Chaotic Noise: The Limits Of Genre
(And Its Social Implications)

by

Robert Echeverria
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“The more industriously the trade erects wire fences between the musical provinces, the greater the suspicion that without these, the inhabitants could all too easily come to an understanding.”

**Chaotic Noise: The Contemporary Crisis**

In recent years, the music industry has endured crisis after crisis. The advent of the MP3 and peer-to-peer file sharing networks along with cheaper, faster, and more accessible digital software, hardware, and infrastructure have rendered the music industry increasingly obsolete as an essential part of the production, marketing, and distribution of music. Industry profits have suffered significantly; the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), the trade organization that represents the interests of the music industry, pegs the annual harm at $12.5 billion in losses to the U.S. economy, as well as more than 70,000 lost jobs, and $2 billion in lost wages to American workers. This dramatic decline in revenue has even forced some corporations out of business. Despite the rising popularity of digital marketplaces and digital streaming subscription services such as Spotify and the iTunes store, the RIAA argues, “music theft is a real, ongoing and evolving challenge. Both the volume of music acquired illegally without paying for it and the resulting drop in revenues are staggering. Digital sales, while on the rise, are not making up the difference.”

This crisis is surprising given the fact that the music industry enjoyed approximately 15 years of steady growth in recorded music sales following the

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1 Adorno 1938:293
3 http://news.cnet.com/8301-1023_3-10197700-93.html
growth of the compact disc as the predominant format for the playback of recorded music.5 According to reports by the RIAA, music sales reached their record highs in the years prior to 2000. This was a direct result of the practices of conspicuous consumption cultivated by the booming American economy of the 90’s, especially amongst the generation of teens and pre-teens who now had greater purchasing power than any generation had previously.6 It was no surprise then that the music industry began to heavily market new content to this newly empowered group resulting in the prominence of bubble gum pop and the boy bands that produced and represented it. After all, “the boy bands were a perfect fit for the new and exploding market of preteen and teenage consumers with enough cash to buy every CD they could ever want.”7 As a result the industry experienced record-breaking success.

It was not long, however, until the consequences of over-saturating a market were realized. Driven by a capitalist demand for greater profit rates and continued growth, the industry embraced the bubble gum pop trend to a fault, as they put a majority of resources behind the boy band craze and neglected other gendered segments of the market and their respective established major acts. As Bennett writes, “with only a handful of talent, and maybe a couple of multi-platinum selling artists, the record companies were hit with perhaps their biggest decline... The greedy recording studios worked on marketing the boy

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5 Leyshon 2005
6 Bennett 2004:17
7 Ibid
bands at the expense of their more talented peers." As the boy band craze dwindled out, the music industry had fewer financial resources and became more risk averse. As a result the industry became less efficient at discovering and successfully presenting new artists to the masses, furthering their losses. All this occurred simultaneously in the environment of a receding American economy crippled by 9/11, shady corporate scandals, the dot bomb and the financial crisis. It comes as no surprise that given an economy with minimal expendable purchasing power, and an industry over-saturated with teen pop and nostalgia acts, online piracy became a desirable alternative to rising CD prices containing content of diminishing cultural value.

Responding to the perceived threat of piracy, the RIAA began to rally against digital technologies, alienating both the public, by prosecuting and labeling them as ignorant high tech criminals, and the artists, who were beginning to realize that the digital could provide a superior alternative to the music industry’s analog business model. Regardless of whether or not piracy was the sole cause of the industry’s failure, it became increasingly clear that specific structures of the music industry have been rendered useless by the popularity of these digital technologies. After all, the traditional role of a record label, in the broadest sense, was to bankroll a band until they became highly profitable, and then keep a majority of the profits as a reward for their initial

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8 Ibid
9 Ibid
10 Kot 2009
high stakes investment. As Adam Frucci writes, "This setup makes sense when bands lacked the wherewithal to produce and record their own albums and when manufacturing and distributing physical copies of albums and marketing said albums costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. It also makes sense when a popular album will sell millions of copies at $15 a pop."  

Despite the increasing irrelevance of the record industry, the RIAA maintains that the music industry is necessary for musical culture to prosper. The organization continues to posit that educating the public about piracy and undertaking minor changes to accommodate this new consumer environment would allow for a return to ‘business as usual,’ allowing the industry to bring to the public a new generation of artists through a thriving legal marketplace. The music industry could then continue to build “successful partnerships between a music label and a global superstar [so that] the revenue generated, finances the investment in discovering, developing and promoting the next new artist.”

Furthermore, the industry contends “without that revolving door of investment and revenue, the ability to bring the next generation of artists to the marketplace is diminished, as is the incentive for the aspiring artist to make music a full time professional career.”

Digital technologies such as the MP3 and peer-to-peer networks were instrumental in rendering the industry obsolete in terms of the consumption of

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11 [http://gizmodo.com/5481545/record-labels-change-or-die](http://gizmodo.com/5481545/record-labels-change-or-die)
12 Ibid
14 Ibid
music. The same technologies that made this possible also make it possible for musicians to produce their music on a computer without the need for a big recording studio. While home recording equipment certainly existed before digital computer technology, the format of the MP3 and the increasing capabilities of digital audio workstations (DAWs) became a catalyst for change, allowing for those same songs to be recorded digitally and stored on a hard drive with minimal space to be distributed at no cost over the Internet, eliminating the need for analog machinery, pressing CDs, and storing inventory in warehouses. With virtually no cost in terms of production, albums could be sold at a price drastically lower than $15-$20. The artists would also be able to keep all profits, because they had no need for the initial investments of a record label. Needless to say, this is a much-desired alternative for many artists, commercially or artistically driven.

These same technologies are rendering other functions of the music industry obsolete. The web has transformed marketing and promotion, another cornerstone service that labels had previously provided. Musicians no longer need radio or MTV plays and ads in Rolling Stone to get the act noticed.\textsuperscript{15} When a band makes a music video, there’s less of a need for a major label with contacts at MTV to push it through so that it will get noticed, instead artists can simply put the video up on YouTube and promote themselves to music bloggers and social media site fans. The fact that it’s a simple click or two from video appreciation to buying actual music is worth more than any paper ad in any

\textsuperscript{15} http://gizmodo.com/5481545/record-labels-change-or-die
dying magazine. These same music blogs have also turned the way artists are discovered on its head. It used to be that high-paid A&R executives would scour clubs to find underground bands to sign, acting as the filter between the millions of mediocre bands and the discriminating public. Today, obsessive music fans scour clubs and the web for free, discovering new acts and writing about them on blogs. Both the public and even the remaining labels now discover bands from these blogs. The A&R system, once essential to both the industry and the artists has also become irrelevant.

Given these transformations, is there any venue left for the music industry to generate revenue? Live concerts and merchandising might be one such option. However, those earnings have historically gone directly to the artists. Furthermore, musicians can use digital technologies to more efficiently build e-mail/text subscription services for their fans, allowing them to offer new merchandise, tickets for shows and other related information directly to fans without the industry mediating. The web traffic analytics from any associated website would even help them to plan successful tours, target social media ads, and make better decisions on how to move forward. The digital is undeniably rendering the remaining possibilities for reproducing a functional music industry implausible.

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16 Ibid
17 Ibid
18 Ibid
19 Ibid
As the music industry nevertheless continues to scramble for ways to push back against the digital and preserve their analog business methods, the most forward thinking corporations within the music industry are only beginning to attempt to re-intermediate musical value chains by becoming the arbiters of good taste.\textsuperscript{20} These companies aim to function as “a quality filter service for the record industry, to help unsigned bands, artists and songwriters get their music onto the desks of major record companies” by utilizing the communicative capacity of the internet.\textsuperscript{21} These record companies would sign on to deliver a song or set of songs to the public through a streaming/downloading service, opening up the opportunity for “a middle class of professional musicians who are able to produce music that will generate significant and regular sums of money,” in contrast to the current model of many making a meager income and few becoming fabulously wealthy.\textsuperscript{22} These business practices would theoretically allow for any piece of music to be heard, as the investment required by the company is negligible, allowing the company to take on greater risks, promote all artists and still recoup profits because of their widespread minimal investments in multiple artists within multiple genres. While this model certainly removes a significant amount of intermediary steps between the artist finishing a song and delivering it to the public, it is nevertheless less efficient than consumer-operated music blogs, streaming services such as Spotify and Pandora and unsigned music-hosting sites such as SoundCloud and BandCamp,

\textsuperscript{20} Leyshon 2005
\textsuperscript{21} Leyshon 2005:194
\textsuperscript{22} Leyshon 2005:198
all of which transcend the machinery of the traditional music industry and have greater populist tendencies.

The music industry used to provide an essential service connecting musicians with an audience and potential fans with exciting new quality musicians. The digital, however, renders the intermediary role of the industry an inefficient and obsolescent burden. It is therefore undeniable that the music industry is facing the possibility of a permanently crippling crisis.

I. The Genre Problem & Its Gendered Solution

Scholars like Henry Jenkins, Yochai Benkler, and others have remarked on the positive implications of these transformations for consumers, fans, and artists. They have argued that digital technologies enable a more participatory culture, which gives fans greater access to the means with which to produce and consume culture. One aspect of these transformations that has gone unexamined is the way in which the displacement of the cultural content industries threatens to undermine the practice of gendering content.

In terms of musical culture, genre is best understood as a series of practices through which musical categories come to shape the music that one might play and listen to, mediating both the social experience of music and its formal organization by an entertainment industry. It serves to define certain musical practices, form and content as being intrinsic to a given genre, externalizing everything else. Musicians, fans, critics and corporations

23 Benkler 2006; Jenkins 2006; Twitchell 1999; Mason 2008; Ayers 2006
24 Negus 1999
collectively shape the specific boundaries, codes, aesthetics and expectations, which make up a genre world, though their interest in this process of shaping are not the same.

The practice of gendering musical objects results in both fans’ and musicians’ identities becoming increasingly sedimented. This forced stasis is a result of the western tradition of rational analysis, a tradition that has made it possible to categorize music into identifiable patterns of musical culture practices, styles of music making, and points of origin (whether it is an artist, location, age group, etc). Embedded in this tradition, musicians and fans construct their identities according to these categories through the consumption of music and the construction and performance of a musical object respectively.25 Rather than understanding the fluid experience of making and appreciating multiple genres as revealing a gestalt self, musicians and fans themselves engage in the practices and discourses of genre that limit creativity, believing there to be mutually exclusive gendered identities engaged in mutually exclusive genre worlds. Even though artists and fans appreciate multiple genres and experience various genre worlds, this appreciation and these experiences are tied to fixed identities in what I will argue is a politically conservative way.

Unlike musicians and fans, the music industry is interested in genre because it allows them to more efficiently market their musical products. The industry comes to understand, through market research data, who makes what genre, who wants to listen to it and where they all are. Then through its

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25 Frith 1996
marketing practices it participates in the construction of stable categories in an attempt to limit the definition of creativity and innovation within genre so that it not only remains interesting and novel, but also decodable and identifiable within a specific set of aesthetic rules that are adhered to by specific social groups, within certain locations. The music industry simultaneously constructs both genres and their markets, forging a path of least resistance from the artist to the fan. This provides incentive for both parties to readily identify with the constructed genre world; it simplifies the process of being discovered or, in the fan’s case, discovering new music.

