

Muzak

The corporation that pioneered what is generically known as muzak (much to their chagrin), elevator music, or dentist music. First established as Wired Radio, Inc., in 1922 to serve small public businesses, the company was founded by General George Owen Squier and was based on communication technologies he had developed for the Army. Over the next several decades, an arranging vocabulary, based predominantly on string textures and gestures, developed into what we now think of as elevator music. This music stopped dominating the programmed music market in the 1980's, however, replaced by what the industry calls foreground music, i.e. songs played by original artists. This development coincides with the invention of niche marketing, the widespread availability of home video and cable television to compete with network programming, and in general the shift to narrowcast over broadcast approaches. The three companies that dominate this industry today are Muzak, Audio Environments Inc., and 3M.

The few existing studies of ubiquitous musics all point to their embeddedness in contemporary capitalism. For example, Joseph Lanza argues in *Elevator Music* that it is the quintessential twentieth-century music, because it seeks to control the environment, as have other defining technologies of the century. Jonathan Sterne suggests, in *Sounds Like the Mall of America*, that programmed music is a significant factor in defining the relationships of spaces and flows in malls. And in a culture of music discourses that made it easy to dismiss elevator music as inauthentic, commercial pap, the shift to foreground music programming raises new problematics—particularly questions of value and ideologies—in the study of ubiquitous musics.

—Anahid Kassabian

New Technology

A catch-all expression that sells cars and universities.

—Janine Marchessault

Nonsense

For some time after its emergence as a literary genre in Victorian literature, nonsense maintained a strong dependence on its perceived opposite, sense. Without sense as a backdrop, nonsense was incapable of existing for Victorians, or at least of coming into view as a recognizable, modern form. Whenever nonsense fell outside the penumbra of sense, it regressed to gibberish, the lowest form of nonsense, and disappeared from view as a pleasurable or tastefully subversive literary form. The success of *Alice in*

Wonderland rests in part on the presence of Alice as the voice of reason, protesting each breach of social and linguistic rules that she confronts. Nonsense later came to follow a course familiar to modernity, that of increasing autonomy. For nonsense, autonomy means autonomy from sense, freedom from the constant duty to challenge the sanctity of sense. The transformation appeared first with the Western European avant-gardes. While their stated goals were frequently the denigration of prevailing “bourgeois” values and institutions, the artworks themselves often exhibited independent aesthetic and critical value. For instance, in addition to insulting prevailing values of order and meaning, Hugo Ball’s “abstract poetry” helped develop new syntactic possibilities in the language-based arts. Magritte’s paradoxical painting of a pipe, bearing the inscription “This is not a Pipe,” typically provokes agreement, with the accompanying recognition that a new, legitimate avenue of thought is being artfully presented. Nonsense forms became slowly de-linked from sense, or at least were no longer defined negatively in a necessary—and necessarily subordinate—relation to sense. In recent years, this path to autonomy has been greatly abetted by the concomitant decline of an agreed upon idea of what “good sense” is. This problem did not exist in Victorian England, where good sense could be confidently presumed, and nonsense therefore instantly recognized and domesticated. Several decades of epistemological skepticism, cultural relativisation and experimentation, along with the absence of even the pretence of social consensus, have expunged the fixity of sense. Nonsense forms, released from the obligation to be “the other” to sense, are increasingly free to form their own, sovereign, contexts of use. New directions emerged from the nonsense skits of Monty Python, for example, which were not particularly intended as satires of order and meaning. Unlike the otherwise comparable work of the Marx Brothers, who directed their nonsense at sociopolitical institutions and at language itself, Monty Python skits, like the “Ministry of Silly Walks” which humorously expands the vocabulary of walking, and “The Cheese Shop” that of disappointed expectations, experimentally explore a world from which the constraints of sense aren’t so much transgressed as ignored. Contemporary nonsense, being newly autonomous and self-justifying, has a correspondingly reduced ability to be “subversive” of sense. In some respects, however, it can be more disturbing than earlier forms of nonsense, for nonsense and sense forms can now jostle against each other in an increasingly inchoate cultural arena. It is, ironically, sense which is the more embattled of the two, while nonsense has entered a period of open-ended expression and experimentation. The threat to nonsense is no longer sense, but decadence.

—Gary Kibbins

Nuclear

An outmoded term (i.e., family, energy); unpopular even with the physicists who invented it. Replaced by organic.

—Janine Marchessault

Nuevocations

Narchitects design houses in their sleep.

Farmermaids plough underwater fields with their tails.

Surgeontologists use scalpels to examine the nature of Being.

Repopes repossess souls and bless automobiles.

Sculptorhors create three-dimensional works of art while nearly comatose.

Stratagemologists affect the outcome of wars by the cutting of stones.

Prostitutors give private lessons to students aspiring to a degree in copulation.

Derangers are paid to go berserk in national parks.

Pachydermatologists examine hides and offer cosmetic tips to elephants, rhinos, and the like.

Robotanists are automated machines that study plants.

Footballerinas bash heads and tackle one another in exquisitely choreographed, fiercely competitive dances on stadium astroturf.

Accidentists remove your teeth by mistake.

Lexiconjurors tap their wands and pull the words right out of my mouth.

—Steve Venright

Number/Numbers

$1 + 1 = 2$

$E = mc^2$

Paint by numbers

Camps

Student numbers

How much is it?

Phone numbers

12 step

Credit card numbers

S.I.N.

M.C.P. Numbers

What's your number?

000011100010100000111010001010

Serial numbers

Number 1

10-9-8-7-6-5-4-3-2-1

New Year. Old Year. Another Year.

Zero. Nothing. Everything.

—Dion Tubrett

Of

To be *of* something, to belong, to be thought of. But to be robbed of something! Or gotten rid of! To be made an enemy of, and thus be left alone. How sad, to die of a disease. Or worse—to be *of* what's coming. All that anticipation, all that weight. So: to work only with what's present, what's passed? A rearrangement? To never write another statement of intent again; to prefer that nobody know? To be unable to think of anything to say that would change all that.

—Michael Turner

Optimism and Pessimism

At a certain point in the 1990s it became clear to me that ethics was to be substituted for politics in the discourses of my contemporaries both in and outside of the academy. Where politics remained it was in the sense of office or career politics. It is true that for the professionalised worker, whose conditions of existence are represented by the modern university, the time that can be allotted to politics in the old sense—work for social or communal causes, goals and interests—is seriously limited by the demands of work. This dilemma is real and shared. These areas of the practise of life take on the status of charity, and, at least in principle, charity work is a viable political practice. However, such activities remain on the margins of the real workings and mechanisms of the accumulation of power, as the agenda of many fiscally conservative regimes testify.

In any case, there is a slippery slope that leads from the projection of a life in comparative poverty, perceived mediocrity or insignificance, to that sacrifice of time required to “build a life.” Some like their work, most