**The Erasure of Antagonisms between Popular Music and Advertising**

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While the use of music in advertising dates back centuries, using popular music in advertisements was often seen as the ultimate sell-out that offended aesthetic and bohemian values. By contrast, today advertisements represent one of the best opportunities for many musicians to gain access to mainstream markets. We chart this warming of relationships between music and advertising by chronicling the practices of music industry insiders, and evaluating the political economy and ideological consequences of such a nominal paradigm shift. We demonstrate that the convergence of these two media is perceived to be non-problematic, and suggest that this may be an enactment of the true industrialization of culture, with important consequences for our dialectical understanding of branding.

Keywords: music, advertising, consumer, culture, marketing

Unlike people who download things for free… the advertising people actually pay you for what you do. This is a startling turn of events. And people like the ads now and they like the music. It used to be thought of as selling out, now it’s the opposite.

Lou Reed (2013)

Zwick and Cayla (2011) have recently sought to delve inside marketing and reveal its ideologies and practices. They encourage a focus on how marketing is a force of valorization, stabilization and destabilization of market boundaries, strategic cultural intervention and political economic acts. Embracing this mode of analysis, we take the opportunity to rethink the relationship between culture and industry; a relationship whose dialectical entanglement is argued to be an ideological front for capitalist reproduction ( Adorno and Horkheimer 1989) and a productive sphere for branding (Holt, 2002). This article charts transformations of marketing practice by investigating music industry and advertising professionals and noting their accounts. In so doing, we address contemporary analyses of culture and industry that argue that the polar modes of dialectical relationships are shifting towards a more conservative orientation. We do this by considering arguments that music has become commensurable with advertising to the extent that music has become ‘thingified’ as part of a industrialization of culture (Lash and Lury 2007), that antagonistic class identifications that previously politicized popular music are evaporating (Hatherley 2011), so that there is now an interchangeability between advertising and popular music: they both serve the same ideological agenda so that today, when we hear popular music, we hear the sounds of capitalism (Taylor 2012). Inasmuch as dialectical understandings of the relationship between branding and culture is central to understanding consumer culture and the cutting edge of marketing practice (Holt 2002), any change in the dialectic between music and advertising is consequentially significant for marketing theory.

This analysis takes place within an extraordinary period of change within the music industry. Amid the well-reported rise in downloaded music and its transformative impact (Giesler 2008), a further phenomenon defines the way in which people today often encounter music: the increasingly widespread presence of licensed music in advertisements (Klein 2010). While the use of music in advertising dates back centuries, after rock and roll emerged as the dominant form of popular music from the 1950s onward, using popular music in an advertisement was often seen as the ultimate sell-out that offended aesthetic and bohemian values. Consider the satirical album *The Who Sell Out* from the 1960s, Jim Morrison threatening to destroy a Buick live on TV with a sledgehammer should The Doors song *Light My Fire* be used in an ad in the 1970s, or Neil Young’s anti-advertising polemic *This Note’s For You* in the 1980s. By contrast, today advertisements represent one of the best opportunities for many otherwise marginalized musicians to gain access to audiences.

Looking through the recent history of the use of music and advertising, a number of pivotal moments are identifiable. The Bartle Bogle Hegarty campaign for Levis in 1985 (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GayQNwxchMA>) where Nick Kamen stripped to his boxer shorts in a laundromat to the sounds of Marvin Gaye’s *I Heard It Through the* *Grapevine* prompted both a massive boost in sales for Levis (also, as collateral effect, for boxer shorts) and for Marvin Gaye’s song, which was re-released to capitalize on the resurgence in popularity. The continued campaign for Levis, and then for other me-too brands, generated a series of re-issued blues and soul songs with musicians like Screamin’ Jay Hawkins (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=klDzS3noyJo>) and John Lee Hooker (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVxmzgeyijs>) harvesting the benefits.

Decisively, in 2000 *Pink Moon* by Nick Drake was used in a Volkswagen advertisement (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIOW9fLT9eY>). Viewers were captivated and Volkswagen capitalized on their newfound cache by putting a stream of alternative music on their website. Here we see the shift of advertising into a delivery mechanism, or media channel, for discovering new artists. Meanwhile, Moby released his album *Play*, also in 2000, initially to modest sales. But his manager succeeded in licensing the songs over and over again until over 300 advertising licenses were granted (James 2001). The album became a ubiquitous staple of commercials and eventually resulted in sales of over 11 million, one of the highest selling albums of the new millennium. Licensing music to advertising was clearly becoming a viable means for establishing a career, in contrast to a traditional path through the music industry.

The practice of licensing music refers to the purchase of synchronization rights that grants permission to use existing music alongside moving images, such as for film or an advertisement. In exchange for the license, the bidder pays a negotiable synchronization fee (Harrison 2000). For example, in 2012 the TV show *Mad Men* paid $250,000 for the rights to use The Beatles song *Tomorrow Never Knows,* becoming the first TV show to ever license a Beatles song (Bell 2012). Lieb (2013) notes that licensing now represents the best way for contemporary musicians to generate revenue. The rise of licensing existing music marks a shift from previous practices of composing jingles, like the Chiquita Banana song (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFDOI24RRAE>), in which new music is composed that specifically relays information relevant to the advertisement (see Taylor 2012 for a history of jingles).

