

some musical notes

(2005/2008)

(taken from the now defunct “Endangered Phoenix” site, this was co-authored by me and Red Marriott, though he wrote the vast majority of it; written between 2004 and 2005, with an update on Muzak in May 2008)



Miles Davis in the parking lots . . .

Sidney Bechet's “Petite Fleur” as a **background telephone while-you-wait** . . .

The thump thump bass of the open air car's sound system . . .

Everywhere music as part of playful communication has been transformed into an anaesthetic for alienation....

“Words make you think a thought. Music makes you feel a feeling. A song makes you feel a thought.”

E.Y. Harburg - songwriter.

Featuring sections on:

Roots (brief history of the blues)

Gospel

Commercialisation, Soul, James Brown etc.

Rap

Music & Social Struggles

Resonance FM Radio

Fame

Muzak To My Ears

For technological reasons music is an art that does not have a recorded “classical” history from ancient times. We can look at cave paintings and the architecture of Stonehenge, the Acropolis and the Coliseum but the oldest decipherable music recorded in manuscript form is much younger, and we are not exactly sure how this old music sounded (#). Music, even more so than drama, has always relied on the immediacy of performance for its existence and its social function has always been that of an activity that interacts with and unites other social activities (dancing, drinking, working etc.) far more - at least until recently - than the visual decorative arts.

Music is inherently social, for those hearing and those being heard, and has accompanied work and leisure activities since our earliest days. The journey from tribal drumming and chanting to the work songs synchronising the labours of the pyramid builders, galley slaves and field hands, children's play songs, the songs of many religions, military marching bands and clan bagpipes, through BBC Radio's Workers Playtime/Music While You Work to today's Walkman-wearing commuter illustrates some of the changes in the social function of music as a means of both unifying and dominating people. Miles Davis in the parking lots, Sidney Betchet's *Petite Fleur* as a background telephone music-while-you-wait, the thump thump bass of the open air car's sound system - everywhere music's original social function, often as a real playful communication, has been transformed beyond recognition - most music has become a background to anaesthetise the *lack* of communication.

Music today still represents the work rhythms of society - increased automation and its technology is reflected in both the production and recreational and commercial use of techno music. Computerised production of dance music creates the appropriate soundtrack to a life lived in sync with the rhythms of modern technology - repetitive, infinitely reproducible, all

encompassing in its volume and hypnotic character - yet, emotionally, expressing nothing more than its obvious function.

For the most part, rap does much the same in a verbal form. Those who shout the loudest don't usually have the most to say. Leaving aside the psychotic anti-social pose of gangsta rap, even the rather obvious concerned' liberal/left views of the socially conscious' rappers is usually the concern of the filthy rich celebrity to show they still care about those beneath them.

None of this is to judge people by their consumer tastes in music (or even anywhere else). Ken Clarke, the former Tory Chancellor and Minister of Health, likes Charlie Parker. Does that make him any better a person than the fact that Adolf Hitler liked vegetables made him a better person? Though we think there are significant radical differences in the history and social use of jazz as compared to techno music, we know that there are lots of people who like techno who oppose hierarchy more than people who have tastes similar to ours'.



(Note; The following comments assume some familiarity with the styles of music being discussed - and their reading will obviously be considerably enhanced by it. Otherwise the reader may feel as we have sometimes when trying to write about music - as if trying to describe painting to the blind.)

Roots...

Today's (western) popular music has its roots mainly in the folk musics of Europe and Africa. The slave trade and migration from Europe made the USA the great melting pot for the collision of cultures that produced blues, jazz, country and rock. The key ingredient in all of them is really the blues - a basic musical form that appeared around 1900 with its own African-derived tonality mixed with western harmonies - in (very over simplified) western terms, singing minor against major - and a distinctly new and sensual sense of syncopated rhythm with different beats accented. Originally a rural folk music of poor Southern blacks, it rapidly became integrated into other styles. It was the dominant popular music of most black Americans, both rural and urban, until the emergence of soul music/ rhythm'n'blues in the fifties.

According to passing references from southern plantation-dwelling whites and also testimonies

of black musicians the blues appeared around the turn of the century; its new, haunting quality caught the ear and was remembered. Blues was the first 20th century music, and the first of its time to transform established musical conventions, both in terms of lyrical expression and harmony. \§ The nightmarish dislocation imposed by slavery and the apartheid race relations of the U.S. created an unprecedented culture clash; so extreme that something as unprecedented as the blues was born. Existing folk musics tended to use inherited lyrical and melodic forms that were relatively static and increasingly limited, rooted in the slow rhythms and traditions of rural communities. The Afro-American blues took these influences from both the African and European traditions and welded them into an emotional language appropriate to its location and social function



“... That music, it was like where you lived. It was like waking up in the morning and eating, it was that regular in your life. It was natural to the way you lived and the way you died...”

No matter where it's played, you gotta hear it starting way behind you. There's the drum beating from Congo Square and there's the song starting in a field just over the trees. The good musicianer, he's playing with it, and he's playing after it. He's finishing something. No matter what he's playing, it's the long song that started back there in the South. It's the remembering song. There's so much to remember. There's so much wanting, and there's so much sorrow, and there's so much waiting for the sorrow to end...

The song, it takes a lot out of a man, he can get mean when he's troubled...what I mean is that when a musicianer made a bad end, it was never a surprise. Sometimes you got the feeling that a musicianer was looking for a bad end like it was something he had to have. So many of them had something inside them and it wouldn't let them rest. It was like there was something in that song deeper than a man could bear, something he could hear calling from the bottom of his dreams so that he'd wake up all in a terrible hurry to get up and go there, but then not knowing where to go. It was that stirring, all that night sound there was at the bottom of the song all that long way back making itself heard.

...Inspiration, that's another thing. The world has to give you that, the way you live in it, what you find in your living. The world gives it to you if you're ready. But it's not just given...it has to be put inside you and you have to be ready to have it put there. All that happens to you makes a feeling out of your life and you play that feeling. But there's more than that. There's the feeling inside the music too. And the final thing - it's the way those two feelings come together. I don't care where that life-feeling comes from in you...even if you start playing a number from a love-feeling, it has to become something else before you're through. That love-feeling has to find

the music-feeling. And then the music can learn how to get along with itself."
- **Sidney Bechet**, "Treat It Gentle", published 1960.

It is the very economy of form of the blues that gives it its powerful directness and emotional depth. The strength of expression in language that is common to predominantly oral cultures is obvious in the blues. But it is striking to read descriptions of the songs of an earlier oral culture, one that itself influenced the blues; A. L. Morton describes the border ballads of medieval Britain in terms just as applicable to the blues - "*Pity and terror, joy and horror and pride are found everywhere in full measure in the ballads... The ballads accept life with all its misery and man with all his frailty, but they accept them heroically with a pride and a clear eyed materialism which refuses to be satisfied with comfortable pretences and evasions.*"

"... in the... tradition of restraint and simple direct statement... the ballads are always concerned with the direct account of action, with brief and vivid pictures, with dialogue pared down to the bone. It is a hard way, deliberately eschewing ornament and imagery and many obvious effects, but followed to the end it has its own reward. What is lost in breadth is gained in intensity. In saying less than it appears to say the ballad succeeds in saying more. Words are used with such simplicity that they acquire unexpected subtleties... because nothing is wasted everything counts for more than itself." ("On the Nature of the Ballad", 1942.)

The blues cannot be reduced to a literal world of description. *Blues is more subtle than that, more layered with meaning and implication. "The sun's gonna shine in my back door some day" is not a weather forecast. The blues comes from a culture in which men and women chose their words carefully, always bearing in mind whom they were talking to and who might be listening. We should expect blues language, rooted as it is in everyday patterns and rituals of speech, to be equally guarded.*' (Tony Russell, **The Blues**, Aurum Press, 1997.) So much that was implied in black language remained silent to the ears of white authority; at the same time it was explicitly loud and clear to black ears tuned to the subtleties and coded slang of the blues. Until the blues emerged, there was no public expression of everyday black language in a cultural form. The few early examples of black literature and poetry conformed to received white rules of language. The minstrel shows were an insulting parody catering to white stereotypes of how blacks behaved; and the preacher and his congregation, in their sermons and folk-spirituals songs, used biblical imagery to express their own interpretations of what was meant by deliverance and the Promised Land. With the appearance of the blues, black America talked back to itself (and, eventually, to the rest of society). It was a form of emerging self-consciousness: *"It is true that before the first country blues recordings there had been a period of recording by urban blues artists and by black jazz groups - but the songs were still*

filtered through the sieve of the white music industry. The texts were generally ridden with the same cliches that had dominated black writing for the musical stage since the days of the minstrel show. It was only with the country bluesmen that the language became authentic - that it had the inflection and the richness of the spoken language. It was the way people talked to each other on the street, the way men and women talked to each other. Of all the things that are the legacy of the blues it's probably this that is the most important - that with the blues the black American, for the first time, was able to speak with his own voice." (The Legacy of the Blues - Sam Charters, 1977.)

The blues is part autobiography and part collective history - and makes explicit the inseparable nature of the two. It describes a landscape, what happens there and the state of mind of those who inhabit it, their emotional landscape. Blues can be humorous and uplifting. But in terms of form and function, the blues is typically a means of airing and sharing common individual problems by facing up to them - exorcism by expression. Universal themes of love, betrayal, loneliness, work, hard times, endurance and hope were worked, improvised and reworked endlessly in the greatest movement of lived folk poetry as an integrated aspect of daily life.



The blues strikes the receptive listener with its emotional intensity and honesty of expression - even when sung in a language foreign to the ears of the listener. *"The tune always gives the words a more positive stamp than they would bear alone. The tune is always a part of the resolution."* (A.L. Morton, *"Promise of Victory: A Note on the Negro Spiritual"*, 1941.) In this respect the particular becomes universal - and the emergence of the blues coincided with the development of the new medium of recorded sound, which changed forever the process of how folk musics developed.² Regional styles that had probably never previously travelled beyond their remote rural corner were now made portable on 78s and could spread far and wide to influence other local styles. To some degree, this also created a certain standardisation of style, as well as graftings and hybrids. By the 1920's blues records were selling in their hundreds of thousands - mainly to poor blacks, for whom they were marketed, but also eventually to a few white collectors and folklorists.

Nevertheless, the development of recording was initially an addition to the folk process of creation and a by-product of it rather than something that replaced it. Playing a similar role to the ballad sheets sold by street-hawkers in London and elsewhere, records first spread previously local material to a wider audience. But the music was still being made to fulfil an original social function while its being recorded was an unintended consequence - it was only later that much music began to be made only *for the purpose of being recorded as a*

commercial product.

