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## Interpreting Muzak: Speculations on Musical Experience in Everyday Life

Over the past forty years, Muzak and other forms of programmed music have become something of a sonic scapegrace in American urban culture.<sup>1</sup> Music lovers who subscribe to traditional conceptions of art have tended to reject Muzak largely on aesthetic grounds, claiming it imposes a condition of musical tawdriness on upholders of "good taste." The earliest opponents, who began to speak out publicly around 1950 as Muzak was becoming increasingly conspicuous in everyday life, seemed particularly incensed by its technological component, which they feared would force a form of sonic banality on the public. During a hearing in 1949, for example, *New Yorker* Editor Harold Ross argued in general terms that public broadcasts of recorded sound would create a situation in which "the individual becom[es] the captive of the sound-makers and los[es] the right to choose whether he listens or doesn't listen."<sup>2</sup> Writers toward the left, on the other hand, have often replicated the traditionalist argument, while framing it in the language of Marxist critique. Their views recall Marxist expositions on alienation, and in particular, Adorno's position on the deleterious effects of mass-mediated culture, which he outlined in his famous 1938 essay on music and commodity fetishism.<sup>3</sup> In his book, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, for example, Jacques Attali employed an Adornian interpretation of sound reproduction, characterizing Muzak as an insidious perpetrator of false consciousness.<sup>4</sup> Popular variations on such arguments appeared frequently in the American youth press of the early 1970s

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as fears of the technocracy and rejection of traditional taste consumed the popular imagination. Muzak took a beating both musically and socially, criticized in the main for its genteel interpretations of popular standards, which American youth identified with middle-class suburban life. A recent skit on the NBC television program "Saturday Night Live" captured the still common youth perception of programmed music. After selling his soul for popular fame, guest host Paul Simon is forced to pay the price: he must spend eternity in an elevator listening to a Muzak arrangement of his hit song, "The Sound of Silence."

I relate these commonplace dismissals of Muzak not to set up a straw man, but to expose the character and pervasiveness of criticisms against it. The opinions reflect generally the degree to which forces in post-modern culture—in particular, mass media—have encouraged a leveling of oppositions between high and low artistic categories. This condition has, in turn, produced a greater equalization of institutional cultural authority, and, as a consequence, a weakening of the traditional aesthetic standards through which we evaluate works of art. The leftist perspective reveals additionally a real and laudable concern about the imbalance of power in capitalist societies and, specifically, corporate control of mass culture, which extends influence over public opinion into all social realms, including the arts. In the end, however, these arguments fall short, for they fail to consider the bottom-line issue: real-life responses to Muzak. The traditionalist argument represents the views not of the primary Muzak audience but those of musicians, critics, and committed music lovers who assume, on formalist grounds, that the art object alone determines qualities of aesthetic experience. The leftist position is similarly suspect for it operates under the questionable assumption that macro-level social forces, which erect the conditions of alienation, carry over to the personal, micro level, shaping the details of everyday perception.<sup>5</sup> It makes no sense to observe Muzak according to these positions, which begin with their conclusions firmly in place. The broad appeal of Muzak<sup>6</sup> suggests that, unless we reject it entirely, we need another approach, one that comments on its effect, its function, and the kinds of responses it elicits. When interpreting Muzak, we must focus on the listener rather than the object, observing the ways in which programmed arrangements shape sonic environments and, in turn, public perceptions of everyday life. Indeed, I would argue that Muzak is important chiefly because it places the responsibility of making a meaningful experience in the hands of the listener, while also creating a sonic context that encourages responses that might be liberally defined as aesthetic.