In selecting which music is to be used for an advertisement a number of factors come into play. A previously dominant paradigm that followed from jingles was that music in advertising should be used to manage consumer affect and inject emotion into the brand (Taylor 2012). The more recent practice, however, is to select music that ‘fits’ with the brand identity. Music fit has been defined by MacInnis and Park (1991:p162) as ‘the consumer’s subjective perception of the music’s relevance or appropriateness to the central ad message’. Within social psychology the same phenomenon has been termed prototypicality; that is ‘the degree to which a given stimulus is typical of its class’ (North and Hargreves, 1997:p95). For example, MacInnis and Park (1991) found that the song *You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman* fit with an ad for women’s shampoo and hence created more favorable brand and ad attitudes. In sum, a series of studies find that the higher the congruity between the music and an ad, the higher the effectiveness of the ad, in terms of purchase intent, brand attitude, brand recall, and affective response (see Oakes 2007 for a review).

As Holt (2002) argues, what is also desirable is the degree to which the music can be used to signify an authenticity of the brand. The underlying assumption is that music, as a non-verbal means of communication, can better stylistically capture and represent the imagined brand essence and intended authenticity. For example, following Volkswagen’s campaign which included Nick Drake’s Pink Moon, as well as music by Hooverphonic, Charles Mingus and others, Volkswagen produced the album *Street Mix: Music from Volkswagen Commercials.* Indicative of the spirit of licensing music that ‘fits’, the liner notes state “We chose these bands because they had something to say, because they felt like kindred spirits. When our creative team set forth to convey the essence of Volkswagen, we needed music that had soul. Well, we got soul and here are 12 tracks of it. Enjoy” (cited by Taylor 2012:p213). This idea of music that could “convey the essence” of the brand, that brand and music co-exist as “kindred spirits” and as such inject “soul” into the advertising message instantiates the phenomenon in question: the erasure of antagonisms between music and advertising. This insight is to remind us that not all forms of popular music are conducive to such practices, but rather skilled ears are required to find songs that match the particular aesthetic of authenticity and notionally unstained aura of the ad.

Of course finding and identifying music that can inject soul and exist as a kindred spirit for the brand is not easy. In this regard we see the rise of advertising “cool-hunters:” creative staff working for advertising agencies whose job it is to find the cutting edge in the far margins of popular music whose aura remains somehow unstained by corporate association (Holt 2002). More recently Taylor (2013) has argued that the practice has evolved to the extent that advertisers are now often “trendsetters”, who actively commission new music that is not advertising music. Following Zwick and Cayla (2011) we can argue that the labor of such cool-hunters and trendsetters is fundamentally ideological as it seeks to valorize brand identities but is also an act of destabilizing boundaries that exist between music and advertising. As Zizek (2012) notes, when economic interest distances itself from itself in such a manner, economy succeeds in inscribing itself into popular culture. The consequence of such an ideological inscription forms the main point of inquiry for this article.

No clearer sign is needed of the changed ideological landscape than to notice that Paul McCartney and Bob Dylan have not just allowed their music to be used in ads, but also personally appeared in advertisements for iPod (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLy7Z8tsA3k>) and Victoria’s Secret respectively (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBq7SyGtG8Y>) [[1]](#footnote-1). As Lou Reed said in the quotation at the start of the article “This is a startling turn of events”. These campaigns bear witness to the fact that, at a time when radio stations are more conservative in their playlists and record labels struggle to respond to the rise of downloading, the dialogue between the music industry and advertising registers not just an economic opportunity but also a space in which innovative and alternative music can access audiences. This parallels music licensing practices in film and television production to the extent that it remains fair to say that we are amid a transitional marketplace (see Giesler 2008).

That popular music stands in antagonistic and antinomianiastic relationship with the world of advertising and organization is a truism that partially defines popular music as a counter-cultural and bohemian device. Note in making the assumption that popular music serves as a counter-cultural device, we follow in the post-Birmingham school and popular music studies tradition of focusing on popular music that relates to youth culture; in particular correlating music with practices of youth consumption and identity and therefore as fundamentally counter-cultural (for further debates noting the problem of defining and generalizing around popular music, see Middleton 1990). As popular music theorists argue, the ability of popular music to register discourses like truth, subjectivity and authenticity has, to varying extents, served as a function of its ability to, at least, maintain counter-cultural capital or, at best, serve as an oppositional and subversive political force (see, for example, Frith and Horn 1987). Consequentially other forms of music that are very popular do not meet this conventional idea of popular music; for example, listen (if you must) to Cliff Richard singing *Our Father Who Art in Heaven* and then you will know exactly what we mean (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cA5QJS3paAo>). In any case, marketing studies have oft framed advertising’s ability to appeal to youth markets and gain market differentiation as a consequence of successfully tapping into, co-opting, or appropriating the counter-cultural capital and/or subversive content of popular music (Holt 2002). As a consequence of this antagonism, it is possible to speculate that the warming of the relationship between music-making and advertising marks a signal point of a paradigm shift.

**The relationship between culture and the marketplace**

In terms of theoretical frameworks that consider the fundamental antagonisms that may or may not exist between music and advertising, the culture industry thesis, as advanced by Adorno and Horkheimer (1989) arguably looms largest. Accordingly, music is understood as carrying the promise of heterogeneity and hence the means through which we engage and participate with the idea of achieving our humanity. However this promise becomes abstracted into exchange value by a culture industry that integrates culture into the order of alienating capitalist production. Adorno and Horkheimer (1989) present a negative dialectical relationship in which music is unable to escape its domination by administered culture and so the resulting synthesis, the culture industry, is one in which music’s enlightenment project is treacherously re-directed towards capitalist domination.