Folk music' is a category/label applied by outsiders often irrelevant to others; Louis Armstrong, when asked if jazz was folk music, replied “*Well I never heard no horse play it!*”. It came into play when the Victorian middle classes became aware of a popular culture that was disappearing as the development of industrial capitalism destroyed the social arrangements that it depended on. Folklorists began to intensively harvest this material from the 19th century onwards. Their interpretation and presentation of folk culture' often said as much about the collectors' own relationship to the present as any realities of the past. There was often a censorship of expressions likely to offend Victorian morality, and a romanticising of the past in terms that provided a comforting image for those who had begun to feel uneasy about the destructive effects of rampant capitalism. It also provided material for romanticised images of national identity. Traditional' Irish dance is in fact a sanitised de-sexualised version created in the late 19th century by a puritanical alliance of the Catholic priesthood and bourgeois nationalists. This is why the solo style is so stiff backed with a rigid torso - there is intended to be no movement above the knee, carefully avoiding any exciting of forbidden passions.¹³

This political sanitising is an ongoing process - Woody Guthrie's ~~YIPPIE~~ *Land Is Your Land*” is taught in American schools and there have been many calls for it to be made the new US National Anthem. But the commonly sung version omits two of Guthrie's little known but crucial verses that would not sit well in the Song of State -

“Was a big high wall there that tried to stop me

A sign was painted said: Private Property

But on the back side it didn't say nothing -

This land was made for you and me.”

and

“One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the steeple

By the Relief Office I saw my people

As they stood hungry, I stood there wondering if

This land was made for you and me.”

Some American pacifists, just after the Iraqi war, sang this song with an ironic twist, in which they make out that US soldiers are singing in Iraq “This land is our land...” (5)



The various changes in musical styles have reflected changes in the relationship of blacks to a wider American society that has kept them at the bottom of the heap. The blues emerged at a time when a predominantly rural population was living in smaller communities, divided by a social apartheid yet in intimate daily contact with whites as their neighbours, farm bosses, landlords, police, with the Klu Klux Klan ever ready to enforce lynch “justice”. In such an atmosphere expression of resistance and criticism of the status quo had to be discreet and coded. Black churches used the Biblical parables of the deliverance of the Jews from oppression as song topics and sermon texts to refer to the situation of their own people. This could sometimes lead to absurd misunderstandings; Blind Willie Johnson, the great street singer, preacher, slide guitarist and recording artist of bluesy spirituals, was once busking on a street corner in New Orleans. He was singing his composition “**If I Had My Way I'd Tear The Building Down**”, based on the Bible's Samson and Delilah' tale. A passing white cop promptly arrested him for being disrespectful to the official City building Blind Willie had innocently chosen as a backdrop for his busking pitch!



There was also a protest' element in some blues songs, probably more so than the recorded evidence suggests, as the record companies would tend to censor such material and refuse to release it. (In the 1950's J.B. Lenoir, the most explicitly political of Chicago blues singers, drew the heat of the FBI with songs against the Korean war.)



The country bluesmen were often travelling buskers, playing the streets and bars, country picnics and juke joints' (shacks providing music, dancing, booze and often, violence), making an easier living than other options such as farm work or lumberjacking. Allied to the whole history of a people stolen away as slaves, the bluesman's rambling lifestyle also contributed to the recurring theme in blues lyrics of leaving and returning; a strong theme in Celtic music too, for similar historical reasons. This lifestyle provided one of the few options for escaping the rural isolation of plantation life or the economic straitjacket of tenant share-cropping. One could join the many others hopping freight trains and hitchhiking and leave those troubles behind you. *The Key to the Highway*, as one song put it... It was also a viable lifestyle for those with disabilities who were excluded from physical work. (The blind Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, who carried a limp from childhood polio, met while both playing the streets and ended up playing together for decades; they described their relationship as "You see for me and I'll walk for you".)

But for every ramblin' bluesman of legend there were more who stayed at home, kept a day job and played in their leisure time for themselves and at social gatherings. Few women lived the rambling life, unless with a male companion. Female blues singers tended to perform in travelling tent shows or in black vaudeville theaters, often with a more ragtime and jazz-influenced style. They were the first blues singers to be recorded and to become stars; some, like the greatest of them, Bessie Smith, selling many thousands of records and gaining a celebrity lifestyle. But blues and jazz musicians were condemned by polite church-going black society - for playing the devil's music', encouraging an immoral' lifestyle. Despite black gospel music being just about as sensual and unleashing of pent-up frustration as religious music gets, this church prejudice against black secular music continues to the present day. Gospel singers who crossed over' to sing blues and soul were (and still are) considered fallen angels led astray by temptation.

Black southern workers moving north in search of better living conditions became a flood by the 1940's when the munitions and related industries needed them to feed the 2nd World War effort. After the experience of WWII, where blacks were routinely segregated in the US Army while

supposedly fighting a war against the racist nature of Nazism, soldiers returning to the same old discrimination at home contributed to a growing militancy amongst northern blacks. Many joined the multi-racial workforce in the factories and the industrial struggles of the time. Leisure time for these black workers often meant hanging out in the neighbourhood bars, listening to the blues. John Lee Hooker's records would have first been bought mainly by the families of car and steel workers in Detroit - the motor city'. Like them, the musicians had also migrated from the south; the major development in the music was its electrification. Rather than a stylistic choice, this was a practical necessity, as acoustic instruments couldn't compete with the noise levels of crowded bars. But electrification brought new dynamics to the music and opened up technical possibilities - greater sustain of notes, more sophisticated band arrangements etc. In Chicago a group of musicians centred around Muddy Waters and Howling Wolf, by electrifying Mississippi blues, took what was perhaps the most influential single step in the whole process that was to lead to the birth of rock'n'roll. (Similar experiments were also being made in the American South.)



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The Gospel Truth

from "I'm Gonna Tell God How You Treat Me" to "A Change is Gonna Come":

For Thomas A. Dorsey "...whatever it is, blues, jazz, or gospel," **all have a similar effect because each is a** "vehicle for your feeling... If a woman has lost a man, a man has lost a woman, his feeling reacts to the blues; he feels like expressing it. The same thing acts for a gospel song. Now you're not singing blues; you're singing gospel, good news song, singing about the Creator; but it's the same feeling, a grasping of the heart. If it's in your public, they holler out "Hallelujah" or "Amen" in church. In the theater they holler "sing it again" or "do it again" or something like that."

"I seen women in the audience jump up, so touched - guess a good man had left them, left them cold or something like that - jump up like you shouting in church. I've seen that right in the theater. Whatever it is that touches them, they jump up and wring and shout just like we would in church. It gets low-down. Now what we call low-down in blues doesn't mean that it's dirty or bad or something like that. It gets down into the individual to set him on fire, dig him up or dig

her up way down there til they come out with an expression verbally. If they're in the church, they say, "Amen." If they're in the blues, they say, "Sing it now." (Quoted in *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* - Michael W. Harris, Oxford University Press, USA, 1994.)

The stylistic changes that led to the emergence of gospel music are linked to the southern black migration to the northern cities. In the southern churches there was an ongoing call-and-response between the preacher and congregation, and - using the sermon and spirituals as a starting point - individuals improvised words and spontaneous harmonies that were responded to individually and collectively by the rest of the congregation in shouts and song. This older collective style of worship - product of a less stratified, more intimate community - was considered crude and frowned upon by the more sophisticated and ambitious hierarchy of the northern black church. The black church leaders wanted to eradicate the specifically black mannerisms from worship, so as to court acceptance from the white churches they were affiliated to, whose supposed refinement they aspired to and whose approval they sought. (As proof of the growing civilising, more cultured developments going on under their instruction etc). Gradual assimilation into white society was the goal.

Something of this development is described in Alan Lomax's book "The Land Where the Blues Began", in which he recounts a conversation between himself and a Reverend Martin: *"Martin was eager to explain - "In the modern Baptist church we are trying to move on past the wonderful old cornbread spirituals and sermons...We want to bring our people forward with a new and more progressive type of music, created especially for modern worship by our leading composers. The old sister leading songs from the back row is being replaced by an educated musical director. His job is to spread our new, more intelligently composed songs".*

"But what is more progressive about a musical director, when your old sisters could already harmonise beautifully without any direction?", I asked. *"That's not the modern educated way. They need direction to learn the more modern songs we want them to have. This is a new day and we must adapt to it...The old must give way to the new."*

"But what about Go Down Moses' and Steal Away' and all the wonderful spirituals - you know that they are considered great music by everyone in the world. Are you going to throw that all away?"

"Absolutely not", said the Reverend, offering me a songbook. "A lot of them are right here in this gospel songbook, in spanking-new arrangements by our best gospel writers..."

I looked at the book...There were some of the great old songs, alright, but they were set like conventional 19th century hymns, with no intimation of the fabulous head arrangements that their unprogressive' country congregations always gave them...an original African-American way of handling harmony...The new gospel songs were handled well, with rather jazzy arrangements, but still essentially within the frame of conventional European tradition...'^(*)

This attitude had a long history amongst the black clergy and the rest of the black middle class who emerged after the Emancipation from slavery. The clergy were educated mainly in white-financed and dominated schools and were schooled in white bourgeois values and culture. After Emancipation the spirituals - religious folk songs of the black churches that had been sung since slavery times - became looked down upon and rejected by many, particularly middle class, blacks; spirituals declined in many places “ ...except [for those churches] in the rural sections where the Spiritual clung to life and survived because of the sheer desire to sing on the part of the men and women in the congregation.” (C.W. Hyne.)

“Since almost immediately after Emancipation, when ex-slaves seemed to want to discard them as unpleasant reminders of their bondage, spirituals were pawns in one of the many battles over black cultural identity. At the heart of the controversy was the question of the proper context for their use among freed persons. One side seemed to want to make the spiritual an art song, to have it appreciated with minimal reference to the experience and feelings out of which it had originated.” (*The Rise of Gospel Blues, op. cit.*) They wished to sanitise the spiritual, to arrange it so it conformed to the rules of western classical musical harmony, and could be therefore “elevated' so as to “gain... artistic recognition...”. According to them, to keep it in its original form “... would doom it to stagnation and to the contempt of highly musical people.” (J.W. Work. Work practised what he preached; he toured as the director of the Fisk University *Jubilee Singers*, performing sanitised, “artistic” musical arrangements of spirituals. He was later to accompany Alan Lomax on field trips recording folk music for the Library of Congress and it has recently been claimed that his research was plagiarised without credit by Lomax, though this is strongly disputed by others. See ^(*)footnote.) This attitude shows how much the black middle class had internalised the values of white bourgeois society and sought to use their borrowed cultural values to justify their class position in relation to poor blacks. Ironically, the whole history of black American culture shows this approach to have produced little more than pale grey imitations of white cultural forms. None of the greatest black musical innovations went down that road.

From the opposite view “C.W. Hyne noted that the qualities of folk musicianship, namely “quarter-tones, slurrings, and unusual harmonies” are lost and “sacrificed to conventional orthodoxy when the folksongs are reproduced... [and when there is] the attempt to dress them up' unduly.”

