated from licenses and iTunes sales for music videos has become substantial enough for record labels to “actually cover the costs of the music videos and make a profit to boot” (in Billboard 2009). Large record companies, after all, are able to aggregate revenues generated by an entire catalogue of music videos old and new.

The availability of online music and video distribution to unsigned and independent recording artists by no means spells the end of major record label and music publisher dominance. In fact, the centrality of various inter-firm licensing agreements (as opposed to unit sales) to the rights-driven digitalizing music industry arguably renders the administrative function assumed by these corporate entities even more important today. A Canadian major record label executive marveled at how, despite massive lay-offs overall, at his company,

Our royalties department downstairs has grown exponentially. We probably have eight to nine people in our royalties department now, because we used to put out … one CD and there’s …. a royalty that comes from that for the artist and the publisher and it’s one product line…. We might put out a physical single, … maybe going back five or six years, and that would be it. Now we’ve got … a digital single, a digital video, a ringtone, mobile content, we’ve got the full album, we’ve got all ten or twelve tracks on the album separately, a bunch of other unique exclusive pieces of content. We might have thirty pieces of content for every single project released. (I/Canadian major label executive B 2009)

According to music publisher Quinlan, “You’re always going to need an administrator, but you might not need a publisher and a record label” (I/Quinlan 2009) inside the maturing digital music economy. In the near future, a recording artist’s administrative associate, music publisher, and record label “might be the same person…. To be a
stand alone publisher that doesn’t sell T-shirts … or doesn’t make records or doesn’t manage artists or book tours might not be viable in ten years” (I/Quinlan 2009). Clearly, a dynamic of convergence is at work.

In response to the unbundling of the CD album into the digital single and, hence, the splintering of profits, then, record companies have launched and expanded markets for various music products, rights, and licenses. Miège’s publishing logic is still in evidence here: in the digitalizing music industry, record labels and music publishers still produce highly reproducible products, which are sold to end consumers, and creators are still remunerated through a royalty-based system. However, departing from Miège, record labels have also become unprecedentedly dependent on the business-to-business market for music licensing and endorsement opportunities. Moreover, according to music industry economist Will Page, “‘Business-to-Business’ revenues, or licensing income … is likely to make up an increasing part of an increasing pie” (Page 2010).

This expanding licensing business shares a key characteristic in common with the earlier record business: record labels and music publishers profit from economies of scale, because they are able to exploit the breadth of entire rosters or catalogues to generate high volumes of license sales. Individual recording artists do not have this luxury. Importantly, the licensing market not only generates additional revenue for record companies and music publishers; it also produces a new power base for the advertisers and media properties that license music, as will be examined in Chapter 5.

As record labels continue to remake themselves into rights-oriented rather than predominantly units-oriented businesses, they begin to resemble music publishers.
While the centrality of these rights marks an interesting continuity with the pre-recording phase of music’s industrialization, the continuing dominance of the major record companies unites the pre-digital record business with the digital music model. Next, I examine how record companies have ‘innovated’ or, better, ‘renovated’ the recording contract itself in order to assure that they profit from these and other new revenue streams. The recuperation of popular music’s commodity form is contractually inscribed in the 360 deal – a type of contract that I argue reflects the digitalizing music industry’s reconstitution of the core music commodity as the artist-brand.

4.5 Today’s Core Music Commodity: The ‘Artist-Brand’ and 360-Degree Monetization

I’m not interested in selling a song. I’m interested only in selling an artist. I’m not interested in popping a song on the radio and having them go and buy the single. My job is to grasp onto the integrity and the vision that these artists have, and help them evolve their lifestyle-driven bands.
— Jordan Schur, CEO of Suretown Records (in Donahue 2008)

As a result of the splintering profits and consequently expanding ancillary markets discussed in the previous section, the hub of the digitalizing music industry’s various revenue streams is now the recording artist’s image and reputation, understood by record labels as the artist’s brand. The core music commodity is no longer the CD, I argue, but rather the ‘artist-brand’ – or lifestyle-driven brand, in the words of Jordan Shur, former CEO of Geffen Records. The artist-brand is a marketing construct that speaks to a new capitalization strategy: 360-degree monetization. Music companies now attempt to profit from all business activities connected to recording artists, not only conventional products and activities such as recordings and live performances. This
type of business thinking is not without precedent. Indeed, twenty years ago, Negus observed that the recording industry had become increasingly geared toward “developing global personalities which [could] be communicated across multiple media” (Negus 1992, 1). In today’s marketing-driven and business-to-business centred music industry, however, the artist-brand approach assumes new significance.

More broadly, rhetoric regarding the recording artist as a brand is consonant with the rise of what Alison Hearn terms ‘self-branding’ under post-Fordist capitalism. This “form of self-presentation [is] singularly focused on attracting attention and acquiring cultural and monetary value”; such value is “extracted from the production of affect, desire, attention, and image” (Hearn 2008, 213-14). The notion of a ‘branded self’ assumes a distinctive character in the music industry; music companies directly capitalize on affects and desires, which form the thread that stitches the artist-brand to various products, musical and otherwise, through encircling recording contracts. The idea of the artist-brand has been rendered concrete and formalized through radical changes to the recording contract itself. The consequences of this dominant branding logic are not only felt by those artists who sign 360 deals with record labels, however. The artist-brand paradigm also guides the marketing of unsigned and independent artists and informs A&R decisions made at the earliest stages of talent recruitment.

The recent institutionalization of all-encompassing 360 deals has enabled record companies to capitalize on key revenue streams that formerly lay outside their reach, including live performance, music publishing, and music merchandise, in addition to the new rights and digital products that are now essential to record label profitability.
While the convention of locking down recording artist labour by way of long-term, one-way ‘option’ contracts is well established (Stahl 2010), the 360 deal, now more commonly (and euphemistically) referred to as the ‘multiple rights’ deal inside the music industry, permits labels to ‘participate’ in most, if not all, revenue streams linked to artists in addition to recording revenues (Stahl and Meier 2012, 442). This includes sponsorship, licensing, and endorsement revenues, and, increasingly, artist and fan club websites, mobile phone marketing, video streaming, and artist-photo based revenues in addition (LaPolt and Resnick 2009). Although only formally introduced in 2002 (by way of the £80 million contract Robbie Williams signed with EMI), the multiple rights deal was shored up as the standard deal offered by the Big Four major labels by 2008 (Stahl and Meier 2012, 448-450). In a Q3 2011 earnings call, Edgar Bronfman Jr., then-CEO of Warner Music Group, boasted that “today nearly half of our total revenue comes from businesses that did not exist in 2004. More than 60% of the artists on our active global recorded music roster are signed to deals with a comprehensive suite of expanded rights” (in Seeking Alpha 2011). For major record companies, the introduction of new music products and new recording contracts to encircle those revenues go hand in hand. The 360-degree capture of artist rights is a source of growing profits for companies and growing vulnerability for working artists.

The expanded reach of the multiple rights deal amplifies the rationale behind major record labels’ continued emphasis on the production of blockbusters. More products attached to the artist-brand equates to more opportunities for monetization. The swelling profitability of superstars under these contracts, in turn, exacerbates
stratification among working artists overall. “Their plan seems to be swinging for the fences, how many home runs can we hit,” opines Agency Group’s Steve Martin, “not how many artists can we develop from 50,000 units to 100,000 units to 200,000 units, which in this day and age should be a successful touring career” (in Waddell 2010a). A notable example is Lady Gaga’s multiple rights deal, which, as the driving force behind corporate partnerships with Polaroid, Estée Lauder’s MAC, Virgin Mobile, and others, generated nearly $200 million in revenue for Universal’s Interscope Records as of May 2011 (Roberts 2011). In fact, due to the recent emphasis on endorsements and other new revenues, record labels approach the signing, development, and marketing of recording artists differently in general. As Steve Robertson, senior VP of A&R at Atlantic Records, joked, “Now we’re Atlantic Merchandise” (in Peoples 2010a). Numerous ‘squeezes of the orange’ can be wrung out of 360-degree superstars.

Record label executives routinely adopt artist-brand oriented thinking to justify the use of these encircling contracts. In the words of Tom Corson, GM of RCA, “We’ve woken up and said, ‘Hey, this isn’t fair.’ … Record companies for years have funded the brand creation of artists and have only benefited through record sales” (in Knopper 2007). Once these companies help build the brand value of their recording artists, they expect to fully capitalize on this investment. Countless recording artists and artist managers share a starkly different perspective on the purported ‘fairness’ of these deals, however. Ari Martin, VP of Artist Management at Nettwerk, a record company, acknowledges that opinions on the 360 deal vary across the industry, but observes that a pervasive view is that this type of contract constitutes “a land grab by
the labels trying to make up for the waning CD sales…. You would hope they’d be able to increase the overall pie, but they don’t. It’s generally just taking more rights to help their bottom line” (I/Martin 2010). While non-recording revenues across the digitalizing music industry are growing on the whole, this does not mean that the ‘overall pie’ is increasing for individual artists, especially non-star artists; as we have seen, record companies aggregate revenues from entire rosters of artists. Multiple rights deals enable record labels “to hedge their bets in a declining record market and to recast themselves as music – rather than just recording – companies” (F. Goodman 2008). The seizure of recording artist rights and revenues and not necessarily the growth of artist revenues, then, is the means through which record companies hedge their bets.

Amid the digital turbulence experienced by the recording industry, it is not surprising that record label executives no longer see themselves as in the record business at all. Not only have they recast themselves as music companies, but they also claim to be in the marketing business. According to a Canadian major label executive, who predicted that his label will remake itself into a hybrid enterprise modeled after advertising agency McLaren McCann and IMG Worldwide, a sports and fashion marketing, licensing, and media rights company, music executives now function as “brand managers doing branded things” (I/Canadian major label executive B 2009). From his perspective, record companies’ expertise will soon lie in the promotion and monetization of celebrity brands and not necessarily the production of popular music. In a similar vein, at Toronto’s North by Northeast conference, Universal Music Canada’s Justin Erdman suggested that the major record companies are transitioning
into boutique marketing companies, not labels *per se* (Erdman 2011). If there is merit to these claims, then what was formerly particular and distinctive about the recording industry is seriously eroding.

Within the artist-brand era, it is increasingly the case that artist development no longer happens under the roofs of these record labels-*cum*-marketing companies. Rather, major labels expect aspiring artists to establish themselves and to ‘build their brand’ *before* signing (Erdman 2011; I/Grierson 2010; Nuwame 2011). According to Grierson, labels today “have much smaller A&R staff[s]” and “don’t do artist development” (I/Grierson). “Because they’re under such enormous pressure,” he explains, “they don’t want to sign artists that they know will need to take time to become successful – which we were able to do in the better days” (I/Grierson 2010). In effect, the major labels have outsourced the work of A&R onto the shoulders of independent and aspiring recording artists:

They [the major labels] want somebody else to do that work, which becomes the independent community with the do-it-yourself mentality. And they look for artists that have created a buzz. “have a story” is the word they use – a story. They want to know that that act is touring, they’ve sold some CDs, they’ve got some downloads, they’ve got some hits. They want to know that something’s happening, or they won’t take a chance. They’re not making decisions on pure talent. They’re basically saying, “prove to me that something’s happening and then I’m interested.” … Plus they don’t sign as many acts today, because they don’t have the budgets and they don’t have the staff. (I/Grierson 2010)

In this account, major label interest hinges not only or even primarily on talent, but on the existing ‘buzz’ around an artist.

The new metrics used to measure buzz and forecast the sales potential of an up-and-coming artist-brand include YouTube views, Facebook friends, Twitter followers,
and the like. According to Los Angeles-based entertainment attorney Glenn Litwak, instead of sending A&R executives to Sunset Boulevard clubs to listen to live shows, the major labels might hire one person to scour the Internet for emerging artists (Litwak 2010). Rather than committing to artist development, they look for artists who already have YouTube hits. Discussing the ‘digital reputation economy’ more broadly, Hearn argues that social media provide an infrastructure through which a person’s “total social impact … can be measured, rationalized, and represented as their ‘digital reputation’” (Hearn 2010, 429-30). This is decidedly so in the case of recording artists. “The great beauty of digital delivery … is that it’s all ultimately trackable,” according to advertising executive Mike Tunnicliffe (I/Tunnicliffe 2010). In the digitalizing music industry, digital records of consumer music streaming and purchasing habits lend more predictability to the sales potential of different aspiring artists.

The centrality of ‘digital reputations’ to label recruitment decision-making feeds into an already stratified and stratifying system for organizing musical labour. When faced with the opportunity to sign a multiple rights deal, emerging artists, penalized for their lack of brand value, have been offered ever-shrinking advances and lop-sided contract terms on a ‘take it or leave it’ basis. Superstar artists, on the other hand, have received huge advances in exchange for bestowing record labels with these additional rights (e.g., Madonna, Shakira, Jay-Z); recording contract terms reflect a recording artist’s bargaining power, and the already-famous bargain from a position of strength. Much as royalty rates favour established artists, so too do ancillary revenue stream shares under multiple rights deals. As entertainment attorney Day explains, “The
label’s share of those non-record kinds of income is in the range of 10 to 20 percent, but for new artists it can get as high as 50 percent” (Day 2009). While an examination of the politics of subordination born of multiple rights deals, which bind recording artists to one company in an unprecedented fashion, lies outside the scope of this discussion, it warrants noting here that “the math does not add up: lower sales volumes of recordings, concerts, and merchandise, coupled with less favourable contract terms, is a formula that promises to deepen disparities between the elite and the ranks of aspiring, increasingly disposable artists from which new stars are expected eventually to appear” (Stahl and Meier 2012, 450). Pinning the recording artist’s exchange value to her already established digital reputation or celebrity, as opposed to talent, prevents label executives from perceiving value in unknown or unproven artists.

Given the decidedly one-sided terms of multiple rights deals, why do aspiring recording artists continue to sign on the dotted line? Many do not. Many others, however, recognize that the major record companies continue to boast an unrivaled capacity to market stars. According to Andrew Wernick, “capitalists will seek to optimize the promotional value of the celebritified creators or creations they utilize through long-term arrangements which stabilize the link. And the same ... applies in reverse: performers can only ratify their status by securing, with ‘majors’, a relationship of this kind. The result is a kind of double promo” (Wernick 1991, 107; emphasis added). While association with the majors may not be the only means of achieving celebrity status today, this “double promo” logic persists nevertheless. Although numerous new avenues are available to aspiring artists who wish to sidestep
the record labels, remember that the marketing budgets afforded by the majors have become even more important to the production of commercial success than in the past. While a record deal is no guarantor of commercial success, it still works to legitimate an aspiring artist’s reputation or brand. Those artists prioritized by labels (typically a select few) benefit greatly from this marketing muscle.

Aspiring artists who seek marketing support but are not interested in signing a restrictive label deal now have an additional option available; they may choose to partner with a ‘lifestyle’ brand. In recent years, brands such as Mountain Dew and Bacardi started offering record label services, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Consumer brands typically offer “short-term deals with few strings” that many recording artists and artist managers therefore consider “fairer and more favourable than traditional label contracts” (Sisario 2010). However, partnering brands are actually less invested in marketing music because they have less of an ownership stake in the artist. Instead, music is a device for marketing these brands.

Even the marketing of independent and unsigned recording artists is not immune to the dominant artist-brand paradigm under consideration here. Rather, this new industry ‘common sense’ has penetrated many independent labels. In the words of Toronto-based independent music consultant and Exclaim contributor Allison Outhit,

The most important thing for artists to understand and for everybody in the music business to understand right now is that artists, bands, musicians are a brand unto themselves…. [T]he most important thing that we do is to continue to develop the brand in a way that grows their audience, that grows their consumer base, so that we can leverage their brand against every other possible opportunity, whether it’s licensing and so on. (I/Outhit 2009)
In fact, Emily White, a New York-based independent artist manager, requests that her artists submit lists of brands that they would feel comfortable promoting and then seeks out appropriate band-brand pairings. According to White, both artist longevity and the success of brand partnerships are tied to “being genuine”: “When the branding thing works for an artist, it’s when it’s something they genuinely like or use” (I/White 2011). Two examples cited by White were Kid Rock’s deal with Jim Beam whiskey, which, in her estimation, “really worked for … his fans and his brand,” and a partnership between one of her artists and a high-end fashion brand, which was a good fit due to the quality and prestige of the product and the image or reputation of the artist in question (I/White 2011).

Under these arrangements, brands do not simply promote independent recording artists. Rather, these artists are advised to promote their various brand partnerships. In order to curry the favour of brands, for instance, White publicizes the promotional arrangements she engineers through recording artist and social media websites:

So, every brand that we deal with – even if it’s just … Gibson guitars or something…. Whenever we get free stuff, like gear – and that’s, like, the most basic level of branding for musicians – we’re, like, “Cool. Thanks. We’ll post this on [the artist’s] site and Twitter and Facebook.” And brands are psyched. You know, they just want to see that we’re … working to push them out as well. And … everything is a brand. It’s not just H&M or whatever…. I really look at things so that it benefits both parties as much as possible…. I think that our artists are so authentic and genuine … they might often pick a brand or a stylist or a vegan cookie company or whatever and then I have to reach out to this

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24 When I asked White if the notion of ‘selling out’ has any cultural resonance today, she responded: “I don’t hear it from my colleagues, because for my colleagues, it’s all ‘branding, branding, branding, synch, synch, synch’ [synchronization rights]…. I hear it from the bands a little bit more…. They have very specific morals, I guess?” (White 2011). While most of her recording artists remain “open” to branding opportunities, they draw the line at “animal cruelty-related, fast food …, nothing anti-women, nothing anti-gay, which to me are very obvious things, I think, especially for artists” (White 2011).
small company and explain what we’re doing. Once they get it, they’re, like, “Wow, this is really cool.” (I/White 2011)

While the substance of such ‘authenticity’ will be taken up in Chapter 5 (see also Meier 2011), what is important here is how increasingly difficult it is becoming for independent recording artists to opt out of this music licensing and brand partnership approach in a digitalizing music industry fixated on the monetization of artist-brands. Today, consumer brands and media properties present themselves as an important gateway to a music-buying audience. What industry commentators refer to as the ‘new DIY’ involves a new degree of dependence on such brands.

The path to ‘independence’ for working artists who rely on brand support, in fact, demands new depths of commodification. Overall, the new DIY is increasingly oriented around selling what Hearn (2008) terms the ‘branded self’ in any and every way. According to independent recording artist Damian Kulash, whose band OK Go is championed as a successful example of this DIY model, “making a living in music isn’t just about selling studio recordings anymore. It’s about selling the whole package: themselves” (Kulash 2010).25 Kulash commends the entrepreneurial creativity of drummer Josh Freese, who has sold lunch dates with fans for $250 each and even

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25 OK Go, formerly signed to EMI and now independent, is reliant on brand partnerships for revenue and exposure. “Now when we need funding for a large project,” explains Kulash, “we look for a sponsor. A couple weeks ago, my band held an eight-mile musical street parade through Los Angeles, courtesy of Range Rover…. A few weeks earlier, we released a music video made in partnership with Samsung, and in February, one was underwritten by State Farm” (Kulash 2010). In another telling example, Chevrolet sponsored the band’s music video for “Needing/Getting” (2010), in which the Chevrolet Sonic car features prominently. Clips from that video are also featured in a separate advertisement for the Sonic, which first aired during the 2012 Super Bowl. Strangely, the spot, titled “Stunt Anthem,” features the song “We Are Young” by Fun – not “Needing/Getting” – synched to those video clips; the brand’s popular musical preferences, so it seems, are subject to change. The advertisement, which had received over 3.4 million views on YouTube at the time of writing, celebrates “Sonic’s first skydive,” “Sonic’s first music video,” “Sonic’s first kickflip,” and “Sonic’s first bungee” – separate “stunts” performed by the car itself, with the help of expert drivers (Chevrolet 2012). Chevrolet’s partnership with OK Go was positioned as yet another stunt.
offered a premium $20,000 option: a miniature golf date with Freese and his circle of friends (Kulash 2010). Amanda Palmer, an independent solo artist and former member of The Dresden Dolls, is also widely seen as a new DIY success story. She uses her Twitter account and personal blog to monetize her connection with her fans, as Billboard’s Cortney Harding reports:

Palmer, 34, can’t sell lots of albums in a record store. But she can spend a few hours on a Friday night in front of her computer, drinking wine and tweeting, and wind up rallying her followers to drop $11,000 on T-shirts. (The numbers Palmer reports are all gross, but even so, 440 $25 T-shirts less production and shipping costs is still a nice number.) She can spend a few more hours in front of Twitter and auction off postcards and miscellaneous junk from around her home and bring in another $6,600. And she can release an album of Radiohead covers played on her ukulele and gross $15,000. (Harding 2010)

Palmer offers fans a performance of a more private self – not a (straightforward) stage personality – and even sells her own personal items. “Not every musician takes the project of selling themselves literally,” according to Kulash, “but the personality and personal lives of musicians are being more openly recognized as valuable assets” (Kulash 2010). Here, the monetization of recording artists’ private lives, always a facet of the music industry’s star system, is rendered more explicit, intensive, and personal.

Major label artists, too, are offering fans more intimate access to who they ‘really’ are. According to sponsorship agent Laura Huftless, country star Zach Brown, an avid cook, prepares brand-sponsored meals for his VIP fans before his concerts, and Michael Bublé, a table tennis enthusiast, participated in a sponsored ping pong tournament with fans prior to a show (Huftless 2010). “Finding what the artist likes to do,” she advised attendees at the 2010 Billboard Touring Conference, “always makes it a better experience for the fans and for the brands who are sponsoring, because that
gives them something different” (Hutfless 2010). In order to effectively function as a lifestyle-driven brand, it seems, an artist must represent more than just music. She must offer and monetize a snapshot of the whole person, at least as defined by hobbies and non-music interests. This is a burdensome demand to place on working artists.

While the shift away from the CD would seem to signal the loosening of major label control, these labels, reinvented as diversified marketing companies, have retained market dominance. The hurried institutionalization of the multiple rights deal reveals that the artist-brand terminology commonplace inside both major and independent record companies is not simply a matter of marketing hype. Rather, it speaks to a larger reconfiguration of record company monetization strategies triggered by digitalization, which include new capitalist accumulation tactics whose imprint has been etched into contractual conventions. Moreover, the artist-brand paradigm affects the recruitment and marketing of recording artists who choose to work outside of the major record companies. As the popular music commodity mutates, so too do the contractual terms and marketing strategies devised to wring surplus value out of musical labour. Even if the term ‘artist-brand’ proves to be a fad, music companies are unlikely to cede new levers of control afforded by this approach.

4.6 The Transformation of the Live Performance Sector

In a digitalizing music industry buttressed by the aggregation of multiple and multiplying revenue streams, the live performance sectors exists alongside business-to-business licensing revenues as a key source of value creation. The volatility of the digital music marketplace has prompted major and independent labels alike to gear their
business models around live performances and to gauge the viability of recording artists in terms of touring revenue. After all, the concert *experience* (as distinct from the actual songs performed) cannot be pirated. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the number of concerts, festivals, and the like available to music fans mushroomed (Laing 2009, 19). According to Dave Laing, as of 2012, “the live business worldwide … may have definitively overtaken the record industry in revenue terms” (Laing 2012). To clarify, Laing’s claim is specific to sales of recorded music; as we have seen, the recording industry now encompasses lucrative music licensing, endorsement, and merchandising businesses in addition. Furthermore, for major and independent record labels alike, “[l]ive events are seen as a counterweight to recorded-music declines” (Peoples 2010b). To be sure, the affect-laden encounter with the artist-brand offered by the concert experience makes for very lucrative business in the case of a handful of stars, but as Peoples and numerous other industry commentators, analysts, and executives make clear, the live performance sector is no panacea for the music industry more widely, especially for aspiring artists.

The new reliance on live performance revenues marks a decided shift from the old industrial model, under which concerts were viewed as promotional vehicles (Goodwin 1992, 27; Shuker 2002, 307). Writing in 1992, Andrew Goodwin observed a contradiction inside the music industry, between inherently mass-produced commodity forms such as records and cassettes (which produce profit but insufficient meaning) and preindustrial forms of promotion such as live performance (which help to ‘complete’ the package of meaning, but which until the 1980s generally failed to generate profit even when organized on a mass scale). (Goodwin 1992, 27)
While live performances may have offered the fan a popular musical experience imbued with meaning, they were primarily used in an effort to drive record sales. Touring was seen as “especially necessary to promote a new release and build up an audience” (Shuker 2002, 305), yet those tours were often “a loss-making activity” for all but the top star performers (Frith 2001, 45). Once already commercial successful, however, rock performers in particular could “support careers in virtual absence of live performance, so that audiences [knew] their work only through recordings” (Gracyk 1996, 7). When concerts did generate income, these revenues were deemed ancillary.

Inside the digitalizing music industry, this arrangement has flipped; countering trends deemed significant and analyzed a decade or more ago by Goodwin (1992), Frith (2001), Shuker (2002), and Gracyk (1996), recordings are increasingly seen as a means of promoting concerts and other products. As we have already seen, the major labels are invested in monetizing all music-related products, and as such, forego opportunities to use free music as a promotional medium. However, especially outside of the major labels, it is now widely held that records (CDs and MP3s) no longer constitute the core popular musical commodity, as was the case under the old model, but instead are “merchandise” or “promotional items for what artists are actually doing, which is providing the service of music in the many ways that they do” (I/Outhit 2009). Sherman Young’s and Steve Collins’s account of “Music 2.0” is representative of this view, which is widely held among fans:

MP3s and CDs are becoming viewed as promotional tools dispatched to draw fans to live performances. There, they transform into customers paying for the initial ticket and then merchandise including the traditional T-shirt, but also
singles, albums, and in some cases a recording of the gig they just saw – the ultimate fan memento. (Young and Collins 2010, 352)

Profitability, in this formulation, hinges on sales of music-related merchandise, and albums, reconfigured as merchandise, are hawked alongside T-shirts and the like. “Proponents of this model believe that directly charging consumers for recorded music is becoming less viable,” explains legal scholar Mark F. Schultz, “but that musicians will still produce recordings because they serve an important promotional function…. Recording is thus seen as a necessary promotional expense for other, more profitable businesses like touring and merchandising” (Schultz 2009, 697). In what appears to be a remarkable turnaround, the concert ticket is seen to function as the key popular music commodity and the recording as the necessary loss leader.

Initially, the live performance sector was seen as the remedy for the digitalizing music industry’s woes for good reason. Profits were robust. However, in stark contrast to 2009, when “concerts were given the mantle as the savior of the music business and in large part impervious to economic recessions,” the average gross and attendance per live show saw double-digit decreases on a global scale in 2010 (Waddell 2010b). Large concert promoters postponed and cancelled tours and used ‘fire-sale’-style ticket discounting to fill venues (Waddell 2010b). Touring industry profitability was restored in 2011, however, in part due to lower ticket prices (Waddell 2011). In the aftermath of the industry’s 2010 struggles, Michael Rapino, CEO of concert promotion behemoth Live Nation, reported that “the top-tier artists are still able to demand high guarantees and the bidding remains competitive.” Mid-tier artists, however, “are taking into account what happened in 2010” (in CQ Transcriptions 2011). Ticket prices decreased
not because Live Nation took a smaller cut, in other words, but because guarantees for non-star artists fell.