An attempt to update the culture industry argument to adjust for brands is presented by Lash and Lury (2007)*.* Lash and Lury (2007) dispute Adorno and Horkheimer’s (1989) claims and argue that “things have moved on” because the rise of branding transfigures how value is generated and, in turn, how culture is subject to evaluation by capital. A core of their argument is that culture now exists ubiquitously and infiltrates all parts of the economy, ranging from branded products to financial services to leisure services and beyond. The point is that culture no longer functions in relation to resistance or even as a means for representation but rather as a device that mediates across forms of production and organization that are themselves affective, knowledge-based and aesthetic. To this end, Lash and Lury (2007) refer to a process of “thingification”. We see thingification of media in action when, for instance, brands become brand environments, movies become computer games and when brands take over airports and restructure department stores. In this sense Lash and Lury (2007) are describing a process through which everyday life media objects, such as music and brands, come to rival manufactured objects; not as objects to be read, or as means of representation, but rather as much as to ‘do’ them or to ‘do’ with them. All of this, they argue, amounts to a “true industrialization of culture” that complicates the commodification of culture that Adorno and Horkheimer (1989) were describing.

Central to such argumentation is the idea of the brand as a device that affectively organizes and mediates the social and aesthetic world of consumers. As such, value resides with mobile media that operate across domains and become woven into the social fabric of the consumer life world (Arvidsson, 2006; Moor, 2007; Lury, 2004). In addition to such framings of media, Lash and Lury (2007) devote particular attention to how culture and cultural events become a sort of super-determining process. For example major sporting events like the Olympics can be thought of as necessary spaces for global brands to inhabit and promote themselves; in other words brands increasingly determine mega events. The art career of the so-called Young British Artists (YBAs), a group of artists associated with Goldsmiths College in the 1990s whose most famous exponents include Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas, (see Stallabrass 2006) is interpreted as manifesting a second conceptual wave whereby, rather than offer reflections on the constitution of art contexts in which works are presented (as, for example, Duchamp’s urinal famously did), their art serves as commentary on the market devices themselves. In this sense, cultural devices exist as objects and media already immanent within markets; a context of markets that are organized and determined by such media rather than vice versa. Lash and Lury (2007) provide the example of merchandising in films like *Toy Story* and *Wallace and Gromit* to suggest that there is a “thing-likeness” about the characters, an “intrusion of the thing into the narrative that propels these cultural objects into merchandise, into games, ringtones, key rings, alarm clocks, T-shirts, and screensavers, and a whole wider system of objects outside of the film” (p186). Similarly we might argue that popular music is increasingly produced as a “thing” that propels itself into advertising so that upon hearing contemporary music, it is easy to imagine that advertisers will have ideas for new branding campaigns.

Lash and Lury’s (2007) theory of culture in the global culture industry presents a form of analysis in which it is no longer useful to understand culture as existing antagonistically to production and instead culture is presented as mediating across modes of production and doing so mostly in the form of texts that are not just commensurable with but sometimes even determinative of branding practices. This provides us a means of thinking through the erasure of antagonism between music and advertising as marking what they call the “true industrialization of culture”. Lash and Lury’s (2007) argument parallels Taylor’s (2012) analysis of music as ‘the sound of capitalism’. Providing empirical evidence which can be used to exemplify Lash and Lury’s (2007) argument, Taylor (2012) argues that the advertising industry today enjoys a greater influence over the making of culture, especially music, more generally than at any time in its history and increasingly drives popular music production. There is now such a convergence between the content of musical production and the process of advertising that there is no popular music that is *not* advertising music, and so the long standing distinction between art and commerce, Taylor (2012) argues, is moot; “the sounds of capitalism are everywhere” (p8). The infiltration of popular music production by advertising production and dissemination can be witnessed through various practices: Taylor (2012) hence depicts practices of advertisers sponsoring tours, commissioning songs that are not obviously advertising music, inviting consumers to be a part of the music-making process through remixing, and promoting musicians’ recordings. Consequentially, the practices of advertisers move beyond the idea of trend-spotting and cool hunting and into the domain of trendsetting. From a parasitic relationship of licensing music said to ‘fit’ with a brand identity, advertisers are now active in the sphere of music production. Indeed, as Taylor argues, in rare cases where distinctions still exist between the production of advertising music and popular music, it is very often the same musicians in the studio performing the music. Hence through Taylor’s (2012) work we see the instantiation of the thingification of music and its movement into total convergence, integration and commensurability with advertising and branding.

We seek to explore this thingification of music and its convergence with advertising through examining the practices that have led to this. To do this we turn to music and advertising industry insiders to chronicle how this shift is taking place inside the marketing practice itself. It is important to note that through examining these practices, we are examining ideology itself, as ideology is inscribed in practices (Zwick and Cayla 2011).

**Methodological Approach**

To investigate how the use of music in advertising is destabilizing boundaries, we need to chart the ideological practices that have led to this shift (Zwick and Cayla 2011). That is, rather than undertaking phenomenological, interpretive data analysis, we instead record the practices of varying economic actors within the music and advertising industries. Whilst it may well be the case that analyzed discourse performs an ideological role of legitimizing transformations, we want to shift our analytical gaze to examine more specifically the practices themselves. This is done in the spirit of Zwick and Cayla (2011), where they advocate for scholars to focus more on marketing practices; to engage in approaches which yield meaningful theorization of how marketing actually works rather than delve into the cultural meaning generated outside in the pasture of the social, as Arvidsson (2006) puts it. Zwick and Cayla (2011) point out that how marketing knowledge manifests itself in actual practice is relatively uncharted territory and requires a different approach. We answer their call to theorize marketing as a material social and ideological practice. Empirical qualitative research tends to privilege phenomenological readings of interview data, but here we examine the ideology of marketing practice itself instead. In other words, within the field of marketing scholarship, we do not want to become so preoccupied by individuals’ interpretive strategies for encountering mass-mediated marketplace ideologies that we overlook how those mass-mediated marketplace ideologies come to be in the first place (Zwick and Cayla 2011).