Getting rid of genre might provide a kind of liberation from fixed identity, insofar as genre hinders music’s otherwise inherent creative fluidity. Fans would cease to bicker about authenticity, would no longer argue about the superiority of a genre, and would inject themselves into musical discourse to find that their musical interests align with those whom they least expected. Musicians would be free to make any music they desire, free to collaborate with whomever they please and endorse styles of music-making they themselves do not comprehend. Both fans and musicians would always come to expect the unexpected. The music industry, however, has made realizing this liberation difficult, insofar as genre has played a central role in its traditional business model. With the industry in crisis, however, fans and musicians are now closer than ever to creating musical cultures that do not rely on genre as a way of understanding music, and therefore do not participate in the construction of static, fixed ideas.

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26 Ibid
Just the opposite. While some fans and musicians undoubtedly cling to genre as a way of engaging in musical cultures, we are beginning to see the emergence of musical cultures that evade genre categorizations, and which offer a model for the type of social transformations that might accompany a broader revolt against genre, if only fans and musicians would be receptive to it.

Electronic dance music (EDM) is an example of one such culture. While it seems paradoxical that a gendered category can provide an alternative to the problem of gendered categorization, the praxis of the genre reorients and, in fact, transcends the traditional understanding of genre and its function and experience in musical culture.

EDM is a style of music that came into existence with the emergence of computer technology. Because of its foundation in digital technology, the genre readily endorses technologies such as the Internet and the personal computer (along with Digital Audio Workstations), which have made musical practice, consumption, and discourse simpler, faster, and more creative. These technologies have connected fans with other fans and with the artists themselves, allowing them to engage in conversations about existing work and to cumulatively build on such works as equals, elevating the amateur bedroom producer as an equal to the professional career musician.

This is one of the defining and unique characteristics of EDM: its inclusivity. Unlike the fans and musicians of many other genres, EDM fans and musicians don’t debate what norms and aesthetics are authentically EDM and how one might construct an authentic identity that adheres to its norms and
aesthetics. It is always already artificial and inauthentic, and this is its strong
suit, insofar as it brings fans and musicians together without fixing their
identities, or forcing them to conform to group norms— it offers unification
without homogenization.

This unique quality shows up, in part, on the dance floor. The culture of
EDM values a collectivity of dancers, regardless of the specifics of each individual
or his/her movements; it celebrates differences and the body as a manifestation
of sound.27 A culture of remixing and constant collaboration as well as sub-genre
hybridization has risen because of a value system dependant only on the music’s
ability to make more and more people move, not on the question of an author’s
or their audience’s authenticity, or adherence to genre boundaries.

EDM is therefore a music of a varying aesthetics, even though it is
founded in rhythm and the four-to-the-floor (4/4) beat pattern. It is the only
musical aspect of EDM that is uniform. As Neil writes, “Electronic composers use
steady pulse, loop-based structures and 4/4 time as a vehicle for a wide range of
compositional ideas and innovations... at any given time there are many styles
being practiced and developed along with hybrids forming and new genres
constantly emerging.”28 This aesthetic fluidity is linked to EDM’s relationship
with dance; EDM borrow various elements from all forms of music to keep the
body moving in different, ever-evolving ways. It endorses experimentation with
no inherent risk of alienating fans or listeners. Bedroom producers and

27 Ferreira 2008
28 Neill 2002:4
powerhouse DJs alike can therefore create, share and contribute, free to neglect any established audience, and attempt to reach a new crowd.

The potential expansive reach of the genre furthers creativity and encourages innovation. This is because EDM understands genre through beats-per-minute (BPM). Rather than categorizing musical styles according to various aesthetics, EDM categorizes according to tempo. This is a superior understanding of genre because it doesn’t limit creativity, allowing EDM to endorse participation, inauthenticity and inclusivity. EDM is therefore a genre that doesn’t require identification as a prerequisite to entering its discourse, and as a result, it values anonymous creation, rejecting genre and its associated sanitized identities.

The following chapters will argue that electronic music provides an ethos that would allow for genre to be fully eradicated from musical culture; a transformation with important and desirable social and political consequences for fans, listeners, and musicians, and perhaps society at large. In Chapter 1, I describe the history and formation of genre and the corporate culture that reproduces it. In Chapter 2, I discuss how the digital and digital music practices provide an alternative to a homogeneous gendered identification. In Chapter 3, I provide an analysis of the one particular sub-genre within EDM--Moombahton--and how it successfully rejects the concept of genre and circumvents the traditional outlets of the music industry. The final chapter reflects on how a successful antagonistic revolution within the culture of music can provide an outline for a society that also rejects homogeneous identities and the identity
politics of race, nationality, sexuality, religion, gender, class, creed, etc. that such practices incur.

The true revolutionary power of music and its most often overlooked function in society is the ability of music to transcend and refuse identity; to provide a retreat from the social categories that each self must navigate in fabricating an autonomous subjectivity. Music serves and has always served as a resource for imaging utopia, alternate institutions, social relations and, ultimately, a new reality. The practice and activity of musicking can be used strategically to presage new worlds.

**The Foundation Of An Industry & Genre Practices**

Traditionally, academic and journalistic writing about music has focused on three separate groups of individuals: artists, fans and the industry. An in-depth analysis of any of these groups would show that individuals often fit into some combination of these seemingly mutually exclusive groups. Each group, however, serves a unique social role with a specific function in the process of producing and consuming a musical object. Therefore these reductive categories are nevertheless pragmatically useful for understanding this otherwise highly complex process. As Keith Negus writes in his book *Music Genres and Corporate Culture*, an industry produces culture and culture produces an industry. Negus understands that the actions of one group directly affect how the three groups come to perceive and interact with one another. Although individuals can fill all three roles in their everyday lives, actions taken in the interest of fulfilling one
specific role can sometimes contradict the actions that would be taken in the interest of fulfilling a different one. Musical production is therefore best understood as an interaction between the industry, its artists and their fans, as an industry (artists and the industry) producing culture (influencing the passive artists and fans), and as culture (artists and fans) simultaneously producing an industry (influencing the passive industry and artists).

By using the term “industry produces culture,” Negus refers to how “entertainment corporations set up structures of organization and institute distinct working practices to produce identifiable products, commodities and intellectual properties.”29 This approach is informed by questions of political economy and the hegemonic power that corporations exert over individuals but neglects the contributions of individuals, both inside and outside of musical corporations.

By using the term “culture produces an industry”, Negus stresses that “production does not take place simply within a corporate environment structured according to the requirements of capitalist production or organizational formulae, but in relation to broader culture formations and practices that are within neither the control nor understanding of the company.”30 This approach is informed by the critique of political economy, acknowledging the potential of various musicians and groups of consumers to appropriate the meaning of musical products in a variety of ways.

29 Negus 1999:14
30 Ibid:19
The overall aim of Negus’ book is therefore to “outline how corporations shape the conditions within which particular practices can be realized and contested as ‘creative’ while also containing genre categories that might otherwise be far more unstable and dynamic.” (Negus 24) Negus does so through an in-depth analysis of the functions of various corporate structures in relation to musical production. His analysis is a perfect compliment to the work of Jacques Attali.

Jacques Attali’s book, *Noise: The Political Economy Of Music*, is a historical analysis of the dialectical relationship between fans, artists and the music industry from pre-capitalist to post-capitalist societies. The idea that an industry produces culture and culture produces an industry is central to his thesis. Attali argues in his book that music is power over the violence of chaotic noise. All sound that is understandable and identifiable is elevated to the status of music, relegating unidentifiable, foreign sounds to the status of undesired chaotic noise. The music industry is therefore able to shape the conditions within which particular practices can be realized and contested as ‘creative’ through the formation of stable genre categories with distinct boundaries defining what is musical and what is chaotic noise. As a result of these reductive classifications, the industry can create a cultural environment conducive to its continued reproduction through a valorization of its own musically categorized products and the devaluation of any sounds produced outside of the industry’s institutions and understanding.

31 Ibid:24
Nevertheless, artists and fans do not often experience these genre categories as stable, but rather as dynamic and unbound, alternating between experiencing various genre worlds through periods of disruption, outreach, or resistance. Disruption is experienced as the simultaneous intensification and destabilization of genre boundaries. Reactions are conditioned by general social changes, technological innovations, the social status of the individual genre and its cultural distance to the new competitor. Outreach is experienced as the fusion of the disruptive elements with the genre, either resulting in the creation of a new fusion or sub genre or the complete transformation of the original genre to accommodate these developments. The majority of the experience of any genre world is spent in outreach. Periods of outreach are interrupted by periods of disruption, depending on how this new permutation aligns with one’s musical preferences, one then either returns to a period of outreach or enters a period of resistance. Resistance is experienced as skepticism and protectionism in the name of tradition and purity. All individuals experience multiple genres as going through these varying periods on a daily basis.

Attali provides an analysis of the periods throughout musical history in which all genres experience a simultaneous disruption. These industry-wide disruptions have both a cultural origin and a technological origin. These two bases interact to bring about a new mode of musical organization, each exerting influence on the other. During these reorganizational crises, the revolutionary

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32 Holt 2007
33 Ibid
potential of artists and fans are at their highest. As a result, attempts to reclaim musical culture are always met with a reorganization of the industry’s functions, structures and institutions in order for the industry to continue to reproduce itself beyond each crisis. Attali presents a history of individuals’ attempts to reclaim musical culture from the music industry during these revolutionary moments.

Attali’s musical history shows that what began as a perfect system of domination has endured greater and greater losses, as each crisis is resolved. It has created an environment conducive to a full eradication of this industrial commercial system during this current crisis. Using both Negus’ analysis of the industry and Attali’s analysis of reorganizational crises, this chapter will show that the crisis described in the introduction is the crisis predicted by Attali that will finally overcome the practices of genre outlined by Negus that continually reproduce the hegemonic music industry.

I. Sacrificing

Attali begins his analysis with pre-capitalist societies. He calls this stage in musical evolution: sacrificing. Here, music has a political function, representing the very possibility of organized society. In these pre-capitalist societies, music is a collective activity undertaken by every member of the society. Each individual has a right to make noise but those sounds are always pre-determined by an individual’s given role in the musical process. Failure to adhere to that role leads to musical dissonance. This dissonant noise is always
violent in relation to the harmonious music of the collective because it represents chaos, alien differences and the unfamiliar.\textsuperscript{34} Since music was at first a necessarily collective activity, it allowed for the subsumption of individual desires in the name of the collective. Music therefore came to represent a minor form of sacrifice, “it symbolically signifies the channeling of violence and the imaginary, the ritualization of a murder substituted for the general violence.”\textsuperscript{35} Music affirms that society is possible; that humans can set aside all differences in a mutual sacrifice for their collective benefit, but only if the imagination of individuals and their desire for infinite possibilities is sublimated. In a world of hardships and scarcity, organized society and the promises of security and community are enticing and the sacrifice seems but a small loss for a far greater gain. This sacrifice, however, makes us forget that we could be free, that all men and women can make noise and be heard.

The production of music is thus a game of power: “monopolize the right to violence (control over noise); provoke anxiety (silence individuals) and then provide a feeling of security (dictate who makes what noise); provoke disorder and then propose order; create a problem in order to solve it.”\textsuperscript{36} Dissonances are eliminated through musical praxis so that chaotic noise can be kept from spreading, and order can be perpetually reproduced. This is what Attali calls the ritualization of murder, a celebration of silence (death).

\textsuperscript{34} Attali 1985
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid: 26
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid: 28
This mode of organization is centralized on the level of ideology but decentralized on the level of the economy. Similar to Marx’s understanding of a pre-capitalist world, the sacrificial mode does not create wealth, but does successfully unify what would be heterogeneous individualities into a homogenized collective ideology. Upon the introduction of money and a primitive form of capitalism into society, however, sacrificial rituals broke down. Attali calls this transformation, a transition to the mode of representing.