Muzak's promotional literature provides a good starting point for examining its perceptual effect.<sup>7</sup> Since its founding in 1934, the Muzak

corporation has been offering programs of "functional music" that, the literature claims, can help to improve the psychological disposition of its listeners. Couched in the empirical language of experimental psychology, Muzak's literature offers statistical evidence to support its claims. The corporation aims to portray Muzak not as mere background music, but as a psychologically active, sonic accompaniment, carefully designed to remain below the threshold of common attention. As a balm for everyday life, Muzak purportedly works effectively in industrial and public environments, helping to boost employee morale and productivity, while also creating a pleasant environment for the consumer. In the words of Donald O'Neill, a former Muzak Vice President, Muzak is a "non-entertainment" (implying non-artistic) sound form that one is meant "to hear, not listen to."<sup>8</sup> The net effect is an anonymous sound field seemingly devoid of directly perceivable musical meaning.

Muzak's arrangements effectively express this quality of anonymity. Despite recent changes in style and instrumentation—from White-manesque orchestras of woodwinds, brass, and violins to rock-based popular ensembles replete with electric and electronic instruments—the repertory consistently conforms to musical strictures that have earned mass appeal over the years. On the promotional tape "Environmental Music," for example, the programmers include a series of arrangements of currently popular songs scored for rock-oriented ensembles. On the version of Madonna's "Open Your Heart," straightforward readings of the two-part theme, played by pairings of trumpet and alto saxophone, then flute and electric guitar, appear against an accompaniment of sustained brass chords, drum machine (sounding sixteenth-note repetitions of the tonic), and drum set. On Stevie Wonder's "Don't You Worry 'bout a Thing," one hears similarly literal readings of the notated melody performed by varying combinations of big-band instrumentation, accompanied by electric bass and drums. On all the versions, studio musicians employ conventional performance practices that fulfill our common stylistic expectations, often emulating the playing styles of some of the most widely celebrated artists in popular music and commercial jazz.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, while relying on the commercial song repertory for their principal material, Muzak's arrangers omit the vocal parts and lyrics that might call attention to themselves. "The minute you use words," explains Muzak's Jane Jarvis, "you call up contemplative thinking and people begin to have opinions."<sup>10</sup> Vocal parts, she also suggests, would introduce a humanizing element that might attract public notice. Employing severe style constraints, Muzak arrangers and programmers enforce a sense of musical certainty and conformity. They produce through precise means a style devoid of information, of surprise—the epitome of innocuous sound forms.

A brief look at a typical programmed recording will show how these qualities of anonymity are expressed in the musical work. Bruce Johnston's "I Write the Songs" is a simple verse/chorus song that became a number-one hit for Barry Manilow after he recorded his piano/vocal version in 1976. On the recording, Manilow plays and sings the verse/chorus sequence three times, replacing the third verse with a "B" theme or interlude. On a recently-broadcast programmed version, the arranger not only employs the same formal design, but accentuates that design with stereotyped conventions of studio orchestral arranging.<sup>11</sup> In the first verse, a flutist plays the eight-bar melody, accompanied by quiet piano block chords. In the chorus, a string section states the theme against a background of bass and drums. The logic of this textural sequence—from a sparse piano/horn duo in the verse to a dynamic orchestral "answer" in the chorus—determines subsequent verse/chorus statements, with a trombonist playing the lead in the second verse and a trumpeter picking it up in the third; the full ensemble joins in to restate the third chorus. The transparency and obviousness of the arrangement reveals, paradoxically, complexity in intent. Through conventional means, the arranger reproduces literally both the melody and form of a highly familiar popular song, thereby minimizing the introduction of new—and potentially interesting—musical stimuli. Yet the arranger also varies the texture by changing instrumentation and by employing typical arranging conventions that, while innocuous and banal, help to reduce monotony and keep forward motion steady. Accordingly, the programmed arrangement maintains a delicate balance between interest and convention, preserving the work's anonymity even as it exists so centrally within the everyday sonic landscape.