To that end, we engage in open ended discussions with key industry players, each of them representing alternating nodes of power. This interview approach with key gatekeepers is in the tradition of Richard and Curran (2002), who spoke with a small number of major players in the advertising industry to understand how they defined advertising, and also mirrors Lieb’s (2013) methodological approach, wherein she talks to a handful of key industry players to understand how female pop stars are marketed. See table 1 for profiles of the industry experts who narrated their role in the marketplace shift. Our experts were chosen because of the amount of time they spent in their professions as well as their leading profiles (Richard and Curran 2002). Lieb (2013) points out that these “gatekeepers are underrepresented, if not entirely invisible, in our academic literature about the production of popular culture” (p. xviii). This is because gaining access to key gatekeepers is difficult, and thus the number of respondents is typically limited, but Lieb (2013) argues that more studies focusing on these industry leaders are needed, even with small numbers of responsents, because these people control how the music industry evolves. Our methodological approach answers her call.

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We engaged in long interviews (McCracken 1988). Our discussions focused on our experts’ experiences in using music in advertising, and in particular on drawing out exemplars in their careers. We also touched upon the changes they had seen over the past fifteen years or so. We asked numerous probes and follow up questions depending on the direction in which the interviews went. From an analysis perspective, we focus on charting practices, and seek to draw out structure and process rather than underlying meanings (Cayla and Penaloza 2011; Lieb 2013; Richard and Curran 2002). We use our understanding of the ideological practices within the music and advertising industries to comment on the political economy underlying the erasure of antagonism between popular music and advertising.

**From selling out to making out**

Overall, our experts chronicle that the cultural shift from viewing using music in advertising as selling out to it becoming a ubiquitous and sought out connection is non-problematic, for the musicians, the audience, the record labels and the advertisers, lending support to Lash and Lury’s (2007) contentions about how the global culture industry transforms. The musician Adam encapsulates this as he describes why advertising is so personally beneficial:

“Advertisers and supervisors and TV people, people connected to money much bigger than music acts, much bigger than album sales, are on a monthly basis telling me, “You’re a hit in our world. For us, you resonate. What you do is incredibly successful to us. We rely on you to provide us with our soundtrack for certain things.” So I feel like I’ve had my cake and eaten it, too. I haven’t had to live in a tour bus that smells like farts for five months at a time, I get to have my music used in films and TV shows that I love, and I haven’t had to sacrifice my life for touring and building this other part of my career. I’m perfectly content to do this the way I’m doing it—sell a nice amount of records and have the music used this way. I just love how these songs find a place. I don’t know how much of it is me, really, this is just what I wrote. I didn’t plan for this stuff to be used a certain way. I don’t know why it would be used as the theme for a show about CEOs and then be used for cars and then be used for girls and then be used for mayonnaise. I guess the problem now is that all this music is being used for these certain usages. How can it not affect the way you write music? That to me is the question. How do I make music now and not think, “Okay, now I hear a car commercial…” That’s horrible. That’s not why I write music. I just want people to enjoy it.“

Because the music industry has changed so much in the past decade, in terms of the decreasing influence of radio and overall decreasing music sales (Klein 2010), musicians are grateful to have an avenue for exposure to an audience as well as a means to get paid. Adam summarizes this as, “You couldn’t ask for this type of exposure”. He goes on to describe the licensing process, emphasizing the congenial nature of the relationship between him and the advertising agencies/brand managers:

“You have to understand, I nickel-and-dime my way financially through licensing. I’ve had some very nice licensing, but my pride and joy is based on the fact that we just chip away. It’s easy to do business with us; I don’t have my hand out for a million dollars for everything. I’m thinking “Let’s build a relationship. Let’s do some licensing.” So we had not really worked with these people before. We knew it was a big dollar account, but we didn’t want to be pigs. We wanted to get the situation to occur where they would work with us and we were thinking minimally one year but maybe two years of them using the music. And you know what? Maybe if you work the right way with people, maybe they will think this piece of music should be used for four or five years. We worked out the deal in 10 minutes. We said, this is what we want, and it was so matter-of-fact and easy.”

Lacey, in discussing her interactions with advertising agencies and companies who are looking to license music from her label, a major US indie label, offers insights on the criteria being used to choose songs:

"Companies are looking for two things when they choose a song for their ad—they want to tap into some sort of cool cache and they also don’t want to spend a ton of money. Indie labels charge significantly less than the majors, and their product is inherently ‘cooler’.”

Our discussions reveal insights on how the evolution of the relationship between music and advertising has played out over the years, and why the current attitudes are so harmonious. For example, Adam describes his reaction to Moby’s album *Play*:

“Licensing has always existed, but it is only in the modern era has licensing become this Holy Grail. Moby’s *Play* is the record. To me, even more than Fatboy Slim’s *You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby*. They were contemporaries when those records came out. I know they were very competitive with each other. I know that Moby can say that every single track on Play was licensed multiple times. There are still licenses—the record just works. It’s the *Sgt. Pepper* or the *Thriller* of licensing. It’s ridiculously successful. Was it important? Yes, I think it was. I listen to that record and I’m not the biggest Moby fan in the world. But I listened to it and I was angry: He bettered stuff that I had done about a year-and-half before its release. I had done some similar stuff and he just nailed it. He figured out a way to do it better. I don’t know how. I don’t think he was thinking too much about it, he was just doing. You know, in the US, that record sat and didn’t do anything for the first six months of its life. It was like, “Moby has a new record out that just sounds like old field recordings and it’s not that great.” Then all of the sudden, Greg in my manager’s office started placing things. For some reason, people started asking whether they could use a track as a theme for a sitcom or could they use a track in an Oliver Stone movie. It just exploded. What happened with that record was just amazing.”