“The other side argued that the spiritual belonged within the context of the traditional black religious experience - especially since emotional performance and equally emotional response were intrinsic to black worship.” This was undoubtedly true, as long as it had a living presence within black worship. But this was an argument between factions of educated black society, over who were to be the custodians of black cultural history, and how it should be collected and preserved. It was a political dispute between folklorists. *“Both sides agreed on the issue most critical to the spirituals: spirituals should be collected and transcribed. The treatment of the spiritual after its gathering and notation was the issue under debate. The arguments Work and Hyne represented, therefore, were created by and apparently of interest only to transcribers and arrangers. For, having been frozen by notation, the spiritual over which they argued was no longer a dynamic expression of Afro-American thought.”* That expression and thought only survived within those, mainly rural and southern, congregations that retained *“the sheer desire to sing”*. *“It was an artifact whose discoverers offered widely differing opinions as to how to exhibit it. Given the cultural awareness and the musical skill required to perform it, Work's spiritual could be none other than the song of the exalted Negro. With the inherent limitations of western music notation, Hyne's spiritual had been denatured long before he thought of criticizing its lack of slurs and quarter-tones.”* (*The Rise of Gospel Blues, op. cit.*)

The black church authorities suppressed the old style spiritual-type collective worship the congregations had brought up north from the southern churches with them; and replaced it with Classical-style choirs arranged by professional musical directors. This was resented by the congregations, but the authority of the preacher held sway and these changes were reluctantly accepted. Lomax quotes a friend of his saying, *“The church is pushing those songs right across the country. My guess is that there's a tie-in between the big preachers and the publishers somehow. One thing for sure, there's a lot of money being made out of the whole thing.”*

At this point Thomas A. Dorsey entered the story. Formerly “Georgia Tom” - a blues singer of such raunchy hits as “It's Tight Like That” he had jumped from blues to church music and back. He lost his young wife to illness in 1932, and entered a deep emotional crisis; turning away from his blues career, he deepened his commitment to religion and began attending a local church. (But, unlike many religious people, he never dismissed or criticised the blues, always seeing it as a form having a valid function. His experience in both fields made him more aware than most of the common emotional ground they shared.) Dissatisfied with the musical content of services and sensing what was lacking, he had already in the 1920's started writing gospel songs. He eventually produced such classics as *“Take My Hand, Precious Lord”*, *“Peace in the Valley”*, his two most famous songs. His aim was to reintroduce the more bluesy, southern stylistic musical elements that the church establishment had suppressed in the northern churches. (He was not the originator of gospel, but more than anyone, developed and popularised the style.) He tried to

market the songs by getting them sung in churches and at church music conventions but met strong opposition from the black church establishment. He also sold them as sheet music (at that time commonly used by many ordinary people with pianos at home or in the locality). His songs struck an instant chord with the congregations, recognising in them the elements of expression they had been missing. Gradually the first churches conceded to the popularity of this new style, seeing that it gave them an edge over their many competitors, and soon gospel was established in most churches as the dominant style. At the same time Dorsey established several singing groups in churches - not really choirs' as untrained and inexperienced singers were welcome - their emotional commitment being the important criteria. In contrast to the Classical-style choirs' repertoire, Dorsey's songs were musically uncomplicated and accessible in their structures.

Dorsey became a wealthy man from his enterprise, establishing a profitable gospel music publishing business. Many gospel singing groups emerged, amateur and professional, to tour the churches - and a gospel recording industry was born. The changes of the type Dorsey began were inevitable, linked as they were to class and cultural tensions in the black church. He exploited them commercially, but by fulfilling a felt need, by returning, partially, something that was missed. Gospel was part of the professionalising of church music - but it also returned to the congregation collective stylings and forms of expression that had been suppressed by the church establishment. And by no means all services today are dominated by a gospel performance. Collective testifying' still goes on, to varying degrees in different areas, and depending on the traditions of the various sects.

Just as there is a commercial aspect to the blues, yet there are still people who play the blues simply because they have the blues. And alongside the commercial aspects of gospel, there are those for whom it is nothing more nor less than an important emotional release and expression. To use Marx's overquoted phrase - while religion remains "*the heart of a heartless world*" that need will continue to be sung about.

Gospel, at its best, is great music, with some of the greatest of singers. Its mode of expression and powerful intensity - how it says what it wants to say - can be appreciated by those with no religious belief. The soul music emerging from the late 1950's and exploding in the 60's was gospel secularised. The message lyrically was now what religious music could not or would not say - erotic sensuality and passion, and a growing political awareness reflecting the struggles of the times. From gospel came Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, James Brown, Otis Redding etc (who, like most soul singers, all first sang in church).

The social function of gospel music and its artistic development became more specialised and

separate to a degree - the element of performance was elevated. But in contrast to soul music, gospel never became so estranged by stardom from its constituency - the church remained its natural venue. (Though a few gospel singers did undertake commercial tours in concert halls.) Gospel and black traditions of collective singing were still connected enough to daily black life that they became largely the music of the civil rights movement and the later South African anti-apartheid/class struggle movement - albeit with altered words, usually. After over a century of using bible stories as coded references to a future deliverance from persecution for their race, singing of reaching the promised land etc; now, using gospel musical forms, implied meanings became explicit. (In a different way from the Wobblies earlier, this was another form of detournement of religious song.) For example, one civil rights song sung by marchers reminded the demonstrators to not let - *nobody, not the politicians or policemen* "... *turn you round, turn you round, turn you round... you got to keep on walking, keep on talking, marching to the freedom land.*"

* * *

The Soul Of Money

"Maybe there's another thing why so many of these musicianers ended up so bad. Maybe they didn't know how to keep up with all this commercialising that was happening to ragtime. If it could have stayed where it started and not had to take account of the business it was becoming - all that making contracts and signing options and buying and selling rights - maybe without that it might have been different. If you start taking what's pure in a man and you start putting it on a bill of sale, somehow you can't help destroying it. In a way, all that business makes it so a man don't have anything left to give. I got a feeling inside me, a kind of memory that wants to sing itself...I can give you that. I can send it out to where it can be taken, maybe, if you want it. I can try to give it to you. But if all I've got is a contract, I've got nothing to give. How'm I going to give you

a

contract?...

The men who are doing the business part of the presenting, they won't let the music be. They give the public what they want them to hear. They don't care about the music; just so long as they can get that, they don't care about nothing else. Some band leader gets himself a reputation for being a personality, and that's it. From there on out it has to be his personality first and then the music. He's busy doing every kind of thing but the music. "Here's an extra saxophone", he says. Maybe you don't need that extra sax, it doesn't belong, but that's no matter to him...And before you know it, you've got a whole lot of something that hasn't got any spirit. All you've got, it's something like running a ball through a

pinball machine and watching all the lights come on. You've got a hell of a lot of lights showing themselves off.

These personality boys don't ask a musicianer what he thinks is best: they arrange it for him....They've got themselves a great big band. They've got themselves a kind of machine. And so to make sense out of whatever it is the machine is doing, they get a whole lot of composers and arrangers to write it all down, just the way the machine is supposed to run - every note of it. And all that freedom, all that feeling a man's got when he's playing next to you - they take that away. They give you his part to play and they give him your part, and that's how it's to be...every man doing any damn' thing but the one thing he should be doing if he's really to find the music. All that closeness of speaking to another instrument, to another man - it's gone. All that waiting to get in for your own chance, feeling yourself, all that holding back, not rushing the next man, not bucking him, holding back for the right time to come out, all that pride and spirit - it's gone. They take away your dignity and they take away your heart and after they've done that there's nothing left..."

- **Sidney Bechet** (op cit).



Whereas the blues players tended to retain their social function and connection within the urban black community, soul singers tended to become distanced far more by celebrity as their music soon crossed over in a big way to a white audience. They began a more representational role, akin to politicians representing a constituency or preachers a congregation. The role of James Brown would reveal much in this respect, as shown below...

By the late 50's James Brown and Ray Charles were mixing up blues and gospel influences to develop what became known as soul music. If the blues is a means of dealing with problems of everyday life - facing down troubles by facing up to them, thereby building strength to deal with them as they recurred - then soul was more assertive, expressing a historical awareness by placing one's actions in a new historical context. Say It Loud - I'm Black and I'm Proud' implied

that one's actions could have positive consequences - as Sam Cooke said, 'A Change Is Gonna Come'. (Cooke is said to have been influenced to write that song after hearing Dylan's "*Blowing in the Wind*", which he also recorded a version of.) In this way 60's soul reflected the emerging struggles of black America, as the largest riots in American history tore through the black ghettos and Black Power was proclaimed. But this brought out the tensions between the music and social reality; it's worth looking at James Brown's role as the strongest musical symbol of black assertiveness in the 1960's. Following Martin Luther King's assassination Soul Brother No.1' James Brown went on TV to perform a show in Boston as an explicit tactic to keep angry blacks indoors and so prevent rioting. He joined with politicians to make an appeal for calm. As a true American patriot, Brown supported the US role in the Vietnam War, flying out to play for the troops and campaigned for Presidential candidate Hubert Humphreys. He also played benefits for liberal groups such as the NAACP, SCLC and the more leftist SNCC. Brown was now a very rich man with his own private jet and he "publicly endorsed the sort of black capitalism he practised". His political beliefs were that blacks should be able to compete economically on equal terms with the rest of American society. That's why he once sacked half his band because they wanted a small wage rise. So his message was really that it's fine to 'Say It Loud' - just so long as you don't *do* anything to challenge the hierarchical power of a system that will always need to ensure there are far more black losers than winners in its economic structure. The pop star as cop star.



Don't diss my rap, punk...

Rap shares with punk a one-dimensional emotional expression - predominantly youthful male anger and aggression at full volume defining the style within a narrow emotional spectrum.

The biggest selling rap artists and record labels organise periodic conferences for their industry - which is the dominant force in popular music. They discuss the fact that product and brand placement' is more commercially effective in their industry than others. What they wear and consume, their many fans will follow. This of course encourages various enticing gifts and offers to rappers for endorsement' from manufacturers of clothing, jewellery etc. This fits well with the rappers' image of themselves as suitable role-models' for their fans.

“The black politicians, middle class social workers and made-it-out-of-the-ghetto rap and graffiti artists generally see themselves, as examples that young blacks should aspire to. Some rappers, while flaunting some of the biggest gold chains on the block (ghetto status symbols made from gold mined by South African blacks) advocate a specifically Black Capitalism - but obviously they will jealously defend their privileged position within it, because (contrary to the illusions they sell to youth) there ain't much room at the top or too many routes out of the ghetto. They need a permanent captive ghetto audience as a basis for their privilege and black capitalist wealth - those who market rebellion need the obedient exploited consumer to buy.