One may speculate that Muzak's arrangements are so successful because they reinforce a cultural vision of the well-assimilated American. The scores seem like sonic abstractions of our common conception of an American mainstream, expressing, like a maudlin Hollywood film, a one-sided vision of an ordered, simple world. Muzak arrangements communicate a sense of resolute calm and predictability; they lack complex expressions of feeling, suggesting metaphorically the courteous pleasantries of polite public encounters. Muzak sounds "happy," and only happy; its makers rely on accepted conventions of popular music in order to avoid consciously the expression of a wide range of emotion. (The epithet "*easy listening*" seems, in this light, remarkably appropriate.) Notably, there is a distinct lack of abrasive tone colors, harmonic ambiguity, rhythmic complexity, and swing that might make overt reference to musics outside the normative order. Furthermore, programmed music's reliance on commonplace instrumentation—the studio concert orchestra, the Hollywood big band, and standard pop small groups, all of which serve as fixtures of middle-class musical

life—underscores the sense of compliance and order it seeks to convey. Muzak exists in the realm of abstraction, decidedly void of the humanizing qualities we tend to associate with the musical work.

Muzak's means of transmission and reproduction complements the anonymous quality of the arrangements. Broadcast over multi-speaker public address systems, the recorded program lacks physical locus. This eliminates association with any visual corollary, even an inanimate object such as a jukebox, a stereo, a record, or an album cover. Consequently, in this simplest and most basic way, Muzak resists direct, conscious attention, for it avoids the primary sense—sight—with which we perceive and shape the world. Muzak disrupts the listener's ability to objectify and spatialize experience, to bring coherence and order to the sound. And because memory relies exceedingly on visual association, it interferes with our ability to build a historical relationship between sound and the self.

Muzak also reinforces its quality of anonymity through reliance on continuity. Whereas some purely sonic phenomena call attention to themselves through intermission or volume (for example, an air horn), Muzak, broadcasting continually and quietly below the dynamic level of normal speech, "hides" from the listener, becoming a kind of sonic wallflower, or as it has been described pejoratively, wallpaper music. On the other hand, in industrial settings where an individual may work for long stretches of time, Muzak broadcasts are alternated every quarter hour with segments of silence in order to avoid attracting attention through sheer monotony. In fact, Muzak's only potentially conspicuous quality is its low fidelity, the result of transmission over public-address systems via telephone lines, and more recently, FM-band radio. Yet the association with mechanization tends mainly to reinforce Muzak's impersonality.

The disruption of sonic-visual relationships and subversion of overt emotional expression effectively reduce the humanizing qualities we expect to encounter during a musical experience. Interference with visual and human associations correspondingly eliminates the presence of the artist and performer from the art work. Muzak carries this situation to an extreme by eliminating listener choice and control and removing music from the concert hall, where performer-audience interaction traditionally takes place. It creates a situation in which music becomes commonplace, displaced from its historical role as the centerpiece of ritual, forced into the realm of everyday objects. Muzak epitomizes the reproduced form, shed of all personal, idiosyncratic, and human qualities—qualities of authenticity, of originality. As a consequence, Muzak lacks the fundamental mystifying qualities of the art work, what Walter Benjamin calls its "aura," which represents his-

torically the personality of the composer, the performer, and the performance act.<sup>12</sup>

Opponents would, of course, dismiss Muzak precisely on these grounds. Most critics who tend to prefer art forms such as jazz, blues, and "new music," that rival normative styles, wholeheartedly reject expressions that appear to reinforce bourgeois cultural values. Furthermore, many educated Americans, particularly those born after World War II, mimic such arguments even though they at the same time create their own background musics with radios, stereos, and televisions at home. (In fact, at least some of these people *enjoy* Muzak, just as they enjoy junk food and television kitsch, but admit it only begrudgingly.) I don't think that appreciating Muzak necessarily signifies a condition of aesthetic philistinism or that upholders of high critical standards must purge themselves of unabashedly conformist sound forms. The two operate in very separate realms, each associated with different kinds of musical experience. In the concert hall the music lover responds emotionally, intellectually, and, one would hope, critically to the formal character of the musical work. It is a reflective musical experience. When encountering Muzak, however, that same individual responds to the way in which Muzak interacts with the total environment. It is a non-reflective musical experience. Clearly, then, when observing Muzak, we must consider the experience broadly, examining not just the intricacies of the musical form but the way the sound form elicits response regardless of its significance and worth on purely artistic grounds. At the risk of constructing an argument on the basis of a seemingly inherent contradiction, I will propose that Muzak, by transposing a sonic image of a familiar domestic world into the public space, helps to temper the modern condition of dislocation and dissonance at the same time it metaphorically expresses that condition. Let's examine this theory in some detail.