Even prior to this cut to mid-tier artist guarantees, however, the concert business was plagued by what Schultz terms “the superstar problem” (Schultz 2009, 733). “The distribution of rewards in the business is incredibly skewed,” he points out (Schultz 2009, 733). Drawing on Billboard’s touring statistics, Schultz charts a distribution of the $2.6 billion in gross touring earnings reported for 2007: the top 0.76 percent (just twenty-five tours) accounted for 53 percent of all earnings, while the bottom 99.24 percent shared the remaining 47 percent of revenues earned (Schultz 2009, 734-35). Most unknown artists, those who perform at a variety of smaller venues, clubs, and bars, make little or no money from their performances, entertainment attorney Litwak told attendees at an artist management conference in New York City (Litwak 2010). In fact, in 2010, Topspin’s Rogers reported that only 25,000-30,000 recording artists in the United States make a living from music – an estimate derived from the size and type of live music venues played, not record and digital download sales (in Resnikoff 2010). “Rogers pointed to millions of MySpace bands, tens of millions of musicians, and a Long Tail that is ‘well, very long,’” notes Paul Resnikoff of Digital Music News (Resnikoff 2010). David Lowery likewise emphasizes the financial struggles associated with touring in his widely debated indictment of P2P file sharing and the new music industry (see J. Frank 2012; Lefsetz 2012; Worstall 2012; White 2012):

You know only a handful of artists make a living touring right? Most artists need another job to go back to or they get tour support from the record label. Touring usually only pays enough to pay the crew and expenses. Touring only
makes sense if it increases your sales. Artists often go on tour for free in hopes that the tour pays off in increased sales. (in Resnikoff 2012)

The healthy touring earnings routinely cited do not reflect the more telling median numbers but, instead, a grossly misleading mean.

An overall increase in competition, coupled with falling guarantees and ticket prices for non-star artists, only exacerbates the realities of touring as a costly and, hence, risky venture. As Nettwerk’s Martin points out, certain costs (e.g., a van, fuel, accommodations, crew wages) are fixed, which makes it difficult for small-scale tours (under 2,500-seat venues) in general to generate a significant profit (I/Martin 2010). To mitigate this risk, the touring sector is taking a page from the record companies’ playbook and becoming even more reliant on older, well known, and established artists (I/Jansson 2010; Billboard 2010; Schultz 2009, 733). The commercial dynamics at work inside the concert promotion business continue to favour tours that feature star artists, large venues, and pricy tickets. These lucrative tours, in turn, are monopolized by mega-promoters Live Nation and Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG). Trends in the touring business speak to an additional aspect of artist stratification inside the digitalizing music industry overall.

The live performance sector, then, has been a savior for only a small minority of players. Relative to the number of aspiring recording artists competing for audience attention in the touring market, very few are commercially viable, even on a very small scale. As noted by Lowery above, some recording artists even agree to tour for free (in Resnikoff 2012). What is more, unknown artists are often tasked with paying for access to prime venues on Los Angeles’s Sunset Strip or in New York City; the artist is
required to guarantee (i.e., buy upfront and hope to sell) a certain number of tickets (Litwak 2010; Mencher 2010). Interestingly, house party gigs have become more effective revenue generators than traditional bar venues for many smaller-scale acts in the United States (Sherbow 2010; I/White 2011). Unlike bars and clubs, house party hosts do not take a cut of ticket sales but rather pay the artist a fixed fee.

Overall, the touring business mirrors the recorded music and music publishing businesses insofar as a handful of superstars are exceptionally profitable, while most working artists struggle to break even. *Billboard*’s Peoples characterizes concerts as a “winner-take-all market”:

There’s growing competition for concert revenue, too, and it has become a winner-take-all market. While superstars have been able to raise their ticket prices as their music sales have softened, mid-tier and up-and-coming artists don’t always have that luxury. Artists who release music in order to tour – rather than tour to support new releases – can’t afford two loss leaders. (Peoples 2010b)

In this context, it is increasingly difficult for unknown and unsigned artists to eke out a living. As the focus of profitability within record companies continues to gravitate toward the monetization of artist-brands encircled by multiple rights deals, the promise of career-sustaining tours remains illusory even for many artists signed to record deals. The major companies, meanwhile, reap the spoils generated by stars.

4.7 The ‘Flexible’ Music Corporation: Leaner But Larger

The majors – I don’t think they’re going away. I think they’re going to continue to be downsized…. The word is, everybody believes that they will eventually, in some way, come together. The majors will consolidate more. So, you’ll probably end up – I think that’s pretty much a fair bet – you’ll end up with three major labels. (I/Grierson 2010)
Two particularly significant continuities between the old music industry and the new are the monopolization of popular music profits by a handful of major music companies and the persistent drive for further consolidation; these dynamics actively work against the types of industrial complexity emphasized by Miège (1989), Hesmondhalgh (2007), Williamson and Cloonan (2007), and others. The same transnational behemoths that dominated the old recording and music publishing industries still dominate the global music marketplace today. The major record companies are starting to look different, however. According to former EMI CEO Tony Wadsworth, “Record labels are unrecognisable compared to the 90s. They are smaller, more efficient and they have diversified and taken on many more functions” (in Topping 2011). While an industry performance report warns that “CD sales are in a tailspin because the medium is quickly growing obsolete,” it assures would-be investors that the recording industry is nevertheless on the mend:

Looking forward, the picture is not so grim for the industry. Labels will benefit from their successful cost-cutting measures, new revenue streams and improvements in consumers’ disposable income levels. IBISWorld projects that over the five years to 2016, the Major Label Music Production industry will increase revenue at an average rate of 1.8% per year to $8.1 billion. The industry’s profit performance is also expected to improve. By 2016, IBISWorld anticipates industry profit will increase to 8.0% of revenue, up from 4.5% in 2011. (Ripley 2011a, 5)

Notwithstanding a misplaced optimism about disposable income levels, the business projections for these leaner and more diversified corporations are generally sound and continue to improve. As one major record label executive told me, when external clients inquire about the effect of the recession on business, his response is that after “eleven years of recession, we’re actually doing very well, thank you. We’ve actually
worked out how we can manage our business when you literally see a 15 percent
decline [in CD sales] year on year on year on year” (I/Canadian major label executive B
2009). Over that time span, the major record labels reinvented themselves.

To be clear, these more ‘flexible’ music companies are only smaller in terms of
staff numbers. As of July 2011, 83 percent of U.S. recording industry market share was
concentrated in the hands of the Big Four: Universal Music Group (30.6 percent), Sony
Music Entertainment (27.6 percent), Warner Music Group (13.7 percent), and EMI
Group (11.1 percent) (Ripley 2011a, 30). Among the major record companies, industry
analyst Ripley reports, “acquisitions have been a key growth strategy” and means to
revenue stream diversification (Ripley 2011a, 15). As Giuseppe Richeri observes, “On
an international scale, the two [media] sectors in which concentration has attained the
most noticeable levels are the music industry … and the movie industry” (Richeri 2011,
132). Music industry concentration is intensifying (Billboard 2009; Ripley 2011a, 24).

Indeed, Grierson accurately predicted the shrinking of the Big Four into the Big
Three. In November 2011, EMI agreed to sell its recording interests to Universal.
After United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and European Union (EU) led
investigations into whether the deal violates anti-trust rules (Fixmer and Erlichman
2012), the acquisition was, in the end, approved (Mock and Smith 2012; Sisario 2012).
Therefore, only a ‘Big Three’ will remain: Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music
Group, and Warner. With the addition of EMI, Universal Music Group will control
over 40 percent of the recorded music market (Ripley 2011a, 30; F. Robinson 2012).
As Edgar Bronfman Jr., a former Universal heavyweight before he assumed the reins at
Warner, warned in his plea to stop the deal, this one “super major” will have an inordinate amount of power over the recording industry and digital entertainment more broadly: “[Universal] would basically determine the future of not only recorded music but really any kind of digital initiative as well…. I think it’s dangerous, I think it’s problematic and I think it’s got to be stopped” (in Christman 2012a). While Billboard’s Ed Christman suggests that Bronfman was possibly “trying to shake loose some asset sales from the proposed acquisition, because the Warner Music Group would be the likely beneficiary of any regulatory enforced asset sales” (Christman 2012a), Bronfman’s assessment nevertheless rings true.

The outcome of a separate FTC and EU anti-trust investigation will shape the competitive landscape of the music publishing industry moving forward. In November 2011, Sony/ATV Music Publishing agreed to purchase EMI’s music publishing assets. As of December 2011, the Big Four accounted for over 53 percent of music publishing market share in this $4.9 billion U.S. industry, with EMI Group PLC and Sony/ATV accounting for 15.8 percent and 8.4 percent, respectively (Ripley 2011b, 3). This deal, too, was approved with only minor concessions (Christman 2012c; C. Morris 2012), meaning that Sony/ATV will be in a position to almost triple its market share. It now promises to overtake Universal as the largest music publisher in the world (F. Robinson 2012). At the same time, the fifth largest music publisher, BMG Rights Management, has been “one of the most acquisitive players in the market. During the company’s buying binge, it has picked up leading independent publishers like Cherry Lane Music Publishing, Chrysalis and Bug Music” (Christman 2012b). Overall, music publishing
industry concentration is forecasted to “increase substantially” amid declines in recorded music revenues (Ripley 2011b, 22).

Just as significant, music industry consolidation has extended beyond the recording and music publishing industries proper. The Big Four (now Big Three) have spread their interests across “management, merchandising, agencies and promotion, driven by a search for new revenue, not just economies of scale and higher market share” (Billboard 2009). Moreover, after merging with Ticketmaster in 2010, concert promoter Live Nation also acquired “management companies, promotion companies, a ticketing company, a venue owner and operator, and a company that sells photographs” (Peoples 2011). In fact, the high profile multiple rights deals that Live Nation signed with superstar recording artists such as Madonna, Jay-Z, and Shakira between 2007 and 2008 prompted considerable speculation that Live Nation would assume a growing role in signing recording artists and would begin to resemble, and compete directly with, record companies. Live Nation has not entered into such a deal since 2008 (Peoples 2010c), however, and at the time of writing, the company does not appear to wish to become a major record label or to directly challenge the majors on their own turf. The first album to be released from a Live Nation artist, Madonna’s MDNA, was, in fact, produced through a business partnership with Universal (Sisario 2011). Such initiatives are themselves commonplace, and reveal a method of profit generation that functions as a nice complement or alternative to consolidation for companies trying to stay flexible and lean even as they grow large: project specific corporate partnerships.
Thanks primarily to the persistent deployment of strategies of integration and consolidation, fewer companies control more commercial music sectors across the recording, music publishing, and live performance industries today. After all, ‘leaner’ in the context of the flexible music corporation means fewer employees, not fewer business activities, and as this chapter demonstrates, the diversification of revenue streams by no means leads directly to a diversity of recording artists. Rather, a new blockbuster model for producing stars is the flexible music corporation’s preferred approach in the artist-brand era, uniting the digitalizing music industry to its pre-digital precursor in very important ways. The sum of these industrial dynamics, which have facilitated the centralization of tremendous influence and power into the hands of a few transnational corporations, presents working artists with formidable obstacles. Those interested in signing with the major companies are faced with an ever-narrowing range of potential business partners, upon whom they will become overwhelmingly dependent once signed to a multiple rights deal. Those who choose to opt out of this system altogether, on the other hand, are forced to compete for audience attention and dollars not only with the stars backed by these global giants but also with countless others attempting to forge a similarly independent path. As a result, many aspiring artists covet corporate assistance with marketing activities, a factor that has led to business partnerships between artists and consumer brands, as we shall see in Chapter 5.
4.8 Conclusion

In a 2007 interview with the *New York Times*, Paul McCartney relayed his record producer’s assessment of major record label struggles in the digital era: “[A]s David Kahne said to me about a year ago, the major labels these days are like the dinosaurs sitting around discussing the asteroid” (in Kozinn 2007). It is a familiar cliché. After initially fiercely resisting the industry-wide change thrust upon them, however, the major record companies ceased discussing how they might stop the digital juggernaut and began to take decisive actions to ensure that they would adapt to and profit from the new commercial opportunities it afforded. Against understandable excitement regarding the purported ‘consumer revolution’ in the music industry and the “widespread feeling that the major record labels are becoming redundant” (Young and Collins 2010, 340), this chapter calls attention to the worrisome business trends that, in fact, have enabled the majors to retain their dominance over the global music marketplace to the detriment of most working artists: intensified, cross-sector consolidation and the institutionalization of encircling multiple rights recording contracts. Today, according to *Billboard’s* Peoples, “The ability to create, which has never been easier, is confused with the ability to be heard and especially the ability to gain sales” (Peoples 2010b). The new music industry resembles its pre-digital predecessor insofar as a handful of stars continue to yield a disproportionate share of profits. Overall, the corporate trends surveyed above have allowed for popular musical production ‘from below’ to be frustrated by monetization ‘from above’.
In this chapter, I argued that the core popular music commodity in the post-CD era is the artist-brand. This key change leads us back to an even more important, abiding continuity: an egregious disparity in power between recording artists and music companies persists, which, in turn, seriously threatens the autonomy of working artists. What is more, inside the new model, activities that were formerly seen as vexing or even alienating, such as selling music to advertisers, have become standard practice. Indeed, both major label and independent artists are aggressively monetized through a host of licensing and endorsement deals today. When I asked independent music consultant Outhit whether the notion of ‘selling out’ had any cultural resonance in the current context, she responded,

I mean, I’m forty-five years old. I came of age in the punk years, you know, I started buying records as a teenager in 1977-1978…. [T]he whole anti-consumer thing … was very much a part of my ethos and something that I’ve given a great deal of thought to over the years and I’ve come around to basically realizing [laughing] – what a pile of crap. The fact of it is, by participating in any way in the business of music, i.e. the selling your records and so on, you’re in the machine. You are in the music-selling machine. (I/Outhit 2009)

A perhaps unforeseen consequence of the open-armed pursuit of music licensing agreements by record labels, music publishers, and recording artists has been the dynamic of dependence that has intensified in this shift toward business-to-business revenue generation models. Music companies have become unprecedentedly reliant on partnering with consumer brands and media properties, which, in turn, have joined entrenched major music corporations as new music industry gatekeepers.
5 THE NEW GATEKEEPERS: BRANDS, POPULAR MUSIC, AND THE LICENSING OF CULTURE

5.1 Introduction

The new ‘common sense’ inside the digitalizing music industry is that music placements in advertisements and across popular media constitute a standard mode of music marketing. In interview, Don Grierson, former vice president of Artists and Repertoire (A&R) at Capitol Records, EMI America, and Epic Records, relayed a phrase that has fast become an industry cliché: “They call it the new radio. It’s exposure, right?” (I/Grierson 2010; see also Hau 2007; Barnhard and Rutledge 2009; Klein 2009, 59-78). Under this new promotional model, an abbreviated version of the licensed song is intended to stand in for and function as an advertisement for the song as a whole and, by extension, the featured artist’s singles and albums, live performances, and merchandise.26 From the perspective of consumer brands and media properties (e.g., films, video games, and television programs), however, the purpose of music placements is decidedly different: to transfer positive feelings and associations over to the brand in an effort to set it part from its competitors. Popular music is now an instrument of brand differentiation (Barnhard 2009).

It is generally assumed that the objectives of music companies, recording artists, and brands are all achieved – that ‘everybody wins’ – through music licensing and other promotional agreements. In Chapter 5, I challenge this assumption. In sections 5.2-5.4,

26 As such, these music placements are a decidedly more indirect method of marketing music than radio. Radio stations play entire songs (or radio edits), not clips of main hooks, catchy riffs, or emotion-saturated measures. Furthermore, on radio, songs do not simultaneously compete for audience attention with brand messages; airtime dedicated to songs and advertisements is kept more separate.
I sketch a history of the changing relationship between popular music and brands, and analyze these changes. Drawing on music branding expert Mike Tunnicliffe’s three phases of popular music-driven branding – 1) “brand-music associations,” 2) “brand-music integrations,” and 3) “brand-music partnerships” – (I/Tunnicliffe 2010), I cite examples considered ‘milestones’ by both critical scholars and marketers in order to chart what I contend is an intensifying relationship. In sections 5.5-5.6, I discuss the consequences of the now standard music branding paradigm for working artists and for music making. While the “erosion of meaningful distinctions between the advertising and music industries” has been framed largely as “a convergence of content and commerce” (Taylor 2009, 413), the term ‘convergence’, which suggests a mere union or merger, fails to capture the actual dynamic at work: the collapse of popular music into advertising. Music companies’ and recording artists’ increasing dependence on music licensing and brand partnerships for marketing exposure and revenue has paved the way for popular music’s colonization by new industry gatekeepers: brands. As Andrew Wernick explains,

> Those who shape and transmit its [advertising’s] material have no intrinsic interest in what, ideologically that material might mean. Advertising is an entirely instrumental process. You promote to sell. You sell to get money, in turn to get more money or else to exchange for something else. In this, the mobilization of affect through the invocation of values is strictly a tool, an incidental side-effect of what advertising is instrumental for. (Wernick 1991, 25-26)

Music placements work in service of this instrumental process. Brands are not interested in popular musical content as such, but rather in what particular sounds and associations can do: facilitate the strategic mobilization of affect.
In this analysis, I consider uses of popular music by consumer brands and media properties together. Taking my cue from Tunnicliffe, I see popular media as effectively functioning as “media brands” (I/Tunnicliffe 2010). Certain differences, however, warrant acknowledgment. “The function of music in ads is to sell a product,” explains music supervisor Amy Fritz, whereas “the function of music in a film is to help tell the story of the film” (I/Fritz 2009). “If you can hear the music,” she continues on the topic of film music, “sometimes that means I haven’t done my job right” (I/Fritz 2009); this is a decidedly different goal than that of attention-grabbing advertising music. In television, popular music is used to aestheticize particular moments (Donnelly 2002, 331) – a role it also assumes in film. Video game music, on the other hand, is typically “a focused compilation of music … for a particular demographic,” which serves the function of “wallpaper” or entertainment “environment” (I/Fritz 2009). These differences aside, all music placements generally involve the strategic production of affect, and are used to target audiences seen as desirable in an effort to increase sales or ratings. When put to these uses, substantively different musics and artists are rendered commensurate or substitutable. This logic of equivalence, in turn, works to pit working artists against one another. Indeed, furnished with an inordinate amount of power vis-à-vis aspiring artists, brands have driven down licensing fees and now exercise considerable control over musical content itself, signaling a deepening subordination of popular music to the objectives of brands and marketing more

\[27\] While the distinctions Fritz makes between advertising, film, and video game music are subjective and debatable, note that she indicated to me that she chooses to work in film and television due to the more creative role that she, as a music supervisor, is afforded (I/Fritz 2009).
generally. In seeking to avoid the Scylla of the major music companies, I argue, recording artists have fallen into the Charybdis of brands.

5.2 The Origins of Advertising as the ‘New Radio’: From Jingles to ‘Brand-Music Associations’

Recording artists have long played a central role in the production of advertising music. Perhaps most famously, Barry Manilow worked as a jingle writer during the 1960s and 1970s, co-writing and performing now famous jingles for State Farm Insurance (“Like a Good Neighbor”), Band-Air Brand (“Stuck on Me”), and others. Songwriters, such as Carol King and Herbie Hancock, and rock bands, too, earned paycheques penning jingles during this period (Taylor 2012, 133). Speaking at a South by Southwest conference panel titled “Advertising IS the new radio,” Universal Music Publishing’s Keith D’Arcy cited 1960s jingles written and performed by the Rolling Stones for Rice Krispies, The Who for Coca-Cola, and Jefferson Airplane for Levi Strauss as important precedents (D’Arcy 2012). Brands also hired a wide range of recording artists to perform jingles. Coca-Cola’s “Things Go Better with Coca-Cola,” for instance, was performed by the Limeliters (1964), Petula Clark (1966), Ray Charles (1967), and Aretha Franklin (1968) in a campaign declared to be “a smashing hit with the target audience” by the company’s vice president and brand manager (in Taylor 2012, 151; find Taylor’s archive of commercials at www.soundsofcapitalism.com). Similarly, different versions of Pepsi’s “You’ve Got a Lot to Live, and Pepsi’s Got a Lot to Give” were performed by Johnny Cash, B. B. King, Odetta, Tammy Wynette, Three Dog Night (all in 1970), and Roberta Flack (1971) (Taylor 2012, 154-156). While the specific arrangements of such jingles worked to mimic the featured artists’
own musical material, in them slogans were substituted for lyrics. They were original jingles, after all, and not original songs.

Coca-Cola’s famous 1971 “Hilltop” television commercial marked a turning point in the crossover between songs and jingles (I/Tunnicliffe 2010; see also Klein 2009, 83; Taylor 2009, 410). The advertising spot featured a jingle, “I’d Like to Buy the World a Coke,” which was reworked into a popular song, “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing (In Perfect Harmony),” that eliminated references to the cola brand altogether (Klein 2009, 83). The song became a radio hit for both The Hillside Singers (a group of studio singers) and The New Seekers (a British pop band) (Klein 2009, 83). In an earlier but arguably less influential example, the jingle used in Diet Pepsi’s “Girlwatchers” spot (1966) was spun into Bob Crewe Generation’s instrumental radio hit, “Music to Watch Girls By” (Klein 2009, 83; Taylor 2012, 132). Advertising music, it was discovered, could provide entertainment in its own right. The initial ‘convergence’ of advertising and radio, then, entailed commercial jingles becoming popular songs.

The migration of popular songs into advertisements, by contrast, gained force with the shift toward what Tunnicliffe terms brand-music associations (I/Tunnicliffe 2010). Whereas jingles function as sonic mnemonic devices designed to enhance brand recall (Huron 1989, 562), brand-music associations involve capitalization on the signifying power of popular music. As such, the meanings tied to popular songs and recording artists – extra-musical and cultural associations that are (at least initially) constructed outside the world of advertising – are positioned as more closely tied to the
production of affect than are the intra-musical contents (the ‘notes’). The introduction of MTV in 1981 initiated key changes that facilitated a move toward this approach. The rise of music videos “has had a profound impact both on music, fashion and youth culture, and on the codes and forms that operate across television, film and advertising” (Firth, Goodwin, and Grossberg 1993, i). These media texts, which advertise the songs and recording artists they feature, accentuate the visual dimensions of pop/rock culture.

By partnering directly with recording artists in the MTV era, brands were able to harness associations tied to popular music as an audiovisual cultural form. While jingle writers during this period initially composed jingles intended to sound like songs played on MTV (Sanburn 2012), it soon became apparent that brands’ interest in popular music was inextricably linked to pop/rock culture’s visual signifiers. Original music by recording artists not only provided a sound; it also lent a brand a look and a feel. “The influence of MTV can’t be overstated,” argues musicologist Timothy D. Taylor regarding key changes to television commercials witnessed during this period, “since it ushered in a new, fast-paced visual language to accompany music” (Taylor 2012, 185). The advertising industry started to employ a music video-inspired practice of devising commercials “driven by music and visuals, with no hard sell,” termed “atmospheric advertising” (New York Times 1989). For instance, in a 1986 Michelob spot, Genesis performs their song “Tonight, Tonight, Tonight,” interlaced with shots of couples embracing, women, city nightlife, a bar, and Michelob beer (New York Times 1989).29

28 Note that Tunnicliffe classifies the “Hilltop” spot as the first notable example of brand-music associations, even though the popular song it generated was originally a jingle (I/Tunnicliffe 2010).
29 This television commercial belonged to the “Night Belongs to Michelob” campaign, which also (ill-advisedly in retrospect) included a spot featuring Eric Clapton performing at a bar. The deal was
It was the record-setting $5 million celebrity endorsement deal struck between Pepsi and pop superstar Michael Jackson in 1983 (Herrara 2009), however, that “transformed the world of music and marketing” (Taylor 2012, 187). Jackson’s music lent Pepsi a sound that originated in radio coupled with a visual aesthetic pulled straight from MTV. Opposite to the aforementioned “Hilltop” case, Pepsi’s “Street” (1984) and “Concert” (1984) spots entailed the conversion of a hit pop song into a jingle in terms of lyrics; both feature Jackson performing a version of “Billie Jean” in which the song’s chorus is replaced with “You’re the Pepsi generation / Guzzle down and taste the thrill of the day / And feel the Pepsi way” (Herrara 2009). In terms of visuals, however, the spots, both of which were directed by Bob Giraldi, director of Jackson’s “Beat It” music video (1983) (Giraldi 2009), harnessed Jackson’s position in youth culture as a popular cultural phenomenon. “Street” features Jackson, clad in his fashion staples (leather jacket, sequin socks, and glove), performing his signature dance moves along with the Jackson Five and a troupe of child dancers on a brownstone-lined street. “Concert” (known for the severe burns suffered by Jackson during filming) features the Jacksons performing on stage in an auditorium filled with screaming fans. The commercials were intended to have a family appeal; importantly, this strategy “was devised before Jackson was engaged, and he was hired because he fit that strategy” (Taylor 2012, 188).

In interview in 1984, Allen Rosenshine, then-CEO of BBDO, the advertising agency behind these spots, explained that youth “express themselves through music, they live through music; MTV is not an isolated phenomenon. So if we’re going to be

terminated after the rock star revealed to Rolling Stone that he was an alcoholic and had begun rehab by the time the spot was released (Robert 2010).
leading edge, we have to be in music” (in Taylor 2012, 188). He continued: “There are attitudes and styles which we wish to make signals of, or synonymous with, the brand. Advertising and brands don’t really create style. They take styles that exist, hopefully at the forefront ... and try to make [them] the property, proprietarily owned by a brand” (in Taylor 2012, 187; emphasis added). This business thinking provides evidence for Adam Arvidsson’s more recent argument that “brands are mechanisms that enable a direct valorization (in the form of share prices, for example) of people’s ability to create trust, affect and shared meanings” (Arvidsson 2005, 236). In this case, Pepsi directly capitalized (i.e., converted into capital) the meanings tied to Jackson’s music and status as a pop idol. Indeed, emboldened by the success of their first campaign (Pepsi generated $7.7 billion in sales in 1984), Pepsi signed Jackson to a second endorsement deal, valued at $10 million, in support of his Bad album and tour (1987-1988) (Herrara 2009). Following a template similar to the previous Jackson commercials, in “The Chase,” the lyrics to “Bad” are transformed into advertising slogans: “You’re a whole new generation / And Pepsi’s coming through / You know I’m bad / I’m bad, come on / And Pepsi’s good / It’s good, you know it.” This four-part, four-minute spot, which paired concert footage with shots of the star eluding hordes of photographers and fans via helicopter, convertible, ski jump, and parachute, also featured Jackson singing (lip-synching), dancing, and acting.  

30 Similar to the Jackson campaigns, Pepsi’s “Simply Irresistible” (1989) spot with Robert Palmer adapts Palmer’s lyrics (e.g., “she” is replaced with “it” in order to lyrically address Pepsi, rather than a woman), and mimes the aesthetic of Palmer’s well-known “Addicted to Love” (1986) and “Simply Irresistible” (1988) music videos, in which he is flanked by a troupe of mannequin-like, highly sexualized women.
A high-profile endorsement deal between Pepsi and another pop star marked the next step in the crossover between radio, MTV, and television commercials: Madonna. Similar to “The Chase,” the Madonna-Pepsi spot, “Make A Wish” (1989), was unusually long (two and a half minutes, although more standard 30- and 60-second versions later aired) and was launched as an entertainment event. As Canadian advertiser and media personality Terry O’Reilly recounts,

First, Pepsi aired a teaser commercial on the Grammys telling viewers that the Like a Prayer song and commercial were set to premiere a month later…. Then, on March 2nd, 1989, Madonna’s two and a half minute Like A Prayer Pepsi commercial aired during the Cosby Show. People in 40 countries around the world watched, giving the commercial an audience of 250 million. (O’Reilly 2012)

The advertisement featured Madonna lip-syncing, dancing, and acting, and drew on visual conventions found in narrative-driven music videos. In contrast to the Jackson spots, however, it showcased the song “Like A Prayer” with unaltered lyrics, and thus serves as a key precedent for popular song’s displacement of the jingle altogether.