The black role in the American cultural spectacle is one of individual achievement: sport, music and to some extent film and literature, have been the traditional “ladders to success” for blacks. This individual achievement is often seen as a source of collective pride; role models to aspire to and identify with (encouraging advancement through individual, as opposed to group, dedication) and an integration into the dominant values of society - both in pure economic terms, as consumers, and by directing energies towards upward mobility in either the black or mainstream white world. Nevertheless, because only limited numbers can move upwards regardless of individual effort, the spectacle masks a lie that is exposed on the level of collective daily experience.

Rap emerged from the U.S. ghetto much the same as reggae toasting did in Jamaica. The emphasis on words over music is part of a reduction of music to its basic components (the Punk ethic is similar). With a record deck and a microphone anyone could be a rapper, and techniques like scratching and sampling were dismantling pop music, stripping it down to its component parts and making them interchangeable, like some mass market atonality. This was logical, seeing as pop recording studios had long since become conveyor belt corporation production lines. It was admitting that the social function of one pop record was equivalent to any other; also that the cult of individual originality (i.e. guitar heroes, specialised musical skills etc.) could largely be replaced by technology. Yet what the form implied was denied by the content and by speedy commercialising. Some of the early, more subversive rap scene, when the mike was passed around and freely available to anyone who had anything to say, would perhaps have been “too real” and unmarketable. (Perhaps a continuing link with the “call and response” song tradition that the slaves brought with them from Africa, and, via the communal work songs of the fields, was passed on through blues, jazz, gospel and soul?) This openness and “democracy” was quickly submerged/suppressed by the individualising influence of the whole star-making process when record companies came around flashing cheque-books and contracts - passports out of the ghetto. Despite being preoccupied with words, rap records have most often been a vehicle for either macho boasting or simplistic black nationalist ranting and sloganeering repeating the mistakes and limitations of the 60s civil rights/black power movements. Anyway, in time it will become clear that, behind the image that teases with

rebellion (“Burn Hollywood Burn” was used to good effect by the L.A. insurgents of May '92), Public Enemy, NWA (Niggers With Assets?) etc. are just as much part of the cultural bourgeoisie/pop establishment and in real terms no more radical than the Rolling Stones or Michael Jackson. Perhaps the recent attack on Spike Lee, while he was filming his biography of Malcolm X movie, by hundreds of black youths in Harlem who accused him of commercialising and profiting from the man's memory is the beginning of a critique-in-action of commercial black culture and its role in the containment and recuperation of rebellion.”

Taken from **a text on James Carr (written in June 1993).**



Politics of French Rap

“ French culture combines a highly rationalistic mode of discourse with great value placed upon verbal articulation. In an important way, every educated French person is expected to rap ' ...Those who possess African, North African, Caribbean or other third-world cultures in addition to being French, combine the rhetorical training peculiar to the educational system with more “traditional” oral cultures...” - L. Portis, “French Frenzies”.

Rap in France has recently been given a boost in its rebellious image. A leading government party politician, backed by 200 senators and deputies, has recently started the prosecution of 7 rappers, including the most famous - a rapper called Mr.R. ' (Richard Makela) for insulting France, for saying that “France is a bitch, don't forget to fuck her till she's exhausted/You have to treat her like a slut, man...I piss on Napoleon and on General de Gaulle”. This combination of genuine hate and a crass traditional masculine way of expressing it has been the classic content of rap for years. Undoubtedly these words are an insult - to sluts' and to women for liking sex - the usual hypocritical misogynist crap rap. France and Napoleon and de Gaulle are obviously unquantifiably worse than sluts', as are all countries and all their leaders. The compulsion to shock sometimes hits the right target a bit - particularly when it's attacking France, the cops or the media. But it undermines anything valid by expressing itself so shoddily. By being often arbitrarily provocative for its own sake, it illuminates little because its aim is always to sell, to turn anger into a commodity, to popularly *represent* anger in a traditional masculine way. Sadly,

it also reflects some of the stupidities of many men (their deformed attitude towards their *own* sexuality, as well as women's) , not only in these ethnic' groups, but amongst many French men generally.

The prosecution got the go-ahead post-riots(i.e. the riots of November 2005).

Is this a bizarre self-delusion on the part of the State? Do they think that attacking rap is necessary because it genuinely incites riots? Surely it is riots that feed rap, which then, through the inverted logic of the need for this society to find hierarchical scapegoats/Leaders, is seen as the instigator. At the same time, French rap seems to be more genuinely on the edge of merely teasing with an image of violence and a heart-felt hatred of the system than, say, in the USA, probably because France is often more *overtly* racist, and up to now hasn't been forced to adopt much of a margin of integration like the States was after the far more threatening riots of the 60s (in the US the State made a conscious attempt to create a black middle class, a social buffer zone; a strata of black representation and a social position to aspire to). For instance, the political' rappers are almost invariably banned from radio and TV (so far). And yet, at the same time, some municipalities have been providing financial subsidies to selected rappers for some ten years now, so in many ways it's a French version of the very usual stick and carrot, sometimes 20 years behind everywhere else, sometimes very modern. This is partly because of the vast across-the-board rebellion in many different aspects of society and of life there. And the need to use race as a basic divide and rule makes for some very intense contradictions: French society has to brutally repress and falsify the non-whites (e.g. by caricaturing the explosions as simply preying on their own kind' or shitting on their own doorstep') at the same time as enticingly integrate a few of them, providing hope'.

Some American Leftists complain about the lack of affirmative action there, ironic since it is the obnoxious right-wing Presidential hopeful Sarkozy who is now pushing for positive discrimination as a way of providing "hope" ("hope is the leash of submission" as a 60s revolutionary once said). Mr.R. has as guest co-star on his last album - "Politically Incorrect" - the head of the Trot organisation, the LCR (which, faced with the non-existent, and manipulated, fantasy prospect of the National Front coming to power, urged its audience to Vote for Chirac', as did quite a few anarchists' - about as politically incorrect' as you can get). Are there those in the State who think it's worth boosting this professional *image* of opposition? Isn't French rap simply an unthreatening image, like the LCR - essentially *representing* the poor, and almost always in terms of some amelioration of conditions, rather than in the radical destruction of these conditions (French rap, when it tries to be positive, calls for work and respect, as if the two are compatible)? Mr. R. himself appealed to this unthreatening image when he said, "*There are plenty of songs that are part of this country's artistic heritage and every bit as virulently*

anti-France, and nobody complains.” - but then when possibly facing 3 years inside, you use such democratic arguments. Repressed, rap appeals to such democracy within a limited narrow perspective of a moan about cultural censorship - when most people have to shut their mouths all the time when they work and can never appeal to the privilege of a specialised cultural bubble - "Hey - I'm an artist!". At the same time it reflects something more general - an increasingly common individualist consciousness which thinks only of one 's *own* misery: everybody wanders why they are the exception', why the State and the system is picking on *them* even as it picks on' millions. This is essentially because unless there is common class struggle, all these miseries become just little you on your own, or in your little unit, trying to fight your way through the jungle. And rap artists too have to defend their corner. But there's a difference in a rap artist and other workers. Workers who rebel for the most part only identify with the money they get from the work, not with the alienation they produce. Rappers pretend to rebel but identify very strongly with the commodity they produce: it's them themselves.

Sarkozy has already, some two years ago, tried to prosecute some rappers, for, amongst other things, "anti-semitism" (in fact, for supporting Palestinians against Israel) but without success (though a few years back, in Toulon, the National Front mayor and judge *did* manage to successfully prosecute some rappers, who got 3 months inside, and were banned from playing for 6 months which shows how insanely racist France is). Maybe the State thinks it's worth experimenting with trying to terrify everybody into silence? Regardless of the intention, the effect is the same - providing rap with a post-riot image of genuine rebellion and and a post-riot role model for getting out of the hell-hole estates. Mr.R. himself no longer lives on the estates - despite his continuing need to claim to represent these estates; after all, it's the estates that provide him with his income, and the announcement of Mr.R. 's intended prosecution has already boosted sales, surprise surprise.

This was written at the end of 2005. In July 2006 the prosecution of Mr.R was dropped

The Wobblies, The Big Rock Candy Mountain And Social Struggles

The Industrial Workers of the World, commonly known as the Wobblies, were an industrial union set up in 1905 by a group of workers and activists. Their intentions were to form a revolutionary organisation to gather together those many relatively unskilled workers who were ignored by the

elitist craft unions of the day. The organisation was to be a weapon of the daily class struggle, but with an ultimate goal of the abolition of capitalism and the creation of a classless society. The Wobblies had two main wings; the northern factory-based workforce and the larger western migrant, casualised hobo-ing harvest and lumberjack workers.

"She say Will you work for Jesus?"

I say How much Jesus pay?"

She say Jesus don't pay nothing.'

I say I won't work today.'"

Hobo to Salvation Army girl in *The Swede from South Dakota'*.

The migrant workers evolved a culture of song, storytelling and poetry that was tailored to its social function. As one example; Wobblies were regular soap-box street speakers but they often had to compete to be heard with Salvation Army bands. So songs were often written to the tune of familiar hymns - when the band began playing the Wobblies would sing along with their subversive lyrics and attempt to drown out the Sally Army choir. (This technique of reclaiming tunes is an early form of what the situationists were later to call detournement; taking a conservative cultural form and altering the content by using it as a vehicle for subversive expression. The situationists used comic strips, others have used advertising billboards etc. In the late 1960s it was fairly common to hear demonstrators singing, "The hills are alive with the sound of ...SMASH THE BOURGEOISIE" or "She wheels her wheelbarrow through streets broad and narrow singing ...SMASH THE BOURGEOISIE", a corny slogan but quite funny in the context of the songs)

Joe Hill and many others wrote songs, poems, and stories that propagated their political outlook, commemorated struggles and fallen comrades and expressed faith and determination in the victorious creation of a new classless society. These were widely distributed by the Wobbly press, leaflets, songbooks and word of mouth, and circulated widely amongst the working class in factories, hobo camps and harvest fields.