Moby’s album was so successful in terms of licensing that the formula for determining how much a band has sold-out was named the Moby index (Wyman 2007). It is worth reproducing Moby’s own perspective here:

“I got a lot of criticism for letting my music be used in movies and TV shows and advertisements; everyone just assumed that the reason I did it was so I could make a lot of money, but the whole reason I did it was because I wanted to reach a larger audience. And I wanted people to hear my music.

Interviewer: Do you feel there’s a difference licensing your music for a car commercial than licensing your music for a public service announcement?

It’s all subjective. Audio information almost always comes out of two speakers. There isn’t any objective way to establish a hierarchy of audiovisual information because it’s intangible. You can establish an objective hierarchy for food because you can say that an orange has more nutritional value than, say, a Twizzler, and there are objective criteria to back up your claim. With audiovisual information, it’s purely subjective. There are certain things I would never allow my music to be allowed to sell – tobacco and meat products and weapons of mass destruction – but at the same time it’s just information and people can tackle it at some hermeneutic level however they so choose.” (Walker 2008, pgs. 158-159)

In the wake of Moby’s success with licensing songs, Adam has had much success of his own, and is proud of the ability of his music to further brand images, as we see here:

“Chico’s, I was shocked that this brand wanted to use my song, ‘Chick A Boom Boom Boom,’ which is a really funky New Orleans sounding tune. But it’s also a pretty sophisticated, complicated puzzle. While it doesn’t sound that complicated to the end listener, it’s a very intricately produced track. I didn’t think they would possibly want to use it, and they used it and said, “You’re making us hip! This track makes it seem like we are cool, that we could sit in a room and have a couple of drinks and hang out.” This was an uptight, Midwest, white woman’s brand of clothing. In the year that they’ve used my song—and this has nothing to do with me—it’s their choice, they chose an aesthetic, they’ve had their best year in the history of the company based on the coolness of the advertising. That’s what they said to us! They’ve attracted a customer that they’ve never had before—a younger, hipper customer. I think that is really cool! I’m proud of that. “

From the advertiser’s perspective, this non-problematic relationship with musicians has been a boon to the industry. Pete, the creative director of a major advertising agency, explains:

“You know people are like how do we get more heart share? It’s interesting because music you respond to emotionally right away. And I’ve always told creatives, if you want a fast way in to people, music is the quickest way into an emotional connection. You think about it. Like romantic music gets you in the mood, you know, Barry White (laugh) gets you in the mood. And if you think about that, it’s a tool that you can use to get people to feel that emotional attachment. Then the other thing that I tell creative people here is, you have to start off thinking what do I want people to feel? And if it’s anger, or fear, or shock, or happiness, or sadness, the music is going to dictate that feeling. So think about what you want people to feel, and then music will be your guide, or be your tool to get them to feel that. “

And Lacey explains that for her label, licensing is a great source of revenue, but also it is an important marketing tool:

"Initially licensing was more of a 'gravy' thing, but as print outlets have decreased and radio play has remained as difficult as ever, licensing has become more important to the marketing of a record".

That is, consumers become exposed to songs via advertising, and then later seek out the songs for purchase (Klein 2010), and thus advertisements become a marketing channel for the dissemination of music.

Our experts also provided insights into the warming relationship between music and advertising. As we mentioned earlier, along with Moby’s album *Play,* another key moment was when Volkswagen used obscure 1970’s British artist Nick Drake’s song *Pink Moon* in an ad. The ad skyrocketed Nick Drake to fame, something he had striven for all of his life and never achieved (Petrusich 2007). Initially Drake’s cult following were outraged that his music was being used to sell cars. Ron, the creative director at the time of the ad agency that produced/directed the ad, explains,

“Everybody says they’d never do it. Everybody. We used it [music] for a lot, you know, the more underground, less obvious stuff. Number one, ‘cause we didn’t want the music to be the idea; it wasn’t. And the music, talk about the expense to begin with, we couldn’t really afford to spend another hundreds of thousands of dollars on music, so we tried to find something a little more obscure, and in that way a little cooler, that you could afford. So that’s where it all started. And then it became a game, and fun for us. [For Volkswagen], we had research on our customers, we knew what the age group was, and we knew their psychographic, as well as their demographics and… these were relatively young, up and coming people, that while they had certain peers of their age, they were gonna keep growing and becoming more successful than certain other people in their age groups were. Educated, like music. And it was all there. You look at the psychographics, it’s all there. And then you look at, you know, what’s inherent in the brand. What’s gonna seem like oh yeah, that’s Volkswagen. What’s true about that brand. “

The ad agency matched the song to the brand as well as the target audience, to very successful ends. The ad is widely considered to be one of the best ads ever made, having been directed by the future director of the award winning film *Little Miss Sunshine,* and certainly iconic for the Volkswagen brand. As Klein (2010) suggests, commercials that succeed as entertainment present advertising as a cultural commercial hybrid in a way that less creative ads do not. Because Nick Drake had committed suicide decades earlier, partly because of his lack of commercial success as a musician, it was his estate that gave permission for the song to be used. After the spot aired, Drake’s sister and head of his estate, Gabrielle Drake, issued a statement, part of which is excerpted here (Caplan 2000):

“Nick is dead, and those of us who are left to protect and promote his memory and his music are faced with the almost impossible task of knowing how he would have wanted this done. But if there’s one thing of which I am sure, it is that he wanted to communicate through his music. He wanted it heard. Thousands more people in the U.S. have become aware of Nick Drake’s music through the VW commercial. Given that the commercial is tasteful and sensitive, I think that Nick would have not only approved of his music being used, but also been quietly pleased, and quite amused.”