Representing characterizes the entire economy of competitive capitalism, centralized on both ideological and economical levels. The introduction of money into our society led to the emergence of a class with power over capital, the bourgeoisie. Sacrificial rituals had begun to break down because individuals now no longer needed to sacrifice for the collective but instead only had to conform to bourgeois norms and values. Musicians, recognizing that they only had to please the bourgeoisie, neglected the rest of society and their music became a form of entertainment meant exclusively for the bourgeois class. As compensation for their performance, the musicians were paid in wage or barter; one use-value (the event of musical performance) was exchanged with another use-value (food, clothing, etc.).

Musicians, however, soon desired autonomy; they no longer wished to sacrifice their unique individuality for the sovereign desires of the bourgeois class. Musicians could not become autonomous, however, unless music became autonomous, an object capable of generating wealth. Music then inevitably became a commodity, produced solely for the purpose of being exchanged for
money. This commodification, entrapped, produced, exchanged, circulated, and censored it.\textsuperscript{37} Music was no longer an affirmation of existence through activity and communal belonging, but was instead relegated to an exchange good with monetary value. Like all commodities, musical objects now had a maker and an owner, laying the foundation for the copyright protections afforded to intellectual properties.

\textbf{II. Representing}

Music had celebrated active life in the stage of sacrificing. It served as background noise for the daily activity of men, constantly reminding all of society that the collective must be valued over the individual. However, upon entering the order of the exchanged, music valorized bourgeois productive individualism and the theatrical enactment of the spectacle. The sacrificial code had ruptured, bringing with it, the introduction of a market system and through the innovation of the printing press and the printed score, a reified individualistic representation of the once collective musical process.

The printed score allowed for harmonic developments to display rational progress, allowing for textual analysis and elevating music to the Pythagorean ideal of mathematics, giving birth to the western tradition of academic music theory. The primitive notion of natural collective harmony (code of sacrificing) gives way to the western bourgeois belief of equal temperament, the idea of "a constructed, reasoned order, a scientific construction, brought about through

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid 53
dialectical, reasoned discourse by rational and therefore inherently equal individuals.”  

Music became valued as a representation of perfectly harmonized music via the score, and was presented to the public in a theatrical reproduction: a performance of the abstract musical object and, at the same time, a theatrical representation of an ideal bourgeois world.

The score represents the complete triumph of harmony, rationality and the metaphorical elimination of dissonance because it could be analyzed, edited and reasoned to perfection. This perfect representation was then offered to the public as an ideal piece of artistic work worthy of exchange because of its adherence to bourgeois ideology, elevating musicians to the status of the bourgeois class. This was the new mode of musical organization: a copy of the sacrificial ritual murder of dissonance, attempting to represent the original. Through this metaphorical sacrifice, the spectacle of intellectualized music was sufficient to channel the violence of dissonant noise; the sacrificial ritual was no longer necessary. Nothing could be imagined beyond rationalized perfection.

Over time as capitalism evolves and advances, copyright emerges as a method to establish private ownership of a musical work, granting power and uniqueness to its author (who is capable of achieving perfect harmony) and to those who can distribute the work (those who discover artists and present their works of perfection to the society, thus dictating value). This is the foundation of the modern day music industry: a valorization of bourgeois individuality and the

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38 Ibid: 60-61
39 Ibid: 40
emergence of intellectual property and copyright. As Attali argues, “Instead of being a relation, [musical discourse] was no longer anything more than a monologue of specialists competing in front of consumers. The artist was born, at the same time as his work went on sale.” Music praxis had finally become autonomous and its products were capable of generating wealth.

The emerging middle class (including composers, publishers, and the paying audience) then, in the hopes of also becoming autonomous, employed the music itself to present and reproduce the bourgeois ideology of a necessarily rational, understandable and organized social order, in the hopes of achieving the status and recognition of the bourgeoisie. Rather than demanding the expansion of the bourgeois spectacle to the proletariat, the public endorsed the bourgeois order necessary for money to come to equally represent all value.

In order for money to properly represent the value of all commodities, rational analysis was employed to reductively categorize all commodities into valuation hierarchies. The perceived divinity and universality of rationality eradicated the need to recognize internal differences. As a result of this valorization of commodity fetishization, “commodities speak on behalf of those who purchase the spectacle of their order, their glory.” The completion of the transformation to a representative society culminates in money becoming the medium for accumulating cultural and social capital, through the consumption of commodities.

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40 Ibid: 47
41 Ibid: 81
In pre-capitalist societies there were various ways of accumulating cultural and social capital, however, in capitalist societies, the valorization of commodities and the fetishization of money is the only possibility. Commodities thus say more than a given individual ever could, not only because value doesn’t exist independent of them but also because commodities are perfect, void of human error. This is the mode of representation, a confusion of objectivity as subjectivity and the alienation of humanity from itself.

Similar to what occurred in the stage of sacrificing, Attali argues, the composers themselves brought the mode of representation to a halt. The inherent contradiction of the mode of representing was brought to light: a crisis of normalization in the name of reason. Composers fought back against harmony with dissonance; they brought back the violence of noise, the desire to be irrational and sparked an engagement with the discourse of freedom. Theodor Adorno, who opposed melding material to a predetermined form, favored the musics of this era, and argued that music should elevate the listener to the status of compositional partner and teach its listener to perceive illogical contradictions by challenging his or her critical faculties. This reactionary music was the catalyst for change and the shift from representation to the mode of repetition.

III. Repetition

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42 Ibid: 90
43 DeNora 2003
The public realm was in chaos; the people had begun to reject the order of the harmonious and endorse the nonsense of noise. The revolutionary new left furthered an endorsement of this artistic bohemian ideology and posited their values over those of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeois capitalist music industry then, in an attempt to preserve the old order, responded by shifting its focus to the private realm, specifically through the innovation of recording technologies. The phonograph and the radio, technologies of unidirectional communication allowed for the removal of music from the rationally harmonious order of public life into the far more irrational and individualistic private realm. These technologies came to serve as tools employed to entrench society in the cycle of repetition, a cycle that gave birth to the structures and institutions of the modern music industry.

The immateriality of musical commodities allowed for a shift from the commodification of performance to the commodification of compositions and an exchange of pure signs: records and broadcasts. Similar to representative commodities, these signs became a locus of social capital and by extension power. It was a natural step for these signs to begin to be stockpiled in order to increase one’s cultural capital and for the mass to be completely silenced upon reception of the goods.

The phonograph and the record allowed individuals to interact with music freely in the private realm, eliminating the need for social exchange time. It became irrelevant whether one enjoyed harmonious or dissonant musics. This

44 Brooks 2000
mode of organization is decentralized on the level of ideology but still
centralized on the economic level as the industry managed to successfully re-
monetize the consumption of music through a loosely totalizing synthesis of the
bohemian values (irrational noise) compatible with bourgeois ideology (rational
stockpiling). Records became the new commodity to be stockpiled and
repeatedly enjoyed at home. The advent of the radio was the final push for a
complete transformation.

The radio made repetition even more widespread, as it was free (once the
radio was purchased) and could transcend physical space. Collective
consumption (concert halls and performance spaces) gave way to individualized
accumulation. The collective was silenced. Music consumption stops being a
necessarily social event. Without these regular social interactions and
negotiations, community couldn’t truly exist and consumers must sacrifice group
solidarity for the sake of individualized satisfactions. As a result, each individual
now identifies with the choices he or she makes, as those choices are no longer
recognized as being part of a social process. Because individuals were deceived
into believing their consumption reflects an ontological self-identity, market
research becomes increasingly proficient, quantifying individuality.

The aggregating of individualities into cohorts and demographics gives
perceived legitimacy to commercial power. The market system began to
“understand” individuals better than they knew themselves. It was not long
before the market system claimed to offer individuals the satisfaction of their
desires at the very moment such desires became conscious. This is the era of
musical production in which genre begins to play a much more important role in the organization of social and corporate life. Here Attali’s analysis of musical history is analogous to Negus’ analysis of genre’s function in the corporate cultures of the music industry.

Negus argues, “genres are used by record companies as a way of integrating a conception of music (what does it sound like?) with a notion of the market (who will buy it?). Musician and audience are considered simultaneously, as a way of ‘defining music in its market’ and ‘the market in its music.”\textsuperscript{45} The conception and construction of a static identity with essential characteristics is therefore necessary for the music industry to function properly. That is why within the corporations that make up the music industry, music genres are formally codified into specific organizational departments, with narrow assumptions about markets, and ‘targeted’ promotional practices.\textsuperscript{46} This is the corporate strategy adopted by the various players involved in the music industry.

Corporate strategy aims to control and order the unpredictable social processes and diversity of human behaviors that are condensed into notions of production and consumption riddling the music industry with uncertainties.\textsuperscript{47} Strategy provides a way of monitoring and accounting for the activities of producers, artists and recording industry personnel. It also provides a means of rationalizing and ordering the activities of consumers and audiences. Strategy

\textsuperscript{45} Negus 1999:28
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid:31
has therefore been formulated and pursued in an attempt to manage the connection between ‘internal’ production and ‘external’ consumption.

Corporate space is utilized to manage the often-fragmentary social relationships through which music is produced, consumed and given meaning. Record company strategy attempts to resolve this problem through the organization of catalogues, departments and promotional systems according to genre. This system of portfolio management provides a way of viewing the company’s labels, genres and artists by dividing them into discrete strategic business units. This makes visible the performance, profile, and contributions of each. Each unit can be assessed and categorized according to its performance and level of investment required.48

Each unit has to regularly report to corporate headquarters; it has sales targets to hit, budgets to work within, it rewarded for good performances and can be punished for bad ones. Rewards often consist of finance for expansion and individual bonuses. Punishment consists of the loss of a job, the reorganization of a division or the entire removal of a department from the portfolio. As Negus writes, “record companies are not unified businesses, but collections of units organized according to musical genre. Genres assume a position within a company’s portfolio, with different departments continually struggling for greater recognition and further resources.”49 Resources are allocated to some types of music and not others; certain types of deals are done

48 Ibid
49 Ibid: 49
with some acts and not others. Greater investment is accorded to certain types of familiarity and newness and not others, allowing for the music industry to influence what music is heard and what isn’t, limiting the notion of creativity.

Accounting knowledge provides the principal means through which strategy is assessed and enforced. “Such intense financial control encourages simplified aesthetic judgments, contradictory management and anxiety or confusion in the face of musical changes.”50 Through market research two interrelated issues are continually researched and monitored weekly: purchase and consumption. Who buys what, when and where, with what kind of frequency, and what influences these purchases (price, visual image, radio, video, location) How do people consume- does it fit into a specific lifestyle or a particular way of living. Where do they listen, with whom, at what time and for how long? Are they partaking in other activities or appreciating just the music? Every month various data outlets provide figures broken down according to age, sex and other social characteristics. These figures influence the prioritization of artists for promotion and termination.51 This also directly influences the distribution network, affecting whether too many or too few recordings are being pressed, and the outline of retail space, with certain acts at the forefront and others off to the side. The practice of accounting therefore reduces certain actions to figures, which are then abstracted out of the social context within which they were created and which they seek to explain.52 One immediate

consequence is reluctance to experiment, a reduction in risk taking and a propensity towards a partial view of the world.