Observers talked of strikes that sang' - the social function of music was used as an expression of unity and strength. This brings to mind an argument with an arrogant marxist/cultural avant-gardist academic bore. He was sneering at the sight of people playing acoustic folk music at a Reclaim The Streets squat party. He asserted it was backward and conservative and truly

radical music was that of the modern avant-garde composers (a good example of how the pretension to being superior takes the form of ideologising one's personal tastes). It was replied that this confused mere innovation in musical form with actual radical practice. Collective song was an important part of many of the best movements of the past. One could imagine some avant-garde music performance in a concert hall in 1970's uptown Johannesburg, for example; the bourgeois audience would pride themselves on their cultural radicalism - meanwhile across town in the township of Soweto the mass struggles of blacks would reverberate with their singing of songs of struggle. (As did the US civil rights movement of the 1950's and 60's. In both cases this was a reflection of the involvement of black churches, children and youth in these struggles. It is not appropriate here to go into the contradictory influences of these churches...) Where was the more radical subversive use and function of music going on? As Steve Biko pointed out - it is not enough to contribute from outside songs for the struggle'; if you are part of the struggle the songs will come of themselves. (This was undoubtedly true of those times - today people's relationship to music and struggle has been so changed by social forces that we can only say that it might be a sign of the depth of radicality of a future movement if such non-performance orientated collective music-making became a part of it. How many songs came out of the 1984-85 miners strike? A chant of 'Here we go, here we go...' - and that was about it...well, there were a few but not nationally known)

The Big Rock Candy Mountains is one of the best known song to come out of the US hobo/migrant worker culture. Though usually thought of as an innocent sing-a-long children's ditty (due to Burl Ives's version), some versions are claimed to be a seduction song used by older men to entice boys to become their travelling sexual partners. But the meaning of the song least known now and most interesting is as a utopian fantasy. As discussed by A. L. Morton⁽⁴⁾, it follows in a tradition of utopian song where the world is turned upside down, paradise is made on earth (see his book *The English Utopia*, pubd. 1952). Though less profound and more humorous than the much earlier (14th century) *Land of Cockayne* (Cocaine?!) from England that Morton compares it to, *The Big Rock Candy Mountains* shares a similar class perspective in so far as it sees the unequal scarcity of the necessities of life as something imposed by class power. There the hobo has all his material needs met; he 's surrounded by *cigarette trees...lakes of stew...streams of alcohol* - *the cops have wooden legs* and their *dogs have rubber teeth* and it's a place where *they hung the jerk that invented work in the Big Rock Candy Mountains*'.

A DVD "Amandla"^{***} about the South African struggle from the mid-70s through the 80s says the following about this movement's songs: *"There's no initial previous arrangement as to who starts what song. As a song finishes, another one starts one and in that process there's lots of compositions coming up - a new song. And a person might have tried to sing what he's presented with one or two people during the day and as he leads and the other two back him up*

and then you've got an entirely new song. The song might take 3 minutes or 3 months to compose and no-one knows who wrote it". This DVD also describes how terrified the heavily armed cops were when a massive demonstration was approaching at a fairly good speed chanting some of these songs, that the singing enhanced their fear, despite their enormous superiority of weaponry. The New York Herald Tribune reports from this period (mid-1980s): "A South African company is selling an anti-riot vehicle that plays disco music through a loudspeaker to soothe the nerves of would-be troublemakers...the vehicle also carries a water cannon and tear gas." Sounds almost like a parody of the stark contrast between music as part of a developing community of struggle - non-specialist music, and music as part of the commodity economy.

If history tells us anything, it shows that in every social movement of struggle the radical faction must fight against both its external and internal enemies. The external enemy is the element that united the movement against it and called it into being, the internal one is the force that seeks to dominate and control from within for its own selfish ends. This broadly corresponds to the division between the political and the social struggles. It is the site of any struggle between the conquest of power and the abolition of that hierarchical power. Popular music of the past 100 years has had a unique relationship to social and political struggles. It generally appears to be on the side of rebellion, yet its actual function tends to be as a measure of the actual limits of a social movement (South Africa's a good example: most of the names' from the period of subversive music under apartheid are now pro-ANC). To the extent that the audience is content to remain an audience of fans, it retains a respect for hierarchical relationships that maintain the wider society. The radical' popular musician represents his constituency of fans every bit as much as the politician who would like to regain this constituency. This is why rock/pop/rap stars are often happy to be enlisted by politicians to "deliver the youth vote" to them.



"As in all other spheres of traditional culture, the music and dance of Britain could not satisfy the demands of its new, alienated youth group. Popular negro music and dance...is essentially the recreational pattern of an alienated people, developed to express the rage, the anger, the violence and the vitalism of a sub-culture which, for various historical reasons, is basically hedonistic in orientation. It was what the youth of Britain lacked." (Orlando Patterson, "The Dance Invasion", New Society, 15/9/66 - reprinted in "The Pop Process", Richard Mabey, Hutchinson Educational.)

Early rural American country and blues music was usually recorded by company talent scouts sent out to hold auditions in southern towns. They would set up portable recording equipment in a hotel room, barn or front porch and record local players. The large market among poor blacks and whites for these cheap 78 r.p.m. records was discovered more or less by accident when one or two recordings in these styles were casually released as novelty items'. This was the modest birth of today's multi-billion dollar pop music industry.

It's interesting to speculate about how differently popular music in Britain might have developed had a similar harvesting of local folk talent been made by an enterprising UK record company (it was partly because of the enormous power of the BBC, as opposed to the more genuinely free market in the States in the 30s and even till the late 60s). Undoubtedly popular American music would have still imported its influence in the form of blues and jazz and its revolutionary musical improvisations and implications, but is it possible that there could have emerged a native blues and jazz-influenced folk music in the UK in the 20's and 30's? In Jamaica, for example, rhythm'n blues and jazz picked up via New Orleans-based US radio stations and records brought by returning sailors and emigrants quickly influenced local musical styles. Jamaican music soon progressed from mediocre covers of American material to blending these influences with local traditions such as *mento* native rhythm patterns (and British folk songs and sea shanties brought over by colonists, slavemasters etc) - and from this emerged the wonderful sound of Ska. But in the UK things moved more slowly and it was not until the mid-60's that outside influences were incorporated into a native rock style via, particularly, a band like the Kinks. This was followed by the innovative folk-rock of Fairport Convention (which in its initial freshness and spontaneity - even if obviously limited by this society - worked better than most subsequent attempts; but since their early innovations - under the influence of the fresh spontaneous upheavals of the 60s, Fairport have for decades now coasted along on a cosy nostalgic folkiness)..

Resonance FM Radio; the avant-garde earache? - 104FM

Resonance is a London based experimental community radio station run by the London Musicians Collective. It is licensed and funded by the government and broadcasts daily. It seems that more or less anyone with an otherwise un-exposed musical and/or verbal sound to make can probably get some airspace on this station. It appears to aim to be a platform for those voices given no outlet by other media forces. Which all adds to its wide diversity - and often, its incoherence...

Tune in any day, and you'll hear presenters jabbering away about anything that floats into their head, swapping banal conversation with each other, or playing sound collages of randomly associated noises and bits of music, and so on. The modern avant-garde in your living room. Yes, it's a novelty to experience this in stuffy old London where the State still keeps a tight hold on policing the airwaves. It's also sometimes interesting and entertaining' - but to these ears, more often banal, pretentious and irritating. We get the impression that being avant-garde' in this context means abdicating all attempt or responsibility for coherent meaning or structure in what one expresses. A chronic relativism takes over where everything becomes a bland equivalent of everything else, all much of a muchness. But if one challenges the typical banality and emptiness of such cultural products then one is often put down for taking it so seriously - the joke's on you for looking for any meaning in it!; or you're too shallow to fathom the depths of the artist's or performer's intensity and complexity, which is beyond meaning and description.

(There are also some useful political discussion and foreign language programs, though the politics is usually of a limited type; for example, a weekly Indymedia listing and info program is almost exclusively about DIY-type activist protest events, with almost nothing about any strikes occurring.)

Like so much of alternative comedy' it's constantly implied by Resonance presenters and their pals that the everyday banality of life is a rich source of potential humour. Today someone matter-of-factly read out their last year's diary in boring detail - as if there was something both daringly authentic and intimate about such an act - with the assumption that they are anyway such a fascinating personality that we would gratefully enjoy their very presence in our lives, the content and meaning of it being entirely secondary. It's an illusion reminiscent of the exaggerated comment sometimes made of people with fine singing or speaking voices - "They'd sound good even if they recited the phone book." (Except that in the latter case their talent is usually real rather than imagined.)

It's typical of the obsession with the portrayal of the mundane details of everyday life that pervades the media. Reality TV, soaps, fly-on-the-wall documentaries, Big Brother, Pop Idol-type shows offering instant stardom to ordinary' (desperately fame-seeking) people. At a time when daily life is more lacking than ever in real social communication, the very force that imposes this isolation steps in to represent the intimate details that in fear we all tend to hide from each other in daily life. One can imagine the Resonance listener gratefully feeling a little less isolated for being part of a dedicated minority audience; and for some Resonance FM will also be a fashionable lifestyle accessory, identifying them with something perceived to be daring and radical.

But Resonance does not escape the trap of most media, despite appearances. It seems to relate to its listeners as something more than an audience and as consumers: its novelty is its unsophisticated, home-made approach, and its accessibility; it's not hard to get yourself heard on Resonance - send in a tape and the odds are good you'll get on the airwaves (this has the added appeal for Resonance of keeping its production costs very low). Obviously a relatively large proportion of their audience must also be involved in performance of various kinds - both as producers and consumers. So it has its niche audience - who as cultural producers and audience, see their lives as somewhat of a performance; therefore the mundane details of life paraded on the airwaves are considered as meaningful artistic statements. The fact that they are also convenient filler in the absence of anything inspired or useful to say (other than please notice me') is conveniently avoided. From Emin's unmade bed exhibited in posh galleries to domestic lives shared over the airwaves with Resonance listeners - the mundane, uninspired and boring is invested with a gloss of cultural meaning merely by being put in a context where it can have a label of artistic creation' stuck on it. In this society even a speck of dust achieves significance, grabs people's attention, merely by placing it outside its normal context. This is a perversion, a distortion, of a genuine desire - to reflect and distance oneself from the banalities of daily life in order to practically transform them. But the only transformation' in these cases is to turn them into a show, outside daily life, colonising daily life as something to be contemplated.



Fame Is A Mask That Eats Away The Face

The desperation of fame and those who admire and seek it

The cliché of the lonely entertainer, unhappy clown etc. is grounded in a certain truth; the attention and, often, adoration, an audience gives to the performer is close to the unconditional love of a mother to her child****. (This is reflected in the obsessive behaviour of some fans'- i.e. fanatics.) Yet, unlike a mother, it is a strangely impersonal love, as shared by thousands or millions. And it can easily be transferred to the next trend to come along, so the star must compete for attention with all the others clamouring for exposure in the media marketplace. (If one lasts long enough to be granted legendary' status, a reputation based on long past activities then one is frozen in time with the millstone of a past that all present activity is compared to.) So fame inevitably tends to breed insecurity. Like a beautiful' woman who inspires interest on the

basis of an impersonal, objective fact - her appearance - the celebrity can't be sure if the crowd loves the real them or merely their performance, their appearances. To compensate for this confusion (and add to it), the star sometimes loses the distinction and comes to see their whole existence as a public performance. S/he lives only through the maintenance of a public image - life mediated by the media. In extreme cases this alienation from one's self becomes chronically self-destructive and the celebrity falls apart in public; the vultures of the Media gleefully record the crack up, as if to say; we put you up there and we'll exploit the performance of your downfall.'. Meanwhile, the fans think they are ever so autonomous by by-passing the media, devoting websites to the ins and outs of their idol's problems (Pete Doherty in 2005 is only the latest in a long line of stars going through this process - but what the hell, it sells records and keeps him famous - that's why he got into that business). The early 70's movie Stardust' was more honest than most about the alienation of the rock star celebrity, but then this was in an era when all roles were being questioned, and the movie was a recuperation of a more profound critique.