This statement sums up the warming of relationship between music and advertising: because advertising is ubiquitous, it gives the artist an opportunity to reach an audience, and as Lacey explained earlier, because it is cheaper to license more obscure artists, it can even out the playing field and give fringe artists a chance to garner an audience. Lacey goes on to say:

"There’s the age old cry of sell-out for sure, but there are increasingly more and more messages of congratulations. A lot of people have weird ownership issues with their favorite bands which causes them to become upset when their favorite band is in a McDonald’s commercial or what have you, but like I said earlier, I think a lot of folks are wising up to the reality that this may be the only real way to make money as a professional musician these days".

Pete goes on to further explain the transition from selling out to making out:

“When I got into this business, I got out of art school in ’84, it was really, really difficult to get any musicians involved with advertising. It was just not cool. I worked with Whitney Houston early on, but for the most part, the phones calls back were like not interested. ‘Cause I was always tryin’ to get Zeppelin or use like Stones music, or even the Beatles, and it’s like, not interested, we’re not selling out. And now, I honestly think some bands write a 30 second musical intro, before their lyrics start their songs in the hopes that somebody will pick it up and use it for an ad. (Laughs) I swear to God. Listen to music now, and lyrics, a lot of times, don’t kick in until like second 31. And it’s funny because a few years ago, I had Warner Brother’s records, we got a meeting in L.A. A few of us went out there to talk to them about some sort of alliance with Warner Brothers. We were thinking about should we set up alliances with like Atlantic Records or Warner Brothers and things like that. So when you get new artists, you funnel ‘em through us first, and we can break them in the advertising. They’re open to that. And I said to him, well what’s funny dude, is that you—the head of Warner Brothers records, you, when I got into this business, you would have not even taken the phone call. But now you guys are reaching out to us. And I’m not bein’ a jerk, I just find it interesting “.

As the partnership between music and advertising becomes less controversial, it evolves away from MacInnis and Park’s (1991) notion of fit. Rather than having a song uniquely suited to a brand, such as *Pink Moon* to Volkswagen, songs are being licensed for multiple brands, with the progenitor of this model being Moby’s *Play*. For example, at one point Lacey believed the concept of integrating music into a commercial was to "marry a particular song to your brand", but now she feels that ad clients might be looking for familiarity. She cites 5678's *WooHoo* as an example of a song that was licensed to commercials for several different products (Carling beer 2004, Vonage VoIP 2004, Chevrolet Chevy Cobalt 2005, Toyota Yaris 2006 – see Vonage’s use of the song here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XfhuXcBqKLA> and Chevy Cobalt’s here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNAmMy_XGI8> ).

"I actually think that the relationship between songs and brands may be weakening. For instance, you’d think that once a song was used in an ad for one product that no one else would want to use it, but we’ve totally found the opposite to be true. We license the same songs over and over. Do you remember a couple years ago when like three companies were using that same 5678’s song at the same time? It was mind boggling to me. I thought the whole idea was to marry a particular song to your brand, but it turns out that ad clients might be looking more for familiarity or to evoke an emotion that they think another ad captures particularly well. I don’t really see them as being particularly music savvy, those ad clients."

While Lacey focuses on the potential conflict of using the same song for varying brands, Klein (2010) would suggest this is done because the selection of music for an ad campaign may serve to increase a company’s perceived cool. Thus, if a song such as *Woo Hoo* has been deemed ‘cool’ in the marketplace, a brand would prefer to use it to increase their cache with a particular target audience despite potential brand overlap. As an example, Pete describes the inner workings of a current Southern Comfort campaign featuring The Black Keys:

“The Black Keys were two dudes from Akron who had no money, and they got approached, $500,000, and they said ‘no’. And they regretted the decision, because they went back to being poor for like another 8 years. (Laughs) And they’ve been together, those two guys have been at it for like 10 years. And then the next advertising thing that came along they went at it, and they have been doing it ever since. So they’re really open to it now. Now you take a brand like Southern Comfort, that isn’t necessarily… on the edge, or like it’s as hip, or cool, and you match one of the coolest bands going on right now, and most popular bands going on, and you plug your brand into them, and, that’s how, that’s like a quick hit. It’s like oh, Southern Comfort is kinda cool ‘cause the Black Keys are cool. So you make that connection. “

We have now seen multiple examples of how music is used non-antagonistically in advertising, from the musician’s as well as the advertiser’s and record label’s perspective, and the inner workings of the practices that led to this. To sum up, possibly the best illustration of this new relationship between art and the marketplace is the use of Iggy Pop’s heroin anthem *Lust for Life* in a Caribbean Cruiseline campaign (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7dCrtdRtZQ> ). Pete explains:

“Take Royal Caribbean. So, Royal Caribbean, it was a cruise line we had here for 10 years. Cruising, the cruise category, as defined, the way we looked at it was here’s your target. Overfed, newlywed, or nearly dead. (Laughs) That’s what your business model is. Those are the people that you’re getting to come on board your ship. You need younger, more active, more thrill seeking, people into your brand. Because everyone that you’re talking to is a one-time deal, or they’re dying. And so you need to attract a younger, hipper group of people. So that’s where like Iggy Pop, *Lust for Life*, boom, boom, boom, the Bo Diddley thing, boom-boom. And then you see this cruise stuff of people like kayaking up in the glaciers, and like, parasailing and all that stuff, all of a sudden it’s like, holy shit, cruising is completely different. And it worked. And their sales went like straight up. And it was just a matter of the music and the visual, just flipping it around and saying, we have to do something completely different. And the verbatims they get back, I mean they would pay—they paid Iggy Pop a huge amount a money every year, to keep *Lust for Life* in the brand. Although it was a heroin anthem.”