Sound recording is, and has been, for virtually all Americans, a fundamental aspect of musical life. It represents our common views on what music is thought to be, molding taste, perception, and appreciation. One might even argue that the history of music in the twentieth century is as much a history of sound reproduction as it is of musical works themselves. The mechanism has generated an aesthetic of loudspeaker sound that has transformed the way we hear and listen to music. After the introduction of the commercial disc in 1895, recorded sound quickly acquired a secure footing in American musical life. It soon rivaled and eventually supplanted the piano as the principal form of home musical entertainment, offering convenient, inexpensive, and — with the introduction of electrical recording in 1925 — convincing

sound reproduction of an eclectic repertoire. Already by the 1930s phonographs and table radios had become fixtures in the home; and they grew increasingly conspicuous as such devices improved in quality and affordability. Familiarity began to inspire a variety of novel associations with sound playback devices. Classical music lovers and jazz fans started collecting recordings; by the late 1920s collectors had begun forming the clubs that institutionalized a patently modern hobby. The introduction of stereo and component systems in the late 1950s gave rise to the audiophile, who seemed to find as much pleasure in amplifiers, loudspeakers, and turntables as in the music they reproduced. The development reflected on a more general level the conspicuousness of recorded-sound mechanisms that commonly accompanied middle-class domestic activities. Cheap portable devices of the 1960s could be heard throughout the home, providing a background for common activities and conversation. Repetitions of such experiences increased the familiarity of recorded sound, which became, over time, inextricably linked to one's history, one's self.

Playback mechanisms have tended to acquire special importance during adolescence, when music accompanies the ritual path to adulthood. For the middle-class teenager the phonograph or tape deck frequently occupies a conspicuous place in the bedroom, signifying its vital importance to that period of coming of age. With the home playback device one learns not only a repertoire but an association with an object, a relationship that finds new expressions and meanings in social contexts. For example, among a group of teenage friends, the phonograph often serves as the centerpiece of musical attention, providing a visual component to their listening, an artifact that comes to represent their sense of solidarity and camaraderie. Similarly, at a large gathering such as a party, playback devices tend mainly to make their presence felt aurally, providing an important accompaniment to formative adolescent experiences.

Such experiences with sound reproduction accordingly condition our responses to Muzak. The anonymous sound systems of the public space possess a quality of familiarity representing sonically the low-fidelity radios and phonographs of the home. Field studies have shown that many listeners respond positively to the Muzak sound, which, individuals report, tends to reduce feelings of anxiety and self-consciousness in the public place.<sup>13</sup> These responses suggest that the timbral familiarity of Muzak overshadows any sense of psychic disruption that its visual obscurity might otherwise create.

The Muzak program's emphasis on songs of mass culture affirms this sense of familiarity. Over the years the corporation has offered arrangements of current commercial favorites, show tunes, and light classical works interspersed with standards from the 1920s, 1930s, and