While the Madonna-Pepsi campaign is widely known for the controversy sparked by the release of the “Like A Prayer” music video and the subsequent termination of the Pepsi deal,31 for the purposes of this analysis, it is significant for the way that consumer brand advertising was explicitly conceptualized as an alternative approach to promoting Madonna’s new single. As explained in a Pepsi press release at the time, “The ground-breaking deal is expected to change the way popular tunes from major artists are released in the future. Traditionally, new songs have been made public through heavy radio air-play. In an innovative twist, the Pepsi-Madonna deal uses television to

31 The “Like A Prayer” music video, which featured cross burning, stigmata, and interracial love, incited anti-Madonna fervor among social conservatives.
provide unparalleled international exposure for her new single” (in Siegel 1989). The commercial aired prior to the release of the “Like A Prayer” single in stores or on radio, and prior to the launch of the corresponding music video on MTV (Klein 2009, 89; Siegel 1989). The short-lived Pepsi-Madonna campaign was an antecedent for the cross-promotional approach that came of age at the turn of the twenty-first century – what Tunnicliffe terms brand-music integrations (I/Tunnicliffe 2010).

The transition to brand-music associations did not involve a clean break from past practices. During the 1990s, for instance, Pepsi returned to the use of jingles. Ray Charles performed “You Got the Right One, Baby, Uh Huh,” a jingle based on Prince’s unreleased song “Uh Huh” (1990-1991); the Spice Girls performed “Generation Next” (1997-1998); and Britney Spears performed “Joy of Pepsi” (1999-2000). Similar to the approach employed in the 1960s, these jingles were produced to sound like the star artist’s own material; they reflect the jingle’s makeover into an imitation of the pop charts. By virtue of working with recording artists, however, these campaigns enabled Pepsi to capitalize on the cultural value of popular music, despite their musical and lyrical content. In the new milleneum, however, advertisers would become interested not only in endorsement deals with celebrities, but also in licensing original music by lesser known artists. Brand-music integrations would offer brands the opportunity to

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32 As media studies scholar Bethany Klein observes, “It is interesting that this case was framed in terms of bypassing commercial radio since, at the time, US commercial radio was nowhere near the disaster it is today for young artists, with ever-narrowing playlists, a plague of payola schemes, and practical if not technical oligopoly status” (Klein 2009, 89). Furthermore, given that the chart-topping Madonna had not been shut out of commercial radio or MTV, but rather was played in heavy rotation, it is curious that she deemed it necessary to pursue alternative means of promotion.
tap into popular music that fell well outside the Top 40 – songs that were less expensive to license and could function as potent signifiers of ‘difference’ and ‘authenticity’.

5.3 The Recording Artist ‘Buy-In’: ‘Brand-Music Integrations’ as Cross-Promotion?

Now that ad agencies have mined the most accessible music, they are forced to search out more esoteric tracks that are still perceived as pristine. Leading creative agencies now use music from the distant past, from obscure genres, and from independent bands that are known to only a few thousand fans.... Postmodern branding is now running a fine-toothed comb through the culture industry’s dusty closets and countercultural dead ends to mine the last vestiges of unsponsored expressive culture. (Holt 2002, 86)

Writing in 2002, professional branding expert and former Harvard and Oxford marketing professor Douglas Holt observed how advertisers’ increasing use of popular music as a tool of differentiation had forced forwarding-thinking agencies to cast the net wider in their search for attention-grabbing or affecting music. The use of popular music in and of itself by now had become expected. “The postmodern branding paradigm,” in his account, “is premised upon the idea that brands will be more valuable if they are offered not as cultural blueprints but as cultural resources, as useful ingredients to produce the self as one chooses” (Holt 2002, 83). Advertisers’ turn to lesser known, ‘unsponsored’ culture was intended to create the perception that brands are “without an instrumental economic agenda,” and in so doing, appeal to consumers wary of commercialism (Holt 2002, 83). Popular music was valuable insofar as it functioned as a ‘useful ingredient’ in the production of (consumer) ‘selves’ and helped to camouflage brands’ actual motives. As advertising firms were experimenting with
new branding tactics, many smaller and independent record labels were hunting for new marketing outlets. Brand and music industry interests seemed to align.

Roughly between 1998-2008, the notion that music placements constitute the ‘new radio’ went from novel idea to becoming the new common sense. The dividing line between the worlds of popular music and advertising began to fade, largely due to changing attitudes among recording artists. “Brands have always been interested in co-opting hit songs,” according to sonic branding executive Bill Nygren, but whereas rock bands had rebuffed advertiser advances in the 1960s and 1970s, artists since have become considerably more “open to letting brands … grab the … equity out of songs that were well loved and attach them to their products” (I/Nygren 2009). “When we started in the ‘90s, it was still considered sacrilegious for bands to work with brands,” recalls Jon Cohen, co-CEO of lifestyle marketing firm Cornerstone (in Billboard 2009).

The first decade of the twenty-first century, by contrast, witnessed a new “openness from artists when it comes to branding. Licensing and brand partnerships have [become] part of the marketing mix alongside radio promotion, press and other things,” he continues (in Billboard 2009). During this period, brand-music integrations (I/Tunnicliffe 2010) were forged under the auspices of mutually beneficial cross-promotion, not celebrity endorsement; this ‘new radio’ purportedly served the dual purpose of promoting both artist and brand. However, as we shall see, promotion leaned one way more than the other: a possessive promotional logic worked to bind popular music even more closely to brands. We may determine precisely how this logic
is possessive by looking at practices of licensing music for use in television commercials, television programs, and video games in turn.\footnote{I do not discuss the licensing of popular music for use in film here, as it was already well established during the timeframe of interest. According to Fritz, following the commercial successes of John Hughes films such as \textit{Pretty in Pink} (1986), which feature popular songs, the major studios began to realize that they “had a captive audience” to whom they could promote ancillary products and spin-offs, such as music soundtracks (I/Fritz 2009). \textit{The Big Chill} (1983) is also notable for its prominent use of 1960s and 1970s classics: “There is a theory that Madison Avenue started to use songs in advertising in a big way after … advertisers saw the way baby boomers responded to the movie’s soundtrack” (O’Reilly 2010). This is not to suggest that the notion of ‘selling out’ vanished altogether in the wake of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. When the Shins licensed “New Slang” to McDonald’s in 2002, for instance, fans and rock journalists censured the band; the “unwritten rules and boundaries” regarding the appropriate distance between popular music and advertising “bubbled to the surface” (Klein 2009, 123). The licensing of indie rock in particular was still relatively rare in 2002, and partnering with global fast food franchise McDonald’s was seen as particularly egregious. Pop/R&B singer Justin Timberlake’s performance of the slogan in the McDonald’s “I’m Lovin’ It” jingle (2003), which was subsequently released as a Timberlake single, was more expected. Reflecting on the widespread shift toward licensing original songs, Nygren suggested that “I’m Lovin’ It” is “probably the last example of the truly great jingle” (I/Nygren 2009).}

Prior to undertaking this discussion, a brief adumbration of historical-industrial context is needed to understand what amounts to a tectonic shift away from longstanding beliefs regarding the inherent tensions between culture and commerce – beliefs that Simon Frith argues lie at “the core of the rock ideology” (Frith 1981, 41). In the United States, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 shored up oligopolistic market conditions and ever-narrowing playlists for commercial radio, effectively compelling recording artists and record labels to seek alternative means of exposure (Klein 2009, 62-63; Taylor 2009, 407-08). The inaccessibility of radio arguably instigated a re-evaluation of the idea of ‘selling out’ altogether, leading Taylor to argue that “the old stigma about allowing one’s music to be used in commercials … evaporated almost overnight” (Taylor 2009, 408).\footnote{This is not to suggest that the notion of ‘selling out’ vanished altogether in the wake of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. When the Shins licensed “New Slang” to McDonald’s in 2002, for instance, fans and rock journalists censured the band; the “unwritten rules and boundaries” regarding the appropriate distance between popular music and advertising “bubbled to the surface” (Klein 2009, 123). The licensing of indie rock in particular was still relatively rare in 2002, and partnering with global fast food franchise McDonald’s was seen as particularly egregious. Pop/R&B singer Justin Timberlake’s performance of the slogan in the McDonald’s “I’m Lovin’ It” jingle (2003), which was subsequently released as a Timberlake single, was more expected. Reflecting on the widespread shift toward licensing original songs, Nygren suggested that “I’m Lovin’ It” is “probably the last example of the truly great jingle” (I/Nygren 2009).} The popularization of P2P file sharing and resulting destabilization of established modes of monetizing popular music, examined at length in Chapter 4, exacerbated this shift. A decline in CD sales catalyzed
record labels’ pursuit of new revenue streams, in addition to new promotional channels. As aspiring artists began seeking “alternative routes to market without signing to major record labels,” licensing deals with brands were positioned as a way “to help them gain their new independent status” (Tunnicliffe 2008). Advertisers presented themselves as “hero to the damsel-in-distress of the struggling artist” and, perhaps surprisingly, were portrayed as a champion of music that might otherwise be unheard” (Klein 2009, 60). Seemingly paradoxically, deals with brands were cast as a vehicle for circumventing the restricted major label/commercial radio/MTV system.

**Television Commercials as the ‘New Radio’?**

One of the first key cases that entailed licensing original music to an advertiser in a campaign explicitly designed to bypass radio and MTV promotion actually involved a star artist who had previously benefited greatly from that closed promotional system. Sting’s “Desert Rose”/Jaguar spot (2000) is widely viewed as the landmark example of the integration or convergence between music and advertising (Donaton 2003; Taylor 2009, 409; I/Tunnicliffe 2010). Despite Sting’s prior commercial successes, his “Desert Rose” single had received little radio airplay after its release. Miles Copeland, his manager, believed that the corresponding music video, which features scenes of Sting in a Jaguar, resembled a car advertisement, leading him to pitch the idea of a cross-promotional television commercial to the automaker (Donaton 2003). Jaguar agreed, and the resulting spot – which includes clips from the music video and captions that promote Sting, the “Desert Rose” single, and the *Brand New Day Album* – reportedly catapulted album sales from an anticipated one million to four million within the United
States alone, and injected the single into the playlists of 180 Top 40 radio stations (Donaton 2003). Notably, unlike the Michael Jackson and Madonna deals with Pepsi, this was not a formal endorsement deal; Sting was not paid to promote the car and Jaguar was permitted to use music video clips at no cost (Donaton 2003). Instead, the Jaguar spot was a site of promotional synergy in which Sting’s celebrity and music was a type of currency exchanged for the marketing exposure it might garner.

The licensing of all eighteen tracks on electronica artist Moby’s album *Play* (1999) for use in commercials, films, and television programs was another milestone in the move toward using music placements as promotional media (I/Tunnicliffe 2010; see also Taylor 2007, 240; Klein 2009, 59). “On a purely accidentally level,” Moby told *Wired*’s Ethan Smith in 2002, “I have managed to develop my name and self into a brand” (in E. Smith 2002). “On the contrary: It’s no accident,” Smith correctly informs the reader (E. Smith 2002). Moby’s managers sought out music placements in advertising and media as part of an aggressive marketing plan explicitly designed to sidestep commercial radio promotion (Sanburn 2012). The approach worked. After signing in excess of one hundred licenses in North America alone, the independent artist earned in the range of one million dollars in licensing fees, gained access to radio and MTV (promotional media previously closed to him), and sold over seven million copies of *Play* (Leland 2001). Moby’s style of electronica lent brands an unthreatening yet distinctive sound. His music “sounds cool - but not too cool,” Smith wrote at the time, “[w]hich is precisely why it’s so appealing: To corporate America, Moby offers an easy shorthand for cutting-edge cachet” (E. Smith 2002). Moby, he continued, “made
electronica (read: edgy, intimidating, next big thing) safe for the mainstream (read: mass exposure, mass audience, massive sales)” (E. Smith 2002). Indeed, the pervasive licensing of Moby’s techno tracks “got more advertisers interested in less-known acts whose contemporary sound could resonate with consumers” (Fixmer 2012).

While Moby’s highly touted licensing deals contributed to the popularization of this approach, note that advertisers’ turn to electronica and independent music had already begun. “I think that by the time Moby did it,” recalls advertising sound designer Ray Loewy, “it was almost like the floodgates had opened…. The wave was already moving” (in Sanburn 2012). Citing Madison Avenue’s use of music by Crystal Method, Stereolab, Spiritualized, and others, Washington Post’s Frank Owen suggests that “1998 may go down in pop history as the year in which the really cool music wasn’t heard on MTV or the radio but on TV commercials” (F. Owen 1998). In his account, advertisers had become “convinced that pop music classics no longer guarantee audience attention,” and, as a result, had started to use “electronic and alternative music as a way to stand out from the pack” and attempt to “out-hip one another – aiming for postmodern surprise and novelty” (F. Owen 1998). The sonic attributes of electronica, rather than the celebrity personae of pop and rock stars, were becoming increasingly desirable to advertisers interested in targeting youth audiences. Advertisers favoured electronica’s dramatic qualities and expansive sonorous range,

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35 This is not to suggest that advertisers’ use of pop and rock ceased altogether during this period. One of the more high profile licensing deals of 2002, in fact, was between Cadillac and Led Zeppelin. However, this campaign was intended to speak to an older demographic, not youth, as GM’s John Howell explains: “Led Zeppelin and the song ‘Rock and Roll’ appeals to our target market. You know, the 45 to 59 group grew up with that group. It’s a piece of music and genre that does very well in terms of appealing to them” (in LeBeau 2003). Also, it was a traditional celebrity endorsement deal; the rock stars were paid to endorse the brand. Finding otherwise unavailable marketing exposure was not the primary motivation.
and, more importantly, the fact that it typically did not feature vocals, which they worried could “distract from the ad” (Taylor 2007, 247). Underground techno was effective for “ambient advertising” strategies that used “mood and setting to attract the youthful media-cynical audience” (F. Owen 1998). Simply, it made for a cool atmosphere and, as such, functioned as background.

This approach was markedly different from the pop endorsement deals of the 1980s, then, which had placed star artists at centre stage. Under the brand-music associations approach, forging explicit links to specific recording artists had been seen as a way to bolster the profile of the sponsoring brand. Under the nascent brand-music integrations approach, in contrast, advertisers often avoided prominent promotion of artists on the grounds that it might impede effective brand messaging. Here, the explicit marketing of music was not a key consideration, despite the rhetoric of cross-promotion. Instead, ‘different’ sounds were used as a means to target audiences seen as generally resistant to marketing. The subordination of music to the brand message leads me to characterize this promotional dynamic as ‘possessive’ rather than reciprocal.

Ironically, the well-known but decidedly unrepresentative cases of Sting and Moby would come to stand in as evidence of the viability of this approach for aspiring artists more broadly. It is important to remember that Sting was already a star, and Moby’s case was remarkable in terms of the unusual volume of licenses sold. Furthermore, when these deals were engineered at the turn of the twenty-first century, the music industry’s digital transition was not yet fully underway. Still under the sway of the old promotional model, record labels and artists saw music licensing “as not only
an alternative avenue for reaching the ears of potential buyers, but also a way to reach the ears of radio programmers” (Klein 2009, 64). The commercial success of these two anomalous examples was a product of record sales, radio play, and access to MTV – the bulwarks of a soon to be obsolete business model. In addition, these deals garnered considerable attention because this practice was still novel.

The licensing of popular music to advertisers became increasingly commonplace during the first years of the twenty-first century. However, at the time, “it still seemed relatively uncool for musicians, especially newer bands, to hawk products – until Apple changed things” (Sanburn 2012). Apple’s much lauded, music-driven iPod and iTunes commercials lent this practice a new credibility, cementing the notion that advertising was the new radio, and the accompanying assumption that this shift was to the benefit of independent and aspiring artists. After initially licensing songs by star artists, such as U2’s “Vertigo” (2004) and Eminem’s “Lose Yourself” (2005), Apple began licensing less known tracks, including “Ride” by the Vines (2005), “1234” by Feist (2007), and “Shut Up and Let Me Go” by the Ting Tings (2008). In the cases of Feist and the Ting Tings, exposure through an iPod commercial translated into a spike in sales: “1234” jumped from 16,000 the month before the spot to 249,000 during the month of the advertisement’s release, and “Shut Up and Let Me Go” (unreleased prior to the Apple spot) sold 1,000 during the month of the advertisement’s release, and shot up to sales of 116,000 the following month (Hampp and Netherby 2011). Apple’s interest in lesser known or emerging artists, rather than Top 40 stars, was widely celebrated as a positive
development for independent music; deserving musicians were finally receiving the spotlight and the sales, or so the argument went.

Indeed, the commercial success of artists such as Feist, the Ting Tings, and Yael Naim (whose song “New Soul” was used in a MacBook Air advertisement in 2008) translated into a widespread belief across the music industry that Apple had a unique ability to ‘break’ artists, shoring up the business rationale behind the use of advertising as a means of marketing music. “It’s the ultimate way to win,” Nygren told me in interview in 2009, because the already hip Apple brand “gets to be that much hipper” by tapping into the credibility of independent music, and Feist gets a wide audience “listening to the hookiest part of her tune” (I/Nygren 2009). An advertising creative director based in Toronto championed Apple as “probably more powerful than MTV, in some cases, in making a star” (I/advertising creative director 2009), and Canadian independent music executive Allison Outhit characterized iPod commercials as the “holy grail” of advertising opportunities for emerging artists: “Not only does Apple benefit from the great music and from whatever brand that artist has as being a kind of a cool insider, but absolutely the reverse happens, too, which is that the artist benefits from the brand of Apple” (I/Outhit 2009). A ‘synch’ placement in an Apple television commercial, in fact, ranked number one in Billboard’s “Maximum Exposure” list in 2008 (Harding 2008b) and 2009 (Bruno 2009), before falling to number two, behind a performance on the Grammy Awards, in 2010 (Bruno et al. 2010).³⁶ Exposure on

³⁶ These rankings of the “best ways to generate sales and buzz” are based on surveys of record label and music publishing executives, artist managers, publicists, and branding experts (Bruno et al. 2010).
MTV, by this time, was tied to starring roles on reality shows, synch placements on *The Hills* (2006-2010), and performances on award shows, not music videos (Bruno 2009).

Much as MTV was (and remains) a restricted institution, access to these prime Apple advertising spots was limited to a select chosen few. By 2009, *Billboard*’s Antony Bruno had already observed a winnowing down of Apple’s music playlist: “So far this year, Apple has relied on only four songs for its TV ads in the United States, down from seven songs licensed last year and the eight licensed in 2007. And none of the ads featured artist performances the way previous commercials presented Feist and U2” (Bruno 2009). His second point is also significant. In contrast to the iPod commercial template – Apple’s signature iPod-wearing, dancing silhouettes – the Feist iPod Nano spot (which promotes the video capability of the device) quite atypically features clips from Feist’s music video. Her colourful video, played on the Nano, renders her image uncharacteristically prominent, effectively pulling the music from background to foreground. Unlike most music licensing from this period, and similar to the Sting-Jaguar case, this spot was distinctively cross-promotional; Apple pitched Feist. It is for good reason, then, that Ben Swanson of independent record label Secretly Canadian Records warned that “everyone looks at someone like Feist and thinks they can do that, but she’s really the exception, not the rule” (in Harding 2008a).

For those few artists selected by Apple, the conversion of this marketing exposure into robust sales was by no means a given, even at the height of Apple’s influence. In 2008, while touting the significance of the Apple spots, *Billboard*’s Cortney Harding also cautioned, “more often than not, the increases are modest” (Harding 2008b). The
Vines, for instance, saw sales from “Ride” crawl from 3,000 to a mere 7,000 during the month their spot aired, before falling back down to 3,000 the month after the commercial’s release (Hampp and Netherby 2011; see Harding 2008b and Hampp and Netherby 2011 for sales figures for artists that have appeared in Apple commercials).

Although Apple has been trumpeted as a supporter of independent music and aspiring artists, the emergence of Apple commercials as a medium for promoting music did not free recording artists from media conglomerate power. Instead, Apple simply joined the ranks of the music industry’s old guard – Sony, Universal, Warner, and EMI – in terms of the power it wielded vis-à-vis artists. As recording artists began to seek an endorsement from Apple and not the other way around, it became clear that Apple, not the artist, was firmly in charge. Crucially, the majority of promotional capital was accrued to Apple, as the sum of these music-driven commercials helped the brand create a distinctive indie ‘sound identity’; if these commercials served as the new radio, then the station, Apple, was the real beneficiary. Grey Group’s Josh Rabinowitz uses the term “neojingle” to describe Apple’s approach: “Instead of literally singing about the product, the music becomes the sound of the product and in essence the product becomes inextricably connected to sound. It feels not as if they borrowed or even stole the music, but that the music belonged to the Apple brand” (in Hampp and Netherby 2011; emphasis added). By creating a distinctive sound identity, the brand, in effect, came to ‘possess’ the symbolic force of the chosen music. This possessive promotional logic undermines the notion of cross-promotion in a straightforward sense.
The central role of iPod advertising in music promotion reached its zenith in roughly 2007-2009. Apple’s interest in licensing popular music for its iPod and iTunes spots, after all, largely aligned with the function of these music-related digital media technologies. As Apple switched its focus from iPods to iPhones, the importance of music to its marketing, and therefore its relevance as a cross-promotional vehicle for recording artists, lessened. Placement in an Apple commercial was not even included in the listing of the top 65 ways to promote a single or album in Billboard’s “Maximum Exposure 2011” (Mitchell 2011). However, a “song in a TV commercial that runs during a special event with significant viewership,” “synch placement in a high-rotation TV ad for a leading athletic shoe brand (Adidas, Converse, Nike, Reebok, etc.),” “synch placement in an ad for Coca-Cola,” and “synch placement in an ad for Pepsi” ranked number eleven, twenty, twenty-four, and twenty-seven, respectively (Mitchell 2011).37

During the late 2000s, as a result of the influential Apple spots, the indie advertising soundtrack inaugurated by Moby and others a decade earlier emerged as a new standard rather than a novel exception to the rule. Indeed, advertisers credit Apple with “pav[ing] the way for many other brands that would later incorporate indie music into their marketing efforts, from Converse to Kia to Verizon Wireless” (Hampp and Netherby 2011). During the same decade, television programs also were pitched as cross-promotional vehicles that could ‘break’ aspiring artists.

37 “Performance on the Grammy Awards,” “performance during Super Bowl halftime show”, and “homepage placement on iTunes” ranked first, second, and third, respectively (Mitchell 2011) – a testament to the continued importance of mass audiences to effective popular music promotion.
Television Programs as the ‘New Radio’?

Pop music is now dominant as stock music on television, filling the expansion of continuity and advertising spaces, and indicating the degree of industrial integration and collaboration between the television and music industries. (Donnelly 2002, 331)

K. J. Donnelly’s observation, though specific to British television, captures the dynamic at work in the North American context. From the original recordings inserted into programs such as teen drama Gossip Girl (2007- ), comedy-drama Parenthood (2010- ), and crime comedy-drama Bones (2005- ), to the cover versions performed by the cast of musical comedy-drama Glee (2009- ), popular music permeates contemporary television. The practice of licensing popular music performed by original artists, rather than hiring studio musicians to create sound-alikes, can be traced back to WKRP in Cincinnati (1978-1982) (Butler 2007, 249), and Miami Vice (1984-90) “set a precedent of having stylish visuals accompanied by contemporary pop music” (Donnelly 2002, 332). However, according to Canadian music publisher Jennifer Beavis, the first iteration of Aaron Spelling’s Beverly Hills, 90210 (1990-2000), which featured Top 40 R&B and pop, marked a decisive moment in the formalization of this practice: “Previous to 90210, … T.V. producers didn’t feel that they needed original music to carry the narrative – to make … the viewer … feel that they’re actually looking at reality” (I/Beavis 2009). She describes the shift toward licensing original popular music for use in television programs as the “90210 effect” (I/Beavis 2009). As stock music, popular music’s purpose is to support the narrative; cross-promotion is secondary. Thus, the possessive dynamic introduced above also holds for television placements: the music used is folded into the television program’s ‘sound’. During the
first decade of the twenty-first century, record labels and artists desperate for exposure and revenue aggressively pursued these opportunities nevertheless.

*The O.C.* (2003-2007) and *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005-present) are routinely credited as pioneers for their use of lesser known or independent music in particular and, hence, for ‘breaking’ artists (Garrity 2007; Hau 2007; I/Tunnicliffe 2010). A handful of teen dramas from the 1990s, however, set the stage for the licensing of music by aspiring artists rather than stars. First, in an important television benchmark, alternative rock band The Flaming Lips appeared in a 1995 episode of *Beverly Hills, 90210* (McFarland 2005). In fact, Death Cab for Cutie bassist Nick Harmer cited the Flaming Lips 90210 appearance in order to justify his band’s decision to work with *The O.C.*: “When people were saying, ‘Are you guys comfortable with either being on the show, or the references that the show makes to you guys?’ We would just say, ‘Well, The Flaming Lips were on 90210’” (in McFarland 2005); an indie cool precedent had been set. “Music driven” shows such as *Dawson’s Creek* (1998-2003), *Felicity* (1998-2002), and *Party of Five* (1994-2000) – each of which released soundtrack albums – were also instrumental in the development of the independent music “formula” (I/Kenzer 2011).

Death Cab for Cutie featured extensively on *The O.C.* (Tunnicliffe claims that the band did “all the signature tunes for *The O.C.*)”) and are touted as a key brand-music integration success story (I/Tunnicliffe 2010). Much as Feist’s iPod spot was more explicitly cross-promotional than most, Death Cab for Cutie’s relationship to *The O.C.* was unusually close. While a standard music placement in television would entail the insertion of a song into a scene, and a prominent placement would occur in a
particularly important scene or episode (e.g., a season finale), Death Cab for Cutie were actually written into the storyline; they were a main character’s favourite band, their poster was included in his bedroom, and the band was a topic of discussion in the drama (McFarland 2005). This promotion undoubtedly helped to raise their profile.

The music placements of Snow Patrol and The Fray in Grey’s Anatomy are also cited as evidence of television programs’ effectiveness as sites for cross-promotion (I/Tunnicliffe 2010). Snow Patrol’s “Chasing Cars” (2006) shot up the iTunes charts after appearing in an emotional scene (I/Tunnicliffe 2010), selling 1.8 million digital downloads and achieving a number five position on Billboard’s pop charts (Hau 2007), and a prominent placement of The Fray’s song “How to Save a Life” (2006) is credited with helping the band achieve platinum status (Ben-Yehuda 2008; Hau 2007). Not only was the song used in “a really critical moment in the show,” but it was also promoted in a music video featuring clips of both TV show and artist (I/Canadian major label executive B 2009).

Notably, “How to Save a Life” was selected by The O.C. and Grey’s Anatomy music supervisor, Alexandra Patsavas, after the Fray’s record label arranged for the band to perform a private acoustic set at her house (I/Canadian major label executive B 2009). Patsavas, the music supervisor also responsible for selecting music for Mad Men (31 episodes, 2007-12), Numb3rs (25 episodes, 2006-09), Private Practice (69 episodes, 2007-12), Without A Trace (111 episodes, 2003-09), and the Twilight films (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012) (IMDb 2012), was actively courted by the record label. The clout she wielded was so great that she was even given the opportunity to open her
own record label (Garrity 2007; I/Coffing 2010). Chop Shop Records was launched in partnership with Warner’s Atlantic Records: “it is fantastic that we have her dialed into our company,” averred Atlantic president Julie Greenwald (in Garrity 2007).