Stephen, the former punk musician and high level ad exec, adds:

“It’s very interesting now when you see those people from the punk period, like Iggy Pop, Johnny Rotten, all now doing ads, so you could say it’s turned a full circle hasn’t it.”

There is a semantic incongruity between the lyrics for Lust for Life and the message of the ad (Oakes 2007). Yet it has been incredibly successful for the Carnival brand. Klein (2010) makes the point that selling out**--** the charge that has traditionally been positioned at the crux of conversations about the use of music in advertising --is a distraction from how the use of music in advertising constrains, highlights, or suppresses meanings that audiences have the ability to create, and cites the use of *Lust for Life* in the Royal Caribbean campaign as an especially telling example of how the socio-cultural meaning of a song has been changed via its use in advertising. Going from a heroin anthem to being used to attract a younger target segment to take cruises, with all parties delighted about these changes, perfectly encapsulates the erasure of antagonisms we have highlighted.

**Discussion**

We have uncovered practices in the music and advertising industries that illuminate the erasure of antagonisms between popular music and advertising. We have heard the musician’s, record label’s and advertising agency’s perspectives on how boundaries are being destabilized. We now turn to the political economy underlying this shift.

As Zizek (2012) reminds us, the name that we should give to economy distancing itself from itself by inscribing itself insidiously into culture is politics. In this regard it is notable that the marriage of music and advertising, or the thingification of music, coincides with the depoliticization of popular music, or rather the absence of popular music that confronts major political issues. This argument is advanced by Hatherley (2011) who reviews the disappearance of politically directed and subversive popular music. Hatherley (2011, p.1) presents the phenomena of this disappearance in stark terms:

From the early 1970s onwards, a series of groups or individuals, from working or lower-middle class backgrounds, educated at art schools, claiming state benefits and living in bedsits or council flats months before they found themselves staying at five-star hotels, were thrown up in the UK. The Kinks, David Bowie, Roxy Music, Japan, Associates, Soft Cell, Kate Bush, The Fall, Pet Shop Boys, The Smiths, amongst others – all balanced some unstable combination of sexuality and literacy, ostentatious performance and austere rectitude, raging ambition and class resentment, translated into sonic documents balancing experimentation with populist cohesion, it was the most part in the 1990s this literacy –experimental pop tradition, completely inadequately subsumed under the rubric of ‘indie’, disappears, seemingly at its moment of greatest triumph.

This particular blend of politics that emerges out of British art schools is analyzed by Frith and Horn (1987), who describe the art school as the place in which bohemian ideology clashes with the idea of cultural production as commodity production. For Hatherley (2011) these art schools can be thought of as politicizing generations of cultural producers by creating a social contract between a section of the artistic intelligentsia and a section of the young working class. This contract can be thought as materialized by a series of specific living conditions that mark a temporary convergence between what Harvey (2011) would describe as the dispossessed and the disaffected – such as claiming the dole, living off a student grant and living in a council flat. As Hatherley (2011) puts it, these living conditions and consequent social contracts are now all but obliterated by neoliberal agenda and what remains is a “striking homogeneity of class as much as of sound in British music”. “In a telling statistic”, he writes, “in October 2010, 60% of British artists in the UK top 10 had been to public school, compared with 1% in October 1990” (p6)[[2]](#footnote-2).

Perhaps the best known recent art movement to come out of British art schools is the Young British Artist movement– a movement analyzed by Lash and Lury (2007) as a perfect example of the global culture industry and whose radical politics have been severely dismissed by leading art historians like Stallabrass (2006). Indeed in Stallabrass’s (2006) work, the idea that art occupies any zone of freedom is foreclosed by the commensurability of contemporary art practice with the world of finance, so that we end with a form of art that instead of existing antagonistically with, is actually entirely nurtured by, the instrumentality of capitalism. In a similar vein, Murphy (2012) suggests that the relationship between art and politics follows the same theoretical coordinates of the London police tactic of ‘kettling’. Just as students protesting against the injustice of their tuition fees tripling find themselves encircled by police as a means of corralling crowds of dissenters and herding the population at large through the “construction and distribution of the figure of the student-protestor-as-threatening-vandal” (p5), art today operates by physically and psychologically containing free-thinkers:

It does this by regulating the manner in which our capacities for creativity, for inventiveness, for imagination, our capacities to interpret, to judge, to experience, seek and find what is perceived to be their most fitting expression leaving the rest of social, cultural and political life free of such unpredictable, such potentially revolutionary, capacities, all the better for our uninterrupted control by the almost-global forces of mass uniformity and constant, small-scale, change that suit so well the interests of capital to which liberal democracy seems now inextricably tied. (p5)

Arguably in seeing the disappearance of the idea that music might stand for something that exists antagonistically with the logic of an advertisement, we see the kettling of culture and its attendant containment and organization of radical human spirit. Following such analyses from Murphy (2012), Hatherley (2011) and Stallabrass (2006), we see this as a reason for the soon-to-realized disappearance of a radical tradition within popular music and its close relationship with the advertising industry.