In the process it does not so much understand the world of musical culture and consumption but invents one. “The power of strategic calculation lies in its ability to divide, collate and classify. However, it is precisely through this analytic fragmentation that it loses sight of what it claims to represent. In seeking to grasp the real, strategy manages instead to construct a reality.”\textsuperscript{53} Genre classification works this way to reduce financial risk by diversifying record companies’ portfolios into different demographic segments. However, the very security provided by data generates insecurity and anxiety due to the way in which it does not provide the answers. “It is a world of strategies without vision, order without insight: strategies that operate to reduce risk taking, increase anxiety, and curb spontaneity.”\textsuperscript{54} While the artists and industry personnel experience this corporate strategy on a regular basis, it is only made visible to the public through the creation of various hit lists and ranking systems propagated through the various media associated with the music industry. Attali similarly argues that the triumph of the market was achieved through this hit parade and its perceived legitimacy.

As Attali reveals, outside of the communal sacrificial ritual or the bourgeois spectacle, music has no value as an abstract object. Instead, only their signs have value, a value dictated by the hierarchy of the hit parade. The hit

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid:61
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid:63
parade serves to create value for musical objects, through an expression of sales figures, predictions of success and supposedly, listener preferences. As a result, any song not on the hit list necessarily has no value or inversely only has value because it is not on the hit parade. The hit parade succeeded in creating a value system that further narrowed the scope of accessible noise.

Without the hit parade as a value system, all music goes undifferentiated and has no preconceived value outside of an individual’s listening experience, allowing for individuals and artists to interpret it as they please, freed of genre categories and their value hierarchies. However, due to the limited number of spots for a finite number of categories in the hit parade, the music industry becomes capable of hindering music’s inherent creative fluidity, imposing its values and norms on the mass through classifying and valuing musics that necessarily reproduce its mode of organization and preserve the industry’s intermediary functions.

Using Attali’s and Negus’ frameworks, we can see how because the hit parade is premised as a culmination of listeners’ preferences (requests to radio stations) and their participation in the realm of consumption (sales figures), the industry is able to deceive the mass into believing that the hit parade is an accurate representation of their collective values and ideologies through the homogenization of genre worlds and the otherwise inherently heterogeneous value systems of their diverse fan base. Worse yet, when the hit parade does not necessarily feel like an accurate representation, the industry can retreat into the predicted failure of a song or genre (numbers don’t lie) and positively frame the
practice of conspicuous consumption, necessary for its own flourishing, as the opportunity for each individual's voice to be heard (but you can try and get more people to buy it).

The hit parade therefore creates the conditions for accelerated growth. It creates a reserve army of music, allowing supply to routinely exceed the possibility of consumption. Attali argues that the speed of production of this new cultural capital marks the elimination of use-time. Because these signs represent a form of social capital, there is no need to engage with the music; simply having it is sufficient to satisfy our needs. The lack of use-time marks an era of perpetual repetition and the transformation to an advanced capitalist society. The elimination of any moment where noise is still heard and pleasure is derived from the object is the complete victory of death (silence).

Aesthetically, the result is repetitive music: colonized and sanitized, each priced the same as the rest. Value is now dependent on an artificial, temporary differentiation. Music is increasingly just background noise, facilitating "cultural normalization, and the disappearance of distinctive cultures." This is the standardization of music and the emergence of pseudo-individualization that Adorno also sees as most problematic of popular music. Musicians separate into the stars of repetition (super stars), and the anonymous residues of representation (local, small label bands). Super stars are often placed in a cult of celebrity and genius, as a result of their prevalence within a genre world, both

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55 Ibid:92
56 Ibid:111
57 Adorno 1972
because of their adherence to genre norms and because of the relentless promotion afforded them even as they break the rules and spontaneously innovate. Those who are not super stars are often considered derivative of this higher class of artists. They can only attempt to emulate the stars and trendsetters, awaiting their chance to inject novelty into musical culture.

The musician himself, especially the super star, has now become an essential tool of the music industry: a unifying actor, designed to fit an all-encompassing genre mold. Any musician who doesn’t fit this mold but demands mass appeal is quickly subsumed into the totality. The industry can therefore claim all antagonistic actions; it encourages artistic deviance from the norms and marginalities, by explicitly recognizing the originators of this gendered innovation in an attempt to make total a unifying ideology, to rid it of the possibility of dissonance. As Attali writes, “no human act, no social relation, seems to escape this confinement in the commodity...everything in our societies today points to the emplacement of the process of repetition.”

Mass production eliminated differences in musical objects as well as the socially necessary labor time to produce and consume them. “Although training and confinement began as the heralds of repetition, they are no longer necessary when people are taught to take pleasure in conforming to the norm.” This norm is continually moving towards a successful abolition of human (musical) difference.

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58 Attali 1985:127  
59 Ibid:125
Attali goes on to argue, that, nevertheless, society readily identifies with this music because it has nothing more to say, no arena left for meaningful discourse. Because the feeling of powerlessness to resist the totalizing practices of capital is rooted in the promise of isolation upon its rejection, it coerces individuals to consciously accept the homogeneous and pseudo-individualized identities. This endorsement of meaningless emptiness in order to attain a feeling of social inclusion is a celebration of the stockpiling of the means for individual death. Through this celebration of death, however, the possibility of antagonism reveals itself.

The threat of imminent death is no longer just a condition of individual life but also of social life. Repetition valorized the endorsement and stockpiling of empty meaninglessness. An endorsement of meaningless nonsense, however, is also an endorsement of anonymity, a return to the undefined and unknowable, a world with infinite possibility. In repetitive social life, death has become immediate and certain, as the social consumes individualities. Capitalism, however, feeds us with a drive to present ourselves as a unique individual. Yet, as we become more and more alike through genre practices, violence necessarily increases as we find fewer and fewer outlets for our individual unique desires. In terms of musical culture and praxis, this violence is exercised through a culture of configurability; a culture that celebrates an individual’s right to make (bedroom producer) and hear (pirate) all noise.

Like the analog technologies that form the basis of Attali’s argument, digital technologies support the unilateral communication tendencies of
repetition, but they also contain the possibility of multilateral communication.

As a result, these technologies have allowed for the proliferation of musical communities that serve as a networked public sphere, consisting of various publics and counter-publics. It has brought forth an environment conducive to the DIY (do-it-yourself) ethic and a reclaiming of culture as our own, freed of industry intervention. The innovations of the MP3, efficiently cheap means of production (DAWs) and distribution (Internet) have become readily accessible to all. The practices of sampling, remixing, on-the-fly DJing and mash-ups allow anyone to reconstitute any product as his or her own or just as easily compose a product from scratch.

This moment of realized abundance is the condition through which any remaining ties to the idea of gendered identities and static genre culture will be abolished. The refusal to engage in repetitive, restrictive social life is the ethos of configurable culture. Its eros is the individual, the self-valorization of one’s ability to make unique noise. Its medium is the digital.

In this chapter, I have summarized Attali’s musical history in conjunction with Negus’ analysis of the role of genre in corporate cultures. I have shown that hindering creativity and forming defined social identities was necessary in pre-capitalist societies, the introduction of capitalism furthered this tendency towards financial gain. In terms of musical culture, this was achieved through the practices of genre. As capitalist societies became more individualistic, however, so did musical praxis, allowing for an individual musician to now have the tools to produce music that could have once required an orchestra, all on a
computer. This development renders the initial pre-capitalist desire for stasis a burden on society and musicians; nevertheless, it has not yet been done away with. The following chapter is an analysis of the digital and how it can allow musical discourse to finally eradicate genre practices, open up creativity and challenge the very notion of identity.

**The Power Of Digital Music**

As I stated in the previous chapter, various scholars, theorists and journalists have often celebrated the modern technologies of the computer, the Internet and the various digital media that allow for a populist musical culture. Others, however, have rejected the belief in the utopian potential of technology as foolishly naïve, arguing instead that modern technologies further dystopia\(^{60}\) and the eradication of a humanized humanity.\(^{61}\) Marshall McLuhan and Aden Evens are two media scholars who believe that both are right.

Marshall McLuhan argues in his book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, that technology is inherently neutral and can be utilized towards utopian or dystopian ends. As a result, it is the medium itself, not the content that it carries, that should be the focus of study. He believes that a medium’s form embeds itself in the message it delivers, creating a symbiotic relationship through which the medium influences how the message is received.

Each new form of technology therefore necessarily changes social relations and

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\(^{60}\) Bennett 2004; Dean 2010; Ferreira and Thompson 2008; Marcuse 1964; Morozov 2011

\(^{61}\) Heidegger is often understood as arguing, in The Question Concerning Technology, that our current understanding of technology as a challenging forth rather than a bringing forth of truth, leads to a mechanized humanity.
humanity’s perception of reality. He gives the example of a light bulb as a clear example of this concept. A light bulb does not have content, yet it is a medium that has a social effect; that is, a light bulb enables people to create spaces during nighttime that would otherwise be enveloped by darkness, "a light bulb creates an environment by its mere presence."\textsuperscript{62}

Aden Evens provides a similar argument in his book, \textit{Sound Ideas: Music, Machines and Experience}. Evens analyzes the form of the digital, the backbone of modern technologies such as the computer and the Internet. He argues that modern technology no longer refers to its creator or to its immersion in any of the many worlds through which it passes, materially, historically, or economically. It is rather at human disposal, ready to serve, and as such is also disposable. In accordance with Heidegger, he acknowledges that technology sets upon nature, demanding that it be “identifiable through calculation” and “orderable as a system of information.”\textsuperscript{63} As a result, technology becomes an end in itself. Modern technology, however, Evens argues, has a measure that allows it to be both the means and ends, to be refined, honed by a standard of precision. This measure is the digital; “ordering is what digits do best.”\textsuperscript{64}

Evens’ theorization of the digital highlights some important features which I will use to theorize the way in which EDM, a genre endemic to digital technologies (more so than any other genre), works to undermine the music

\textsuperscript{62} McLuhan 1994:8
\textsuperscript{63} Evens 2005:64
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid
industry’s reliance of genre on notions of authenticity, specificity and historicity, thereby making possible an unfixing of identity through anonymity.

I. The Question Concerning The Digital

Evens argues that the digital provides a universal standard that is easily transportable, exactly duplicable and broadly applicable. The digital implements an immaculate ordering that isolates desired properties and gives verifiable, repeatable, and measurable definitions. Refinement, precision, storage and isolation are therefore the powers of the digital, amplifying technology’s powers in many ways, imposing on nature with an order that is both highly malleable and utterly consistent. He writes, “the digital is a logic, an abstract code underlying the technology’s effects, a set of instructions, reducible to 0s and 1s, on and off. While one cannot exactly point to a 0 or 1, one can point to a condition that counts as 0 or 1, a condition that is a measure of voltage or magnetic field strength or some other physical value.” The binary code is thus a system of abstraction, a reductive abstraction of actuality that is nevertheless effective, and governs the operation of digital technologies.

The digital therefore represents everything according to this same binary order, a hegemony that is both the source of its great power and its grave danger. When dealing with the digital, content and medium cease to be relevant. To treat something as digital is to operate on form as the digital inherently turns

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65 Ibid
66 Ibid:65
everything into information.\textsuperscript{67} The digital captures the general, the representable, the repeatable, but leaves out the singular, the unique, the immediate; whatever is not formal. By contrast with the actual, the formal includes only stasis, what remains fixed long enough to be measured, determined and specified; the actual can be copied but can never happen again.\textsuperscript{68} Actuality always exceeds its form.