The decomposition of this stupid life is given a boost in the way the fan wishes they could be the decomposed idol of their choice. Fame being the image of power and glory, the fan strives for this power vicariously, one step removed. The decadence of the celebrity and their decomposing contradictions within the intensified collapse of this world becomes a projection and valorisation of the petty misery the fan endures. It all makes misery seem glamorous, an aestheticisation as tragedy': "even if I'm fucked up I can become a star, and maybe even use my fuck-ups to become a star, or an artist of some kind. Poets always suffer for their art". Criticism remains confined to thinking of ways to improve the star but the fundamental hierarchical respect for the star as living commodity is not criticised. This modern dialectic of pseudo-'criticism' - and real identification - is expressed in the transformation in the fan from frenzied adoration to a partial detachment - the more sophisticated' fan. Take the fairly recent French no. 1 hit whose most famous line is "If I exist, it's to be a fan, to be a fan, to be a fan" repeated endlessly in almost operatic style, obviously implying a partial contempt for the fan (partial because obviously the singer can't go so far as to totally bite off the hand that feeds him). The guy who wrote and performs it was at one time an obsessive fan. He's turned his lucidity about himself into another reason to perpetuate the star system, but this time with an apparent knowing' superiority, having risen from spectator to spectacle', from fan to star. At the same time, criticism' here expresses the fact that the fan, if s/he is to be really cool, must no longer be absolutely unsubtly abject, but must take his spectacle with a pinch of salt. Only that way can s/he have the possibility of not being simply a contemptible fan, but also maybe an innovator, maybe even making money out of it.



Muzak to my ears

Public space and muzak as policing

“If you want more Mozart in your life, start loitering.”

The managers of certain public commercial spaces, such as shopping centres and railway stations, have seen the use of these spaces by youths for meeting places as a problem for some time. It sends the wrong message out to potential consumers, can feel intimidating and can affect profitability. It's not the image or ambience they want to promote for their businesses. So they have enlisted a tactic (or rather it has been sold to them) of playing classical music over loudspeakers to drive away the groups of youths. *“Staff at Co-op stores ... have a remote control that can turn the music on if there's a situation developing and they need to disperse people”. Tyneside Metro reports similar success, especially if the music is either sung by Pavarotti or written by Mozart’. For your better-educated vandal, atonal music has been found to do the trick: the union bar at Leicester University was emptied in an instant by some computer-generated sounds. And apparently we can expect to hear more of this kind of deterrent on the London Underground, which has taken up the scheme. If you want more Mozart in your life, start loitering.”* This has reportedly been surprisingly successful in the UK, which is kind of depressing, if these reports are accurate and not wishful propaganda. From our own limited observations, there would seem to be some truth to its effectiveness.

Its effectiveness presumably shows how much youths are attached to self identity being defined by consumption of particular kinds of music. That they can be so easily manipulated in this way is another example of how much personal image and its close relation, status, still are invested with an inflated sense of self worth and importance. The mere situation of being seen to share the same space as uncool' music is considered damaging enough to move on. Music is every bit as much a lifestyle accessory and element of conspicuous consumption for these kids (as it is for many other social groups) as the flash car or watch is for the pimp, yuppie or other businessmen. Of course we are all colonised by Capital sufficiently to be driven to indulge in often irrational, contradictory behaviour as compensation for the miseries of social life within capitalism; gambling, drugs, fashion, celebrity worship and various other avenues of entertainment and consumption. But the extent to which this is now dominant and no longer balanced by other countervailing, more critical oppositional forces in daily life is depressing - and

a symptom of a terrible defeat that we have, as yet, failed to overcome....

Muzak is annoying, but to so easily cave in to its presence is a pretty weak state of affairs. Maybe it shows how weak people's sense of self, of individuality, are in a society which colonises us from every angle. Maybe it's a reflection of the general air of resignation in the UK as a country with, for so long now, such a low level of struggle - the ego's resistance to externally imposed culture is likewise at such a low level. (Yet in other places, such as Seattle, USA - where struggle has been at similarly low levels - street people have resisted this musical policing and refused to budge from occupying public space. Maybe because these are the street-homeless who really have nowhere else to go.) Ironically, some of these UK youth are likely to be the same characters you can sometimes find keeping a whole neighbourhood awake at all hours by blasting out the heavy thump, thump bass of their favourite rappers from car stereos - or from their bedroom CD players. But maybe that's a clue to their passive response to the Muzak - a conformity to the law of the urban jungle; he who roars the loudest claims the territory in the noise war of all against all. The common sound of the stupidly loud car stereo blasting from a car of (usually male) youths as they drive around is a territorial gesture. It says "I exist, look at me and the flash car I possess, I listen to music that is modern and cool and I therefore embody these qualities, I insist on dominating your attention and consciousness for the duration I am in your presence." Competitive appearance and conspicuous consumption is valorised into the be all and end all of the use of public space. In fact it makes the space less public, and brutally colonises it with a generally hypnotic noise (dominated as it is by the bass frequency and the particular emotional and biological affects this imposes) - so one is even denied the internal space to think and concentrate in peace, as one negotiates the generally uncommunicative population of the streets.



The flipside of this domination is the solitary retreat into the internal soundtrack of the walkman/Ipod/MP3. Cutting off from the public arena where people rarely talk to each other is a self-fulfilling prophecy - part of the appeal is that people are less likely to communicate with you, and you can also block out the banal nonsense that people generally insist on talking in public on their mobile phones ("I'm on the bus..."). Everybody on the bus is physically present, but so many people are socially and mentally somewhere else. "Technology - the knack of so arranging the world that we don't have to experience it." (Max Frisch). So technological responses to the social alienation of public space generally perpetuate and compound the problem, or create new ones.

(note added 10/2/2013: for a more obviously miserable effect of headphones, check out: <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/nationnow/2012/01/study-number-of-distracted-pedestrians-killed-triples-since-2004.html>)

Another related, more sinister, form of policing public space is also now in use, sometimes used in combination with muzak; *“Mosquito units are small generators giving out a[n irritating] high frequency sound which, it is claimed, only people aged under 25 can hear due to the density of their inner ear bones.”* These are turned on and off as necessary to give the youth an aural cattle prod to get moving. So there is a low level guerrilla techno-war going on in the arena of public space. On the one side, the homeless who live in the streets, and also those youths with no communal leisure spaces of their own. On the other, the market forces of shopkeepers, shopping mall managers, security guards and other cops. The message is that if you're not here to consume then you have no business being here. One might expect that some smart young techies could come up with a blocking device against the mosquito units. (There have been calls - in Feb 2008 - by the Children's Commissioner for the device to be banned, as it is an indiscriminate targeting based solely on age which, for example, also affects babies - whose source of discomfort would not be understood by their parents.)

* * *

Canned music for the masses

“...in a recent Mori poll, 17% of people surveyed said that “the thing they most detest about daily modern life” is the use of muzak.” (Guardian, 28/3/2006.)

“When I was younger, I worked in retail, and Muzak was the equivalent of Chinese water torture. Imagine listening to Lawrence Welk, or instrumental versions of Christmas carols, for forty hours per week. It was horrible.” (CBS News website, 9/2/2008)

In 1948, the local transport system in Washington DC began broadcasting Muzak in its buses and streetcars. Over 90% of the passengers favoured the continuation of the service, but a small but vocal group objected to this infringement. There followed a court battle challenging the constitutional basis for the broadcasting of music in public spaces - a court battle which proceeded to the US Supreme Court. Psychologists were employed to testify for the supposed healthy effects of Muzak on the population and the case was ultimately lost, thereby securing in law the irresistible expansion of muzak in daily life.

“MUZAK

Muzak is about an idea. A big idea. The kind that shoots past the conventional, sharp lefts around the expected and knocks the predictable off its pedestal. Its premise is simple. Every company has a story to tell. What we do is bring that story to life with music, voice and sound in a way that is as powerful as it is persuasive. Emotion is our driver. It is the force that connects people and places. The intangible that creates experiences that builds brands. The passion that fuels who we are and what we design. Seventy years ago, Muzak created an industry. Three generations later, we're still revolutionizing it.

AUDIO ARCHITECTURE

Audio Architecture is emotion by design. Our innovation and our inspiration, it is the integration of music, voice and sound to create experiences that link customers with companies. Its power lies in its subtlety. It bypasses the resistance of the mind and targets the receptiveness of the heart. When people are made to feel good in, say, a store, they feel good about that store. They like it. Remember it. Go back to it. Audio Architecture builds a bridge to loyalty. And loyalty is what keeps brands alive.

AUDIO BRANDING

Think of it this way. You are a brand. Your clothes, your hair, your way of walking, talking, living-all of those elements are unique to you. It's the same with companies. Each one has a brand all its own. Muzak translates that image into a language that speaks to the heart. We call our creation Audio Branding. It is the convergence of art and science, of methodology and intuition, of pulling out the parameters and accelerating to something as true as it is engaging.”

- Promotional drivel from the Muzak company website.

Muzak is both the name of the company that introduced piped music, aural wallpaper, into our lives back in 1924 and also the common generic term for such product. ****Originally piped into workplaces to improve productivity, it has now invaded public space like a cancer everywhere, from lifts/elevators to shops, transport, toilets, telephones etc. It is nowadays often used in shops to create an atmosphere that makes what is on sale more saleable and appealing. The effect of various music on consumers' behaviour has been thoroughly researched and analysed in its various aspects; including its biological and emotional effects and its effect on brain function. Muzak is a commodity that, by being consumed, encourages you to buy other commodities; neatly illustrating the old situationist slogan “culture - the commodity that sells all the others”.

But Muzak is only the logical extreme of a more general commodification of music in this

society; it is an exaggeration of the normal' social function of music. Music has several different functions and forms as a commodity:

as a recorded performance - record, tape, CD, MP3 etc.;

as live performance - in concert by musicians;

as component of another (usually visual) commodity - in film, TV, advertising;

as environmental aural decoration, ambience creator - background music, jukebox, Muzak, ringtones;

as an influencer of economic behaviour - by encouraging greater productivity in the workplace and increased spending in the marketplace.

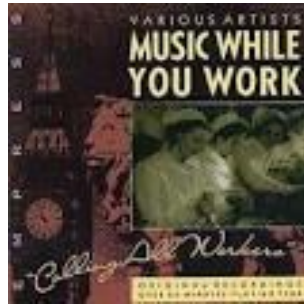
It is this last aspect we want to explore in discussing muzak.



General George Owen Squier, the Father of Muzak.

Picture says it all, really.