1940s. Past Muzak programs have included versions of "Spoonful of Sugar" (from the film *Mary Poppins*) and Bobby Scott's "A Taste of Honey" alongside classical pops versions of Brahms's "Lullaby" and Victor Herbert's *Babes in Toyland* and fixtures of the standard repertoire: Rodgers and Hart's "My Romance," Vernon Duke's "Autumn in New York," Hoagy Carmichael's "Skylark," and George and Ira Gershwin's "'S Wonderful."<sup>14</sup> Recent programs have included similar works along with versions of the current popular repertoire. One also hears on these broadcasts originally composed material that, while unfamiliar melodically, maintains the same stylistic and textural familiarity that listeners find so appealing. Muzak's producers continually revise and expand the Muzak repertoire, eliminating tired versions and introducing new ones—according to one count, up to three hundred a year.<sup>15</sup> By offering a highly varied program of the most conspicuous songs and performance practices of twentieth-century America, Muzak presents a kind of consensus music, a repertoire that brings together those songs and performance practices that have gained the broadest approval from the national public culture—music that stands at the center of the mainstream of American life.

The durability of consensus music fosters in each of us the accumulation of a range of extra-musical associations. Over the years, we have all heard these songs in a variety of arrangements and social contexts, both live and recorded. New performers and new orchestrations offer new interpretations of the songs; this increases visibility while simultaneously altering character and meaning. Some songs may elicit fond memories of a particular place, a relationship, or an event. The same songs might also inspire associations with a painful incident or difficult experience. Over time, songs of the consensus repertoire acquire a variety of meanings and with each hearing those meanings grow deeper and richer. Frequent repetition brings the songs closer spatially and humanly, accompanying the individual in both public and private life. The songs come to epitomize familiarity, being perhaps the most conspicuous organized sound-forms in everyday life. Eventually consensus songs attain a level of familiarity that by association signifies the home, "our corner of the world . . ." where, in the words of Gaston Bachelard, "an entire past comes to dwell."<sup>16</sup> One may speculate that the consensus repertoire becomes an abstraction of the bourgeois conception of domestic life where middle Americans seek to construct a world of intimacy, privacy, and well-being.

Muzak interpretations, then, not only convey an immediate response, but refer to the range of past meanings a song has acquired. When encountering a Muzak version of "Stardust," for example, the middle-aged listener experiences more than that particular arrangement. He or she also recalls a multitude of prior recordings: Isham Jones's popular

arrangement of 1930; Artie Shaw's big-band version (with memorable solos by trombonist Jack Jenney and Shaw himself) from 1940; Billy Ward and the Dominoes' rhythm-and-blues hit from 1957. Together these recorded performances have built the song's history and our culture's relationship to it. Like the mechanism of sound recording, consensus songs occupy a familiar place in American life, becoming fixtures in everyday experience that represent tangible forms of our history. The stripped-down Muzak arrangements, in all their anonymity, as a whole offer collective opportunities to recover past associations. They become vehicles through which we can rediscover, however subliminally, our past selves within their banal forms. The Muzak repertory may be seen as a mirror of our collective realities expressing metaphorically to each of us a personal image of ourselves.

In this way Muzak shifts the role of authority and ownership from the producer to the consumer. It becomes in an everyday, practical sense a public extension of personal, private, and domestic experience. Public broadcasts of the consensus repertory offer to each of us a familiar sonic world onto which we impose our personal associations and experiences. Similarly, the Muzak technology signifies the radio and phonograph, the media with which we "make" music; by association, then, we come to think of Muzak as a public expression of the songs we play and listen to at home. Muzak is at once personal and communal, idiosyncratic and general. It validates itself by expressing both the self and the social, thereby signifying individual and collective experience.

Muzak's means of presentation further familiarizes the public space. The predictability and syntactic concision of the program create a sonic order that imposes itself on the general quality of the environment. Muzak stabilizes and structures the space shaping it into a congruous ordered assemblage. As a syntactically coherent sonic event, Muzak becomes an analog to speech, helping to maintain a directionality in the passage of time. During a social event, moreover, Muzak's "language" substitutes periodically for conversation, filling in the gaps while simultaneously providing a basis for casual conversation to take place. More abstractly, the general stylistic regularity of Muzak functions syntactically as a metaphor for the home; harmonic simplicity and predictability signify popular conceptions of a secure private world. Indeed, Muzak's appeal is double-edged: it communicates publicly both tangible and abstract impressions of the home, impressions that arresting, conspicuous sound would negate. If Muzak were imposing, it would force the listener to confront the new order, disrupting the abstraction of the private world it is meant to suggest. Muzak takes a place alongside other familiar objects of our private worlds. It functions as a special blanket of security that has through transference of complex

personal perceptions come to represent symbolically a public transposition of domestic bourgeois life.