Again, although frequently deployed as evidence of the viability of television programs for breaking new artists, “commercial success stories like the Fray and Snow Patrol … tend to be rare exceptions to the rule” (Hau 2007). An unusual emphasis on cross-promotion set the cases discussed above apart from more common licensing arrangements. Because the commercial success of a minority of placements has helped to solidify the notion that television programs offer a way to get ahead in a competitive digitalizing music industry, songs by aspiring artists now flood music supervisors’ inboxes. As music publisher Peter Jansson explained, “people are submitting music to music supervisors all the time via email or MP3s,” and as a result, “music supervisors quite often get overwhelmed” (I/Jansson 2010). The unfortunate consequences of this oversupply of popular music for working artists are explored in section 5.5.

The use of music placements in television as an attention-grabbing promotional strategy must be understood as a historically specific phenomenon. This does not mean that this practice has ceased: the opposite is true. Licensing to television has continued to grow, and is now so common that these placements no longer garner the audience and media attention they received only a few years ago. Interestingly, Gossip Girl was the only television program cited in Billboard’s 2011 listing of “the best ways for emerging acts to get the word out,” which now focuses on YouTube, Pitchfork, and
Twitter promotion (Mitchell 2011). While by no means the final authority on music marketing, the ranking does reflect the thinking of music industry and branding experts.

*Video Games as the ‘New Radio’?*

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, video games also were pitched as the new radio. The popularity of *Grand Theft Auto III* (2001) and subsequent versions (which featured in-game radio stations), *Guitar Hero* (first released in 2005), *Rock Band* (first released in 2007), and various karaoke games produced excitement across the music industry about the music marketing potential of video games. Music-based games in particular have had an “incredible” impact on back catalogue sales for established bands, such as Kansas and Queen (I/Coffing 2010). As might be expected, stars have benefited most from these music placements in terms of music sales. The priority of video publishers is not the promotion of unknown music. “Our priority is selling games,” Andrew Hanley, a music supervisor at Rockstar Games (publisher of *Grand Theft Auto*), clarified on a North by Northeast conference panel (Hanley 2010).

As with the use of popular music in film, video game publishers license original songs to make games “more expressive and vibrant and exciting” (I/director of licensing at video game publisher 2010). Popular music is seen as a storytelling tool. According to one video game licensing executive, cross-promotional campaigns with recording artists are rare; if his company does choose to develop such a campaign, it is because “obviously it’s a big-name artist and … you want to integrate their name [into] … some sort of marketing initiative…. Mostly for us, though, ninety plus percent of the time, … it’s really what works best, what we think fits the game the best” (I/director of licensing
at video game publisher 2010). A video game can benefit from the media and audience attention garnered by stars. The purpose of less familiar music, by contrast, is atmosphere or background; it functions as “wallpaper” (I/Fritz 2009). Again, I characterize this relationship as possessive; if video game publishers’ marketing strategies are effective, the music used becomes part of the game’s distinctive ‘sound’.

The End of an Era? Brand-music ‘Integrations’ (c. 1998-2008)

It’s no longer uncool, unhip, you know, traitorous to license your music. It’s just smart, because one, you get paid, but two, you open up a new media channel, because radio is so static and so stale and so safe. (I/Nygren 2009)

By bracketing off the brand-music integrations (or music placements as cross-promotion) model as historical, I do not mean to suggest that this practice is no longer occurring, but instead that music licensing has become the new baseline – the new normal. Today, licensing is seen “not only as a revenue generator, but an extremely important part of exposing an artist” (I/director of licensing at video game publisher 2010). Some even argue that “[t]he idea that licensing music is somehow different from selling music through iTunes isn’t taken seriously anymore” (Sanburn 2012). According to this logic, because the intent of those involved in the commercial production of popular music is to sell music, the specific commodity form or buyer is of no consequence (recall Outhit’s contention, quoted in Chapter 4, that by “selling your records and so on… you are in the music-selling machine” [I/Outhit 2009]). As I argue elsewhere, artists today are presented with a problematic savvy/naïve binary opposition between ‘taking’ licensing money and ‘selling out’ (Meier 2011, 402). Although the
‘smart’ approach has yielded commercial success for some, the wholesale adoption of music licensing as independent music’s savior has had damaging effects.

By 2008, aspiring recording artists were faced with a conundrum. “If you’re a recording artist and you think you can make it financially without exposure via other media, like TV, film, advertising or videogames, you’re almost certainly wrong,” pronounced Grey Group’s Rabinowitz, but “if you think associating your music with a brand is going to secure your future, you’re definitely wrong” (Rabinowitz 2008). For aspiring artists, licensing agreements with brands had become the price of admission to a competitive digitalizing music industry. Given the ubiquity of popular music across media today, in order to garner attention, it is now necessary to “do more” than simply place popular music in commercials (I/lifestyle advertising account executive 2011).

Significantly, unlike the brand-music associations surveyed in section 5.2, which involve brands capitalizing on the promotional value of popular music and recording artists’ personae, the brand-music integrations discussed in section 5.3 involve recording artists capitalizing on the promotional muscle of advertising and media properties. This shift indicates a central change in the balance of power. As recording artists, record labels, artist managers, attorneys, and music publishers began to realize “the power of promotion through associating yourself with a brand,” they also began “chasing” these opportunities (I/Tunnicliffe 2010). There is “more of a supply than there is a demand,” according to Sony/ATV Music Publishing’s John Campanelli, and “there are tons of small acts that are … totally up for licensing their music for … very lows fees” (I/Campanelli 2010) – a theme examined in section 5.5. Today, brands have
a new source of leverage vis-à-vis recording artists: access to a highly sought-after media audience. The widely held and seldom questioned belief that music placements offer effective cross-promotion, and are therefore mutually beneficial, actually has helped fuel the growing gulf between the fortunes of a sea of aspiring recording artists and a comparatively small set of brands. Unlike the handful of highly publicized cases reviewed above, most music placements do not function as brand-music integrations in a strict sense insofar as the brand’s emphasis typically is not on cross-promotion. Instead, if an artist happens to experience commercial success after appearing in an advertisement, television program, or video game, it is viewed as a happy, but not strategically planned, outcome. I see merit in retaining the brand-music integrations terminology to describe this period of music marketing history, however, as it captures the tightening relationship between popular music and brands.

Under the current phase of marketing with music, what Tunnicliffe terms brand-music partnerships (I/Tunnicliffe 2010), we have seen popular music’s further colonization by brands; no longer content with renting culture, brands now want to create it. “[A]dvertising agencies are increasingly producers of popular music,” Taylor observes, “not just its brokers; the boundary between ‘advertising’ and ‘not advertising’ in the realm of popular culture is even more porous” (Taylor 2007, 235). Brands pursue opportunities to create their own original content (I/advertising creative director 2009), with the ultimate aim of transforming the brand itself into the media content sought by audiences (Hanlon 2012). After all, while “licensing offers the opportunity to leverage celebrity brands,” the creation of original works “allow[s] advertisers to create 100%
brand equity” (Barnhard and Rutledge 2009). The persistent drive to build brand equity has produced a shift from the ‘brand as broker’ to the ‘brand as creator’ model.

5.4 The Consummation: ‘Brand-Music Partnerships’ in the Era of Branded Content Curation

The proliferation of music licensing agreements has had a curious effect: from the perspective of advertisers, the use of popular music in and of itself no longer achieves the objective of brand differentiation, yet it remains an important source of cultural meaning and, hence, value to brands. While “music is not unique anymore as far as breaking … through the cluttered marketplace,” one advertiser explained, it remains “a way for brands to help touch different cultures” (lifestyle advertising account executive 2011). In the ‘brand-music partnership’ era (c. 2008-present), we have seen increasing use of ‘authentic’ popular music and novel business arrangements as a result of strategies designed to garner attention, ‘touch’ audiences, and build value for brands. “Brand/music partnerships truly [came] of age in 2008, with a raft of increasingly innovative deals between brands and musicians appearing on what seems like a daily basis,” according to Tunnicliffe. “A number of brands [are] striking deals that go way beyond traditional music licensing for TV commercials or standard endorsement deals” (Tunnicliffe 2008). While these business partnerships do not follow a set template, they are underpinned by a common logic: the creation of targeted and seemingly ‘credible’ matches between consumer brands and ‘artist-brands’ (as defined in Chapter 4).
The New Pitch: ‘Authentic’ Music and ‘Credible’ Brand Partnerships

The foundation of brand-music partnerships remains brands’ interest in mining the associations tied to popular music and recording artists in order to reinforce brand identities and build brand equity. However, as advertisers have detected consumer resistance to blatant commercialism, the particular associations sought have changed. According to a strategist at a New York City-based advertising firm, “Brands are trying to be more lifestyle oriented… They’re trying to step away from being super commercial… They’re trying to feel more authentic. They’re trying to feel like they’re a part of your life…. That’s the kind of emotion they want to evoke in you” (I/advertising strategist 2011; see also Holt 2002, 83-85). As music supervisor David Hayman observes, “gone are the days of jingle houses…. [M]ore and more these days the brands want a song that actually really exists that they can reference in the real world, so it’s ‘authenticity’” (I/Hayman 2009). Under contemporary marketing strategies, brands “use” recording artists to “talk to” fans, but “in a subtle way” (I/Tunnicliffe 2010).

Indeed, to advertisers, popular music, especially independent or lesser known music, is an instrument for lending brands ‘authenticity’ (I/Hayman 2009; I/Tunnicliffe 2010; I/advertising strategist 2011; I/Gutstadt 2011; I/lifestyle advertising account executive 2011; I/White 2011). An indie soundtrack is now the default setting for many brands. According to Jared Gutstadt, CEO of music licensing firm Jingle Punks,

Authentically, nowadays, you can’t just … put … a Britney Spears video in a Pepsi commercial and expect people all of a sudden go, “oh yeah, I love Pepsi.” It’s more like the idea of… subversively trying to convince people things are cool without it seeming like overt commercialism…. You’re basically sneaking in the
back door of culture by … creating a cool sound to go alongside what they’re doing and maybe exploiting the indie band du jour. (I/Gutstadt 2011)

Independent music can “bring a feeling and … an emotion” to an advertising campaign (I/advertising creative director 2009). It can also confer distinction. “Indie-inflected music serves as a kind of Trojan horse,” claims Grey Group’s Rabinowitz; “[c]onsumers feel they are discovering something that they believe to be cool and gaining admittance to a more refined social clique” (in Sisario 2010), or so brands hope.

The use of popular music to lend cultural relevance and credibility to a brand is not new in principle. After all, Pepsi used its deals with Michael Jackson and Madonna to piggyback on the cultural currency of MTV within youth culture. Advertiser interest in electronica also reflected a response to growing audience cynicism toward marketing. Today, however, we have seen a growth in business rhetoric about, and strategies geared around, the use of cultural beliefs about authenticity as a tool for achieving brand differentiation. According to business consultants and authors James H. Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II, best known for their work on the “experience economy,” the “management of the customer perception of authenticity” is a “new source of competitive advantage” and “business imperative” (Gilmore and Pine 2007, 3; emphasis in original). “Rendering authenticity,” they argue, can be likened to “controlling costs” or “improving quality” (Gilmore and Pine 2007, 3). This produces a paradoxical dynamic: “Having a link with the world outside brands, a world itself ever-more constituted by brands, seems to be the substance of ‘authenticity’ in this context” (Meier 2011, 409; emphasis in original). The relentless hunt for authenticity actually leads to what Holt terms “authenticity extinction” (Holt 2002, 86).
Brands’ interest in popular music today is by no means limited to independent or unknown artists; they also routinely seek out star artists. Branding strategist Michael Baylor, for instance, engineered a partnership between British pop star Robbie Williams and T-Mobile. “Music and music associations are a great way of forging meaningful cultural connections with a consumer who has never moved faster, never been so elusive, or so resistant to brand messaging,” he claims (in Tunnicliffe 2008). The key to the effectiveness of these partnerships, in his account, is that they are “put together in a credible and meaningful way that allows the brand to slip behind the consumers’ ‘firewall’” (in Tunnicliffe 2008). Here, the ‘credible’ link between that music or artist and the brand is of more importance than the music used. For advertisers, authenticity hinges on the perceived ‘fit’ between recording artist, brand, and audience; the ‘management’ of perception rests on believability. According to a Billboard white paper, for instance, “the successful use of music in branding relies on the strength of links between the artist or event and the product. Weak alignments – caused by lack of relevance or differences in the perceived value of artist and product – threaten to spoil the transfer of one brand’s image and affinities to the other” (Peoples 2009, 4; see also Tunnicliffe 2008). Strong alignments make for persuasive promotion. Increasingly, ‘authenticity’ is defined in terms of the salience of these alignments.

It is the calculated matchmaking process used to link brand and artist-brand that sets brand-music partnerships apart from brand-music associations and brand-music integrations. “If we’re going to use anybody – celebrity, … musician, whatever – it’s not just an endorsement deal,” an account executive at a New York lifestyle advertising
firm explained in interview: “It’s: These are the core values of each brand: Brand Rihanna, brand, you know, Kodak or whatever. The reason it would make sense is this. The reason why we should partner is this. The reason why it makes sense to do it over a certain amount of time is this” (I/lifestyle advertising account executive 2011; emphasis added). Under this logic, ‘brand Rihanna’ could be exchanged with another recording artist, famous or not, so long as that artist had a similar level of credibility with the target market. The partnerships that are most compelling to brands are justified with consumer data: “Brands look for a proven fan base…. So the more measurable fans [sic] base in hand, the better artist-brand partnerships are formed” (Bruno 2010).

As the digitalizing music industry caters to the demand for customized, targeted, and strategically chosen popular music and recording artists, record labels now feature departments dedicated to the development of brand partnerships (I/Koren 2009; I/advertising strategist 2011). Warner Music Canada, for instance, boasts an in-house “entertainment-marketing consultancy,” which helps brands “tailor[] entertainment concepts to match the consumer profile of the product or service being promoted” (Warner Music Canada 2011). EMI Music Canada likewise claims to help brands create a “perfect music match” as it pitches “an extensive range of promotional and business products designed specifically to meet the needs of your company and its brands” (EMI Music Canada 2012). Record labels, remade as retailers of music designed for brands, play the role of matchmaker.
Key Cases: From Branded Artists to Branded Labels to Branded Festivals

The case of Rihanna, in fact, is paradigmatic of the new brand-music partnership model and correspondingly dubious language about authenticity. “We’ve worked hard to build me and my name up as a brand,” Rihanna attests. “We always want to bring an authentic connection to whatever we do. It must be sincere and people have to feel that” (in Creswell 2008). She has signed an abundance of promotional agreements, including deals with umbrella brand Totes Isotoner, Procter & Gamble’s Secret, Nike, J.C. Penney, Nokia, Fuze, and CoverGirl (Creswell 2008) in this effort to aggressively, yet ‘sincerely’, promote her name as a brand. Nevertheless, according to Marc Jordan, one of her managers, “We said no to so many deals. Either the fit wasn’t right – it was more about a check than extending Rihanna’s brand – or there was a disconnect between the brand and Rihanna” (in Creswell 2008). Music industry executives, like advertisers, are becoming increasingly calculating as they pursue music licensing and endorsement opportunities, even if the calculus involved in determining fit is subjective.

A key factor is consumer lifestyle. Within many brand-music partnerships, the consumer brand must be seen as authentically linked to not only a recording artist’s music, but also her (perceived) personal lifestyle or star persona. Marketers have touted Jeep’s sponsorship deal with Faith Hill and Tim McGraw as a particularly authentic brand-music partnership, for instance, due to the country singing couple’s personal history with the Jeep brand (Tunnicliffe 2008; see also Peoples 2009, 10). The “My Jeep Stories” advertising campaign was anchored with the following pitch: “It was during a ride in a Jeep in 1996 in State College, Pa., that country music’s reigning first
couple Tim McGraw and Faith Hill decided to build a life together. That’s their Jeep story. What's yours?” (PR Newswire 2007). The campaign, which invited fan participation, was deemed a success due to the “high degree of functional relevance” between artist and brand, and the “value derived from deeper personal meaning” (Peoples 2009, 10). Personal meaning, so understood, was a source of surplus value for the brand. In another lifestyle-driven example, Brita forged a sponsorship deal with singer-songwriter and surfer Jack Johnson in its efforts to brand Brita water filters as the eco alternative to bottled water. Brita offered free water at Johnson’s concerts as a means of promoting its Hydration Station™ product (Brita 2012). Johnson was considered a good fit, explained Drew McGowan of Brita/Clorox, because he “lives and breathes a green lifestyle” (in Elliot 2010b). Brita attempted to gain credibility by associating itself not just with Johnson’s music, but also with his star persona and environmental advocacy work.

Lifestyle-driven strategies are often tied to advertisers’ perceptions of the link between genre and ethnicity. For instance, in a brand–music partnership orchestrated by Translation, an influential advertising firm, Wrigley partnered with R&B singer Chris Brown, because “the company’s consumer research showed that African-American consumers prefer Doublemint to other gum brands” (Smith and Jargon 2008). Wrigley helped launch Brown’s new single, titled “Forever,” which features the Doublemint slogan “double your pleasure / double your fun” (Smith and Jargon 2008). The song became a hit before it was revealed that it was actually commissioned by Doublemint: “This is a song placement in reverse and the first time that a song has been seeded into
popular culture before it has been used in a commercial…. [T]his is the first time that a branded song such as this has been served up to the public in such a covert fashion” (Tunnicliffe 2008; see also Smith and Jargon 2008).38 Indeed, opposite to the early examples of converting jingles into pop hits (e.g., “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing”), the slogan-driven song was launched prior to the commissioned jingle. For Wrigley, it was important not only that the song appear to originate in popular culture, but also that the brand itself assume an authorial role.

Under lifestyle-driven brand-music partnerships, brands have taken on roles formerly served by music companies. Between 2008 and 2010, the notion that “lifestyle brands are becoming the new record labels” (Sisario 2010) gained traction. Mountain Dew’s Green Label Sound, Red Bull’s Music Academy, Converse’s Rubber Tracks, Diesel’s U:Music, and Scion Music Group had begun offering label, publishing, distribution, and/or recording studio services, with a focus on emerging and unsigned talent in particular (Sisario 2010). Label-like arrangements with aspiring artists enable brands to glean cool credibility from independent music (Sisario 2010; I/sound branding executive 2010), but are also business ventures. In some cases, brands take an ownership stake in recordings and live performances, while in others artists are permitted to keep full ownership rights. I will briefly review key examples.

In 2008, TAG body spray partnered with Def Jam to launch a record label in the hopes that it would “establish even more credibility for TAG with the important urban/African-American market” while also securing “a return [on investment] over and

38 Note that Wrigley suspended the advertisements and eventually terminated the deal after Brown assaulted R&B/reggae/hip-hop singer and then-girlfriend Rihanna (Kreps 2009).
above the promotional benefits of being associated with an artist” (Tunnicliffe 2008). Artists would receive promotional support and the label would share in the revenues generated (Tunnicliffe 2008). The label signed aspiring Brooklyn rapper Q da Kid and hired noted record producer Jermaine Dupris (Sisario 2010). While the marketing push for Q Da Kid included the insertion of his song “I Am Him” in a TAG commercial and the airing of a documentary about the artist on MTV, his single, “On a Mission,” which was released September 2008, had only sold 2,000 units by December 2008 (High 2008). TAG Records collapsed in less than a year (Sisario 2010). “I was with a company that didn’t understand the music business,” Q da Kid offered. “They’re used to their brands flying off the shelves like it ain’t nothing, and they thought, ‘If we put enough money behind this, he’ll be big.’ And it wasn’t like that” (in Sisario 2010).

Also in 2008, Bacardi partnered with an already established act: Groove Armada. The rum brand signed the British electronica duo to an exclusive one-year record deal, which covered the release of a four-track EP (I/Tunnicliffe 2010; Brandle 2008). While this ‘360 deal’ also covered touring and audiovisual content (Brandle 2008), Bacardi simply took a cut from all revenue streams; Groove Armada retained ownership of their masters and copyrights (Tunnicliffe 2008; Brandle 2008). According to Groove Armada manager Dan O’Neil, “They are looking at it from a point of view of association, and they’re getting access to a license to use the music to implement their strategy worldwide” (in Brandle 2008). Bacardi was able to introduce its customers “to a musical experience … with an artist that had great credibility, … that was really well
known, but quite cool still” (I/Tunnicliffe 2010). While the duo was seen as a “snug fit” for the brand (High 2008), the deal was not renewed (I/Tunnicliffe 2010).

PepsiCo brand Mountain Dew also started a record label in 2008: Green Label Sound, run by Cornerstone, a prominent lifestyle marketing agency (Sisario 2010). Mountain Dew’s Hudson Sullivan indicated at a North by Northeast conference panel that the label’s artists keep ownership of and all revenue tied to their music (Sullivan 2011; see also Barshad 2011). Mountain Dew seeks to build brand equity not through direct ownership, but rather by credible participation in cultural creation. “Consumers are smarter,” according to Sullivan. “The last thing we want is to look like we’re paying someone to drink our product on-camera. We want to create genuine loyalty” (in Barshad 2011). “Chromeo, Cool Kids, Theophilus London, MNDR,” all artists who have worked with Green Label Sound, “they reflect our sensibility. They define their own genre,” he continues (in Barshad 2011). Under such hands-off arrangements, it is understandable why some artists, such as Chromeo singer David Macklovitch, would argue that multiple rights deals with major labels (as examined in Chapter 4) are “way more of a sell-out than doing a collaboration with a brand where you have full creative control and you give free content to your fans” (in Sisario 2010).

Mountain Dew’s record label is not a stand-alone endeavour. Rather, it is part of a much broader marketing strategy designed to target youth culture:

Instead of being a sponsor to anything, instead of sponsoring an event or sponsoring a concert … they’re being creators…. So, they created a label. They created … an art project … Green Label Art…. And they created a platform to let consumers speak for themselves. It’s called Dewmocracy…. They created a tour
Mountain Dew does not want to function as mere sponsor or “wallpaper” at festivals, according to Sullivan; the brand seeks collaborations with, not endorsements from, artists (Sullivan 2011). By ‘collaborating’ with recording artists, the brand seeks to entrench itself within the web of meanings produced by fans. As such, Mountain Dew’s strategy exemplifies the shift from brand as licensor or sponsor to brand as content curator. Media content is so abundant today, marketers now argue, that the discovery, sifting, presentation, and overall curation of content is the new site of value creation: “content isn’t King because it isn’t scarce. It’s everywhere, it’s overwhelming, and it’s gone from quality to noise” (Rosenbaum 2010; see also Sisario 2010; Seybold 2011).

As Taylor points out, “the gold standard for an advertising agency is for its client’s brand to become part of popular culture, not simply to emulate it” (Taylor 2012, 227).

Interestingly, Mountain Dew’s interest in this type of approach dates back to its “early sponsorship of extreme sports in the early 1990s,” which helped the brand “become perceived as cultural producers … rather than mere cultural parasites that appropriate valued popular culture” (Holt 2002, 84).

The notion that lifestyle brands would become the new kinds of record labels waned by 2010. As Tunnicliffe explained to me in interview,

> Whilst for a while people were saying … brands are going to become the new record labels… that’s not really what brands want to do…. Brands are not in the business of music. Brands are in the business of brands. Alright? And that’s a very important thing to remember … and a very important distinction…. To be frank, anybody who wants to get into the music business is going to have to be really brave or really mad or both. (I/Tunnicliffe 2010)
According to *New York Times* reporter Ben Sisario, “Tag Records’ fate points to the reality that sneaker and soda companies are ultimately in it to sell sneakers and soda, not music” (Sisario 2010). Brands’ interest in music is decidedly different from traditional labels; brands are interested music fans as would-be consumers of lifestyle products, not recordings. Many advertising executives now express considerable reticence about the music business overall, which one sound branding executive characterized as “a giant hole that people pour money into” (I/sound branding executive 2010). Even while they might be dissatisfied with simply licensing music, brands do not necessarily want to be investors in a turbulent industry. Instead, following a content curation-inspired strategy, it appears as though lifestyle brands are more interested in the production of music festivals.

From Coke Live and Virgin Fest (now Virgin Mobile Festival in the United States), both launched in 2006, to Budweiser’s Made in America festival, begun in 2011, corporations do not simply stamp their brands on, but also curate line-ups for, live music events. Brand-curated music festivals are less risky investments than record labels (remember that concerts cannot be ‘pirated’); in terms of marketing, they enable brands to position themselves as the headliner. In her study of an Irish music festival, Witness, run by Guinness (2000-2003), Elizabeth Moor argues that such ‘experiential’ branding tactics are intended to expand the “perception and practice of what constitutes a marketing ‘space’” and thereby “achieve a much more proximal relationship between consumer bodies and brands” (Moor 2003, 45). “Music, perhaps the most portable and simultaneously the most affect-laden of all cultural products,” is of particular utility in

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39 Note that an event called Coke Live and Local was first initiated in Australia in 2004 (Yahoo 2007).
strategies designed to socialize and spatialize the links between brands, experience, and memory (Moor 2003, 50). According Nicholas Carah, whose analysis of Coca-Cola’s and Virgin’s music festivals draws on interviews with young people, musicians, and marketers, “The audience’s festival experience creates brand value…. The mediation of social life that unfolds at music festivals embeds brands within everyday cultural practices and webs of meaning” (Carah 2010, 122). Situated at the heart of a site of collective meaning making, the brand is able to “extract[] value from social actors” (Carah 2010, 143). In the case of Budweiser’s Made in America, the brand has a direct and explicitly proprietary stake in music-related cultural practices.

Budweiser’s two-day concert, whose 2012 line-up featured stars such as Pearl Jam and Drake in addition to lesser known, ‘credible’ artists such as Calvin Harris, Passion Pit, Odd Future, and Dirty Projectors, was “headlined and ‘curated’ by Jay-Z” (Logan 2012). The festival, designed to target younger consumers, was the product of a change in branding strategy initiated by Anheuser-Busch vice price of marketing, Paul Chibe (Logan 2012). Steve Stoute, CEO of advertising agency Translation, in turn, united Budweiser with Live Nation and Jay-Z (an artist signed to a Live Nation 360 deal) (Hampp 2012b). “We started with the music, but it’s more than that,” according to Budweiser vice president Rob McCarthy. “It’s a property – Budweiser Made in America – that celebrates the diversity of young adult culture and experience” (in Logan 2012). Approximately 45,000 people attended the festival (Greenburg 2012a), paying from $75 (an early-bird, single day special) to $175 for tickets, according to the festival website (Made in America 2012). Budweiser has also commissioned a film,
directed by Ron Howard, about the event and not the performances *per se*, as Stoute’s pitch suggests: “The narrative of this film is not a concert. The narrative is everything Made In America stands for, and the music is a backdrop. Budweiser has been a partner from the beginning because they own the trademark for ‘Made In America.’ You’re gonna start seeing brands become much closer to the content” (in Hampp 2012b). In this example, the brand positions the music as a ‘backdrop’ for its broader branding ambitions even at a music festival. Importantly, as brands embed themselves ever more deeply into content and generate content themselves, corporations benefit more directly from profits associated with this content, in addition to the marketing exposure and cool associations this content cultivates.