A digital world therefore has no uniqueness or immediacy, for it is inherently generic, treating every place as an abstract space represented by reproducible numbers, every object as a type defined by such precise values, every action reduced to on/off commands.\textsuperscript{69} To live in such a world is to have reproducible and generic experience; everything in cyberspace is a matter of a set of numbers that can be exactly reproduced with the right formula.

The digital is entirely equal to its form; it is nothing but a form. Digital articulations are therefore immaculate, the distinction between 0 and 1 is absolute, and this absolute difference carries over into the differences between two digital data. This equivalence to form means that our interactions with the digital offer a unique exactitude, robustness, repeatability, transportability, and applicability, but these powers are gained only by a reduction to formal qualities.\textsuperscript{70} The process of digitization requires that an object be divided into parts, then, each slice, each little piece is evaluated according to a determinate

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid:66
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid: 67
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid
scale and assigned a number. The digital is therefore calculably imprecise, measuring its object to a given level of accuracy and no further. The digital presents its own completeness, its absoluteness, and its total lack of concealment.\textsuperscript{71}

That the digital holds nothing in reserve, that it “leaves nothing concealed but is equivalent to its presentation, would seem to preclude it as a site for the coming-to-presence of truth, at least according to Heidegger.”\textsuperscript{72} Evens argues, however, that because the digital has shown everything in its initial appearance and therefore provokes no questions, poses no problems, demands nothing of its observer, it is nevertheless a challenging forth of truth. Digital data are givens, and are, as such, not open to question. In the process of digitization, the digital establishes thresholds in the qualitative continuum of the actual. These thresholds mark an absolute distinction, transforming the actual world of continuously varying qualities into the digital world of discrete and exact quantities. By dividing the actual into ranges of quality defined by endpoints or thresholds, the digital makes a range of the actual correspond to an exact value. The gap between two thresholds is a range of quality; but the digital imposes a uniform value on that entire range that erases the difference of quality in favor of the stasis and consistency of an exact and determinate quality. Divide and conquer, the strategy of the digital, reduces the heterogeneity of an actual range

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid:68
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid: 69
to the homogeneity of a digital value but as such allows the exact comparison
over time and space of a digital object to itself and to others.\textsuperscript{73}

The digital, by virtue of its discreteness, establishes an absolute standard
of sameness and difference, distinct thresholds that are either crossed or not.
What the digital misses, however, besides whatever falls between its
articulations of thresholds, is the creative power of the actual that will always
defy fixed or static representation. “This missing haecceity (here-ness) is a not-yet-determined, an ontological fuzziness inherent to actuality itself, actuality has
a singleness that testifies to its generation.”\textsuperscript{74} The digital, on the other hand,
holds nothing back; its datum has no margin or fringe of uncertainty. The digital
only deals with problems in this refined domain, where everything is crystal
clear. The digital itself becomes a universal, generic, formal standard.

It is a standard form for representing objects for storing, manipulating,
analyzing, and transmitting information. The digital is able to accommodate a
huge variety of different kinds of information, but in each case, it can store it on
the same media, transfer it over the same digital channels, and manipulate it
according to the same rules.\textsuperscript{75} The digital’s pure formality means that digital data
are indifferent to their content or delivered medium, so that a digital
representation of a sound can be seen as well as heard. With no content to
complicate things and resist manipulation, digital data can be isolated from the
set, manipulated independently, and then restored, while evidence of this

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid: 71
selective tampering can be erased. By representing the formal properties of an object independently of the object itself, we can effectively compare that object to others, or to an established standard, without needing any actual experience of the object.

The digital is therefore hermetic in Evens’ argument, imprisoned in its own domain. The digital does not present, but rather merely represents. If it refers at all, it refers to the generic, not to a particular actual but to a species of them, a type. The digital is never unique, never singular. The digital world does not offer each time a new experience, does not unfold itself to reveal unique forces gathered from the depths of history, for a digital object is static and without history. It offers instead the promise of generic and repeatable experience.

Nevertheless the digital maintains a border with the actual according to Evens, a border where its perfection breaks down, and its definitiveness gives way to the productive ambiguity of the actual. Utterly useless by itself, the digital is put to use always by virtue of additional technologies that mediate between digital and actual. Evens therefore argues that we will always have the opportunity to restore some of the actuality that is stripped away when things are reduced to form.

Occupying this space are all those technologies that constitute what is commonly called the interface. The interface effects passage back and forth from

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76 Ibid
77 Ibid:76
concrete gestures, images, and sounds to abstract forms, coded as digital bits. It mediates between user and computer.\textsuperscript{78} Not only does the interface convey the user’s intention to the realm of the digital, but also requires that the user enter the digital. To use digital technologies, one must become digital, aligning one’s own articulations to the spatial, temporal, and logical articulations of the interface.\textsuperscript{79} The user programs the interface, but the interface also programs the user. Digital technology determines in advance which commands it will respond to, in what order they must be executed, how far it can go, and in which directions. Desires that are not expressed in terms of these pre-established possibilities simply cannot be carried out. The interface is thus the realm of intervention, wherein we can call attention to the digital’s pure formality and attempt to rectify it.

The formality of the digital, Evens argues, can be rectified through two opposing tendencies. The first tendency is toward the removal of an interface, allowing one to interact directly with necessarily ontological information, ontological because there is no process of abstraction without an interface. This would allow for the digital to present rather than represent, this is a tendency towards a virtual reality that maintains the singularity of actuality. The second tendency is toward the spectacle of mediation, a mediation that doesn’t ever attempt to disguise itself. This results in transparency, as the interface challenges its users faculties and makes its abstractions explicit.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid:78
Regarding the computer as an instrument satisfies digital technology’s inherent contradictory tendencies towards immediacy, the removal of an interface, and mediation, a constant reminder of a mediated experience, resolving the contradiction through an understanding that both tendencies stem from the same impulse. As Evens writes, “immediacy in regard to an instrument is not the removal of its interface, not a demediation, but the creation of an environment in which the user can express her desire with the greatest facility, the greatest ease.” Likewise, highlighting elements of the interface is not a necessary compromise that unfortunately disrupts immediacy but is a way of augmenting the possibilities offered for self-expression and doing so in a way that is unique to the computer. The interface would not stand between the user and her desires but makes possible the articulation of that desire by revealing what would need to be altered in the interface’s programming. By upholding the notion of the computer as an instrument, Evens argues, we may be able to continue to maximize its usefulness while avoiding the threat of a whole-scale absorption into the digital.

II. The Computer As A Musical Instrument

All digital technologies have a built in obsolescence. Technological innovation and advancement expand the limits of technology, rendering older products useless. Evens argues that when the ongoing refinements of the interface improve it to the point where the medium draws attention to itself as

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80 Ibid:79
digital, the digital data must then be reorganized or refined to take advantage of the superior interface. This dialectic of interface and data also implicates the user, who may have to reconfigure her senses in order to detect the digital origins of her experience.

The endgame of this dialectic is the synthesis of an interface that is both transparent and malleable, in order to allow for an immediate technological expression of any spontaneous human desire. This more human interface would be widely distributed and would give creative license to non-expert users who could make fundamental alterations in the interface, fostering competing standards and original uses of technology.\(^81\) When many people, instead of an elite few, create digital content, their diversity resists the uniformity that standardizes the digital, and they pose an inherent challenge to the dominion of a single standard, as authors are various, tools are multiple, and progress unpredictable. The instrumentality of the interface is therefore analogous to that of musical instruments, they are not merely means to an end, but rather, come to generate their own ends.\(^82\)

At the conclusion of “The Question Concerning Technology” Heidegger articulates the saving power of technology, insofar as technology can be a means to an end rather than an end in itself, as being inherent to art. Art is both akin to technology, as a site of revealing, but is also different from it, for it serves no pre-described end. This unique relation to technology makes art the domain in which

\(^81\) Ibid:86
\(^82\) Ibid:89
to cultivate and nurture the saving power according to Evens. By its nature, art pushes its media to their limits, exercising their most subtle elements, exploiting the highest resolutions, and appealing to the most refined sensations. Moreover, art does not tolerate homogeneity, for it succeeds only by a fierce and determined originality. Art pursues invention and so explores the limits of its media to forge new possibilities and discover unexpected directions. As Evens writes, “where art meets the digital, the question concerning the digital will not cease to be asked, there will be a most revealing test of the digital’s limits.”\textsuperscript{83} One such arena to cultivate this saving power is music.

While the digital has become implicated in various points in the process of producing and consuming music, the recent rise of configurable culture and the prominence of electronic music, has placed the computer as an instrument at the forefront of musical praxis. This application of digital technology has implications for musical culture. Evens notes that when we refer to a musical instrument, part of what we intend is a reduction of that technology to its instrumentality, a means to an end. A musical instrument is a means to make sound, as it transduces force into vibrations.

A musical instrument, however, is valued as more than an instrument. Evens argues that while instruments become absorbed and then disappear in their use, the musical instrument remains opaque, as one does not know how it will respond to a given gesture. Thus one invents in unison with one’s instrument. The instrument operates on the player as the player operates on the

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid:95
instrument, and each is altered thereby. Fine musical instruments are extremely sensitive, and this sensitivity offers to the performer a subtle control over the sound. Not perfect control; however, since the performer shapes but does not ultimately determine the sound. To shape the sound requires an ongoing mechanism of feedback so that the instrument places not only the controls under the dominion of the player but also puts the player in direct contact with the sonic surfaces of the instrument.\textsuperscript{84}

These feedback mechanisms preclude a wholly preconceived performance; the player’s goals are always provisional, only starting points that set the instrument to vibrating. Ends are never determined beforehand but are produced from a complex negotiation between player and instrument. By resisting the player’s gestures, and by directing the application of force, the instrument guides desire and generates new ideas in the player. This blurs both the instrument and player at their edges and allows their sonic surfaces to enmesh.\textsuperscript{85} In training, a musician is altered in her body, and her technique is a way of adapting herself to the instrument, which is not without material consequences. Playing then overcomes technique, so that the player, instrument, and sound are assembled in that sublime moment into a single machine with unlimited possibility.

Though electronic instruments may resemble their acoustic counterparts in form, function, and feel, there is a significant difference. In an electronic

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid: 102
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid: 111
instrument, the sound energy is drawn from electricity, so that the musician does not supply the force but acts as a trigger. Evens notes that there is thus an abstraction inherent in electronic instruments since the player’s gestures are interpreted as on/off commands rather than providing a direct force. This abstraction is where the uniqueness of the instrument gets lost. Every acoustic musical instrument has a sonic signature. This signature or uniqueness is precisely what is lacking in the digital.

Digital instruments by nature are generic and interchangeable. The digital process of abstraction not only generalizes the instrument, removing its singular character, but also serves as a filtering mechanism since the measurement process of digitization selects in advance which forces will be relevant to the production of the sound and what sort of difference they will make. Evens goes on to note how the abstraction that separates the sound production of an electronic instrument from the force that triggers that production allows the triggering itself to be automated, displaced from its original time and place. A performance can be exactly duplicated years after its initial playing, and another instrument with a very different sound, can be fed the exact same performance data.