The internalized language of Muzak functions to liberate thought and offer the opportunity for reflection. Because it establishes sonic order, it induces the individual, alone or in a group, to let the mind wander where it pleases, to respond to stimuli in a multitude of ways. The individual is free to think, to rhapsodize, to create, to worry, to wonder. Cognitive exercise is left to the individual, for unlike the complex musical work which demands an intellectual response Muzak liberates as much as it coerces. Of course Muzak arrangements stand outside the realm of "masterpieces" of the musical canon, which over time have acquired meanings that summon a strong aesthetic response. What Muzak does offer is a framework for simple being: it places the responsibility for creating a meaningful experience in the realm of the receiver, circumventing the dichotomy of artist and listener.

From this vantage it would seem that Muzak, while taking the form of syntactically logical and organized sound, might best be thought of not as music but as a sonic form standing at the nexus of music and noise. Functionally it replaces the indeterminate sounds of the outdoors, becoming a kind of natural ambient music-noise of the indoor public environment. While conforming to harmonic logic it encourages non-reflective, non-intentional listening. Traditional forms of musical reception are disrupted, producing a low-level cognitive response. Muzak becomes a shadow—a likeness of music—for which the formalist arguments of value and quality are simply irrelevant. In virtually all cases the receivers do not scrutinize and examine Muzak as an art object; most barely even know it is there. The trouble with calling Muzak music is that for the listener it hardly exists; its effect, while powerful, is largely subliminal—beneath the level of critical discourse. This is why so many in the musical community react with such hostility to Muzak: it stands in opposition to traditional conceptions of musical form and function. And if we wish to maintain such conceptions then Muzak seems to find no logical place in and may even pose a threat to that world.

Indeed, Muzak represents a shift in the center of power and authority in American musical life from the music schools and concert halls to Billboard's Top Forty and the sound forms of the everyday. Today individuals commonly develop musical taste not from private or institutional instruction but from listening to radio and Music Television; accordingly, taste finds its form in the offerings of the culture industry and the listening practices that have developed during the age of recording. Outside the musical community the "high" works of the classical repertory seem by comparison culturally impotent because they lack the appeal that popular music can steadily maintain. And Muzak

successfully reinforces and perpetuates the domination of the popular repertory that reflects at once mass taste and the ideological constraints that mold that taste.

Muzak poses a double threat to traditional artistic standards and authority in its aesthetic irreverence, which shares many similarities with the radicalism of the historical avant-garde.<sup>17</sup> It reflects the degree to which mass culture has appropriated modernist and avant-garde aesthetics, which has in turn helped to reshape the way everyday Americans think about and interpret the arts.<sup>18</sup> Recalling the artistic proclamations of Dada artists and the early French avant-garde, Muzak projects a populist ethos that tacitly rejects the notion of the artist and autonomous art work. It creates a situation where the artist is no longer known, where art is no longer a tangible thing available for close scrutiny. With the helping hand of technology—the transformational life force of the avant-garde—Muzak topples art from its pedestal into the life of the everyday. It accomplishes what John Cage, the father of American postwar vanguardism, hoped to achieve with a highly radical musical language: to remove the composer's imprint from the score and disrupt traditional listening expectations, directing attention away from the artist toward the role and experience of the listener. Furthermore, by rejecting both the artist and the art work, Muzak replicates vanguardist contempt of the masterwork. Imposing the same normative style on the whole of the musical mainstream Muzak creates a kind of sonic syncretism that distorts our sense of the work in historical time. As a consequence, the canon of masterworks that embodies our culture's vision of reality, of truth, of stability, loses its special place, becoming a human construct of reality.