The increasingly branded character of concerts and live events is now generally accepted as an unavoidable reality. As Zach O’Malley Greenburg of *Forbes* reports, “the musicians who played at the Budweiser-backed affair didn’t appear to be fazed by the notion of ‘selling out’ that could arise from appearing at such a heavily-branded festival. Indeed, many suggested that there’s no such thing these days” (Greenburg 2012a). Given the pervasiveness of branding now with *live music*, it is difficult for working artists to be too selective about gigs. Even Lollapalooza 2012, which is not a lifestyle brand festival *per se*, featured “fully-branded stages by Sony, PlayStation, Bud Light, Google Play, BMI and Red Bull” in addition to “a bag check from State Farm, free T-shirts from The Gap and two different activations from Toyota (a Free Yr Radio lounge and a Prius Family Playground)” (Hampp 2012a). According to Howlin’ Pelle Almqvist of The Hives, a band featured at Made in America, “Maybe ten years ago, we
could go on tour and play nothing that was sponsored. But nowadays, if we said, ‘We
don’t play anything that’s sponsored,’ we’d get no shows” (in Greenburg 2012a). “It’s
hard to fight the dragons and pay the people,” Almqvist concedes (in Greenburg 2012a).

Lifestyle brands have even appropriated a critique of the cynical, hits-driven
recording industry as a part of their pitch – an approach consistent with the move
toward authenticity-oriented marketing strategies. The “Right Music Wrongs”
manifesto, penned by Virgin for its 2009 V fest, is particularly illustrative:

In a world awash with the insincerity of reality pop stars and pre-fabricated,
formulaic, celebrity seeking, silicone enhanced lip sync-ers, something has gone
desperately, dangerously wrong…. It is time to remember that out there, in
garages, basements, bedrooms, studios, once smokey bars, stadiums and in fields
across the country, real people are playing real music with real purpose. Real
music isn’t about the instrument, it is about the intent….  
… It [real music] is not ours to judge. It isn’t defined by being underground or
popular. It doesn’t set out for stardom any more than it is diminished if it sells a
million copies. It is not about genres. It can be quiet and considered, or loud and
obnoxious but is not artificially sweetened, mass produced, celebrity seeking
mediocrity with a marketing plan at its core…. It [real music] makes us
individual and it makes us want to share our individuality. (in Carah 2010, 21)

Here, Virgin positions itself as champion of ‘real’ music, in contradistinction to the
major record companies, even though its intent is to sell Virgin products. According to
Ron Faris, director of Brand Experiences at Virgin Mobile U.S.A., under Virgin’s
music strategies, “Our job is just to be the conduit of the conversation that the band has
… with their fan, and that is what is pure – at least with the right band and the right fan”
(Faris 2011). The brand will gladly steer, frame, monitor, and capitalize on that
conversation with the ‘right’ fan.
During the era of brand-music partnerships, we have seen a proliferation of new approaches to music branding, which nevertheless mark persistent continuities with the brand-music associations and brand-music integrations surveyed above. The same advertising impulse that produced advertiser interest first in pop star endorsements and later in electronica and independent music is behind consumer brands’ more recent experimentation with branded record labels and music festivals: the thirst for something new. As Owen observed in 1998, “With advertising, there’s always the need to break through the media clutter by coming up with something fresh and surprising. Since most rock-and-roll is neither one anymore, consumers are currently hearing a lot more unusual sounds in advertisements” (F. Owen 1998, G01). By 2010, even unusual sounds were no longer fresh or surprising. World music and songs with “weird instrumentation” were in high demand among brands, according to Sony/ATV’s Music Publishing’s Campanelli: “[Ambient post-rock band] Sigur Ros has become the default now instead of … rock music” (I/Campanelli 2010). Toronto-based music supervisor Hayman, who has worked for Coca-Cola, Koodo, Ford, and Virgin Mobile, has even licensed the music of a yodeler and of native throat singers to differentiate his clients’ brands (I/Hayman 2009). Indeed, as advertising agencies continue to “mine the last vestiges of unsponsored expressive culture” in an effort to render consumer brands more authentic (Holt 2002, 86), difference – in terms of either content or approach – emerges as the new standard. The turn to “[e]xperiential branding and the brandscape,” according to Carah, “can also be thought of as a contemporary articulation of the culture
industry” (Carah 2010, 9). It marks the expansion of processes of commodification to new spaces of social and cultural life.

My intent here has not been to provide a comprehensive catalogue of the myriad and multiplying array of brand-music partnerships but, rather, to identify a key logic: the increasingly calculated pairing of recording artists and lifestyle brands under authenticity-oriented marketing strategies. Brand-music partnerships forged in an effort to provide brands with ‘credible’ content, I argue, have further eroded any distinction remaining between popular music and advertising. The term ‘partnership’ is a misnomer, as it suggests a business arrangement wherein two parties work together to advance mutual interests. In reality, outside of rich endorsement deals with star artists, in the ‘partnerships’ described above, one party is firmly in charge: the brand. Having mapped an historical trajectory of popular music’s colonization by brands, I now examine some of the effects that the sum of these music branding strategies have had on working artists and on popular music itself.

5.5 Music Licensing and Brand Partnerships as the New Standard: The Payoff for Recording Artists

Recording artists agree to work with brands in the hopes of making a living from making music. The adoption of music licensing, artist endorsement, and other branding deals as a standard practice among even independent artists, however, has produced a profound power shift between artists and brands. Fierce competition for these sought-after music placements has made them increasingly difficult to secure (I/Beavis 2009; I/Ferneyhough 2009; I/Kenzer 2010). Music licensing is “kind of a closed world”
(I/Outhit 2009) – a claim affirmed by entertainment marketing executive Marcus Peterzell:

We just don’t have the time…. I have my brief. I’m going to the seven major labels, my three favourite independents, ASCAP and BMI, my three management companies, and my five publishers. That’s it…. That’s fifteen people. There’re going to give me five suggestions. That’s seventy-five suggestions I have to look through…. We just go to the low hanging fruit. (Peterzell 2010)

In a post-CD music marketplace, however, record companies and recording artists have become increasingly dependent on music licensing revenues, as we have seen. How, exactly, has the growing power imbalance between brands and (especially aspiring) artists affected this source of income? This asymmetrical power dynamic has translated into deteriorating fees for most artists. Music and advertising industry executives tend to shy away from pinpointing specific figures, and often state that all deals are different and depend on the particular artist, song, and use. Therefore, this overview is not intended to be comprehensive or uncontestable; it is a mapping of rough fee ranges and general trends.

In the United States, there has been a steady decline in fees paid to recording artists for advertising licenses. During the “glory days,” according to Grey Group’s Rabinowitz, an artist would be paid $30,000 for a 30-second spot, whereas now $5,000-$10,000 is typical (Rabinowitz 2010). Even today, a song by a star artist such as the Black Eyed Peas would “probably cost a minimum of $50,000, depending on how it’s used,” according to Los Angeles-based music publisher Peter Jansson, but “a similar song from an independent catalogue may only require $10,000” (I/Jansson 2010). Time business reporter Josh Sanburn also cites the figure of $10,000 for an emerging
independent artist as standard (Sanburn 2012). Some brands, however, argue that it is “a privilege to have your song on a commercial” – a position they adopt to justify paying no fee at all to unknown artists (Rabinowitz 2010). As of 2010, music costs overall were typically only five percent of the advertising budget (Rabinowitz 2010). These licensing fees are split between group members, the artist manager, and so forth.

This downward trend in fees, particularly for unknown artists, is mirrored in the American television and video game industries. In 2007, it was reported that “TV producers might shell out upwards of $50,000 for the use of a song by an established artist on a major label, but can sometimes pay as little as several hundred dollars for the use of a song by an unknown talent” (Hau 2007). According to Nettwerk’s Ari Martin, if the artist is successful enough where they’re not relying on that money and they’re not relying on that association … then the leverage is on the side of the artist and … they can command a lot more money…. But on other side of the spectrum, there’s so many unsigned and independent musicians that are clamoring to get on TV that … the prices are pretty low, if … not free. (I/Martin 2010)

The ‘laws’ of supply and demand reign. Likewise, in the case of video games, artists were formerly paid tens of thousands of dollars, even up to $100,000, but fees have plummeted in the past ten years; as of 2010, many video game publishers were offering “five grand ‘all in’…. Take it or leave it” (I/Coffing 2010).40 “The leverage changed,” explains Los Angeles-based music supervisor Barry Coffing. “Before, bands didn’t want to be in video games…. Once the bands wanted to be in there, then they [video game publishers] said, ‘Well, we’re not going to pay that’” (I/Coffing 2010). Unknown and aspiring artists hungry for television program and video game opportunities have

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40 I asked Coffing to clarify what he meant by “all in”: “Writing, publishing, no royalties. This is all you get, essentially. I don’t care if we press five billion of them. You’re not getting another dime. This is it” (I/Coffing 2010).
little bargaining power. In fact, the primary source of lesser known music’s value to brands is precisely the substantial cost savings they reap (Fritz I/2009; Coffing I/2010).

A similar trend can be identified across the Canadian music licensing market. Tim Potocić, president of Canadian independent record label Sonic Unyon, reports that Canadian department store Zellers formerly offered deals worth $30,000 for music used in television commercials, but had lowered their rate to $10,000 as of 2009 (I/Potocić 2009). The rates offered by many other brands are much lower. Potocić describes different competitive pricing strategies imposed by brands, including a fee proposal process that impels artists to underbid one another, leading him to remark that brands are “taking advantage of artists a little bit” (I/Potocić 2009). Universal Music Publishing Canada’s Jodie Ferneyhough notes that the advertising industry “has figured the trick out, so they’re going to indie artists a lot more…. They’ll a lot of time say ‘Okay guys, here’s your $500, off you go’ and the band is thrilled. They’re starving artists – of course they’re thrilled” (I/Ferneyhough 2009). Placements in television programs, meanwhile, formerly earned rates of $5,000-$10,000, according to music publisher Neville Quinlan, but also have dropped dramatically due to unsigned bands’ willingness to license music at bargain rates (I/Quinlan 2009). According to Canadian music publishing executive Jennifer Beavis, many independent artists will clear all rights for $500 to secure such licensing opportunities (I/Beavis 2009). Likewise, licensing fees for video games have fallen in Canada; Quinlan licensed seven songs to *Grand Theft Auto* for a total payout of $15,000 (I/Quinlan 2009) and Ferneyhough
suggests an average of $3,000 for a “decently known” band, but stresses that pricing varies widely (I/Ferneyhough 2009).

Imitating their American sisters, Canadian advertisers and media properties attempt to license (especially independent) music for free based on the argument that these opportunities offer “great promotion” for the artist (I/Outhit 2009). Independent labels and artists often comply. Potocic, for instance, does not like to turn down licensing opportunities and encourages his artists to accept as little as $500 based on the assumption that the marketing exposure can help with sales; however, he also concedes that it is really difficult to tell if it actually does (I/Potocic 2009). After all, music placements offer only “possible exposure”: “It’s not like anything is proven out there” (I/sound branding executive 2010). Note that brands typically are not interested in including captions that identify the artist and song featured in television programs and commercials. When included, these ‘chryons’ or ‘dead cards’ are offered as a tactic to negotiate even lower fees (I/Hayman 2009; I/Campanelli 2010; I/Coffing 2010; I/Martin 2010). Nevertheless, amid dwindling fees, the promise of music licensing largely hinges on its promotional value, however unproven, for independent artists.

Interestingly, at a conference titled Bands, Brands, and Beyond, Cheryl Berman, formerly of advertising firm Leo Burnett, strongly advised against licensing music to advertisers for little or no money in exchange for marketing exposure, as this approach sets a dangerous precedent that advertisers will eagerly adopt as a new industry standard (Berman 2010). It is telling that Berman stressed how the very real potential for brands to exploit unknown artists’ desire to “be big and famous” “scares her” (Berman 2010).
Of course, her fears are not unfounded. Unknown artists desperate to catch a break are routinely advised to be “flexible” (Nagi 2010), a term used to suggest a willingness to accept very little money from brands and even to tailor lyrics to brands’ messages. For payment, artists sometimes settle for free mobile phones (Peterzell 2010), discounted prices on the sponsoring brand’s line of clothing (I/Kuruvilla 2009), or, as mentioned, offer their music for free. Even with custom music written for brands, artists often must be willing to work “on spec,” as noted by music supervisor Heather Guibert at North by Northeast (Guibert 2011). In other words, they must produce demos for free, with no assurance of future payment. As media scholar Bethany Klein laments, “musicians desperate to be heard and survive financially by any means possible make for easy marks to an advertising industry that will pay as little as possible to license music” (Klein 2009, 121). Music licensing deals largely operate on a ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ basis, and brands are in a position to dictate self-advantaging, not mutually beneficial, terms.

Although I identify an overall trend of declining artist fees, a handful of superstar artists still receive rich endorsement deals with consumer brands. For instance, in 2012, hip hop stars Lil Wayne and Nicki Minaj signed seven-figure endorsement deals with Mountain Dew and Pepsi, respectively (Greenburg 2012b, Greenburg 2012c). Speaking in 2010, however, Katrina McMullan, Senior Counsel for Music and Entertainment at Mattel, pointed out that “what cost me a million dollars two years ago doesn’t cost that anymore. Only about five artists are in that [top-tier] category that can command that kind of money” (in Bruno 2010). The effects of the overall collapse in fees have penetrated even the upper reaches of popular music stardom.
When brands are willing to pay a premium for celebrity recording artists, it is because they expect a return on their investment. By signing deals with stars, brands are not paying for music per se. Rather, they are “buying the fame” (I/Coffing 2010). Indeed, while popular music is abundant today, stars remain scarce, and still receive considerable media attention. Superstars can lend a brand “instant recognition” and can command considerable publicity: “If you work with Madonna, you are banking that the commercial you spent a $1 million [on] is going to get $10 million in added value from P.R. and that’s why you pay Madonna 5 [million dollars]” (I/advertising creative director 2009). The artist’s fan base, an additional audience to “pay attention to your brand,” is a source of “added value” (I/digital marketing project manager 2011). Deals with star artists enable the brand to “borrow[] some of the equity and the relationship that artists or celebrities have got with their fans” (I/Tunnicliffe 2010). As they always have, stars function as bait to hook the attention of the widest possible audience.

The ways that brands and music companies appraise the value of recording artists are cloaked in the business jargon of ‘equity’. From the perspective of major music companies, fees reflect “an equity balance” (I/Campanelli 2010). In some cases (e.g., stars such as Lady Gaga), “the brand borrows the artist’s equity,” and therefore the cost can be very expensive, whereas in other cases “the artist has no equity” in popular culture, and benefits from any exposure afforded by the brand (I/Campanelli 2010). The following record label executive’s explanation of the “artist triangle,” though hyperbolic, illustrates the gross disparity born of this type of thinking:

The artists at the top are those like Beyoncé or Bruce Springsteen … or Coldplay or Radiohead, for example, and they bring to the table very, very high equity …
But those are going to be the ones that are most expensive and most fussy and difficult to work with, because they have a very specific … mindset of what they should be associated with, what their vision is … and they can afford to be picky and choosy. Of course, there are … fewer of those. The ones at the bottom are all completely unknown developing bands that no one’s ever heard of. They have no equity whatsoever. They would literally jump off this building naked … just to get lunch at McDonald’s, because they have a six/seven hour journey in a mini-van with eight other guys – [and] they haven’t washed for three days – to earn two hundred bucks in the kitty. (I/Canadian major label executive B 2009)

For brands hunting for cost savings, exploitation of aspiring artists’ lack of equity and, hence, leverage constitutes business-as-usual; this is a system clearly founded on domination.

Where has the sum of these industry trends, and the logic of domination I contend undergirds them, taken us? Now that independent music is readily available for free, the race to the bottom takes on a new hue. Low cost is no longer a source of competitive advantage for individual artists interested in piquing a music supervisor’s interest. Given this, Peterzell provides the following instruction to aspiring artists and artist managers seeking to stand out from the pack and secure a brand partnership:

Take stock of everything you like and own – your shirts, your pants, your skirts, your makeup, your sunglasses, the car your drive, the liquor you drink, the beer, the milk, everything you have that’s not a ridiculous brand, … all of the small things that you’re passionate about, whether it’s ten or twenty – and go to those brands, find them on LinkedIn, and just say: “I’m a singer-songwriter and I love your sunglasses. It’s all I ever wear. They never leave me. They’re unbelievable. There’s great quality and I’d love to just tell my fans.” You’re going to get brands [responding with] – “Really? Thank you. Let me send you a pair. Let me tell you” – and it starts a conversation. So you can’t reverse engineer. You can’t go to a brand and say, “Hi, I’m doing a tour, can you sponsor me?” Not going to happen. You’ve got to give them a reason. Say: “I love your product. I am genuinely passionate about it. That’s all I’m saying and I’m happy to tell my fans, because I think it’s the best jeans or the best sunglasses.” (Peterzell 2010)

The perversely one-sided courtship between artist and brand revealed by this advice
provides evidence of the utter substitutability of non-star artists to brands, and of the ways those artists, in turn, must perform a deep internalization of their prospective sponsor’s brand identity. With little ‘authenticity’ remaining in independent music *per se*, from the point of view of brands, artists must not only be corporate-friendly, but must also prove their utility as pitchmen. Against hype about brands as “patron[s] of the rock arts” (Sisario 2010), we have seen the rise of a type of reverse patronage: the artist supports and champions the brand.

Increasingly dissatisfied with the older music sponsorship model, many brands demand endorsements from artists, yet refuse to pay fairly for those endorsements. The words of Sue Kuruvilla, a director of PR for fashion label Fred Perry, are illustrative: “We don’t do written sponsorships. We don’t pay to have musicians wear the product. *It’s totally about the product and the love of the product*” (I/Kuruvilla 2009; emphasis added). Aspiring artists now compete for the opportunity to serve brands that often offer little in return. Contrary to the widely accepted notion that ‘everybody wins’ through music branding deals, it is clear that brands, popular music’s new gatekeepers, are the real winners. As we shall see, the centrality of these practices today also bodes badly for artists’ creative autonomy and, hence, the future of popular music itself.

### 5.6 Unfriendly ‘Synchs’: Constraints Placed on Musical Content

Given the diverse range of popular music licensed, produced, and curated by consumer brands and media properties today, it may seem curious to argue that brands function as a standardizing force in the digitalizing music industry, yet I contend that brands’ emergence as key music gatekeepers has had precisely that effect. With respect
to capitalist cultural production more broadly, Shane Gunster argues that “the polysemy of the sign has become both functional for and a function of capitalism itself” (Gunster 2007, 310; emphasis in original). This is certainly the case with respect to the ‘different’ sounding musics that interest brands; they are desired because they help to produce surplus value. The homogeneity I identify is not specifically musical, but rather relates to the range of feelings that music branding is intended to evoke, either through lyrics or musical arrangement. Today, it does not necessarily matter what a song sounds like, so long as it sounds or is perceived as happy. Of course, niche-specific violent, aggressive, or sexy songs also are used in advertisements to a certain degree, but they are the exceptions that prove the larger rule: the dominant advertising soundtrack is decidedly upbeat. This does not equal musical diversity, regardless of the genre or style used.

Because music licensing is considered a key way for aspiring artists to build their audience today, songwriters face pressure to write material tailored to the requirements of brands. At an artist management conference in New York, entertainment attorney Stephen T. Erwin stressed that appropriate business planning for recording artists and managers starts from the very beginning; artists ought to write about marketable themes and think of opportunities to license (Erwin 2010). At the same conference, sonic branding expert Paul Nagi advised artists to write songs that are “useable” – to “sell their souls to the devil,” he said jokingly (Nagi 2010). This advice reflects a new industry reality. Even within independent record labels, the centrality of licensing has translated into a strong interest in music that is “synch-friendly” (I/independent label
licensing executive 2011). Many labels are interested in signing those artists who write material compatible with the demands of brands.

What does ‘synch-friendly’ sound like? A synch-friendly song for use in advertising offers “upbeat happiness for 15-30 seconds” and employs lyrical references to cheerful words such as “sunshine” (independent label licensing executive 2011). As Lynn Grossman of independent artist management company and music service Secret Road explains, “We get approached by people usually looking for positive messages in songs. Things like, ‘I feel good,’ ‘Life is great,’ ‘I’m the man,’ ‘I feel good about myself,’ or something about coming home or feeling at home. They’re all pretty similar” (in Sanburn 2012). This is not surprising. As Wernick argues regarding the “bias” of advertising, promotion “is determinedly positive and upbeat…. [I]magistic advertising may build on the values, desire and symbologies that are already out there, but by no means does it simply reflect them. It typifies what is diverse, filters out what is antagonistic or depressing, and naturalizes the role and standpoint of consumption as such” (Wernick 1991, 42). Cheery music helps naturalize lifestyle-driven consumption.

A synch-friendly song for television programs, however, follows a different formula. It typically starts low, builds, and leads to a climactic ending, and features general lyrics: “You want someone to say that ‘it was a great night’ as opposed to ‘it was Tuesday night’” (independent label licensing executive 2011). The exploration of specific themes and ideas reduces popular music’s utility to television producers; the use of vague words assures the widest appeal and, hence, largest number of bidders.
I queried Universal Publishing’s Ferneyhough about how this tendency might impact songwriting: “Do you think that there could be a possibility that if you keep on getting songs, requests for songs about sunshine, that you could say to people, songwriters, ‘Write a song about sunshine?’” He responded:

Yeah, absolutely. We never tell them to write a song about…. I can’t dictate the terms of the single he writes or doesn’t write…. That’s a jingle…. But I say to them, “Look, when you’re writing songs … think about writing about a happy day or … write about sunshine or write about smiles…. How can you incorporate those words, those thoughts?” It doesn’t even have to be the word smile, but it could be, you know, a theme around it…. I’ve never been, “You should write this kind of a song,” but just “these are the key triggers,” because there is [are] key triggers, such as smile, happy, glad, … joyful … that especially advertisers are looking for. (I/Ferneyhough 2009)

While he does not dictate the specific content of songs, he attempts to steer the songwriting process by advising artists to target the themes desired by brands. Singer-songwriter Helen Austin provides an artist’s view: “After being a songwriter for many years … I decided that my next ‘job’ was going to be getting my music licensed” (Austin 2010). Due to her successes in this area, a music promotion website invited her to give advice to artists. “Produce targeted content,” she recommends: “instead of just having songs that I think I can submit, I have started writing with placements in mind. Taxi [an independent A&R firm] had a listing that was looking for a song with the word ‘happy’ in it, so I wrote a song called Happy, which was picked up and is one of my most successful songs” (Austin 2010). The market for happy thoughts remains bullish.

The dictates of synch-friendliness even result in outright lyrical restrictions. The use of K’Naan’s “Waving Flag” in Coca-Cola’s 2010 FIFA World Cup campaign is
instructive. In order to make his political song compatible with Coca-Cola’s campaign, the Somali Canadian hip-hop artist agreed to record a “Coca-Cola celebration mix”:

Coca-Cola loved the song but noted that lyrical references to “a violent prone, poor people zone” and people “struggling, fighting to eat” didn’t fit the campaign’s themes. The crucial moment in the discussion came when K’Naan said, “I can take that song, refashion some of the lyrics and give you an exclusive version,” [A&M/Octone Records president/CEO James] Diener says. “That’s an attempt on K’Naan’s part to revitalize the song in the spirit of the World Cup.” (Prince 2010)

The conversion of K’Naan’s song into advertising music necessitated the removal of lyrical content that reflected a social conscience. In order to effectively serve the purposes of advertising, threatening political content must be scrubbed and muted, resulting in an edgy vibe, aesthetic, or feel that is devoid of specific referents.

The case of Mark Foster of chart-topping band Foster the People may give us a glimpse into the future of popular musical production under this paradigm. He wrote Foster the People’s breakthrough hit, “Pumped Up Kicks,” a song initially used in a commercial for protein drink Muscle Milk, at Mophonics, a sound design and licensing firm (Fixmer 2012). Following in the path of Barry Manilow, Foster is both a recording artist and jingle writer. Despite the commercial success of his Grammy-nominated band, Foster intends to return to his advertising day job after finishing his current tour: “Foster the People wouldn’t exist without Mophonics. Mophonics is kind of a creative home for me” (in Fixmer 2012). The music he writes there typically

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41 “Pumped Up Kicks” seems to be a strange fit for advertisers; it contains the sinister lyric, “All the other kids with the pumped up kicks / You’d better run, better run, outrun my gun.” However, lyrics are not necessarily the primary consideration of advertisers, who do not assume that audiences listen attentively to commercials in any case. The popular music inserted into television commercials, typically snippets of songs, is often distilled into a key rhythmic groove, melodic hook, or an overall ‘vibe’. Also, given what media and cultural studies scholarship tells us about polysemy, it bears remembering that songs are open to multiple interpretations; for some audiences, musical content trumps lyrical content. Lastly, an argument can be made that an aggressive vibe was seen as desirable by the Muscle Milk brand.
conforms to the parameters of synch-friendliness. His safe, indie-sounding, acoustic guitar-driven advertising song “Beautiful Day,” for example, hits all the keywords: “Hey sunshine / Let me see the smile / In your eyes / I said wait sunshine / There’s something I should say / You’re beautiful to me / Yeah, Yeah” (Mophonics 2012). This is no accident. As we will see in Chapter 6, new music supervision software is geared toward such keyword searches.

Given the success experienced by Foster and many other artists, is advertising really the new radio? Margarita Alexomanolaki, Catherine Loveday, and Chris Kennett characterize music featured in television commercials as “a collaborative sign, since it reinforces the meaning of what is depicted and also has a secondary attentive role, since the focus of the viewer’s attention is on the visual track” (Alexomanolaki, Loveday, and Kennett 2007, 52; emphasis in original). While this account of the function of advertising music may be accurate, the use of the term ‘collaborative’ to describe this dynamic is misleading. Music, they themselves continue, may be used to “attract attention, carry the product message, act as a mnemonic device, and create excitement or a state of relaxation. Music functions, not only semantically but also in the viewer’s memory, as an index of the advertising spot” (Alexomanolaki, Loveday, and Kennett 2007, 52). While the particular tactics may vary, popular music explicitly functions as a means of executing advertisers’ goals. This is a dynamic of subordination. I contend that popular music’s semiotic subordination in advertising and the possessive promotional logic characteristic of music branding strategies overall undermine the parallel between advertising and radio. If it is true that “there is no longer a meaningful
distinction to be made between ‘popular music’ and ‘advertising music’” (Taylor 2012, 227), it is because artists are playing by rules devised by brands.

This is not to uncritically champion commercial radio. The demands of ‘radio friendliness’ also have contributed to predictability and homogeneity; radio, after all, favours “repeated exposure of ‘typical’ or ‘non-objectionable’ songs” (Rothenbuhler and McCourt 1992, 113). Radio stations, too, cater to the demands of advertisers, as advertising sales are the basis of music’s monetization for radio. Commercial radio is not so singularly focused on happiness, however; anger, sadness, introspection, and heartbreak can also prove to be lucrative. Advertising, or the management of consumer perception, on the other hand, involves the management of emotion; it targets and harnesses a very narrow range of emotions, and seeks to set a decidedly uncritical tone.

To be synch-friendly is to be corporate friendly. Contrary to the notion that the brand-driven music promotion model is far more open than the previous, locked-down major label system, the new system carries with it a different bias instead. While brands may take interest in a broader range of genres than is typical for major labels, it is because they can empty a song or genre of its specific content, if it poses a threat, and convert it to an ‘authentic’-sounding aesthetic. Whether aspiring artists write with the demands of brands in mind or impose a type of self-censorship regarding the themes they explore, the ‘new indie’ does not look so independent. Indeed, as Wernick points out, “When a piece of music … is fashioned with an eye to how it will promote itself … such goods are affected by this circumstance in every detail of their production”
When brands have too much influence over content creation itself, according to a Toronto-based advertiser, it is cause for concern:

It is scary, because as much as I say that brands can be creative, they’re also controlling, so when they dictate content … it gets a little scary…. The fact is there needs to be a balance between art and agenda, right? Brands have an agenda, they always do, and that’s to sell more product, so there has to be a balance where there’s always content being made for the sake of content. (I/Advertising creative director 2009)

Once again, it is telling that even advertisers fear brands’ hijack of popular music. Unfortunately, it is increasingly difficult for aspiring artists to opt out of the still-expanding music licensing and branding system altogether.