The process of playing a digital instrument is thereby further abstracted; as the playing is separated from the sound at a further remove. This separation allows for all sorts of intervention in the sound via digital manipulation and digital performance techniques that open countless new possibilities. Evens argues that sound design now plays an increasingly crucial role in the
production of music. While performers were always concerned with producing the right notes at the time of performance, sound design is now inseparable from the creative process, it allows the instrument to be programmed, so that new sounds can be created by altering different parameters of the synthesizer. The promise of synthesis is that it opens up the sonic palette to vast new potentials, allows the generation of distinct acoustic spaces and expensively customized instruments.\textsuperscript{86}

This process of sound design marks another difference between acoustic and electronic instruments. Acoustic instruments produce sound through bodily gestures enacted on their sonic surface. This intermingling leaves open the possibility of the accidental or haphazard, the contingent or noisy. Evens argues, however, that synthesis always aims to eliminate noise from the signals, the internal commands that produce sound. Synthesizers define signal in absolute terms as equal to the series of numbers triggered, therefore from its onset, synthesis aims at closing off accidental noise. Evens writes, “it is this noise, however, that binds the signal, that serves as a medium, a baseline, and a plane of relief against which signal stands out. Without an appropriate noise, sounds fail to connect to the implicated reserve of sense, fail to move or cohere, do not live.”\textsuperscript{87} Digitally synthesized sounds, cut off from noise, are produced in a vacuum.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid: 120
\textsuperscript{87} Evens: 130
Like digital instruments themselves, the sounds they produce have immaculate edges that do not degenerate into a surrounding context of noise from which they can draw sense into perception. “They sound thin,” Evens argues, “emaciated to the point of purity that no longer holds any weight.”\textsuperscript{88} Because the digital circumvents the inherent limits of acoustic sound production by allowing arbitrary manipulation of timbre outside of any context, synthesis loses its grip on the world and no longer generates enough friction to turn sound energy into music. Because there is not merely a transduction but a translation from the digital to the analog-acoustic realm, there is a gap that places the performer, composer, and musician at a remove from the music itself. The performer/composer is confronted by the sound as object, and the sound loses its organic immediacy to become something to be manipulated, tweaked and worked over.

At a remove from the sound, standing over it, the electronic musician reflects on the sound, has the opportunity and the distance to hear every detail. Evens argues that digital music tools, therefore encourage an unending editing process, exposing every aspect of the sound to the music maker and blurring its singular history. In an era of electricity and electronics, we start listening more and more to the sounds of invisible bodies contained in these digital technologies. Digital instruments remove sound from its concrete time and place. It can be stored indefinitely, transported perfectly across distance and

\textsuperscript{88} ibid
time and be reproduced exactly on command. The instrument does not produce music from its concrete body but from its abstract program.

Digital sound is abstract from the start and so is connected to former sounds by the fluidity of data rather than by the material solidity of mechanical vibration. Precisely because the digital institutes a uniformity that reduces music to form, digital instruments are connected across space and time into a continuous liquid mass. As Pedro Ferreira writes, “original sounds are tied to the mechanisms which produced them but electro-acoustic sounds are copies severed from their natural sources.” The mutual abstraction of digital instruments provides a historical continuity that is invisible in the domain of actuality. Sounds begin to lose their identities.

The digital even ties its own instruments (programs) into a lineage so that the instruments themselves describe a linear progression. Each successive synthesizer opens new possibilities for the generation of sound without closing off the old ones; the latest synthesizer can do everything its parent did and more. Contrary to their acoustic counterparts, even if there are occasional (and contested) improvements to acoustic instruments, these alterations do not usually add to the possibilities without also changing other ones. This additive property, unique to electronic instruments, doesn’t even allow for sound or styles of synthesizing to be intrinsically tied to their specific era or mechanism. Evens argues that the digital therefore makes necessary a shift from the causes

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89 Ferreira:19
90 Evens 2005:137
of sounds to the effects of sound, an understanding of sound as a generic effect of the propagation of a vibration through different media, independent of any particular cause.

III. An Antithetical Disruption

This disruption of the bond of referentiality that ties source to waveform is only made possible through the medium of the digital and an endorsement of the computer as a musical instrument. This break has significant consequences for musical culture, genre practices and for the reproduction of a music industry premised on stable genre rules tied to an identifiable source.

It is now possible to see a parallel between Attali’s theorization of musical modes of organization--sacrificing, representing, repeating--which he argues leads to the abstraction and standardization of music, and Aden’s theorization of the digital form, which similarly imagines that binary code reduces the actual in order to represent and deliver generic repeatability. In both arguments, musical cultures have devolved in such a way that music is thought to now be impoverished as it has veered from the actual, the real, the authentic, the connected. A close reading of the previous two chapters makes this analogy all too evident, both the digital and the music industry claim to represent reality but are nothing more than a false construction reached through generic abstraction.

The digital is therefore not only clearly theoretically capable of performing all the functions of the music industry related to musical production and consumption, but could actually do so more efficiently, as is the nature of the
digital; void of human error. Evens’ argument is limited to the 
production/performance of music, and because of this, it cannot account for the 
ways in which the digital is revolutionary insofar as navigates the intrinsic 
contradiction of genre better than the music industry, allowing it to 
simultaneously resolve its own internal contradiction of presenting only 
representations.

Genre isn’t problematic in and of itself; categorizing music cultures is 
problematic only insofar as it results in stasis. It would be ideal if genre could be 
stable (insofar as categorization requires stability) but also malleable, familiar 
but also novel. While this seemingly paradoxical dialectic might seem 
inconceivable, this is precisely the kind of anti-genre genre that the digital makes 
possible. This is because the digital flattens history in the process of digitization 
through a systematically reductive categorical analysis of sound, allowing for 
music to be reified as stable, however, because the digital masks this history 
upon the presentation of the sound, the same music is also always experienced 
as novel. The digital therefore allows for the complete eradication of the music 
industry, even the practices of genre, solving the problem that the industry 
ever could.

In the current formation of genre, i.e. the one supported by the music 
industry, one need only hear enough to recognize the genre, to parse the coded 
emotional and intellectual response. This automated response is a reflection of 
social characteristics and musical properties attributed to the music, its makers 
and its listeners. Genre is specific, has a history, and authentic performers and
fans. Because the digital is generic, however, it allows for anonymous musicians to synthesize anonymous sounds to be delivered to an anonymous audience through the computer, first as an instrument and then as a distribution system. In fact, the digital does not ever escape this anonymity, an unfamiliar, undetermined anonymity. With no predetermined source, associations or a pretense of meaning, music completes an eternal return\(^91\) to a state of nature, freed of an industry, decentralized on the level of ideology and decentralized on the economic level. The digital then resolves its own internal contradiction; it represents a world of generic value and unknowable origins and brings forth to presence a culture of music of anonymous origins and egalitarian value.

In this chapter, I have summarized Evens’ analysis of the digital and the theoretical implications of recognizing the computer as a musical instrument. The digital, similar to the music industry’s corporate genre practices, begins to reduce reality to molds and abstractions. Both the digital and genre practices construct a new reality, a generic reality lacking in singularity. While this hegemony is highly problematic for musical culture, the digital is capable of transcending this conundrum when the computer is recognized as an instrument: a means that generates its own ends. The digital circumvents the industry’s desire for static genres, identities and limited creativity. The following chapter analyzes the genre of Moombahton, as an example of how EDM’s incorporation of the digital and celebration of configurability undermines the

\(^91\) Nietzsche’s anti-hegelian concept of an eternal return of the same, a circular understanding of history posited as an alternative to dialectical linear progress.
industry in its entirety, evidencing how musical culture is capable of being liberated from genre.

**Moombahton As An Antagonistic Case Study**

Aram Sinnreich examines the music industry and its relationship with configurable culture, a culture that values the re-configurability of cultural objects, in his book, *Mashed Up: Music, Technology, and the Rise of Configurable Culture*, and finds that it engages in specific practices that are endemic to its economic success: the fabrication of authenticity, the protection of copyright, the establishment of markets, the construction of a drive for conspicuous consumption, the stability of genres, and the eradication of chaotic noise. In order to engage in these practices successfully, the industry relies on a series of socially produced distinctions Sinnreich identifies: art vs. craft, artist vs. audience, original vs. copy, composition vs. performance, materials vs. tools, figure vs. ground. To this list I would also add the static vs. the fluid. The perceived dichotomy of these binaries makes up the foundation of the music industry and its genre practices.

In this chapter, I will therefore use Sinnreich’s analysis to show that the current moment holds not only the possibility of freedom, but also that, through an antagonistic relationship with the music industry, genre and the industry can be finally be abolished. I will argue that the framework for the reproduction of the traditional music industry has been challenged by contemporary changes to the consumption and production of music. Participants in this new system of
configurable culture are actively engaging in a disorganized social movement fighting to break free from a closed system. The genre of Moombahton challenges the sanctity of these binaries and successfully transcends them, liberating the genre from the music industry and establishing an anti-genre genre world.

I. The Industry’s Framework

At the heart of the modern framework is the art/craft dichotomy. Throughout much of history, music has oscillated between its roots in poetical praxis and its Pythagorean elevation to the realm of mathematical theory. Enlightenment ideals called for the separation of art and science (craft), “music’s unique ability to straddle this divide has only been achieved through the somewhat artificial separation of musical composition as a creative act from music theory as an analytical practice.”92 Art was elevated to the highest form of human endeavor because it was a creative activity in the purest sense; it made something out of nothing. Crafts are nothing but the implementation of an existing template on the world. All of the binaries are derivative from this essential dichotomy. Art is believed to have a unique character; it represents a single occurring moment of genius, when materials are arranged in a certain original manner and a piece of artwork is born.

Sinnreich argues that the traditional industry framework creates a value system that believes the act of composition to be representative of genius and

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92 Ibid:46
talent. Composers alone have the necessary talent to engage raw, chaotic materials and mold them into artworks. This is the foundation of the materials/tool dichotomy. In Sinnreich’s analysis tools are pre-established templates through which music can be processed, while materials are the raw notes and words that can be put together in infinite permutations. The audience is relegated to using the tools of music theory and musical education to appreciate the genius of the artist’s engagement with raw musical material. The audience is thus relegated to enjoying music from a distance, always in awe of the capabilities of the artists, creating the dichotomy between artists and audience. Artists as such are given incentive to constantly identify themselves, and remain in the limelight. This specificity of the original creation results in an aura that is necessarily lost in mechanical reproduction.\textsuperscript{93} The loss of the aura places the original piece in a class above the copies and gives birth to the value system of authenticity and the original/copy binary. Authenticity serves to legitimate the placing of artists on a pedestal, and the social valorization of composition over performance leading to the creation of the performance/composition binary. Performance is but a craft, a reproduction of the art of composition. All of these binaries were born out of the era of reproductive society.

The shift to a repetitive society, which maintains reproductive codes but only as auxiliary, places a heavier emphasis on the final two binaries of the figure/ground (which might also be thought of as foreground/background), and

\textsuperscript{93} Benjamin 1936
the static/fluid gendered dichotomy. These two binaries become increasingly vital to this mode of organizing music because they are the sites of the minor alterations or gimmicks in the standardized form of gendered popular musics necessary to validate the activity of stockpiling. The other five binaries remain but auxiliary to this mode of music. This is because the modern music industry recognizes, as do the artists of configurable culture, that both the figure/ground binary and the static/fluid binary contain a greater possibility of permutations, and as a result these binaries are most susceptible to a successful antagonism.

The industry’s attempt to maintain control over noise led to the creation of necessarily static genres. Limiting the possibilities of permutations. Each genre has its own code of value, placing certain aspects of each musical piece at the figure and the others at the ground. A shift in the valorization of the figure necessitates the creation of a new genre rather than allowing for the old genre to “evolve.” The industry then uses these much smaller, less ambitious “innovations”, as a gimmick, legitimating the desire and activity of stockpiling. An influx of figure/ground permutations making various static genres fluid would challenge the sanctity of these dichotomies.