Another way to look at this is that the degree to which popular music and other forms of contemporary art ever genuinely marked moments of opposition against capitalism is problematic. To return to Adorno (2002), in order for modern music to have any relationship with heteronomy, it needed to first escape the logic of instrumentality and therefore must rebel against its own commodity form. For example in his essay on Schoenberg, Adorno (2002) elaborated on the theme of music that “refuses to be enjoyed” (p33) because “today the only works which really count are those which are no longer works at all” (30) but rather music that “flees from the web of organized culture and its consumers” (p30). Therefore for Adorno the only oppositionality that counts is that which turns against its own commodity form. Music that bears the structure of mechanical reproduction and is composed and performed according to standardized form – such as typical popular music – did not impress Adorno as a registration of opposition. What is important to note is the idea that reading a progressive politics and oppositionality into popular music and its relationship with other forms of the culture industry ought to be rendered as problematic. In other words, despite Hatherley (2011) and Frith and Horn’s (1987) positive evaluation of the political antagonisms that existed within popular music, a more bleak assessment from an Adornian perspective would render the music’s oppositionality as a pseudo-discourse.

Perhaps the impossibility of notionally subversive popular culture as it stands in relationship to advertising is best articulated in Frank’s (1998) seminal *Conquest of the Cool* and various influential subsequent pieces such as Holt (2002) or Heath and Potter (2006). Frank (1998) presents an analysis of how advertising agencies were able to develop successful campaigns by precisely embracing anti-consumerist discourse. Frank (1998) argues that this was because there was a large degree of affinity held by advertising producers with the spirit of alienation from conformity that defined so much popular music in the 1960s. As he put it: “the adman was fast being saddled with a new image: no longer was he the other-directed technocrat, the most craven species of American businessman, but the coolest guy on the commuter train, turned on to the latest in youth culture, rock music, and drug-influenced graphic effects” (p174). In other words what Frank (1998) was describing was the very commensurability that Adorno warned of; because popular culture does not resist its own commodity form it can serve the reification of commodity culture as it innovates new practices of capturing difference. An example was provided in our data from Stephen who found many of the same values manifest in the various advertising agencies that he worked in as he did in his career as a lead singer in a punk band, including the rejection of conservative values, ruthless insistence on youthful solutions and even the occasional recourse to physical violence.

All of the above analysis points towards a commensurability of popular music with advertising. Therefore, the antinomianism that guided antagonisms between the two seems misguided. Yet perhaps a useful mechanism that allows us to think through a nonetheless meaningfulness of commodity-form opposition is presented by Binkley’s (2012) concept of a temporal lag that exists between subjectification and de-subjectification, with de-subjectification described as the moment where a person does not succumb to ideological demands– an example might include the moment that a person, such as the second author of this paper, becomes aware that they will never realize the ideological injunction that the body must be kept slim. Working within a theoretical framework of biopolitics, Binkley (2012) identifies a problem for governance that while the different agencies of governance complement each other in processing the person as a subject and therefore function together as an assemblage of power, there is also conflict between the different agencies which open up temporal moments of lag, and it is within these moments where the project of governance is at its weakest and most vulnerable to subversion. Governance, then, is concerned with these moments of capturing lag, of foreclosing the amount of time through which dissonance can function. In this sense we can use Binkley’s argument to say that while popular music in the past may have been commensurable with advertising because of its own commodity form, there was nonetheless a temporal gap between the two that functioned as an temporary expression of dissent that would ultimately be re-directed according to the logic of the commodity culture – for example, rebel ballads that come to be licensed for advertising. In contemporary practice, as described by Lash and Lury (2007) and as articulated by our experts, we perhaps see the closure of even this lag as popular music no longer offers such a vision of antagonism but instead offers an operationalization of the true industrialization of culture.

In sum, we are not suggesting that the non-antagonistic nature of the current relationship between music and advertising is a positive development. We suggest this unquestioned marriage of the two institutions signals an erasure of political reflexivity within the current consumer culture and a normalization of conservative neoliberalism. As we have seen, musicians see the use of music in advertising as a way to still be able to make a living despite the collapse of the traditional music industry, record executives see it as a way to remain in business, and advertisers see it as an effective way to speak directly to consumers’ emotions. In this regard we can see the increased opportunities and material rewards as marking the capture and erasure of a particular form of criticality. However all is not necessarily lost because, as Adorno would have described it, such criticality has always ever carried the co-ordinates of a pseudo-discourse and a treacherous deceit. Indeed our analysis would suggest that although music and commerce have always been in bed together, they now truly seem to be in love.

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**Table 1**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Respondent** | **Position** | **Workplace** | **Specific focus of interview** |
| Ron | Retired Head of Creative | Major Advertising Agency | Use of Nick Drake’s Pink Moon in VW Campaign |
| Adam (Mocean Worker) | Musician | Self employed | Licensing business model from the artist’s perspective (as compared to the traditional record label model) |
| Pete | Current Head of Creative | Major Advertising Agency | How music is strategically used currently in ad campaigns |
| Lacey | Head of Film and TV Licensing | Major Indie Record Label | How record labels utilize licensing in their business models |
| Stephen | Retired managing director/former punk musician | Multiple major advertising agencies & punk historian | The relationship between the punk movement, advertising and selling out |

1. The Bob Dylan-Victoria’s Secret license generated a series of puns in the media which encapsulate the change in popular sentiment about selling out: “The pants they need a-changin’” (Irish Times), “Ad sends Dylan’s status as ‘60s icon blowin’ in the wind” (East Valley Tribune), “Hey, Mr. Lingerie Man” (Daily Telegraph), “Dylan: Victoria’s secret weapon?” (Cleveland Plain Dealer) and “Not across my daughter’s big brass bed you don’t, Bob” (LA Times). It should also be pointed out that, as this clip illustrates - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBq7SyGtG8Y> – the decision to license to Victoria’s Secret was foreshadowed by Dylan himself. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note in the UK public schools are what are referred to as private schools in other countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)