5.7 Conclusion

A brand is not a patron of the arts. A brand has a goal, which is to reach a certain audience, and they’re a patron of whatever’s going to help them reach that audience. (I/Danzig 2009)

Routinely hyped as the new radio, music placements in advertisements and media are considered key revenue generators and marketing vehicles not only for stars, but also for aspiring and independent artists. Music licensing can be likened to radio only in its most negative sense, however; a handful of gatekeepers have an inordinate amount of control over popular music’s promotion, to the detriment of the vast majority of recording artists and their fans. Against claims that this is a cross-promotional model, I contend that popular music is not so much marketed as it is used as an instrument for marketing. In music supervisor Coffing’s experience, “The thing that makes you a great artist makes you probably not … good at film and TV. Like big hit songs, nine times out of ten I can’t place them, because you’re supposed to be playing in the
Licensing is about setting a mood and a vibe and a feeling – and staying there” (I/Coffing 2010). Advertisers are not even looking for a particular sound *per se*:

> As a creative, when you get a strategy, you’re not looking for a piece of music. You’re looking for an idea…. What’s the emotional connection of the idea? If you have an idea, … then you can say, “O.K. Here’s how I want to execute this idea and here’s the role that … music plays in it.” … From my experience, clients aren’t out there looking for a piece of music. They’re out there looking for an idea that they can put on all kinds of different mediums, that is going to build their brand. (Berman 2010)

In this system, which bears no resemblance to altruistic patronage, the brand strategy or ‘idea’ comes first. More often than not, the overarching idea and corresponding mood is an upbeat one.

Today, aspiring artists are presented with a choice between two evils. The major record label system was – and remains – no ally to unknown, especially independent, artists, but neither is the new, brand-run alternative. Deals between recording artists and brands have, in some cases, produced marketing buzz and helped launch careers. However, in this chapter, I argued that the march from brand-music associations to brand-music integrations to brand-music partnerships reveals a deepening subordination of artists and popular music to the objectives of brands overall. This power imbalance has produced alarming consequences, including falling fees for artists, severe restrictions on the creative process itself, and a resulting homogeneity in musical content. The breed of standardization ushered in by music branding is not primarily sonic or musical, however, but sentiment based: it is founded on the production of happy thoughts. The larger story that emerges is about domination (of recording artists) and control (of cultural content). In Chapter 6, I extend my neo-Adornian framework in
order to further conceptualize and offer a critique of this colonization of popular music by brands. In *Composing for the Films*, Adorno and Hanns Eisler argue that “[a]ll music in the motion picture is under the sign of utility, rather than lyric expressiveness” (Adorno and Eisler 2005, 8). Promotional ubiquitous musics, ranging from attention-grabbing advertising music to narrative-driven background music in popular media, are a product of a thoroughly instrumental system and process.
6 PROMOTIONAL UBIQUITOUS MUSICS AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF ‘DIFFERENCE’ INSIDE THE POST-FORDIST ‘CULTURE INDUSTRY’

6.1 Introduction

Promotional ubiquitous musics are a product of the colliding and coterminous changes implemented by the digitalizing music industry and the advertising industry. Taken together, the reconstitution of recording artists as artist-brands in the post-CD music marketplace and the escalating involvement of corporate brands in the licensing and production of culture have effectively transformed popular music into an entirely instrumentalized commodity. While promotional ubiquitous musics are hybrid entities, their promotional intent trumps their cultural content: these musics are, first and foremost, tethered to strategic branding objectives. According to Andrew Wernick, “Promotion (as a noun) is a type of sign, and the promoted entity is its referent…. A promotional message is a complex of significations which at once represents (moves in place of), advocates (moves on behalf of), and anticipates (moves ahead of) the circulating entity or entities to which it refers” (Wernick 1991, 182). Promotional ubiquitous musics represent, advocate, and direct audience attention toward brands. If promotion “is defined not by what it says but by what it does” (Wernick 1991, 184), then promotional ubiquitous musics are defined by the manner in which they work to valorize and, in effect, produce consumption.

This chapter develops a neo-Adornian analysis of promotional ubiquitous musics by examining contemporary music supervision software. In section 6.5, I
consider the ways this software categorizes and sorts popular music in order to illustrate quite concretely how the turn toward post-Fordist customization and ‘difference’ does not undermine, but actually complements the processes of calculation and rationalization typically associated with Fordism; it contributes not only to the instrumentalization of popular music, but also of the affects the music is intended to harness. Such forces of homogenization, I argue, work to counter the semiotic diversity ostensibly given a voice with the affordance of the music industry’s digitalization. In sections 6.2-6.4, I provide the theoretical and political-economic framework necessary to support this argument. I draw on David Harvey and others to outline key facets of capitalist cultural production and ‘accumulation by dispossession’ under post-Fordism. In section 6.6, I contend that post-Fordist shifts in capital accumulation strategies, which are really only “shifts in surface appearance” in capitalism overall (Harvey 1990, vii), do not undermine Adorno’s Fordist critical framework. Rather, because the culture industry thesis examines the commodification of culture under capitalism as such, I argue that it is germane to studies of cultural production in both the Fordist and post-Fordist eras. While Horkheimer and Adorno analyze the transition from ‘autonomous’ to commodified culture, I situate the proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics as the next step in this trajectory of cultural commodification: popular music has been rendered a form of ‘adverturement’ or branded entertainment. To conclude, in section 6.7, I suggest that promotional ubiquitous musics can be characterized as what Martyn J. Lee (1993) terms an ‘ideal-type’ commodity form under post-Fordism, even as they reveal the dialectical complexity of this regime of capital accumulation.
6.2 Post-Fordist Capital Accumulation: The Centrality of Culture

In what follows, I discuss key production and consumption dynamics within post-Fordism that have contributed to the emergence of popular music as a form of branded entertainment – a broad term I use to describe the various content ‘partnerships’ between music companies and consumer brands. Adam Krims identifies two shortcomings of the term post-Fordism: “First, … it defines itself mainly negatively, not offering a unique characterization of that which it claims to describe. And second, and more damagingly, it implies a clean break from Fordism, when in fact … [m]any if not most of the aspects of Fordism continue, even in some respects predominate, in the period of so-called post-Fordism” (Krims 2007, xxii).\textsuperscript{42} Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter, on the other hand, argue that “the ambiguous nature of the term ‘post-Fordism,’ as it teeters between the old (post-Fordism) and the new (post-Fordism), has its merits. It emphasizes the paradoxical nature of change” (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter 2003, 65). Here, I adopt the latter perspective, using the term post-Fordism to describe a regime characterized by the employment of new \textit{and} well-worn strategies to maximize capital accumulation.

‘Post-Fordism’ most commonly refers to a matrix of social, cultural, political, and economic shifts that deviate significantly from the processes of Fordist capitalism. This terminology stems from the scholarship of the Regulation School (e.g., Aglietta 1979; Lipietz 1986; Boyer 1988) on distinct systems of production and consumption, or ‘regimes of capital accumulation’, and the corresponding formal and informal/social

\textsuperscript{42} Also, see Hesmondhalgh (1996) for a review of misleading assumptions and problematic policy implications for the cultural industries in literature on post-Fordism and ‘flexible specialization’.
laws that govern societies, or ‘modes of social and political regulation’ (see Harvey 1990, 121-22). The term ‘Fordism’ demarcates “the birth of mass consumption and the emergence of the modern consumer society” (Lee 1993, 73), which resulted from the rationalization of production enabled by a detailed and regimented division of labour centrally involving Taylorist Scientific Management (Harvey 1990, 125; Lee 1993, 75; see also Braverman 1974). Harvey indicates that the Fordist regime of accumulation began (at least symbolically) in 1914, with the introduction of Henry Ford’s five-dollar and eight-hour day for assembly line workers, and lasted until the recession of the early 1970s (Harvey 1990, 125, 140). The Fordist regime was maintained with assistance and intervention by the state via Keynesian economics. This system of government regulation has been largely dismantled during the post-Fordist era as a result of the persistent progress of neoliberal governmental ideology whose “fundamental mission … is to create a ‘good business climate’ and therefore to optimize conditions for capital accumulation no matter what the consequences for employment or social well-being” (Harvey 2006, 25). The centrality of neoliberalism to post-Fordism will be examined shortly.

Harvey’s political economic analysis demonstrates the ways that post-Fordism “is marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption” (Harvey 1990, 147). Technology-driven production processes (e.g., automation and computerization) enable ‘flexibly specialized’ production; small-batch production and ‘just-in-time’ inventory management and delivery systems allow for the
efficient targeting of highly segmented niche markets (Harvey 1990, 156). Furthermore, practices of sub-contracting and outsourcing enable “better labour control” and significant cost savings (Harvey 1990, 155). ‘Flexibility’ for corporations is contingent on, and produces, precarious conditions for labour. Together, the international division of (often underpaid and exploited) labour and flexible specialization, and the resulting drop in prices for consumer goods, directly affect the realm of consumption; an accelerated turnover in production creates shortened consumption times, especially for trend-oriented products such as fashion and consumer technologies (Harvey 1990, 156). Post-Fordist capital accumulation strategies produce, respond to, reinforce, and rely on consumer fads and are geared around the production of information, symbols, and affects. Post-Fordist production processes are intense, dynamic, and fast.

Cultural commodities have assumed increasing importance as value generators for corporations under post-Fordism. Harvey famously argues that the economic shifts described above and ever-multiplying cultural practices, media texts, and lifestyles exist in dynamic, generative relation to one another (Harvey 1990, vii, 285, and passim). As a result, “[t]he relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism has given way to all the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodernist aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and the commodification of cultural forms” (Harvey 1990, 156). Flexible production systems cater to, but also commodify, diverse cultural practices; the flipside of cultural fragmentation is the expanded reach of capitalism itself.
On the one hand, the digitalizing music industry, now aided by instantaneous distribution (e.g., iTunes) and digital marketing strategies that allow for the increasingly targeted tracking of tastes, reflects the dynamism, difference, and niche-specific customization characteristic of post-Fordist corporate strategies and trends. On the other hand, against a backdrop of unauthorized downloading and, hence, financial risk, music companies have become ever more reliant on mass markets and star artists. As we saw in Chapter 4, the blockbuster model has not waned; it has only been renovated. Underwritten by encircling multiple rights deals, the new blockbuster model has intensified industrial logics inherited from the ‘old’ music industry model, working to counter the musical diversity available overall. The digitalizing music industry, then, is marked by a combination of Fordist and post-Fordist industrial logics. Jonathan Burston makes a similar argument regarding change inside the global economy that is contemporary ‘Broadway’: “Like so many other transition stores inside our brave new world of recombinant entertainment, the story of today’s Recombinant Broadway is intimately wrapped up in the changing motivations and capacities of capital, recent progress of digital technologies, and the constant movement between Fordist and ‘post-Fordist’ moments of production in neo-liberal times” (Burston 2009, 161). Indeed, neoliberalism and intensified commodification go hand-in-hand.

6.3 The Neoliberal Turn, the Digitalizing Music Industry, and ‘Accumulation by Dispossession’

A ‘cultural turn’ has occurred in more places than the academy; it has taken place in capitalism as a whole, and it is closely tied to the neoliberal turn in politics and government. In A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Harvey (2005) argues that processes
of what Marx termed ‘primitive accumulation’ – the capitalist enclosure of common lands and expropriation of people – have continued under neoliberal political ideology in a form of, what he terms, ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (see also Harvey 2006, 43-50). For Harvey, accumulation by dispossession consists of “the corporatization, commodification, and privatization of hitherto public assets”; is “marked by its speculative and predatory style”; and involves “[c]risis creation, management, and manipulation on the world stage” and state redistributions that “revers[e] the flow from upper to lower classes that had occurred during the era of embedded liberalism” (Harvey 2005, 160-63). With respect to cultural production in particular, privatization, trade liberalization, and deregulation have allowed for intensifying commodification across the music, film, television, radio, and new media sectors; assets that were previously publicly owned and markets that were formerly regulated have been rendered new fields for capitalist appropriation and expansion. Following David Hesmondhalgh, it is instructive to conceptualize the commodification of culture as an instance of accumulation by dispossession: “forms of creativity and knowledge and culture which were not previously conceived as ownable are brought into the intellectual property system, making them available for the investment of capital and the making of profit, and helping to avoid the perennial problems of over-accumulation which haunt capitalism” (Hesmondhalgh 2008b, 97). In this section, I consider how the theory of accumulation by dispossession can help to explain the music industry’s changing accumulation strategies in the post-Fordist era.

43 Culture is by no means unique as a field for capitalist expansion. As Harvey points out, “the wholesale commodification of nature in all its forms” (Harvey 2006, 44) is also a product of neoliberal privatization.
Whereas Fordist growth was achieved via ‘expansion’ and ‘massification’, post-Fordist growth rests on ‘innovation’ and ‘intensification’ (Lee 1993, 128). While the origins of culture as commodity can be traced to Fordist capitalism (if not before), corporations today capitalize culture more fully and more intensely by launching new products and wringing additional surplus value out of existing ones, as is the case inside the digitalizing music industry. The *deepening* commodification of culture and new areas of social life is related to capitalism’s inherent growth orientation and the ‘problem’ of overaccumulation flagged by Hesmondhalgh. Growth is the lifeblood of capitalism. 44 According to Harvey, “In the absence of any limits or barriers, the need to reinvest in order to remain a capitalist propels capitalism to expand *at a compound rate*. This then creates a perpetual need to find new fields of activity to absorb the reinvested capital” (Harvey 2010, 45; emphasis added). 45 Crucially, capitalism’s “expansionary” and “imperialistic” character explains why “cultural life in more and more areas gets brought within the grasp of the cash nexus and the logic of capital circulation” (Harvey 1990, 344). Under post-Fordism, the inherent capitalist drive to commodify and colonize new sites and spaces has been advanced by the corporate flexibility gained from new technologies, deregulation, and the exploitation of asymmetrical labour relations.

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44 As Karl Marx observes in Volume I of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, classical economics is premised on “[a]ccumulation for the sake of accumulation, production for the sake of production” (Marx [1867] 1990, 742).

45 In *The Enigma of Capital*, a critical analysis of the global recession that began in September 2008, Harvey notes that economists see a growth rate of three per cent per year as ‘healthy’, and points out that “the language of recession and crisis erupts (many capitalists make no profit)” when rates dip below one per cent growth (Harvey 2010, 27). While compound growth was not difficult to achieve during the eighteenth century, as countless geographic territories were ripe for capitalist takeover, it poses real challenges at this advanced stage of global capitalism (Harvey 2010, 27-28). Economic volatility and crises result.
Because consumers now demonstrate resistance to paying for sound recordings, music companies’ drive to tighten their control over existing commodities and recording artists and to monetize new products has been especially aggressive. Notably, Matt Stahl (2010) employs ‘primitive accumulation analysis’ to conceptualize the institutionalization of multiple rights deals. According to Stahl, the seizure of additional recording artist rights demonstrates how, “when capital encounters an obstacle or a limit it often works aggressively to overcome it; the limit’s transcendence often requires and results in the erosion of the employee’s political position” (Stahl 2010, 348-49). He continues: “Abandoned by increasing numbers of file-sharing (non-) consumers, record company capital … [is] transcending former barriers, colonizing new regions of musical economic activity, and consolidating new dimensions of political control, particularly over legions of new artists in weak bargaining positions” (Stahl 2010, 352). The flexibility gained by record companies produces, and contractually enforces, artist dependence and vulnerability, as we saw in Chapter 4. The binding of recording artists ever more tightly to single music companies is only one aspect of accumulation by dispossession inside the digitalizing music industry, however.

Another key source of capital accumulation for music companies is the (attempted) commodification of previously uncommodified aspects of subjective musical experiences. Thus, record labels and consumer brands are increasingly turning to popular music as a tool intended to help commodify the feelings tied to ‘authenticity’ and ‘experience’ itself. The business-to-business market for music licenses and recording artist endorsements represents an attempt to commodify affects that
previously lay outside the reach of capital accumulation strategies; the commodity that brands and marketers purchase is not just popular music, but also the webs of personal associations and experiences within which music circulates. Furthermore, as brands partner with recording artists, they increasingly look for ‘value added’ or ‘something more’. According to Vered Koren, an executive at a digital media marketing company, “exclusive artist experiences” (she provides the example of private guitar lessons with John Mayer) and other “experiential” strategies are “really popular with brands”: “Stuff that money can’t buy – stuff that you can’t get anywhere else…. Why not sell those, monetize those experiences?” (I/Koren 2009). This logic, which seamlessly rationalizes the sale of those things that ‘money can’t buy’, is unique to an unfettered, crisis-ridden capitalism.

Promotional ubiquitous musics and various artist-brand relationships clearly constitute new sites and modes of commodification. They also reflect new approaches to promotion; they are consumed and they encourage consumption elsewhere. With this in mind, I now wish to situate the use of popular music as a means of aestheticizing brands in relation to the ‘design intensity’ that is characteristic of the post-Fordism.

6.4 Post-Fordist ‘Design Intensity’ and the Rise of Branding

If there is merit to the argument that in the post-Fordist era “culture is more like design: we experience it more like the inhabitations of designed spaces” (Lash and Lury 2007, 196), this shift is surely tied to the aestheticization of commerce initiated in the 1980s and 1990s. In Economies of Signs and Spaces, Scott Lash and John Urry argue that, due a heightened emphasis on flexibility, design, and symbolic production under
post-Fordism, the “[o]rdinary manufacturing industry is becoming more and more like the production of culture” (Lash and Urry 1994, 123). They introduce the term ‘reflexive accumulation’ to capture the new ‘reflexivity’ found in the spheres of production and consumption; in their optimistic account of these developments, new “lifestyle and consumer choice[s] are freed up” by post-Fordist accumulation strategies (Lash and Urry 1994, 61). My interest here, however, is in how design intensity and the proliferation of consumer lifestyles are tied to the concomitant rise of new branding strategies, including music-driven branding.

The increasing role of design in business strategies overall is related to corporations’ “growing interest in cultivating brands as assets through material and ‘experiential’ means” (Moor 2007, 39). Marketing literature suggests that branding has become more ‘culture oriented’ (Holt 2004; Ridderstråle and Nordström 2008), and that product development is more design-driven: design itself is seen as a site of ‘innovation’ and, hence, as a source of value (Brown 2005, 2008; Lockwood 2009). I see the emergence of branded ‘sound identities’ as a product of this wider shift toward ‘design thinking’. As Jonathan Sterne observes in his examination of the ‘programmed’ music used in commercial spaces, “Generally speaking, stores within a particular chain all use the same or similar music programs to achieve a uniformity of corporate image, just as they use similar design and lighting techniques” (Sterne 1997, 35). Such programmed music systems, Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher explain, “are used to mark out and aestheticize these spaces, to invest them with symbolic meaning, and to define the relations of the self, to goods and to others in ways that enhance
commercial interests” (Jones and Schumacher 1992, 165; see also Sterne 1997; DeNora and Belcher 2000; Kassabian 2004; Krims 2007, 127-162). If culture is increasingly ‘designed’, this indicates that utility has become a more central aspect of culture; design is ultimately function-driven, whereas art does not have to be.\footnote{According to Malcolm Barnard, design “possesses communicative or functional intent,” and while aesthetic considerations are important, they serve and yield to “the job there is to do” (Barnard 1998, 15).}  

While branding is a value-adding marketing strategy and practice, the brand itself is form of property or, in the words of marketer Douglas Holt, a “strategic asset” (Holt 2004, 95). Holt continues: “The economic value of a brand – its brand equity – is based on the future earnings stream the brand is expected to generate from customers’ loyalty, which is revealed in their willingness to pay price premiums compared with otherwise equivalent products” (Holt 2004, 95). According to advertising executive Mike Tunnicliffe, brands are “slightly intangible things…. A brand is touching your emotions” (Tunnicliffe 2010). Important here is how such business thinking assumes that without distinctive brand identities, commodities within the same product category are essentially equivalent. The brand and what it signifies for those who value it, then, becomes the substance of ‘difference’. As Shane Gunster observes, “semiotic differences or brand identities increasingly bear the burden of differentiating objects that are virtually the same” (Gunster 2007, 258).  

While the cultural ‘essence’ of brands may be somewhat ethereal, they are treated as tangible, monetizable assets on balance sheets.\footnote{Adam Arvidsson argues that “brands figure as immaterial capital”; ‘brand equity’ is “made up of their subjective meanings or social functions” (Arvidsson 2005, 239).} The importance of subjective qualities to brands has produced more and more complex systems of brand
valuation, which simultaneously measure, work to produce, and exploit the new economic value forms born of contemporary branding strategies (Lury and Moor 2010, 29, 43). Given that popular music is now used to forge links between brands and consumer feelings, and to fold those meanings into brand identities, music is implicated in such systems of measurement: as a tool used in service of differentiation, popular music is intended to help brands concretize and then exploit various ‘intangibles’. Music is just one cultural field where the fundamentally qualitative is subjected to quantitative measurement under new capitalization strategies.

The preceding sections provided a sketch of key aspects of neoliberal, post-Fordist production and promotion that inform my thinking on promotional ubiquitous musics and the contours of cultural commodification in the digital era. The same strategies and practices that enable this ‘flexible capitalism’ to be increasingly supple, dynamic, and targeted also work to intensify the capacities of capitalist calculation and measurement, which has had alarming consequences for popular musical production, as we shall see. In a post-Fordist regime marked by the fragmentation of cultural markets and the proliferation of new media technologies and texts, it is routinely argued that the ‘culture industry’ thesis no longer holds. According to Krims, “What Adorno took for an inexorable process turned out to be historically specific…. What intervened, and what Adorno could not have theorized in his lifetime, is, of course, the advent of flexible accumulation or so-called post-Fordism” (Krims 2007, 94). Scott Lash and Celia Lury argue that it is “not so much that they [Horkheimer and Adorno] were wrong, but that things have moved on…. [C]ultural objects are everywhere; as
information, as communications, as branded products, as financial services, as media products, as transport and leisure services, cultural entities are no longer the exception: they are the rule” (Lash and Lury 2007, 3-4). Does the widespread production and consumption of diverse cultural commodities under post-Fordism buoy up or sink the culture industry thesis? I contend that the dynamics of capitalist commodification, expansion, colonization, and quantification surveyed above provide grounds for the continued relevance and import of the culture industry thesis. Next, I use contemporary music supervision software as a case study to investigate this question.

6.5 Music Supervision Software: Categorizing Affects, Calculating Effects

You just have to give them something pleasant, and what can be a better tool than music? (I/advertising strategist 2011)

As we saw in Chapter 5, advertising and media professionals use popular music as a tool for summoning and directing ‘pleasant’ feelings toward consumer and media brands. The task of finding *which* songs are most useful is now aided by music supervision software. This use of ‘innovative’ technology to achieve the longstanding capitalist goal of maximizing efficiencies reveals a complex dialectic of old and new capital accumulation strategies inside post-Fordism. Insofar as this software caters to client demands for customization and personalization, it is consistent with post-Fordist production and marketing techniques, yet it also conforms to and enables the processes of rationalization associated with Fordism. Employing a neo-Adornian framework, I consider here key effects of this music supervision software, whose search criteria sort popular music according to pseudo-individualized differences; this software facilitates
the domination of the detail (musical or otherwise) over the whole (the song itself) and contributes to the standardization of different musical styles and associated affects.

Music branding is premised on the calculated and efficient targeting of listener feelings in an attempt to rationalize emotions and experiences. According to Brandamp, the use of popular music allows for the streamlining of brand messaging:

[M]usic provides a simple way to communicate a single idea to the masses. It’s good at communicating a deluge of attitudinal and demographic information, targeting deeply and quickly, without images or even, necessarily, words. It can therefore communicate a brand’s essence in a second, summing up its non-rational proposition and communicating emotion, rather than logic. (Brandamp, 2008: 49)

Attesting to the effectiveness of such marketing practices, in a testimonial quoted on the website of Elias Arts, a client praises the audio branding firm for “rationaliz[ing] a subjective tool for us” (Elias Arts 2011). Amid mushrooming demand for business-to-business music licenses and the attendant drive for improved efficiencies, the licensing and music search process has received a digital makeover.

As outlined in Chapter 4, music licensing is a complex process that requires licensors to clear two sets of rights with two separate corporate entities: master use rights from record labels and synchronization rights from music publishers. According to music supervisor Barry Coffing, “There is no clear-cut way to license music…. It’s a bunch of people with a Rolodex and ‘good luck.’ … So I set out to … automate it” (I/Coffing 2010). Numerous other businesses joined Coffing in the rush to automate the licensing process and profit from this burgeoning music marketplace. Music branding firms, music publishers, music supervision companies, and music libraries sort and sell music according to various tagged keywords.
The software systems employed by such firms allow licensors to sift through music catalogues according to composer, genre, style, era, instrument, orchestration, metre, rhythmic complexity, gender, and keyword, in addition to mood (see Olé 2012). Independent music publisher Olé’s software sorts music by moods ranging from “cynical” to “cheesy” to “feel good” to “needy” (Olé 2012). In interview, Jennifer Beavis explained the service that Olé’s ‘e-tools’ offers to music supervisors:

You can say “I need a song that says happy in the chorus” or “I need a song that says wonderful in the chorus” – you can actually type that in and it will show you all the songs we have available with that word in it, for example. Or “I want something sad or maudlin” – you can type any type of emotion in and it will give you the list of songs immediately. (I/Beavis 2009)

These systems are beginning to resemble those employed by stock audio companies such as AudioSparx, which even link the music’s mood to the context in which such a mood is ostensibly appropriate. For instance, one song licensed by AudioSparx is an R&B track that features “an angular vocal in the style of Beyonce, Rihanna, Aaliyah and others,” and is described as “[c]ool for pole dancing, striptease, 20-something nightclubs, chasing girls, teen fantasies, bar lounge club” (AudioSparx 2012b). While a search with the term “evil” produces music options purportedly suited for political attack advertisements and horror movies, a search for “happy” music yields a “quirky” track featuring a piano, ukulele, and glockenspiel that is described as “[p]erfect for commercials and advertising, brand identity, YouTube videos, corporate presentations, motivational projects or kids projects,” among many other similar tracks (Audiosparx 2012a). In a very similar vein, one ‘mood’ earmarked by Olé (2012) is ‘driving’, underscoring the short distance between the mood and that mood’s function for the purposes of brands. The potential use of the music determines how it is tagged.
In *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear*, Steve Goodman argues that “most branding theory has already moved on to invest in the modulation of emotion by nonverbal means, signalling a mutation of capital logic into a more subtle colonization of memory through the preemptive sonic modulation of affective tonality” (S. Goodman 2010, 148). Branded musical hooks or ‘ear worms’ are intended to capture our attention and invade our memory (S. Goodman 2010, 146-47). ‘Affective tonality’ – “dimensions of mood, ambience, or atmosphere” (S. Goodman 2010, 195) – appears to be a guiding force behind music supervision software. These systems of classification and comparison enable the licensor to search music according to the affects it is intended to arouse.