Although allowing the evolution of all genres to culminate in a free form genre, a completely fluid music, where no genre is discernible from the other, seems totalizing and in the interest of the music industry, it actually evades the capitalist agenda of efficient identification. As I have shown in previous chapters, the industry totalizes through creating a reserve army of gimmicks, each ready to be fed to the masses through the hit parade at an increasingly fast rate,
limiting the codes and noise that can be heard by society. Free-form music would free music from categorization, celebrating differences and the mixture of all value codes. With no necessarily unifying limited code, the very premise on which the modern framework is built on, the separation of art from craft, falls apart. All art becomes craft and all craft becomes art. I will now work backwards through each of the seven binaries, to demonstrate how Moombahton achieved the full eradication of the modern framework even at its deepest level, the music industry’s rejection of the fluid for the static. The abolishment of the industry will hail an era of social anonymity and the flourishing of individualities.

II. Moombahton

The genre of Moombahton is a hybrid style of electronic dance music. It is presented by the music industry as a fusion of Dutch house and Puerto Rican reggaeton musics. Commercial DJ, Dave Nada innovated it in 2009, and perfected the sound (released it to the public) in 2010. Since 2010, various producers of the online music community of SoundCloud and a select number of commercial DJs/producers have appropriated it and brought forth an evolution of the genre beyond a simple fusion of Dutch House and Reggaeton.

Innovation is inherent to Moombahton, the spontaneous creation of the genre was the unintended result of an experiment intended to provide stability: a testament to the fluid creativity of music and its tendency to transcend categorization. Dave Nada had agreed to play a "school-skipping party" for his younger cousin in the fall of 2009. When he arrived, he realized the attendees
were dancing to reggaeton and bachata, while he was planning on playing house and club music. House music is at least 20 beats-per-minute (BPM) faster than reggaeton. Nada knew that he would disrupt the flow of the party and clear the dance floor if he opened his set with the abrasively faster tempo. He solved this predicament by slowing down the Afrojack remix of the Silvio Ecomo & DJ Chuckie song "Moombah" from 128BPM to 108BPM. The name of the fusion genre itself comes from the portmanteau of "Moombah" and "Reggaeton." The story goes that the dance floor erupted upon hearing this new sound and Nada realized that he had accidentally stumbled upon a new style of music-making never attempted before in EDM.

Innovation and experimentation has since been essential to Moombahton. Moombahtonistas never express orthodoxy to the genre, but rather often articulate their interest in the genre as a desire to make ~108 BPM music. As a result, within a year, Moombahton had evolved; and it drew influence from all areas of musical discourse. The fusion with other genres led to the creation of multiple subgenres that were user-created and immediate. They were never co-opted by the industry, because they exceeded the possibilities of repetitive categorization and were often an ironic commentary on the notion of genre and sub-genres. Producers would release entire EPs and attach a different sub-genre title to each track, challenging the idea that a genre has boundaries and the idea that a sub-genre is separable from its parent genre. Moombahtonistas borrowed elements from the entirety of musical discourse and incorporated it to fit the ~108 BPM mold.
These sub-genres drew influences from other Latin musics such as cumbia, bachata, merengue, salsa, as well as African-American musics such as jazz, hip-hop, r&b, soca, reggae, and dancehall. Moombahtonistas drew influence from white musics as well; adapting all forms of rock, metal, folk, indie and country. The genre even branched out into eastern musics, drawing influence from gamelan, bhangra, nanyin, and dulab musics. Moombahton also came to encompass its other electronic dance music styles, fusing with electro, house, lounge, techno, drum & bass, dubstep, nu-dance and glitch. Despite the appearance of multiple sub-genres, the industry had marketed all of these sounds as Moombahton. This was a direct result of the antagonist relationship between the public (the prosumers, a portmanteau of producers and consumers) and the industry.

As a result, the Moombahton that is being produced and consumed at this very moment is indiscernible from its parent genres. While it is certainly not free form music, as tempo remains standardized around 108 beats-per-minute. It signifies a move away from the static to the fluid and the possibility of achieving free-form music. The industry could not sufficiently control the torrent of noise that arose through a fully participatory musical discourse. The public was then able to take control of the industry’s previous functions: production, consumption and distribution. By the time the industry had offered Dave Nada’s original form of Moombahton to the hit parade, various sub-genres and evolutions of Nada’s sound had already been innovated. Having committed the genre to the hit parade, the industry had to promote all of its forms or risk losing
its legitimacy. The genre came to be defined and evolve outside of capitalist influence through the noise of individuals sporadically exchanging different codes and musical ideas in the networked sphere of SoundCloud.

The genre is a celebration of the different codes and multiple permutations made possible through a combination of varying elements from each parent genre. While I celebrate Moombahton and will continue to analyze the eradication of the framework under the lens of configurable culture, specifically through the new genre, I do so only because an analysis of all forms of subversion and eradication of the modern framework by other genres are beyond the scope of this essay. I do believe, however, that because Moombahton has come the closest to achieving free-form music, it is the most valuable case study.

The innovations of Moombahton were made possible through the rejection of the figure/ground dichotomy. Each parent genre places different aspects of their respective sounds at the figure. Configurable culture, specifically the practice of sampling, has brought forth a new lens for analyzing the sonic landscape that focuses and valorizes not just the figure but also the ground. As Sinnreich writes, “the argument that in music, there is no given ground rings hollow once we have learned to listen through the metaphor of sampling... Figure or ground from one work, when sampled or sequenced, quite literally becomes ground or figure in another work.”\(^4\) Moombahton may retain its \(~108\) tempo, a tempo too slow for some genres and too fast for others, but because the

\(^4\) Sinnreich 2010:87
focus of both producers and consumers is no longer simply the figure, elements that originally belonged to the ground can also be employed and reconstituted to fit the ~108 mold allowing for the new sound to be indiscernible from the old.

The eradication of the materials/tools dichotomy follows from the disappearance of the figure and the ground. For configurable culture, every piece of music is both a finished product and an unfinished, continuous discourse, capable of being used as a tool of production or as materials for creation. In an age of infinitely permutable culture, musical works can be decomposed and recomposed as often and as easily as the imagination permits. In a culture of remixing, sampling and mashing, such a dichotomy immediately loses its relevance; all musical objects are simultaneously both tools and materials. The atomization of the cultural production/consumption processes "drastically [expand] the horizons for creative expression, liberating us from the constraints of pre-existing cultural formations...man constructs the culture he wants, the way he wants it"\(^95\)

Configurable culture is predicated on technology. The computer and DAWs are ever evolving technologies, always expanding the possibilities of expression and simplifying old ones. The dichotomy of performance/composition is challenged through the simplification of pure improvisation and the emergence of mediation- the production of recorded music for live expression. Moombahton, similar to other electronic musics, exists in inchoate forms prior to performance, but with the emergence of on-the-fly

\(^95\) Ibid:88
DJing, a practice in which mash-ups are constructed live, new instrumentation is added and layered as the inchoate record plays, and/or the song is chopped up and rearranged live, composition and performance forge to become one in the same. A composition exists prior to performance but is only completed in the act of performance. Mediation threatens this dichotomy at its core. Because technology has evolved beyond the possibility of an accurate live performance, the categories of performance and composition become irrelevant. The act of composition is the act of performance and vice versa. Moombahton, like a majority of electronic musics, is such a form of mediated music. The DJ is both a performer and a composer. The industry didn’t previously value performance (expression) because it was necessarily predicated on composition and composition alone gave birth to the fetishization of authenticity, uniqueness, talent and genius. However, the practice of sampling and remixing reverses this logic, composition is actually predicated on expression (performance). By extension, the value system of the music industry that placed the audience in a separate class from the gifted artists, in the name of original art, necessarily falls apart.

Today, configurable technology consciously distorts even as it reproduces, according little or no primacy to the original work. The age of mechanical reproduction gave birth to the dichotomy of original/copy, and brought forth the valorization of the authentic and unique. Configurable culture inverts the hierarchy of uniqueness. In a culture that values configurability and celebrates expression as a prerequisite of composition, the claim of an ex nihilo
form is met with suspicion, “instead unauthorized and rough-hewn reproductions of the economic or cultural underground have become increasingly glorified as authentic.”96 This is a value system that encourages a full participatory culture and values the amateur and the professional equally. This is especially prevalent in Moombahton, because the individual producers who frequent SoundCloud most readily embraced the genre. The first form of Moombahton consisted of slowing down Dutch house tracks and adding chopped up vocals, layered acapella vocal tracks, extended and enhanced build-ups and the introduction of new drums and other percussion elements. Inherent in the innovation of the genre was the reconfiguring and editing of existing tracks. It is the first genre grounded in an ethics of configurable culture.

The cult of talent and genius begins to disappear through the simplification of participation through technology and a fluid system of codes and value systems. Traditional notions of talent become meaningless because technology removes barriers of participation and new codes and aesthetics are constantly being expressed, allowing all members of society to find and express their own inner talent, whatever that may be. Genius also becomes meaningless in a culture that values a cumulative, infinite discourse. Genius is predicated on an artist rising above his contemporaries. In a configurable culture, an artist’s work is both original and a copy, his original work is expanded through the contributions of his contemporaries and he himself extends musical discourse through remixing and reconfiguring the works of others. All individual

96 Ibid:85
contributions are inseparable from the collective of his peers. An artist’s work necessarily consists of the work of his contemporaries. In a full participatory culture, it is impossible to argue for artist exceptionality. This collapse of producer and consumer makes it impossible to distinguish who is an artist and who is a craftsman. The very dichotomy of art and craft is eradicated.

Moombahton made the eradication of the categories of professional (artist) and amateur (craftsman) apparent when at its birth, the few big name DJs/producers who had the backing of a major label were beginning to fly out youths and other bedroom producers to play at all the major festivals. Now every Moombahton DJ, whether he is a professional or an amateur, always plays at least one, if not multiple, tracks that were produced at home by an amateur producer. The majority of the genre’s catalogue of works consists of contributions from the public. The fundamental binaries that structure and reproduce the music industry have been transcending and abolished by the genre practices of Moombahton.

Moombahton was able to successfully create a genre world for itself without industry intermediation. An ideal genre world that is both stable, as everything fit into the ~108 BPM mold, and novel, as Moombahton never articulates orthodox musical practices. A genre world understood through and constructed around BPM. A genre that isn’t a genre. As a result, creativity maintains its fluidity and unidentifiable nature. Not only were the prosumers of Moombahton able to break free of genre but also were able to do so while still successfully reproducing the functions of the traditional industry despite no
central organization or investment capital. Music was produced, exchanged, consumed, promoted, discovered, and discussed globally despite no intermediary between artists and fans. Like a majority of EDM sub-genres or styles, this was accomplished without innately associating a social group of a specific social characteristic with the genre. Because the means of distribution were online, producers and consumers are never identified by an intermediary party, and given the Internet’s inherent tendency towards anonymity, these prosumers never had to identify to one another or to any audience.

The case of Moombahton provides strong evidence that a full eradication of the music industry for all of musical culture will tend towards anonymous sounds produced by anonymous artists and consumed by anonymous fans. Predetermined musical understanding and modes of interaction never come into the picture. There exist only individuals actively listening and engaging in a social musical discourse, exploring the limits of creativity.