Muzak was developed by an ex-army general at around the same time as Taylor was developing his theories and analysis of time and motion in the workplace. Both Muzak and Taylorism (which Lenin praised so enthusiastically) applied scientific observation and analysis as a means to increase the efficiency of workers' productivity. (These techniques were soon extended to also making consumer habits more efficient ' for the capitalists.) Muzak is scientifically engineered music produced industrially. Research has repeatedly shown that Muzak raises workplace productivity and increases sales in the shopping environment. Cycles of rhythm, tension and release within the Muzak are scientifically programmed to coincide with the peaks and troughs of the biorhythms and attention spans of the worker.



(to example the additional pain of what British workers had to put up with when Music Whilst You Work was broadcast, listen to [this](#))

By treating the worker as a simple component of production, an extension of the machine - but targeting certain of the component's human qualities so as to enhance the machine -such as efficiency - time and motion studies sought to ensure that the act of production could be rationalised to a point of maximum efficiency and output; the most profitable use of labour power. During WWII Muzak was further fine-tuned through its application to munitions production and its use in the Army. It was also used extensively to keep up national morale amongst the wider population. The same approach was applied on the other side of the Atlantic in wartime UK:

" Music while you work was first broadcast on 23rd June 1940 as an experimental series starting three weeks after Dunkirk and almost coinciding with the fall of France. The programmes were originally designed for factory workers "as a help to lessen strain, relieve monotony and thereby increase efficiency". They were broadcast in the Forces programme for a half hour each morning from 10.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. and each afternoon from 3.00 to 3.30 p.m.

In those critical days of 1940 the whole country was roused to further efforts of production - Ernie Bevin, then wartime Minister of Labour, wrote: "Britain's army of war workers, an army which is growing daily greater, is untiring in its efforts, but no man or woman can toil unceasingly without relaxation; the BBC's first step in this direction was "Music while you work", a daily ration of music during the morning and afternoon which made the hours pass more quickly and resulted in greatly increased production."

Research was conducted among workers to discover their preferences and among factories to establish their special needs. Among various theories it was suggested that workers in "heavy" industry (machine shops, factories, etc) preferred a "heavier" type of programme - music of a more robust nature played by military bands, brass bands, or large light orchestras. Older workers, especially men, were said to show a preference for martial and light music, while younger workers and many thousands of women preferred dance music.

The regular announcement which introduced "Music while you work" in the General Forces Programme was "Calling all Forces overseas and workers at home"... [...]

In 1943 the programme retained the approval of the Ministry of Labour because it "sustained morale, increased production and gave workers everywhere a sense of kinship." Decca instituted their own special series of "Music while you work" records ... "intended and produced for the entertainment of our war workers and others engaged for long and tedious hours in factories". They announced that Edgar Jackson, former editor of the Melody Maker and reviewer of dance records in the Gramophone would be in charge. Their monthly pamphlet stated that "Before music can be suitable for such purpose a number of highly complicated psychological and technical factors have to be taken into consideration. For one thing, there is its effect on the workers. It must entertain them, but without distracting them from the tasks on which they may be employed. For another, it must be audible above the often almost overwhelming noise of machinery, and this calls for special forms of instrumentation and methods of orchestration and recording." [...]

Wynford Reynolds, ... as organizer of the [Decca record] Series contributed a note to the 1945 BBC Year Book: -

"A survey of the past 5 years shows what an important part "Music while you work" has played in the working life of the community. Hundreds of factories have been visited to study reception conditions and to learn the opinions of the "men on the job". To quote from a few factory reports "The music exhilarates the workers without acting as a harmful distraction". "Music while you work" is a wonderful tonic that cheers us up every day. It gives us a break though we continue to work and helps us to carry on afresh." The listening figures were impressive, 7,000 factories employing 4 million in 1943, 8,000 employing 4 and a half million in 1944, rising to 9,000 factories after the war in 1945.

Excellent also as background music this was another example of a programme designed with a specific audience in mind, which acquired far bigger audiences than expected.

It continued for 27 years ... before it was axed... "

- Tony Clarke, sleeve-notes to "Calling All Workers (Music While You Work)" LP, 1983.

The fruits of these researches were applied in wider areas when peacetime came. Now it was time to apply Muzak more ruthlessly to the consumption activity of workers. Retail outlets were monitored and analysed to provide the Muzak corporation with the data to refine their product as

a tool for maximising the profitable shopping habits of consumers. As the Muzak advert says, *“When people are made to feel good in, say, a store, they feel good about that store. They like it. Remember it. Go back to it. Audio Architecture builds a bridge to loyalty. And loyalty is what keeps brands alive.”*

Muzak is intended to function as a kind of aural Prozac, inducing a mood of passive contentment with one's immediate situation. A mood where one's critical faculties are overwritten by a pacifying effect via one's emotional receptors. The instinctive emotional responses are harnessed to the economic dictates of the marketplace, office and factory. A colonisation of emotional responses, all the more totalitarian in its very inoffensive and unobtrusive nature.



Crossed wires and crosstown traffic

Nowadays some taxis provide facilities for “the fare” to choose one's own soundtrack; but as soon as musical choice enters the equation, potential personal conflicts and misinterpretations of meanings appear. The music facility is presumably to give the passenger the choice to avoid talk with the normally chatty cabbies - on this occasion a mixing of the two brought tragi-comic results:

News item, 5th April 2006:

ARRESTED BY TERROR COPS..FOR PLAYING THE CLASH

A MAN was “frog-marched” off a plane on suspicion of being a terrorist - because he'd played the Clash song London Calling on his MP3 player.

A taxi driver called the cops after Harraj Mann, 24, played him the punk anthem, which includes the lyrics “now war is declared and battle come down”.

He also played Nowhere Man by the Beatles and Led Zeppelin's Immigrant Song, which includes the line: “The hammer of the gods will drive our ships to new lands, to fight the horde, singing and crying: Valhalla, I am coming!”

Harraj said yesterday: "He didn't like Led Zeppelin or The Clash but I don't think there was a need to tell the police."

The cab was taking Harraj to an airport to catch a BMI Baby flight to London but the driver became suspicious about his passenger's choice of music and alerted the police.

By the time they acted, the flight was taxiing into position on the runway - so they ordered it back to the terminal and escorted Harraj off the plane. He was quizzed by Special Branch officers for three hours under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Harraj, a mobile phone salesman from Hartlepool, Teesside, explained he was going to visit family in London. But by the time he was released, he had missed his flight, which left Durham Tees Valley airport at 7pm last Thursday. He said: "The taxi had one of those tape-deck things that plugs into your digital music player. "First, I played Procol Harum's A Whiter Shade Of Pale, which the taxi man liked. "I figured he liked the classics, so I put on a bit of Led Zeppelin - the Immigrant Song - which he didn't like. "Then, since I was going to London, I played The Clash and finished up with Nowhere Man by The Beatles. "I got on the flight and two men in suits came on, asked me my full name and took me off for questioning.

"I got frog-marched off the plane in front of everyone, had my bags searched and was asked every question you can think of. "I was told, We have had a complaint made against you due to your music.'

"It turned out the taxi driver alerted someone when I arrived at the airport and had spoken about my music....

He was quizzed by Special Branch officers for three hours under the Anti-Terrorism Act."

So in these times, when social relations are often reduced to identity politics gone paranoid and psychotic, some racist UK cabbie can get you pulled in by the terrorising anti-terrorist' cops based on his interpretation of your innocent musical choices. But then music consumption is like a blank canvas and people subjectively project on to it their interpretation of themselves and of others. The tragi-comic aspect is how chronically the wires got crossed in this case, cabbie and passenger each assigning to the other assumed identities that did not match. What we see when we look in our own acoustic mirror' is not necessarily what others see. One person's cool' lifestyle accessory that expresses an image/attitude they strongly identify and align themselves with is someone else's corny, cheesy, dumb crap. One man's fantasy song with a catchy tune and a rocking beat is another man's declaration of a threat to the whole civilised world.

Another comic misunderstanding concerning Clash songs occurred when a bass player in a Bristol Clash tribute band texted the lyrics of Tommy Gun' - *"How about this for Tommy Gun? OK - so let's agree about the price and make it one jet airliner for 10 prisoners."*, intending to send them to the lead singer in the band. He typed in a wrong number and the member of the public who received the text notified the cops, who sent a Special Branch officer to visit the unfortunate punk rocker. *"He said he had then been asked to explain what the message meant, and described how the detective had looked "puzzled" when told the words were by the Clash. The officer seemed "a little embarrassed" when he left, Mr Devine added."* (Guardian, June/3/2004). The security services have become so jumpy and paranoid that 30 year old songs (that were anyway only militant punk posing first time around) can be mistaken as a threat. How ironic, at a time when the cosy nostalgia of punk - as the lost youth of the middle-aged consumers of punk tribute bands - has never been less threatening.

For the individual consumer, music is a fashion accessory, signifying a (usually) risk-free identification with various roles; ringtones on a mobile phone are a personality statement. Such small invasions of new areas of life by the commodity seem in themselves trivial; but they embody, transmit and embed the wider logic of the market and the commodity deeper into daily life and social relations. From booming car stereos to tinny ringtones, music colonises attention, filling sensory input and mental space. For many consumers, fashion becomes an obligation, conspicuous consumption the small margin of choice to express originality'; the obvious contradiction being that fashions, by their nature, are collective conformities to a passing look' of this season's/era's marketing; or more particularly, an ensemble of consumer choices - from haircut to ringtone. Music is an ideal commodity insofar as it is central to so many diversified avenues and forms of consumption and role images; recordings, film, clothes, advertising etc. The soundtrack to a whole lifestyle choice for the consumer, where some impoverished form of community is found within shared consumption (e.g. the community' of the parade of various weekend youth fashion cults - associated with various musical styles - of London's Camden Lock market, for example; an empty cultural void lacking in these times even a relationship to any oppositional social movement.)

* * *

"You're on hold....."

"...the subject is fascinating - all part of mood-control. For me the intentions of background music are openly political, and an example of how political power is constantly shifting from the ballot box into areas where the voter has nowhere to mark his ballot paper. The most important political choices in the future will probably never be consciously exercised. I'm intrigued by the way some background music is surprisingly aggressive, especially that played on consumer

complaint phone lines and banks, airlines and phone companies themselves, with strident, non-rhythmic and arms-length sequences that are definitely not user-friendly..." - J.G. Ballard

As we can see from the Muzak Corporation's references to "Audio Architecture", music is now used as environmental material to enhance sales techniques and marketing, usually to soothe the nerves and irritation of impatient phone callers but, as Ballard points out, also to *jangle* the nerves and *exacerbate* the irritation of dissatisfied service customers, probably to make them stop holding on.