The keyword tagging system developed by Jingle Punks goes one step further than tagging musical details and moods. “We filed a patent so that you can describe music using non-musical terms,” Jared Gutstadt explained in interview, such as “it sounds like an iPod commercial” or “it sounds like a show on Bravo … It’s almost like iTunes meets Pandora, but for music licensing” (I/Gutstadt 2011). The Jingle Punks catalogue can also be searched by brand name: “just even using the word … ‘Walmart’ or something, or … ‘Target’ to describe how your music sounds” (I/Gutstadt 2011). In this system, the sound identities of certain brands have become so strong that the referent has become the signifier: the Walmart sound now signifies certain feelings or vibes. One critical consequence of this ‘innovation’ and others like it is that recording artists who wish to license their music to such companies face pressure to think about and position their work in terms of the brands it ostensibly sounds like.
Music supervision software provides just one example of how the rise of promotional ubiquitous musics reflects the instrumentalization of music and the affects it is intended to elicit. It is the literal fulfillment of Adorno’s claim that “[p]opular music becomes a multiple-choice questionnaire” (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 446). What is more, the actions of enterprises such as Jingle Punks illustrate post-Fordist capitalism’s drive to commodify all that was previously uncommodified – in this case, even search terms. Although the use of music supervision software to categorize and sell music is novel, the utter substitutability of particular songs (aside from top hits) within these systems is consistent with the analysis provided by Adorno. As Gunster explains, “Designed to produce an immediate effect, the individual details of mass culture lose their specificity and thereby become interchangeable. In a movie soundtrack, for example, a specific piece of music that excites a certain emotional response (e.g., rage, excitement, sadness) can be easily replaced by any other that has a similar effect” (Gunster 2004, 28). Profoundly different musics are not only rendered commensurate as objects of exchange in the marketplace for music licenses; music must also conform to company-dictated, utility-driven (search) terms. Music is sorted according to its (perceived) function, and the desired effect determines the music selected.

6.6 Post-Fordist Adorno? Cultural Commodification as a Constant

At first glance, a neo-Adornian culture industry framework appears to be handcuffed by the radical changes to the cultural industries ushered in by post-Fordism and, specifically, digitalization. The industrial structures examined by Horkheimer and Adorno were a product of what they refer to as ‘monopoly capitalism’ – an era
characterized by the detailed division of labour, Taylorist Scientific Management, mass consumption, and cultural homogeneity. However, as we have seen, the drive to commodify, rationalize, and standardize persists in the post-Fordist era. Following Gunster, this analysis marks an effort to “[f]ree[] the culture industry thesis from its (now) stifling association with the historical specificity of Fordist cultural production” (Gunster 2004, 26). I argue that the culture industry thesis, which offers a theory on the commodification of culture per se, still holds in the digital era. A neo-Adornian approach helps explain the emergence of promotional ubiquitous musics and the domination of recording artists and control of cultural content that has accompanied the music-driven branding paradigm.

While an overview of the culture industry thesis can be found in Chapter 3, the crux of Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s argument bears repeating: “The conspicuous unity of macrocosm and microcosm confronts human beings with a model of their culture: the false identity of universal and particular. All mass culture under monopoly is identical” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 95). An Adornian critique of commodification centres on the domination of the particular by a universal standard – the exchange or barter principle. Drawing on Marx, Adorno sees the forced assimilation of the individual to the universal as a defining feature of human labour as it becomes a commodity:

The barter principle, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal concept of average working hours, is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. Barter is the social model of the principle, and without the principle there would be no barter; it is through barter that non-identical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical. (Adorno [1966] 1973, 146)
Much as workers are rendered commensurable or ‘identical’ in the labour market, the products of the culture industry are rendered identical by the exchange principle. But we should be careful to make a distinction between the argument that the products of the culture industry are standardized, and the argument that mass culture as a whole under monopoly capitalism is identical; the latter points to the universalizing instrumental rationality inherent in the capitalist system more broadly. While products of the digitalizing music industry may not be overly standardized, indeed they can be quite diverse, today’s ‘artist-brands’ and associated products are nevertheless treated as substitutable insofar as they are seen as profit-generating properties.

In a manner arguably comparable to Harvey’s approach, Horkheimer and Adorno make distinctions between different eras of capitalism as they develop a critique of capitalism. They observe that monopoly capitalism was marked by a decline in competition and a growing concentration of wealth into the hands of the few relative to the preceding liberal era (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 164). Thus, the culture industry thesis speaks to the oligopolistic corporate structures associated with monopoly capitalism. Adorno also observes that the fact of culture’s commodification was not altogether new; the difference he identifies is one of degree rather than kind:

The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms. Ever since these cultural forms first began to earn a living for their creators as commodities in the market-place they had already possessed something of this quality…. New on the part of the culture industry is the direct and undisguised primacy of a precisely and thoroughly calculated efficacy in its most typical products…. Cultural entities typical of the culture industry are no longer also commodities, they are commodities through and through. (Adorno [1967] 2001b, 99-100)
While the origins of cultural commodification can be located in laissez-faire liberal capitalism, the calculation and rationalization techniques used in service of profit maximization became perceptible in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Although Adorno’s critique of capitalism is more conceptual than descriptive, he does offer analysis of specific production and marketing techniques at work inside the culture industry. For instance, Horkheimer and Adorno recognize the strategic function of different product categories, genres, and prices, which, similar to contemporary market segmentation approaches, “assist in the classification, organization, and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated” (Horkheimer and Adorno [1944] 2002, 96-97). The production of ‘difference’ enabled the culture industry to at once cater to and quantify different tastes. Adorno argues that “[t]he culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above” not by imposing only one type of cultural product on the market, but instead by rendering the customer “an object of calculation” (Adorno [1967] 2001b, 98-99). Then as now, market research reflects “the competitor’s desire to find out something about the type of commodities his customers like and to mold his production or his purchases according to their wishes in order to gain by means of such information an advantage over his competitors” (Adorno [1939] 2009a, 436). The relentless drive for competitive advantage and increased sales leads to a corporate desire to understand customer desires and purchasing habits.

A common criticism of the culture industry thesis is that the types of cultural rationalization, standardization, massification, and pseudo-individualization described
by Adorno cannot account for the aesthetic diversity characteristic of post-Fordist cultural production (for example, see Krims 2007, 89-126). According to Lash and Lury, “In the culture industry production takes place in the Fordist and labour-intensive production of identity,” whereas in today’s post-Fordist ‘global culture industry’ “production and consumption are processes of the construction of difference” (Lash and Lury 2007, 5; emphasis in original). What Lash and Lury fail to acknowledge, however, is that because corporations now understand ‘difference’ in terms of its commercial utility, difference itself easily falls under the ‘identity logic’ theorized by Adorno. In Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life, Adorno contends that “[t]he utopia of the qualitative – the things which through their difference and uniqueness cannot be absorbed into the prevalent exchange relationships – takes refuge under capitalism in the traits of fetishism…. [T]he qualitative itself becomes a special case of quantification, the non-fungible becomes fungible” (Adorno [1951] 2005b, 120). The exchange relation works to quantify the qualitative. Post-Fordist techniques used to calculate and monetize strategic ‘fits’ between popular music and corporate brands, such as music supervision software systems, only intensify this process.

A neo-Adornian analysis of promotional ubiquitous musics (or commodified popular music more broadly) suggests that the actual musical content is beside the point; if treated as interchangeable commodities by its licensors and deployed to the same ends, namely grabbing consumer attention and transferring it to brands, those musics are, in effect, rendered identical in the Adornian sense. They are subsumed under the same abstract rules of capitalist equivalence and rendered commensurable.
However, amid the persistent drive to commodify new spaces of social and cultural life, it appears that cultural difference is especially productive for capital today. Read in concert with the theory of accumulation by dispossession, the culture industry thesis provides critical insights into why difference constitutes an important site of value creation in the post-Fordist era: as fodder for unfettered capitalism’s relentless drive for expansion and growth. However, inside the culture industry, commodification “directly expresses itself through a highly specific cultural logic that maximizes certain types of difference at the expense of others” (Gunster 2007, 311; emphasis in original). Music companies and consumer brands alike demonstrate a preference for market-friendly difference at the expense of less commercially viable forms of difference. Moreover, the ‘synch-friendly’ sounds of advertising actually speak to considerable homogeneity against a wider backdrop of musical diversity, at the very least in terms of the sentiment most advertising music is intended to express: happiness. Market-friendly sounds are generally cheerful or can be construed as such; in a sense, they must serve as empty signifiers or pliable symbolic ‘containers’ that can be filled with advertising content. The logics of advertising infiltrate the creation process itself either in terms of happy keywords included in lyrics, upbeat musical arrangements, or general semiotic flexibility, which sets the stage for easy ‘occupation’ by brands.

Geoff Cox, Joasia Krysa, and Anya Lewin argue for the continued relevance of the culture industry thesis in *Economising Culture: On ‘The (Digital) Culture Industry’*, even as new digital technologies, seemingly contradictorily, advance and circumvent the interests of capital (Cox, Krysa, and Lewin 2004, 7). I agree with their assessment;
Adorno’s analysis of the commodification of culture is not hamstrung by the dynamism characteristic of post-Fordism and the digitalization of the cultural industries, because the same technological and economic means that have ushered in the current era of media abundance also have allowed for the expansion of commodification overall. Indeed, Adorno’s critical framework is “more valuable than ever in a time when difference lies all around us yet is nowhere to be found” (Gunster 2007, 312).

6.7 Promotional Ubiquitous Musics as a Post-Fordist ‘Ideal-type’ Commodity Form

The real significance of the commodity … rests upon the fact that it tends to reflect the whole social organisation of capitalism at any historical and geographical point in its development…. [I]f the term Post-Fordism is truly to signify important developments within capitalist production, and if these developments genuinely herald major reconfigurations within contemporary culture, then in the first instance we should expect to see such transformations materialised in a changing commodity-form. (Lee 1993, 119)

This dissertation has been centrally concerned with the ‘crisis’ and recuperation of popular music’s commodity form in the digital era and the resulting proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics. My emphasis on changes to the core popular music commodity has been informed by Martyn J. Lee’s contention that “[q]ualitative changes to the intensity and structure of labour and means of production tend to be reflected in changes to the commodity-form” (Lee 1993, 133). I have offered a sustained analysis of artist-brands and promotional ubiquitous musics in order to bring to light the character of the social relations embedded in them. While I have located key changes within the long trajectory of the commodification of culture, the examination provided in this chapter suggests that the intensifying commodification and instrumentalization
seen in recent years exemplifies post-Fordist accumulation strategies, even as it reveals the persistence of the forces of rationalization and homogenization associated with Fordism. I assert that this dialectic is not contrary to, but rather firmly in step with, capitalism’s accelerating expansion and extension in the neoliberal era.

In Consumer Culture Reborn: The Cultural Politics of Consumption, Lee claims that ‘ideal-type’ commodity forms can be paired with the Fordist and post-Fordist regimes of accumulation. While Fordist commodities were characterized by durability, materiality, solidity, structure, collectivity, homogeneity, standardization, fixity, longevity, function, and utility, post-Fordist commodities are marked by non-durability, experientiality, fluidity, flexibility, individuality, heterogeneity, customization, portability, instantaneity, form, and style (Lee 1993, 128). Of course, schemas based on binary oppositions are typically simplistic, but as a starting point, Lee’s list is instructive; while certain commodity forms complement the dynamic post-Fordist marketplace, others were compatible with its more staid predecessor. Lee nominates standardized housing and automobiles as Fordism’s ideal-type commodity forms, and contends that post-Fordism favours hi-tech commodities, non-physical commodities (e.g., information, data), cultural services, and financial services (Lee 1993, 128). After noting the vagueness of Lee’s examples of post-Fordist ideal-type commodities, Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter submit the interactive video game as its exemplar:

It is a child of the computer technologies that lie at the heart of the post-Fordist reorganization of work. In production, game development, with its youthful workforce of digital artisans and netslaves, typifies the new forms of post-Fordist enterprise and labour. In consumption, the video game brilliantly exemplifies post-Fordism’s tendency to fill domestic space and time with fluidified, experiential, and electronic commodities.... The interactive gaming
business also powerfully demonstrates the increasingly intense advertising, promotional, and surveillance strategies practiced by post-Fordist marketers in an era of niche markets. In all these aspects the interactive game industry displays the global logic of an increasingly transnational capitalism whose production capacities and market strategies are now incessantly calculated and recalculated on a planetary basis. (Kline, Dyer-Witheford, and de Peuter 2003, 75)

In these authors’ accounts, we can indeed read specific production, consumption, and labour relations through a particular cultural commodity.

Parallels can be identified between the video game industry and the digitalizing music industry. Popular music is an ‘experiential’ and ‘portable’ commodity; aside from star artists, musical labour is generally remunerated unfairly; record companies aggressively promote a rapid turnover of ‘new releases’ and associated merchandise; and increasingly calculated production and marketing systems are central to the major music companies’ business models amid digitalization. My focus here, however, is on the emergence of popular music as type of branded entertainment.

I contend that promotional ubiquitous musics meet Lee’s criteria, although I make a key amendment; I find especially illuminating the, in many cases, complementary dynamics between the key characteristics of commodities listed above as binary oppositions. While promotional ubiquitous musics are characterized by pliability, fluidity, and instantaneity, they are functional commodities. We have seen how customization is not opposite to standardization but instead allows for the imposition of different types of standards, and how style is not opposite to but rather has been subsumed by and is defined in terms of utility. As amalgams of music and marketing, promotional ubiquitous musics arguably constitute what Lee terms ‘compound
commodities’: “the merging of two or more previously discrete commodities into a single good. The unification or compression of previously discrete needs effectively opens up both the ontological and physical spaces that are required for the creation and development of new needs and therefore new use-values” (Lee 1993, 134). In such a fashion, the use of popular music as promotion in the post-Fordist era has allowed for the intensified capitalization of music and recordings artists’ reputations, as music companies exploit musical rights in the business-to-business licensing marketplace and brands exploit the associations and affects tied to music as they build ‘brand identities’.

Another noteworthy coupling is corporate ‘flexibility’ and labour rigidity. While enabling maximum capitalization, the pairing of post-Fordist flexibility with Fordist rationalization has also contributed to deepening precariousness and subordination for working artists. On the one hand, the type of flexibility offered by consumer brands brings with it a decided lack of commitment to building artists’ careers. Brandamp’s Bands and Brands study likens advertising partnerships with recording artists to corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and suggests that “[t]here is a need for brands to commit to a longer-term relationship of care and nurture” (Brandamp 2008, 58). Such a commitment is rare. On the other hand, the institutionalization of multiple rights deals illustrates how “the rigid enforcement powers on which companies still depend for their control of labour are not only not inimical to corporate flexibility, they are central to it” (Stahl 2010, 349). The flexibility gained by music companies comes at the expense of artists. In Chapter 7, I further consider the effects of this ideal-type commodity form for working artists.
6.8 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have analyzed changing marketing and monetization strategies across the digitalizing music industry and the advertising industry. A wide range of players, including record companies, music publishers, music branding firms, advertisers, and music supervision companies have found common ground in terms of the way they view music as a thoroughly instrumental value-generating property. Although we have seen a radical expansion of cultural diversity in the post-Fordist era, we have also witnessed a rationalization of that diversity; popular music has been harnessed to brand objectives and ‘difference’ itself has been positioned as a source of value creation. As Gunster points out, “The culture industry thrives on the organized seeding of vast fields of semiotic difference that maximise the volume and rate at which commodities are harvested and exchanged” (Gunster 2007, 310). Today, these fields of “semiotic difference” fall under a wider logic of cultural commodification and branding. The promotional ubiquitous musics that result from contemporary music branding practices provide the soundtrack to contemporary ‘promotional culture’; they feed into the “giant vortex in which, for producers and receivers of culture alike, all signifying gestures are swallowed up” (Wernick 1991, 187).

In this context, I contend that the culture industry thesis remains applicable; the positioning of popular music as branded entertainment simply marks a new stage in culture’s intensifying commodification. While the dynamism of post-Fordism has fostered the development of new sites and forms of cultural production, the ever-expanding logic of commodification has also worked to contain them under the
capitalist principle of exchange. In this chapter, I argued that a neo-Adornian framework that also draws on Harvey’s concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ helps to explain the rise and spread of promotional ubiquitous musics. A combination of Fordist and post-Fordist industrial logics are used toward the aim of maximizing profits and, hence, growth. Opening up Lee’s conception a little further, I proposed that promotional ubiquitous musics can serve as an ‘ideal-type’ commodity form under post-Fordism precisely because they capture this regime’s industrial and cultural complexity.

This complexity notwithstanding, under new music branding models, popular music is rendered equivalent and substitutable not just in musical terms but also in terms of the affects and effects it is intended to provoke. Not only is music thoroughly commodified, as we have seen, but music supervisor software has begun to produce ever more self-referential modes of rationalization and standardization. In “Theory of Pseudo-Culture,” Adorno examines the circulation of symphonic works inside the culture industry: “The popularization, which shifts attention to the themes, diverts it from what is essential – the structural course of the music as a whole – to the anatomical, the bits and pieces of individual melodies. Thus what aids the dissemination sabotages what is disseminated” (Adorno [1959] 1993, 32). Given the degree to which music supervision software dissects and orders music according to the criteria desired by corporate brands, it appears that music placements in media and advertisements, key promotional vehicles for popular music in the digital era, likewise sabotage that content. In this promotional model, music must not only be ‘synch-
friendly’; it must also conform to specific music branding search terms, a demand that produces damaging effects for songwriting and, hence, for working artists.
7 CONCLUSIONS: POPULAR MUSIC AS BRANDED BACKGROUND

7.1 Introduction

The rise of promotional ubiquitous musics in the digital era was conditioned by the ever-expanding and deepening processes of the commodification of culture. This dissertation examined the distinct but overlapping music industry and consumer branding strategies that produced this dynamic of intensification. My argument that popular music has been colonized by brands was supported by original interview, music industry conference, and trade publication research and was conceptualized in relation to Max Horkheimer’s and Theodor Adorno’s ‘culture industry’ thesis. The contours and broader social and political consequences of the increasingly instrumentalized popular music commodity form were assessed through the lens of a neo-Adornian critique adapted and amplified by the assessments of post-Fordist political economy thinker David Harvey, social theorist Andrew Wernick, and ‘cultural industries’ scholars.

Drawing on Anahid Kassabian’s term ‘ubiquitous musics’, this dissertation introduced the term ‘promotional ubiquitous musics’ to describe musics deployed for branding purposes. Numerous other terms were employed and examined in addition: artist-brand; new blockbuster model; advertainment; branded entertainment; possessive promotional logic; brand-music associations; brand-music integrations; brand-music partnerships; synch-friendly music; and authenticity-oriented marketing strategies. These terms all point to the asymmetrical power relations characteristic of the
digitalizing music industry, both between recording artists and corporations and across a stratified pool of artists. They signal dynamics of convergence under which cultural logics are subordinated to branding logics. In this concluding chapter, I first review the key arguments advanced in this dissertation, and then turn to future concerns as I discuss the stakes of the music-driven branding paradigm for working artists and for culture at large.

7.2 Artist-Brands as the New Popular Music Commodity

In the digital era, the core popular music commodity is no longer the record, but rather the artist-brand. Chapter 4 outlined the patterns of continuity and change found inside the digitalizing music industry that have led to this shift. A synthesis of interview, industry conference, and trade publication material was used to reveal the changing business strategies and new modes of monetization employed by the music industry. By mapping how profits accrue and to whom within this emerging model, it became clear that ‘common sense’ assertions that the new music industry is a democratizing, open playing field are entirely misleading, and are better understood as legitimizing rhetoric serving to obscure deeper forms of cultural commodification.

While digital technologies have fostered a decentralization of popular music production, a handful of transnational conglomerates continue to monopolize the wealth generated by music; at a time when more music is being released by more recording artists than ever before, we have seen profound music industry concentration, with Sony, Universal, and Warner at the helm. According to Harvey, under post-Fordism, “the tension that has always prevailed within capitalism between monopoly and
competition, between centralization and decentralization of economic power, is being worked out in fundamentally new ways” (Harvey 1990, 159). In recent years, major record companies have compensated for declining CD revenues by significantly expanding business-to-business revenues. These companies, who act as aggregators of multiple revenue streams tied to entire rosters of artists, have effectively shored up oligopolistic market conditions. Indeed, although numerous new players have entered the music business, it remains a “winner-take-all market” (Peoples 2010b). Thus, gains made in terms of increased access to the means to music production and distribution have been counteracted by monetization from above. In many respects, the power structure inherited from the ‘old’ music industry remains intact.

During the era of digital distribution, corporate reliance on stars has deepened as the commodification of music has intensified. In order to counter the instability bred by peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing, music companies now employ what I refer to as a new blockbuster model under which full capitalization of multiple revenue streams is facilitated by ‘360 deals’ or multiple rights recording contracts. These contracts bestow an even greater share of artist-generated profits to music companies, and speak to new depths of recording artist vulnerability; artists have become reliant on just one company to an unprecedented degree.

Important shifts also have occurred in approaches to marketing music via the rise of the artist-brand. According to Universal Music Publishing’s Keith D’Arcy, radio programmers now ask A&R executives, “‘Who’s this artist touring with?’ ... ‘What press has gotten on to them?’ ... and ‘What placements have they had?’” It’s actually
part of the story that we need to tell to radio these days to get them to pay attention to a
new record” (D’Arcy 2012). Music companies seeking to promote artists and
advertising firms wishing to differentiate consumer brands with popular music speak
the same artist-brand language. As CEO of advertising firm Translation, Steve Stoute,
claims, “We’re in the artist brand management business. It’s about finding corporate
partners and matching them with artists to tell their brand story” (in High 2009). Under
this advertising approach, artists are rendered branding vehicles.

7.3 ‘Credible’ Content: The Sound of Branded Entertainment

The biggest mistake is that they [brand marketers] try to bring the artist into the
brand’s culture and what they really need to do is get their brand into the artist’s
culture. (Stoute in High 2009)

Consumer brands’ search for ‘credible’ content has led to a radical widening of
previously established models of artist endorsement. No longer singularly focused on
celebrities, brands also seek out various partnerships with independent and lesser known
artists in an effort to gain cultural legitimacy. Recording artists, in turn, now look to
consumer brands and media properties for marketing exposure and revenue. Chapter 5
charted the intensification of the artist-brand relationship, drawing on Mike
Tunnicliffe’s (I/2010) terms ‘brand-music associations’, ‘brand-music integrations’, and
‘brand-music partnerships’. Brand-music associations involve advertisers’ longstanding
practice of licensing original music by recording artists in an attempt to glean positive
feelings tied to popular music and its cultural significance. Brand-music integrations
constitute a newer approach under which licensing arrangements with consumer or
media brands purportedly serve the purpose of cross-promotion and act as the ‘new
radio’. My analysis demonstrated how this promotional dynamic is actually possessive: music is used to direct attention toward brands and, if successful, is folded into the ‘brand identity’. The brand seizes the symbolic force of the music.

Brands’ desire for an ‘ownable’ sound has produced a shift away from the standard licensing model and toward brand-music partnerships. The rationale behind Chipotle Mexican Grill’s decision to license a Willie Nelson cover version of “The Scientist” for use in a television commercial, as explained by Peter Nashel, captures this new thinking: “If you were just simply to use the Coldplay version, you don’t really get the same equity as if you kind of make it … ownable by Chipotle and specifically by that film [commercial]. It didn’t feel like it was anything that totally special to rent the song” (Nashel 2012). ‘Renting’ music is now so common that brands seek something more novel and strategic. They demand more from recording artists and from music. Brand-music partnerships, which can assume many forms, involve the increasingly calculated pairing of artists and brands and are driven by a desire for the patina of ‘authenticity’. Authenticity in this context constitutes the credibility that consumer brands annex from popular music, and is gauged in terms of the ‘fit’ between artist, brand, and consumer lifestyle. The Chipotle advertisement demonstrates this logic. Because the spot offers a critique of the industrialization of livestock production, and because Nelson’s work with Farm Aid is well known, the fit between the music and the message is ostensibly ‘credible’. Under this strategy, the restaurant franchise attempts to insert itself into this web of positive associations, feelings, and political dispositions. Brand-music partnerships work to entrench brands more deeply into popular music
cultures – not the other way around.Advertisers’ dealings with recording artists are all business, however, and the term ‘partnership’ is a misnomer.

Corporations are not built to share, but rather to maximize returns on investments. This parsimonious orientation has become apparent as consumer brands have taken increasing interest in producing their own content and have exercised their power to drive down fees paid to recording artists. The brand develops the strategy, chooses the artist, and sets the terms of the relationship. For example, according to Marc Altschuler of sound design firm Human Music, Microsoft’s Xbox brand previously licensed music, but has since done an about-face on music licensing and is no longer interested in this strategy for proprietary reasons: “They don’t want to borrow equity off a band…. They don’t want to share any equity…. They really strongly believe that they have the platform to build their own equity and have the music stand for what they want to do” (Altshuler 2012). Amid declining revenues from CD sales, however, recording artists and record companies have become dependent on brands as a source of income. Gabe McDonough, VP, Music Director at Leo Burnett, declares that “[s]omebody’s got to pay the bills…. In 2012, brands are one of the few entities in human culture that are willing to pony up” (in Beltrone 2012). This claim seems disingenuous. As discussed in Chapter 5, brands are no longer willing to “pony up” quite simply because they no longer have to; emboldened by the harsh force of supply and demand, advertisers have their pick of an abundance of music at prices of their choosing. As Barry Coffing warns, “everyone look[s] to licensing as their savior and we’re not” (I/Coffing 2010).
It turns out that the stigma associated with ‘selling out’ actually had a market value insofar as it served to limit the number of artists interested in such opportunities; an artist’s willingness to breach the brand-music divide formerly commanded high fees. In the era of artist-brands and brand-music partnerships, however, popular music is readily available to advertisers. Bargain-hunting brands offer deals to recording artists on a ‘take it or leave’ basis, and because the number of artists hungry for marketing exposure far exceeds the number of opportunities available, negotiation is unnecessary. As a result, lesser known music has been rendered thoroughly substitutable, while stars remain scarce and therefore continue to command high asking prices. In this context, artists face considerable pressure to cave in to the demands of advertisers and even to write upbeat, ‘synch friendly’ music.

7.4 Adorno and Post-Fordist Consumer Culture

The changing industrial contours and convergence of the music and advertising industries produced the rise of promotional ubiquitous musics, which serve, first and foremost, as marketing devices that aid in the post-Fordist management of consumption. Chapter 2 situated promotional ubiquitous musics within consumer culture literature and reviewed neo-Marxian perspectives on the production of consumption, sociological perspectives on modes of consumption, anthropological, literary, and historical perspectives on the pleasures of consumption, and affect theory. Significant here is how the emphasis on cultural meanings tied to consumption found in sociology and cultural studies research is now mirrored in marketing research. Consumer brands have taken an interest in popular music precisely because it holds cultural value and meaning.
Popular music continues in its role as a type of “social cement” defined by its “socio-psychological function” (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 460), but consumer brands attempt to alter the composition of this cement by inserting themselves into the mix.

The examination of Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s ‘culture industry’ thesis provided in Chapter 3 set up the foundation of my neo-Adornian approach, combining the critical theoretical lens of Frankfurt School scholarship with the empirical rigor and attention to detail and difference offered by cultural industries scholarship. I positioned the culture industry thesis not as a theory about culture per se but as a theory on the commodification of everyday life, and then went on to argue that this theory provides a convincing framework for conceptualizing the shrinking distance between popular music and advertising. Simon C. Jones and Thomas G. Schumacher identify “striking parallels” between Fordist Muzak and Adorno’s critique of popular music; this Muzak reflected a science-like approach to songwriting, functioned as a type of “consensus” music at the heart of mainstream culture, and was designed “to be heard without being listened to” (Jones and Schumacher 1992, 160-61). However, as the manufacturing economy shifted toward a service economy, these authors observe, Muzak moved to the foreground and there was a “shift in musical emphasis away from homogenized instrumental versions of pop standards to a greater diversity of musical selections by original artists” (Jones and Schumacher 1992, 164). In Chapter 6, I demonstrated how the changes associated with post-Fordism by no means undermine the longstanding purpose of such musics. While the specific type of music used may have changed, the
function of Muzak and promotional ubiquitous musics are one and the same: the valorization of consumption.