Thus the Muzak controversy reflects concerns over a major shift taking place in contemporary musical aesthetics, a shift that has transformed listening practices and generated confusion over the way we measure artistic worth in the late twentieth century. The traditional aesthetic yardstick of durability, of feeling and emotion, simply does not carry the authority it once maintained in a world in which the most conspicuous works are those with consistent airplay, where the taste and responses of a musically nonliterate mass culture tend to dominate our musical life. Blanket denials of Muzak's legitimacy won't make the situation go away; indeed the Muzak controversy poses a tacit challenge to Marxist-oriented critics to specify the qualities of middle-class alienation and to highbrow music lovers to prove the superiority of the reflective musical experience. Yet rather than viewing such developments in oppositional terms perhaps the best path to follow would be to recognize the potential significance of both levels of musical awareness, one reflective and the other nonreflective. With that as a starting point we might then begin to explore the varieties

of meanings these modes of reception encourage and in turn the kinds of musical forms they inspire.

## NOTES

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1. In this essay, I employ the term "Muzak" generically to refer to all forms of programmed musics.

2. Paul Kresh, "Music in the Air," *Stereo Review* (Oct. 1971): 71.

3. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds. (New York and Oxford: Urizen Books, 1978).

4. Jacques Attali, *Noise, The Political Economy of Music*, Tr. by Brian Massumi, with a Foreword by Frederic Jameson and an Afterword by Susan McClary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 8-9, 111-12.

5. Randall Collins explores this issue in "Alienation as Ritual and Ideology," a chapter in his book, *Weberian Sociological Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

6. Muzak's promotional literature typically offers scientific data on its psychological effects, yet comparatively little on the views of the listeners themselves. Nonetheless, increases in worker productivity and, in retail business, in the time consumers spend in stores, suggest that Muzak may improve the disposition of its listeners. An early article in *Etude* (June, 1954) reported that Muzak enjoyed incredible and wide acceptance (p. 15), while results from recent field studies appearing in the corporation's 1987 Newsletter, *Notes on Muzak*, indicated that many listeners prefer the program to silence or commercial radio. Studies on retail workers and customers conducted by students at Amherst College and Wesleyan University showed overwhelmingly favorable responses to Muzak. See: Bruce MacLeod, "Facing the Muzak," *Popular Music and Society* 7 (1979): 18-31.

7. Promotional literature was acquired from the Public Affairs office of the Muzak Corporation and the archival files of the Division of Musical History, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

8. Stanley Green, "Music to Hear But Not to Listen to," *Saturday Review* (Sept. 20, 1957): 56.

9. For example, saxophonist David Sanborn, trumpeter Jon Faddis, guitarists George Benson and Earl Klugh, and pianist George Winston.

10. Joel Dreyfuss, "The Halls are Alive with . . ." *Washington Post*, Section K (Sept. 16, 1973): 1, 3. Jarvis offers historical background on the corporation in her paper, "Notes on Muzak," published in the conference transcript, *The Phonograph and Our Musical Life*, Monograph No. 14, edited by H. Wiley Hitchcock (Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1980).

11. The version was broadcast over cable television station Channel Four, Madison, Wisconsin, on Jan. 8, 1989.

12. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) in *Illuminations*, Tr. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

13. MacLeod, "Facing the Music."

14. Muzak broadcast program, Exhibit Files, Division of Musical History, National Museum of American History.

15. Dreyfuss, *Washington Post*, 3.

16. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 4–5.

17. “Historical avant-garde” refers to early twentieth-century attempts to realign the developing categories of high and low art, of modernism and mass culture. As such, it is to be distinguished from high modernism which sought to affirm a high/low conception of culture. For an analysis, see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Translated by Michael Shaw. Foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

18. See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide, Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) for a relevant discussion of mass appropriation of concepts of vanguardism and modernism.