Muzak has been applied at the heart of the two central arenas of modern life; work and leisure. Its initial development as a means of improving workplace productivity led to its later application in the arena of mass consumption. This only reflected capitalism's wider social and economic developments; as rising productivity enabled the greater integration of workers into society as mass consumers, so Muzak then became a weapon - alongside advertising - of sales techniques within the shopping environment. With the growth of the mass consumer, the terrain for maximising the circulation of commodities was enlarged into the emotional and sensory areas of human life - as part of the retail experience'. Retail branding' of corporate image went beyond simple audio-visual advertising and became a creation of a multi-dimensional environment in chains of shops, hotels etc. As capitalism has achieved the commodification of "free time" and leisure as consumption, marketing develops to try and colonise the consumer's senses and emotional responses via the subconscious. The fact that many people "ignore" or filter out Muzak from conscious awareness is the ideal response desired by its creators. So Muzak becomes part of an environmental design consciously arranged by planners to affect the consumer unconsciously.

And so the commodification of daily life is intensified; the unobtrusive nature of Muzak takes it under the radar' of conscious reception and allows its deeper intrusion.

(a differently illustrated pdf version of this last section on muzak is available from here: www.alphabetthreat.co.uk/pasttense/pdf/muzak.pdf)

Footnotes:

(apologies for the lack of consecutive and consistent numbering on these footnotes; despite this the links to the footnotes and back to the text are accurate)

¹ The volume of domestic sound systems has grown massively since the 1960s. The average home/car stereo at high volume is now often louder than a whole rock band in the early 60s. Add to this the widespread use of Walkmans, Ipods etc (particularly on public transport where the volume has to be set high to drown out the noise of the engine or traffic), very loud sound

systems in clubs and cinemas - and it's easy to see why widespread hearing loss is reported among young people. Which means they are being caught in a vicious circle of having to keep turning the music up louder to hear it, which does more damage...

↳ Each to their own in taste in music - *but* there is a link between an aggressive, individualist anti-social attitude and a choice of music that often promotes those values. As well as in the way it is used by the individual to mediate his public presence.

↳ It was not up until the triumph of the bourgeoisie, circa 1800, that music in manuscript form became standardised. This precision demanded a greater submission to exactly how the Great Composer demanded you play it (at least the ones composing from that period onwards). In practice, however, many merely treated it as an indication around which they could express themselves, *interpret, a bit* individually, though this didn't allow for any innovative development of the piece. Moreover, it tended to standardise pieces retrospectively, when it's not clear how the dead composers wanted it played or whether they wanted it played in a standardised way, and implied that the original composers themselves hadn't improvised the pieces they'd written down.

↳ Although there were certainly what might be called bourgeois', more individualist, intellectually-oriented' transformations of classically derived and codified laws of harmony' at this time - Webern, Varese, Debussy, Satie etc. Jazz itself was soon to influence some 20th century classical works, though occasionally there was a reciprocal influence - e.g. Bartok influenced some jazz.

↳ Pre-blues songs such as *Stagolee'*, *The House of the Rising Sun'* and *Frankie and Johnny* are black ballads dealing with, in a different context, similar themes to the UK border ballads. The influence and connections are sometimes explicit - Leadbelly's version of *The Gallows Pole'*, for example, is really a black American variant of earlier British songs such as *The Prickle-eye Bush'*, telling the same story of a woman's attempts to save her father or lover from hanging. Researchers have also claimed to trace the origins of "*House of the Rising Sun'* back to a much earlier British folk song; and the harmonic structure/chord progression of *Frankie and Johnny* strongly anticipates the later classic musical form of the 3-line, 12 bar blues. So they are part of an evolving transitional period of song development, looking both backwards and forwards in their structure.

↳ This was very noticeable in Ireland. Having no recording industry of its own, the earliest records of Irish folk music were imported from America, where musicians were recorded as an offshoot of the thriving Irish dance scene in Chicago and other cities. The truly brilliant fiddling of Michael Coleman, a mixture of his native Donegal style and his individual virtuosity, became very influential across Ireland. But it took recordings made on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean to spread the local style of playing and repertoire from the remote area of Donegal to other corners of Ireland.

↳ "*From the late seventeenth century, dance and music were the main forms of entertainment*

in rural Ireland as neighbours called to each other's houses. According to the accounts of many travellers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, crossroads dancing featured strongly in the social life of rural communities. In winter, or during inclement weather, the dancers moved into kitchens and barns." Though "the word *ceili* originally meant the gathering of people in a house at night to talk and have an enjoyable time together" eventually "music and dancing became part of the proceedings... There was a growing suspicion by the clergy concerning these "occasions of sin", with many priests condemning the practice from the altar and searching hedges for courting couples... Bishop Maylan of Kerry was extremely vocal in his condemnation and even threatened excommunication on those who disobeyed his ruling... The Public Dance Halls Act of 1935 introduced more commercial dance halls with modern dance bands. The Catholic Church used this act to end cross-roads dancing and insisted that young people should only attend dances indoors under supervision." (*Irish Dance*, A. Flynn, 1998.) From the 1890's the nationalist cultural organisation The Gaelic League, with its strong involvement of the Catholic clergy, laid down strict guidelines for the teaching, performance and content of Irish dancing with the intention of watchfully protecting the moral health of the nation'. Another example of how so many generations have suffered the twisted, resentful dictates of the repressed sexuality of a frustrated celibate Catholic priesthood.

4

A.L. Morton was one of the more interesting 20th century Marxist writers on black and white folk musics. He had a strong influence on younger Marxist academics such as E.P. Thompson. His worst trait was his moronic sickening submission to the Communist' Party line on subjects such as George Orwell's books.

5: This is an improvement on the usual insipid pacifist standards - like "I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield down by the riverside..." (updated in the late 50s to "I'm gonna lay down my atom bomb...") or "We Shall Overcome" (not strictly pacifist, but generally used by pacifists), which are devoid of even basic insights. Alan Lomax in his book "The Land Where The Blues Began" tells of an army induction centre at the start of the US entry into World War II, where the blacks are totally indifferent to the various crude nationalist songs (My country, 'tis of thee' etc.) and exhortations to die for the flag, but when the black Minister started singing "I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield down by the riverside" the whole crowd swung behind him and sang "Ain't gonna study war no more..." as they marched to the station to board the train to take them to the Army barracks.

A report in The Guardian (20/9/04) claimed "Roy Moore, the former Republican chief justice of Alabama, led a failed bid to keep a monument of the Ten Commandments in his courthouse. Standing before a group of supporters, some of whom were waving Confederate flags, emblem

of the slave-holding South, he said: "If the rule of law' means to do everything a judge tells you to do, we would still have slavery in this country." Wearing T-shirts proclaiming "Islam is a lie, homosexuality is a sin, abortion is murder", they then sang We Shall Overcome." But then the kid-killer Lyndon Baines Johnson could state "We shall overcome" in an address to the nation. Sure, no song is powerful enough not to be recuperated by our enemies, but these vapid pacifist classics are easy game. On the other hand, they too can be re-written - as "sword and shield" was in the 1970s, sung by demonstrators with these words, *"I'm gonna throw those ol' acid tabs in Parliament's water supply...I'm gonna throw down my molotov down by 10 Downing Street...etc."*

Footnote: Lomax states "... gospel has become a world-renowned idiom, so far eclipsing the folk spirituals and shouts from which it sprang that the older forms have been virtually forgotten...This tendency threatens the continuance of the finest song genre of this and perhaps any continent, namely the black spiritual. I felt this all the more strongly since I witnessed the forced replacement of the spirituals by gospel in the Delta... I thought of the very West African voodoo rituals I'd seen in Haiti. There most of the ritual consisted of holy dancing and singing by the largely feminine congregation, with brief inputs by the cult leader, dealing with the spirits. The African pattern, which had permeated the American folk church, was now being eliminated" (incidentally, the incredible successful Haitian uprising against France and slavery during the French Revolution in the 1790s involved wonderfully passionate firing up through music and drumming and voodoo rituals against the white rulers, enough to scare - 200 years later - Martin Ros, the academic author of *Night of Fire*, a book about the Haitian uprising). But Lomax is being somewhat purist here about the difference between spirituals and gospel, ignoring more democratic' developments in gospel subsequent to the initial crude break from spirituals. At the same time, it's ironic that Lomax, who constantly denounced the way the blacks were ripped off by the whites, has himself, been accused of a similar entrepreneurial mentality, of supposedly copyrighting and claiming interviews and recordings as being carried out by himself when they were in fact carried out by his black research students, who were then denied access to them. At least this is claimed by the editors in *Lost Delta Found* by John W. Work, Wade Jones and Samuel C. Adams, Jr.(edited by Robert Gordon and Bruce Nemerov. Vanderbilt University Press, 2005). But various scholars have questioned this book, claiming it as an oh so convenient denunciation of whites. Undoubtedly as long as people think they can make money out of exposés and exposés of exposés, truth becomes an increasingly tangled forest. When it comes to Lomax, we don't know what the real truth is, but must acknowledge that the allegations are strongly denied by many who knew him.

*******The politics of this video is moronically pro-ANC and Mandela. For information and analysis of

the current situation in South Africa and of the revolutionary movement in the 70s and 80s, see our text '[South Africa: Now and Then](#)'.

********In fact, this could equally be reversed: the fan adores the celebrity like a child loves their mother- it's a symbiotic relationship and who gives birth to whom is largely irrelevant - both depend on each other.

******** Throughout this text we refer to both the Muzak Corporation and the wider genre as Muzak An Interesting book that deal with the history of both the Muzak Corporation and the genre from a pro-Muzak perspective is "Elevator Music" by Joseph Lanza, Quartet Books, 1994 . For Lanza, we live in the best of all possible worlds, one where as eager consumers we are flirted with, flattered and seduced by the enticements of modern marketing. He sees the theme park and shopping mall as the highest realisation of muzak's application.

"The art of merchandising, so celebrated in Disney's amalgam of advertising and entertainment, is practiced with more and more sophistication in other retail haunts. In-store shoppers have become a prime media target. This is why, as foreground music and background music become as interchangeable as microchips, Muzak and its epigones play a grandfatherly role in our information age by simulating the theme park in all of our surroundings. More than ever, the store has become the proving ground for media impact on global consumption. The greatest audience participation show of all is the daily stroll to the supermarket or mall, where our predilections are stimulated by an array of gorgeous products arranged with the precision of a Busby Berkeley spectacle, the scenario brings to mind the finale of the film The Stepford Wives, where robotized females amble placidly through supermarket lanes to elevator orchestrals that are more seductive than sinister."

Lanza can only conceive of the human subject as consumer; therefore consumption must be the source of all pleasure, the realisation of all desire -in an environment choreographed by marketing forces. He concludes; *"Elevator music (besides just being good music) is essentially a distillation of the happiness that modern technology has promised. A world without elevator music would be much grimmer than its detractors (and those who take it for granted) could ever realize. This is because most of us, in our hearts, want a world tailored by Walt Disney's "imagineers", an ergonomical "Main Street U.S.A.", where the buildings never make you feel too small, where the act of paying admission is tantamount to a screen-test - and where the music never stops."*