**III. Attali’s (Revised) Composition**

The musical practices of Moombahton that liberated it from the music industry adhered to Attali’s manifesto for the liberation of all music. Attali argues that during the transition from repetition to composition, communication stops being restricted to the elite of discourse allowing for deviations begin to arise, suggesting a radical subversion of the system of stockpiling. He writes, “when there is an accelerating repetition of the identical, messages become more
and more impoverished, and power begins to float in society.”\textsuperscript{97} The eradication of barriers to entry into cultural discourse weakens the ideological code of capital and its industry, as it constantly struggles to constrain all of the different value systems of the participating public. By rejecting the role of audience, consumers no longer passively receive the imposed code, but instead, actively contribute their own voices, communicating implicit or explicit alternatives to the status quo and praising the technology that made it possible to move from a unidirectional, totalitarian communicative world to a multidirectional, multilateral reality.

Power was once exercised by the music industry through the creation of silence, allowing only a select few to make noise, but as each message begins to lose its ability to control and subsume noise, each individual, can claim free floating power by making his/her own noise in their own way, freed from predeterminations. This exercise of power also allows for others to hear one’s noise, free to experience it as an individual rather than receive it as a member of a mass. This is the era of the pirate and the bedroom producer. It has given birth to a new radical form of subversion; a “conquest of the right to make the free and revocable choice to link with another’s code - that is the right to compose one’s life.”\textsuperscript{98} It is a celebration of chaotic noise and the flourishing of individualities.

Attali therefore ends his analysis of musical history with a call to accelerate repetition, so that the antithesis of the mode of repetition can reveal

\textsuperscript{97} Attali 1985:132
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid
itself. He calls this next stage in musical evolution composition; it is a moment of material abundance, free-floating power and a return to chaotic freedom. He writes, “materialism has today become one strategy for the funereal emplacement of repetition...a way of constructing a political economy entirely different from that of representation, in which death would be accepted for what it is: an invitation fully to be oneself in life.”

Attali argues that repetition must achieve its totalitarian goal for the moment of transformation to be realized. Everything must be commodified and monetized. Once all of society has been reduced to molds, the focus of labor shifts from the production of objects to the production of meaning and perpetual false needs (desires). Utility is therefore sacrificed for accessibility. Music ceases to be heard, but is nevertheless consumed by all: a false need for an empty product that is cultivated and propagated by the industry.

It is here that individual death becomes imminent, and therefore this false need brings to presence, the means of achieving freedom. As a result of music having no meaning outside of the hit parade in the stage of repetition, when one injects oneself into cultural discourse through the practices of configurable culture, the false need for empty products cultivated by the industry doesn’t discriminate between the industry’s meaningless products and the anonymous, and therefore also empty, products produced by any given individual.

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99 Ibid: 127
100 Marcuse 1964
Because contemporary musical technologies continually and more efficiently provide an influx of musical objects, and the hit parade itself is founded on the continuous creation of a reserve army of musical objects, a musician’s creations would begin to over-saturate the market. In response to this accelerated repetition, the music industry must then create demand apace with the accelerated growth and increased efficiencies in supply or cease to produce a supply itself. The latter, however, does not signify the eradication of the music industry so long as it is still efficiently and successfully executing the former. Attali’s project is a path to false liberation, because he doesn’t recognize this trap. Nevertheless, as I have shown in the previous chapter, his theory is still useful as long as the antagonism doesn’t end there.

The creation of demand requires the maintenance of diversity, even as the industry more successfully eradicates differences, as repetition becomes increasingly efficient, narrowing genre categories. If the industry is unable to keep up demand, production will proliferate without finding an outlet for expression that reproduces the predetermined method of comprehension, which is, itself, the basis of genre practices that the music industry itself is predicated on. The industry would then inevitably collapse from an excess of life and uncontrolled replication. This event marks the transition to a true compositional society.

In this compositional society, the abundance of noise means that one is free to not think as others do at no risk or fear of isolation. Everyone is a stranger to someone and a friend to another. There is no coercion into a unifying
ideology. One is free to embody no ideology or multiple simultaneously, but most importantly, one is free to leave and rejoin, as one’s desires dictate. In that sense, one is free to assert a “true spontaneous individuality,” an identity as fluid as the musics being created.

This is the complete abundance of chaotic noise: the first taste of freedom. Amidst this chaotic flood of noise - a flood, not only of familiar sounds: the racket of the machines, musicians, and kin but also of unfamiliar sounds: the pandemonium of nature, which has long since disappeared from the collective memory and the previously silenced noises of the rest of humanity. Humanity will then only be able to hear itself, and therefore, affirm its existence, through the institution of the spectacle of itself as the supreme usage of all its activity. Amongst this torrent of noise, one makes a choice to create one’s own code or select one of the many others; it is the freedom to join an existing community or enjoy a welcoming solitude.

Freedom, however, is not yet fully felt by humanity, as the freedom to choose is not a complete freedom without the freedom to leave. Such a freedom is inherent in this mode of organizing and perceiving reality. The liberty to join and leave a code at the very moment that the code ceases to fulfill one’s desires, signifies the lack of an objective reality. At its core then, no code or accompanying value system is inherently right or wrong. It logically follows that the freedom to create, join, or leave codes implies an ever-changing, fluid membership for all codes. This form of association constitutes social relations in this world: an asocial collectivity of individuals. As such, because membership is
not capable of becoming indefinitely static, the freedom to associate freely is also a freedom from morality, productivity and responsibility. Never has “community” been so free of the burden of sacrifice.

Following with the guidelines of the antagonistic project of Antonio Negri laid out in his book, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, this moment of self-valorization was achieved through chaos. As Yochai Benkler writes, “there was no single orchestrating power—neither party nor professional commercial media outlet. There was instead a series of uncoordinated but mutually reinforcing actions by individuals in different settings and contexts, operating under diverse organizational restrictions and affordances, to expose, analyze, and distribute criticism and evidence for it.”

The Proletariat’s (mass consumer’s) negation of the centralized and homogeneous power of the bourgeoisie (capitalist industry) “is the dissolution of all homogeneity.” It is the dissolution of a mass and the birth of a public. As Negri writes, “it is both a magma which gathers and recomposes everything, and a network of streams of enjoyment, of propositions and inventions which spread out across a land made fertile by the magma.” Humanity must create its relation with the world and neglect or attempt to try to tie other people into the values that it posits; it is the acceptance of others without the incessant need for their presence. It is the only community of anonymous individuals. This is Attali’s mode of composition, a mode of organizing music and society that takes pleasure in the production of

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101 Benkler 2006:232
102 Negri 1984:150
103 Ibid
difference.

In this chapter, I have shown that the genre of Moombahton was able to antagonize the seven fundamental binaries at the heart of the music industry’s structures and functions. By rejecting the traditional notion of genre and embracing the computer as an instrument, it forged a genre world built on BPM that allowed for anonymous individuals to make chaotic noise that is heard by all. I went on to outline how Moombahton followed with the predictions made by both Attali and Negri, when they outlined the transformation from capitalist to “post-capitalist” societies. In my conclusion, I will summarize how genre burdened musical culture and why a culture freed from its practices serves to the benefit of all individuals. I will then attempt to draw analogies to the current political economy, specifically in relation to identity politics. The eradication of genre, as a system of classification, can provide insight into a superior mode of politics and give birth to a new form of social relation.

**Anonymity For All**

As I have shown in the previous chapters, music is an aesthetic exercise that doesn’t “merely reflect the reality that is behind it but serves to ritualize a reality that is within it; music gives man a real experience of what the ideal could be.”\(^{104}\) As Tia DeNora writes, “[Music] takes the lead, brings about new ways of being and new social arrangements, which is why reactions are always so

\(^{104}\) Frith 1996:111,124
polarized.”\textsuperscript{105} Musical culture as such, can alter society, its organization, and social relations. Throughout this essay, I have argued that while musical culture has recently begun to do away with its capitalist intermediary, it has not shown signs of abolishing genre practices. I believe the practices of genre to be politically problematic because they impose stasis and the formation of fixed essentialist identities. I go on to demonstrate how embracing the computer as a digital instrument allows for the creation of an anti-genre genre that celebrates anonymity and spontaneous fluidity. Finally, I provide an analysis of one such genre: Moombahtan. The rising popularity of EDM and its continued expansion into other gendered categories provides evidence that this anti-genre magma could spread to all of musical culture, finally displacing the music industry.

Completely emancipating music from the constraints of a capitalist society, from the project of identification and the imposition of gendered categories, must necessarily allow for the greater society to both experience and begin envisioning an alternative reality through their musical experiences.

The contemporary problem of politics is situated around identification. Similar to the political problem of genre, contemporary politic discourse is situated on monolithic, homogenized, fixed essentialist identities, recognized according to various social characteristics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, class etc. The promise of identity politics for subordinated groups “was the assertion that those who had been subjugated

\footnote{105 DeNora 2000:126}
historically need to be in charge of creating strategies for change.”

The pitfall of such a politic was the ironic assumption that “certain criticisms can only be made by those who share a given identity. Within this construct, it is unacceptable, for instance, for a non-Jewish woman to criticize a Jewish woman or for a White woman to take issue with a woman of color.” Because capitalism, and by extension, the state “shape normative expectations about the nature of political subjectivity, ... [creating] existing ideals of what a political subject [looks] like, [obscuring] identities, ...[and setting off a] widespread failure to recognize the diversity of political subjectivities,”

political movements are constantly defeated, “because we have allowed ourselves to be divided...we have been living in a Hobbesian society where the one is at war with all...this strategy has justified a universal competition among different sections of the working class.”

Similar to genre, identity politics serves to homogenize and divide in the interest of reproducing the status quo.

The experience of participating in a musical culture that rejects the very notion that essentialist, homogenized identities must be constructed and recognized as a prerequisite to action, could therefore theoretically allow for these currently divided and competing political movements to ask themselves, “Why am I doing this? What is it I really want? Do the actual struggles of the class, or parts of the class, have anything to do with what I want? Do we all want

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106 Thompson 2003:386
107 Ibid
108 Enstad 1999:84-86
109 Midnight Notes #7 1984
something close to the same thing, and do we dare discuss that?” An endorsement of a non-essentialist *anonymous performativity*, in which any anonymous human can perform his or her identity as desired, would allow for a politics that recognizes “you don’t have to be me in order for us to fight along side of each other. I do not have to be you to recognize that our wars are the same.”

Nancy Fraser provides a useful analysis of what this society would look like. She believes that differences must be acknowledged in such a participatory society, not bracketed. “Declaring a deliberative arena to be a space where extant status distinctions are bracketed and neutralized is not sufficient to make it so.” She then argues for multiple publics, each with open access, multiple memberships and alternative styles of political behavior and alternative norms of public speech. She believes this would allow for a healthier more grounded discourse between all members of society.

Fraser argues, that even the subaltern would finally be able to speak. “Subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.” This dialectic enables subaltern counter publics to partially offset the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies. The end goal of such a system of publics is a return to true

110 Ibid
111 Lorde 1984:142
112 Fraser 1997:74
113 Ibid:82
social life, in which all voices are heard and accounted for, and all feel power within their sphere. “Under conditions of social equality, the porousness, outer-directedness, and open-endedness of publics could promote inter and intra-cultural communication.”

The liberation of musical culture from capitalist intermediation, could then theoretically provide an escape from, or at the very least, a reevaluation of the contemporary practices of identity politics that so problematically forces individuals of various social characteristics to sign on the agenda of one specific group of a social characteristic, surrendering the possibility for multiple, fluid, open associations. To paraphrase Adorno’s opening quote to my essay, the more industriously capital and the state erects wire fences between the social provinces, the greater the suspicion that without these, the inhabitants could all too easily come to an understanding. Perhaps it is time that we start to bring down those fences and open up our identities to embrace anonymous performativity.

\[114\] Ibid: 84
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