Integrating the theoretical and political-economic scholarship of Harvey into my neo-Adornian framework, I also argued in Chapter 6 that the culture industry thesis remains relevant in a post-Fordist era marked by aesthetic diversity and ‘difference’. By examining new music supervision software, I demonstrated how promotional ubiquitous musics are utterly instrumentalized and interchangeable musics harnessed by consumer brands and media properties. The evolving relationship between brands and recording artists signals the intensification of popular music’s commodification. As such, I argued that Harvey’s concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, which examines the expanded and escalating reach of commodification under neoliberalism, serves as a critical complement to the culture industry thesis. Harvey asserts that the displacement of Fordist durability by post-Fordist ephemerality has destabilized cultural meanings and the uses to which they are put (Harvey 1990, 292). The proliferation of promotional ubiquitous musics reflects corporate brands’ attempts to capitalize on the market for meaning and to commodify affects tied to popular music. In light of this, I slightly amended Martyn J. Lee’s description of post-Fordism’s ‘ideal-type’ commodity form and nominated promotional ubiquitous musics as one such commodity; these musics combine Fordist rigidity and post-Fordist flexibility in a manner that renders them especially productive for corporations. Yet, this new commodity form speaks to new depths of subordination for working artists and for culture, as I will discuss shortly.
Adorno argues that the content of popular music assumes inattentive listening on the part of audiences and negotiates a balance between attention-grabbing novelty and ‘naturalness’ (Adorno [1941] 2002c, 444). Music-driven branding practices reflect similar thinking. According to Steve Goodman, “In its infinite differentiation of product ranges, branding plays with a combination of familiarity plus novelty, a past-futurity, installing new memory that you have not phenomenologically experienced in order to produce a certain receptivity to brand triggers” (S. Goodman 2010, 153). In recent years, however, audience attention has become ever more elusive. The rise of cross-platform media consumption and ‘time shifting’ via digital video recorders and streaming media has produced considerable audience fragmentation and a new ability to delete and evade advertisements. Amid the torrent of digital media products available, advertisers complain that while youth audiences still consume media voraciously, they offer the content itself only “constant partial attention” (Pankraz in Nielsen 2010).

The market value of attention itself is examined within the growing field of ‘attention economics’, which is premised on a conceptualization of human attention as a scarce and, hence, valuable commodity (Davenport and Beck 2002, 220; see also Goldhaber 1997). The advertiser grievance regarding audience inattention belies the fact that marketers now have access to a vast reservoir of digital data on consumers, which aids in the development of hyper-targeted brand messaging based on user interests coupled with demographic and geographic data (see Turow 2011). The ability

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48 Advertiser whinging about audience distraction is not new. As Adorno notes, “An American specialist in radio advertising, who indeed prefers to make use of the musical medium, has expressed scepticism as to the value of this advertising, because people have learned to deny their attention to what they are hearing even while listening to it” – a claim Adorno finds “questionable” (Adorno [1938] 2002a, 289).
to finely segment markets and commodify ever-new sites reinforces, rather than
contradicts, the validity of neo-Adornian critique. Such digital marketing, a topic I will
address in future research, expands the practices and reach of commodification.

7.5 The Discourse of ‘Selling Out’ and the Force of Commodification

Ten years ago, if you went to a label and you said “I want to give away …
100,000 tracks to users for free on Pepsi cans,” they would say, “No way – our
artists don’t want to be associated with Pepsi. That’s a sell-out.” … They were
really precious about where their artists were seen and what products they were
endorsing. And now it’s an opportunity. (I/Koren 2009)

Why did the erosion of the boundary between popular music and brand worlds
occur in the digital era if the commodification of music has been occurring for well over
a century? It could be argued that the overt and unabashed commercialism we see
today had been held in check by cultural and social forces and attitudes in previous
decades. The stigma associated with ‘selling out’ that formerly lay at the heart of rock
culture (Frith 1981, 41) helped govern the distance between popular music and
advertising (albeit contingently, precariously, and at times hypocritically), especially
across genres that aspire to art status. As Keir Keightley points out, the relationship
between rock and commercialism always has been contradictory:

One of the great ironies of the second half of the twentieth century is that while
rock has involved millions of people buying a mass-marketed, standardised
commodity (CD, cassette, LP) that is available virtually everywhere, these
purchases have produced intense feelings of freedom, rebellion, marginality,
oppositionality, uniqueness and authenticity. (Keightley 2001, 109)

As we have seen, those intense feelings flagged by Keightley, available for purchase in
commodity form, have proved especially appealing to advertisers looking to animate
and differentiate brand identities.
Perhaps the most central factor in the demise of the discourse of selling out is the ‘crisis’ of popular music’s commodity form inaugurated by digital distribution and P2P file sharing. When records were profitable, merchandising and licensing revenue remained ancillary, whereas in an increasingly post-CD marketplace, these commodities and rights have moved from the periphery to the centre. Given this, it is not so much that opportunistic or cynical artists have betrayed some sacrosanct notion of ‘selling out’, but rather that a strong business rationale now exists for breaching the advertising-culture divide. Changes in business thinking have informed cultural assumptions within popular music circles. Due to their increasing vulnerability in an already stratified music industry, working artists have become more receptive to music licensing and endorsement deals, often from a place of resignation.

Distinguishing between degrees of commercialism has always been problematic, however, which is precisely why the culture industry thesis proves so incisive. A convincing argument can be made that a record or concert is decidedly different in terms of its cultural content than a T-shirt and other such merchandise. However, the assumption that a Backstreet Boys lunchbox somehow signifies pop alienation whereas a Beatles Yellow Submarine lunchbox does not, or that an ’N Sync ‘doll’ reflects mass conformity whereas an Ozzy Osbourne ‘action figure’ communicates anti-mass individualism, is questionable indeed. Such claims are related to gendered assumptions about pop and rock and the disparagement of popular musical forms associated with women and girls (see Coates 1997, 2003; Meier 2008). Such distinctions are also tied to notions of rock meritocracy that suggest that excessive merchandising and wealth is
justifiable and even well deserved if the music is good enough. The point made in this dissertation, however, is that divisions within and across commodities always have been tenuous, fragile, and near the brink of collapse. The decline of the CD was the tipping point.

This perspective aligns with Tiziana Terranova’s thinking about the ongoing “economic experimentation with the creation of monetary value out of knowledge/culture/affect” (Terranova 2013, 38) more generally:

This process is different from that described by popular, left-wing wisdom about the incorporation of authentic cultural moments: it is not, then, about the bad boys of capital moving in on underground subcultures or subordinate cultures and incorporating the fruits of their production (styles, languages, music) into the media food chain…. Incorporation is not about capital descending on authentic culture but a more immanent process of channeling collective labor (even as cultural labor) into monetary flows and its structuration within capitalist business practices. (Terranova 2013, 38)

Popular music was always already commodified. Yet Bethany Klein is right to argue that “[d]ismissing the art versus commerce divide as constructed and the ‘sell-out’ debates as antiquated conceals the importance of acknowledging and investigating tensions within and between the popular music and advertising worlds. When fans and critics perceive this line to be crossed, it is not necessary to redraw or reject the line, but to assess who is in control and to what end” (Klein 2009, 139). As we have seen, major music companies, consumer brands, and media properties are firmly in control of cultural production, and use popular music and recording artists as profit-generating properties and as vehicles for achieving strategic branding objectives.
7.6 Promotional Ubiquitous Musics as a Post-Fordist ‘Ideal-type’ Commodity Form: The Task Ahead for Working Artists

As an ‘ideal-type’ commodity form under post-Fordism – a commodity form that reveals “[q]ualitative changes to the intensity and structure of labour and means of production” (Lee 1993, 133) – promotional ubiquitous musics speak to the intensifying vulnerability and insecurity of musical labourers today, rendering them emblematic of neoliberal labour politics. Precarious labour conditions have been foisted on aspiring and non-star artist-brands from two directions: via restrictive new contracting conventions from music companies and (in theory) hands-off partnerships with consumer brands. Corporations, as profit-maximizing entities, make decisions based on self-interest; they seek the best possible terms for their own bottom lines. As a result, ‘flexibility’ under the new music industry model refers to an artist’s willingness to comply with corporations’ demands – to sign away more rights and to work for less money. It refers to capitulation to and participation in a race to the bottom.

A notable distinction between the ‘old’ music industry model and its digitalizing successor is that record companies’ interests previously aligned with the interests of recording artists on their labels in some regards. Quite simply, both benefited from record sales.49 Consumer brands, on the other hand, have a very different stake in popular music. Unless brands sign artists to more formal record deals, they have no direct interest in the profitability of a given artist; their interest is limited to that artist’s cultural relevance to particular target markets. As a result, non-star artists are even more vulnerable to the whims of what has always been a trend-oriented marketplace.

49 The degree to which each party profited varied, of course. As we saw in Chapter 4, recording contract terms illustrate how record companies’ and recording artists’ interests are at the same time quite different.
And, according to music supervisor Amy Fritz, “The market trends are … moving so quickly…. Instead of … people saying ‘Oh, that’s so last year,’ people are saying ‘Oh, that’s so last week’” (I/Fritz 2009). Music supervisor David Hayman recounts how brands called him requesting “that Juno sound” two weeks after the movie’s release (I/Hayman 2009). As their target audiences’ tastes change, so too do brands’ tastes.

An overreliance on novelty arguably contributes to promotional ubiquitous musics’ unstable value (Meier 2011, 409-410). What is more, if a spot featuring a recording artist becomes too popular, it can backfire and the music used can become a source of annoyance. For example, in 2010, YouTube-based indie group Pomplamoose were featured in holiday advertisements for Hyundai. These television commercials, which were filmed in the group’s own garage and show the band members frolicking around the car, were initially lauded as effective alternative music marketing (see Lefsetz 2010). However, according to Grant McCracken, the spot “went from odd to charming to familiar to contemptible to irritating in about 3 weeks” (McCracken 2011). In his Seattle Times blog entry, “How Pomplamoose Made Me Hate Christmas, Hyundai, and Pomplamoose,” Mike Seely criticizes the singer’s “generic-Grey’s Anatomy-chick-voice,” among other things (Seely 2010). Sexist language aside, this complaint suggests that the formerly novel, ‘synch-friendly’ Grey’s Anatomy sound has since become too expected, homogeneous, and bland.

Within today’s dominant music model, artists face an unenviable choice between multiple rights deals from major labels and partnerships with consumer brands that often come with no formal strings attached. A downside of the brand-partnership model
is that, in addition to the ways that they delimit artists’ repertoire choices, consumer brands have little vested interest in providing the support necessary to cultivate career longevity. Furthermore, there are tacit strings tied to branding agreements. Hayman characterizes the licensing agreement as “an intellectual property consent form” and indicates that “you better buy into that brand, or else you’ll be called out on it” (Hayman 2009). Jake Hurn of Cornerstone noted on a North by Northeast conference panel that his advertising firm will “rarely go near artists that have talked shit about brands” (Hurn 2011). At the same panel, Panos Panay of Sonicbids (2011b) shared a cautionary tale; GAP was agitated and concerned when an act had the gall to post and discuss the terms and conditions of their agreement with the brand online. Of course, if the terms were fair, why would GAP be so upset?

The ideal artist within the new branding template has no political voice or must agree to be silent. He or she must endorse the capitalist status quo, even if tacitly. The music branding trend threatens to silence more oppositional musics, not because critical or dissenting musics do not exist (they do), but because they may be drowned out by the sounds of the upbeat musics that permeate media and seep into commercial spaces.

While the ‘indie’ aesthetic remains valuable to brands, according to Panay, “It’s the aggregate that is interesting to them [brands], rather than the one individual small band…. If they want to sponsor one big artist, they’ll tend to go … with a bigger name” (Panay 2011a). “Sharecropping the Long Tail,” a blog post by Nicholas Carr on the economics of social media, captures a key dynamic also at work inside the digitalizing music industry, especially among non-star artists:
What’s being concentrated … is not content but the economic value of content. MySpace, Facebook, and many other businesses have realized that they can give away the tools of production but maintain ownership over the resulting products. One of the fundamental economic characteristics of Web 2.0 is the distribution of production into the hands of the many and the concentration of the economic rewards into the hands of the few. It’s a sharecropping system … It’s only by aggregating those contributions on a massive scale … that the business becomes lucrative. (Carr 2006)

The popularization of digital recording technologies is not a threat to music companies. In fact, it is a source of new efficiencies derived from cheap or free content for music companies and consumer brands alike. “We have a world of advertising that is desperate for innovation and creative partnerships,” McCracken points out, and we also have “a world of cultural producers, millions of people at this point, who are very good at producing meanings” (McCracken 2011). In the end, power is monopolized by the aggregator.

As a first step away from this “sharecropping system” and toward more just models of remuneration for musical labour, we must insert the working artist into a file-sharing debate that is framed as a battle of corporations against consumers. The common denominator here, once again, is self-interest, as Jonathan Sterne explains:

Most positions in the file-sharing debate are unable to articulate a strong ethical position beyond self-interest. The interests in the recording industry speak for themselves as copyright holders, and not for the musicians they claim to represent or for music itself. But the same must be said of the people who enable or participate in file-sharing. Often enough, they too have themselves in mind, either as industries who affect music transectorially and find profit as recordings slip out from inside the money economy, or as users who simply get something for free because they do not want to pay for it and do not have to (though they pay for the tools and network access that enables file-sharing). (Sterne 2012, 217)

Unless we only want to hear the voices of heavily promoted artist-brands on the one hand or of artists with trust funds on the other, the working conditions of musical
labourers and the matter of fair compensation for their work must now forcefully enter into discussions about file sharing. Unfortunately, artists have been put in a difficult position. In the culture of ‘free’ content (free for consumers but not for cultural labourers), even asking to be paid for records can come across as pro-corporation and, hence, anti-freedom and simply uncool.

Conversation in the future must focus on how artists might earn a living wage without the ‘assistance’ of record labels or consumer brands. Substantive change will not come from consumers. Indeed, such an expectation simply reinscribes problematic neoliberal rhetoric regarding ‘consumer choice’ and ‘consumer sovereignty’ that works to mask uneven power relations under capitalism. Consumer solutions cannot remedy the ills of consumer capitalism. Instead, progressive change must be systemic, coming from cultural and social policy and from collective action. Working artists must begin to work together with unions and other collectives to order to have their voices heard and to affect positive change toward the goal of equitable remuneration (even as all involved acknowledge that new forms of recompense will invariably have to take our changing digital circumstances firmly into account).

Such collective actions would benefit enormously from new research undertaken on similar matters in production studies, critical political economy, and studies of cultural labour, digital labour, and free labour. The asymmetrical manner in which the digitalizing cultural industries mete out riches and rewards reflects what Henry A. Giroux refers to as the “winner-take-all philosophy” of “casino capitalism” (Giroux 2008, 55). The increasing subjugation and substitutability of cultural workers,
labourers hitherto granted an atypical degree of autonomy (Hesmondhalgh 2007, *passim*), speaks volumes about the character of work under neoliberalism. ‘Flexibility’ exacerbates alienation.

7.7 **Background Music or Background Noise? Forging New Beginnings**

The first characteristic of background music is that you don’t have to listen to it…. It seeps into the murmur of conversations. (Adorno [1934] 2002b, 507)

Because promotional ubiquitous musics are used to direct audience attention toward brands, they actively work against attentive listening. While particular songs used in particular brandscapes or mediascapes may demand attention and push their way into the foreground, as a whole, these musics are pushed into the background as a result of their sheer ubiquity and decidedly jingle-like function. As promotion, popular music has been rendered banal. According to Anahid Kassabian, “From the mixing of instruments in talk-show bands to the volume of music in restaurants, distinctions between foreground and background sound are slowly disappearing and, with them, the distinctions among noise, sound and music” (Kassabian 2003, 91). Within advertising music, distinctions between original music by recording artists and material written explicitly for commercials are also becoming unclear; these musics seem to imitate each other. In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali argues that ‘mass’ music has been rendered a type of “background noise” that is “channel[ed] toward consumption” (Attali 1985, 111). While I do not characterize promotional ubiquitous musics as noise, these musics, which are not chosen by the listener, do summon a type of listening that is distinct from musics consciously selected by the listener. Even
according to music supervisor Fritz, music is now just part of our “always on, all-access” environment and therefore is not as “special” (I/Fritz 2009).

As singular sounds are folded into a universalizing promotional infrastructure, the particularity of popular music as a cultural form is compromised. This dynamic is not inevitable, however. It is my hope that this dissertation helps to start a new conversation about the prospects and perils of the post-CD marketplace. Giroux is right to assert that “[a]s the prevailing discourse of neoliberalism seizes the public imagination, there is no vocabulary for progressive social change” (Giroux 2008, 55). The critical lens and vocabulary lent by Adorno’s scholarship on the commodification of culture offers a fecund starting point. By revealing the political economy of contemporary digital forms of capitalist cultural production, we begin to see the ways they operate as forms of domination rather than democratization or artistic liberation. Once this becomes clear, we can begin to chart paths toward more just modes of creating, organizing, and sharing culture. As Adorno argues, “As long as it doesn’t break off, thinking has a secure hold on possibility. Its insatiable aspect, its aversion to being quickly and easily satisfied, refuses the foolish wisdom of resignation” (Adorno [1969] 2005c, 292). The opportunity for critique is always the ground for optimism.
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Passman, Donald S. 2009. All you need to know about the music business. 7th ed. New York: Free Press.

———. 2012. All you need to know about the music business. 8th ed. New York: Free Press.


Interviews (I/…)

I/director of licensing at video game publisher. 2010. Interview by author. Los Angeles, CA. November 15.
I/Grierson, Don. 2010. Interview by author. Los Angeles, CA. November 16.


Interviews not cited:


APPENDICES
Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear [name of interview participant],

My name is Leslie M. Meier, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Western Ontario’s PhD program in Media Studies. I am conducting my PhD thesis research on recent changes in the music industry that have been spurred, in part, by the emergence of online distribution. My main area of interest is in changing models of popular musical production and promotion, including the increasing employment of copromotional and licensing agreements forged between the music industry and other media and consumer brands. To tackle this topic, I will be interviewing key executives such as yourself who work for: (1) entertainment corporations in general or record labels in particular; (2) advertising agencies and brand managers; and (3) new digital marketers and distributors of music. In addition to interviewing executives based out of Toronto, I will be talking with executives who work in New York and Los Angeles in order to come to understand the different parties’ perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing the producers and promoters of music today.

I would like to extend to you an invitation to take part in this important and timely project. Participation in this research would entail taking part in one private, hour-long, face-to-face interview. I understand the demanding nature of your work and the importance of your time and am quite willing to accommodate your schedule and timelines. The Toronto-specific portion of this research will take place during April, May, and June. I am based out of Toronto and can easily arrange to meet with you at your office or at an alternate location of your choosing. If you are willing to agree to meet for an interview, please know that throughout the interview process, your participation will remain entirely voluntary. Furthermore, the results of my interview with you will be kept confidential and your identity will be kept anonymous, unless you offer written permission to disclose your identity. This interview program will offer you the opportunity to share your expertise and voice your opinion on the direction of a highly valued and significant cultural industry undergoing a period of intense transition.

I can be reached at ________ or ________. I would be glad to address any questions or concerns you may have and to send on any additional information you may require. I am excited at the prospect of having you involved with this research and hope you decide to come on board.

Best regards,

Leslie M. Meier
PhD Candidate, Media Studies
The University of Western Ontario
Appendix B: Letter of Information and Consent

Re: Academic research project, “Understanding Identities, Segmenting Audiences: Changing Dynamics of Popular Music Production and Promotion”

Dear ______________:

Please accept this letter of information about our upcoming interview, as per our previous conversations. As previously noted, your participation will contribute to PhD thesis research on recent changes in the music industry, and on changing models for producing, promoting, and distributing popular music in particular. Specifically, it will consider how the cross-promotional and licensing agreements that the music industry is pursuing with other media and brands are shaping the marketing of both music and consumer items. This research will involve interviews with you and with others who represent entertainment corporations, record labels, music publishers, advertising agencies, brand managers, music supervisors, and new digital distributors of music. Interview participants will be from New York, Los Angeles, Toronto, and other major North American centers.

Our interview will be a private, one-on-one conversation at ______________ on __________ at _______. An audio-recorder will be used to record the discussion for my later consultation. Tapes, MP3 files, and written transcripts of our conversation—transcribed by me—will be securely stored within a locked filing cabinet during the writing and analysis of this study, and will be destroyed within five years of this research project’s completion, if you so request.

Throughout the interview process, your participation remains entirely voluntary. Be assured that you have the right to refuse to participate, to refuse to answer any questions, and to withdraw from the study at any time with no consequences, should you be so inclined. The results of my interview with you will be kept confidential and your identity will be kept anonymous, unless you offer written permission to disclose your identity via a separate waiver/letter, which I will make available to you. The nature of your comments, however, may reveal your identity or the identity of your organization—a matter I will work with you to address if you express concern or hesitation. If you would like to change or amend your responses prior to project finalization, this can be arranged.

If you choose to grant permission to disclose your identity, you will retain the authority to indicate which (if any) information you would feel more comfortable keeping off the record. At your request, you will have the opportunity to review and comment on my transcriptions of our interview prior to the finalization of this research, although the final interpretations of those transcriptions and my findings remain my responsibility.
The Research Ethics Board at The University of Western Ontario requires researchers to specify to potential interview subjects what risks might be associated with the research being undertaken. There are no known risks involved with participating in this research. In fact, research participants may find gratification in being involved in a project that is anticipated to be of interest to both an academic and professional/industry readership. Note that the Research Ethics Board at The University of Western Ontario may contact you directly to ask about your participation in the study. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of the study you may contact the Office of Research Ethics by telephone at ___________ or by email at ___________.

By signing this document, you consent to the conditions and outcomes of the interview as described above. Please keep a copy of this letter of information and consent for your own records. I appreciate your participation in this research and would be happy to provide you with further information. I look forward to our meeting.

___________________  __________  __________________  __________
Researcher’s Signature  Date  Participant’s Signature  Date

Leslie M. Meier  
PhD Candidate, Media Studies  
University of Western Ontario
Appendix C: Interview Guide

Before we begin, I want to assure you once again that throughout the interview process, your participation remains entirely voluntary, and that you have the right to refuse to participate, to refuse to answer any questions, and to withdraw from the study. The results of my interview with you will be kept confidential and your identity will be kept anonymous unless you offer written permission to disclose your identity. I have a consent form on hand that would enable me to accommodate such a request. Also, I want to remind you that I will be using an audio-recorder to record our discussion for my later consultation.

I’m going to start out by asking you a few broader questions about both the music industry and the advertising businesses today. After that, we’ll zero in on some questions focused on cross-promotional and licensing deals.

1. Tell me a little bit about the work you do. Could you describe for me the types of partnerships you coordinate?

2. From your vantage point, how has the business of selling music changed in recent years? What factors have led to these changes?

3. What do you perceive as key threats facing the music industry today? What new opportunities face the music industry today?

4. What strengths and weaknesses do new content aggregators and digital distributors of music offer?

5. How do you characterize the relationship between music and mobile media? Other media, such as video games?

6. What revenue streams look most promising as the music industry moves forward? Let’s turn to the topics of marketing and advertising.

7. From your perspective, has the practice of marketing both music and consumer brands changed in recent years? If so, in what ways?

8. On a related note, from your vantage point, has the advertising business changed in recent years? If so, in what ways?

9. What role do you think music plays in branding strategies today?

10. Could you describe for me the pace at which decisions regarding promotional agreements are made? What types of timelines do you normally follow?

11. How do executives such as yourself go about identifying cool new trends? What type of pressure, if any, do you feel with respect to promoting the “next big thing”?
12. What types of research do you conduct to better get to know your target market? Is your audience research based on demographics, etc. or is it more intuitive?

13. In your opinion, what is the relationship between music and consumer emotions?

14. How would you characterize the relationship between music, brands, and how consumers or audiences imagine themselves? How would you characterize the relationship between music and how youth imagine themselves?

It’s time for us to zero in on the topic of licensing agreements, cross-promotional deals, etc. even more.

15. What would you say are the strengths and weaknesses of pursuing licensing agreements with recording artists?

16. Who benefits most from cross-promotional agreements and licensing agreements? Is it record labels, or is it publishers, or is it brands, or is it musicians? Do record labels or artists retain more authority in such cross-promotional arrangements?

17. What would you say are the pros and cons associated with pursuing licensing arrangements with independent artists rather than established artists?

18. What are the advantages and disadvantages of licensing bands rather than commissioning composers to write jingles to mimic or replicate currently popular sounds, beats, or vibes?

19. I remember when I was growing up the notion of “selling out” had a lot of cultural resonance and was wondering if you think it does today? If so, with whom? If no, why do you think this is?

20. Do you foresee the relationship between music and branding changing in the near future? If so, how?

One more question.

21. Various people in the university and in business have observed that people listen to popular music more and more while they’re consuming other entertainment media, such as television and the Internet, rather than on its own. What are your thoughts on this based on your experiences? Is this characterization accurate? If so, what would you suggest are consequences of such a trend?

22. I’m so grateful for the time you took to speak with me today. Are there any other comments you would like to add or insights you’d like to offer me before we finish up?
Appendix D: Ethics Approval and Renewal

Office of Research Ethics
The University of Western Ontario
Room 4180 Support Services Building, London, ON, Canada N6A 5C1
Telephone
Website:

Western

Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. J. Burston
Review Number: 15990S
Review Date: March 06, 2009
Review Level: Expedited

Protocol Title: Understanding Identities, Segmenting Audiences: Changing Dynamics of Popular Music Production and Promotion

Department and Institution: Faculty of Information & Media Studies, University of Western Ontario
Sponsor: SSHRC-SOCIAL SCIENCE HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL
Ethics Approval Date: March 30, 2009
Expiry Date: February 28, 2010

Documents Reviewed and Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information and Consent, Email Recruitment Letters (2) - (known address, unknown address); Telephone Script

Documents Received for Information:

This is to notify you that the University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the NMREB:

a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
b) all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
c) new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

Chair of NMREB: Dr. Jerry Paquette

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

☐ Grace Kelly ☐ Janice Sutherland ☐ Elizabeth Wamboldt ☐ Denise Grafton

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.
Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. J. Burston
Review Number: 159905
Review Date: February 24, 2010
Revision Number: 1
Approved Local # of Participants: 0
Review Level: Expedited
Protocol Title: Understanding Identities, Segmenting Audiences: Changing Dynamics of Popular Music Production and Promotion
Department and Institution: Faculty of Information & Media Studies, University of Western Ontario
Sponsor: SSHRC-SOCIAL SCIENCE HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL
Ethics Approval Date: February 24, 2010
Expiry Date: May 31, 2011
Documents Reviewed and Approved: Revised study end date.
Documents Received for Information:

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above referenced revision(s) or amendment(s) on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g., change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

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   a) changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
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Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

Chair of NMREB: Dr. Jerry Paquette
FDA Ref. #: IRB 00000941

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Grace Kelly
Janice Sutherland
Elizabeth Wambolt
Denise Grafton

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.
**Curriculum Vitae**

**Name:** Leslie M. Meier

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees**

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Related Work
Research Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2010-2012

Lecturer
The University of Western Ontario
2008, 2010

Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2006-2007

Teaching Assistant
Simon Fraser University
2004-2006

Publications:


