

It's all branding and lifestyle, just trying to get people to buy into, you know, "This is the soundtrack to your life, and this is the cosmetic that's gonna go with it and make you feel a complete whole."

—Composer Andy Bloch, Human Worldwide,
interview by author, 20 April 2004

Music is identity!

—Sam Michaelson, advertising agency
vice president, director for radio buying, 1986

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Consumption, Corporatization, and Youth in the 1980s

Introduction

Despite the growing awareness of the importance of youth culture, whether in its baby boom incarnation or subsequent iterations, few publications mention demographic information in discussions of music before the early 1980s, even though advertising agencies continued to commission studies, some of which were quite detailed. But interest in demographics and music grew in the late 1970s and beyond, as advertising agencies increasingly targeted consumers based on their tastes, their lifestyles, income, and much more. At the same time, the rise of MTV meant that music was permeating American culture ever more, helping propel some musicians to super-

stardom that advertisers and advertising agencies were anxious to harness for their own ends.

Consumption, Lifestyles, Segments

In the 1980s, a new wave of consumption ideologies heightened most Americans' already strong consumption practices, newly invigorated by Ronald Reagan's sacralization of consumption in this era, as George Lipsitz has written.¹ (I have discussed the new wave of consumption in the 1980s elsewhere and need not do more than recapitulate it here.)² Reagan's and others' emphasis on consumption helped shape a culture in which consumption increasingly became part of everyday life, even as a form of leisure. Slogans from the era help recapture this ethos: "Shop 'til you drop," "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping." Additionally, with the rise of the World Wide Web in the 1990s, it became easy to purchase goods online, which meant that one could shop at times and places where consumption was impossible before. By the 1990s, the average American consumed twice as many goods and services as in 1950, and the average new home of today was twice as large as the average house constructed after World War II so as to hold all of its owners' possessions.³

Heightened consumption in this era became a way to realize one's identity, an ideology, and strategy, that arose in the post-World War II era.⁴ Consumption increasingly became not just a leisure activity but also a means of self-definition, self-creation. Wearing particular clothes, sporting a particular haircut, listening to a particular kind of music rather than another—these and many other modes of consumption and self-representation became important ways for many Americans to fashion their selves.

The new increase in consumption was driven not only by political ideology but also by technological innovations such as the Universal Product Code (UPC), or bar code, which first came into widespread usage in the mid-1970s, and which allowed retailers to track with great precision who was purchasing what, where, and when. One of my interlocutors, Scott Elias of Elias Arts (one of the biggest music production companies in New York and Los Angeles at the time of the interview in 2004), said that the utilization of the UPC was one of the two main innovations he had seen in the industry in his decades in it (MTV was the other).

When I first got involved in advertising, the agencies had a very important role to play in the marketing and the research, the design and development, not only of advertising, but in the marketing efforts. . . . What I think fundamentally changed was that now retailers . . . could have such a powerful impact, not only in America, but potentially even globally, that they could have so much data about any product, it could be a Gillette razor, it could be a consumer.⁵

Audience measurement had becoming increasingly refined since its inception in the 1920s, but an important breakthrough occurred after the rise of the UPC with the adoption of the People Meter by Nielsen in 1987. This device, attached to televisions of four thousand American homes (up from an earlier sample size of fourteen hundred), doesn't simply track which programs are watched but allows individual users to indicate that it is they who are watching. If big sister were watching, she pressed her button on the People Meter corresponding with her profile with Nielsen; if little brother were watching, he pressed his button. The data thus generated were much more specific about the tastes of individual viewers, not just those of an undifferentiated household.

Another effect of these developments was that niche markets were cultivated even more assiduously than before in an effort to increase profits, since profits began to matter more than the quality of the advertising agency's work in this era. One worker in the industry described what the process was like during this period.

The process of developing a musical image, or jingle, for an advertiser or broadcaster usually follows a similar course. A detailed consultation with the client takes place initially to establish the primary goals and objectives. This process also includes developing a profile of the client's potential customer from the information given, which in turn helps to dictate the musical style, delivery and lyrics best suited to strike the responsive chord.

The depth to which this profile is taken has grown measurably in the past decade. Once the development of a musical theme or concept was almost entirely dependent on the character of the product or service to be advertised. But recently a shift in emphasis has altered the positioning and presentation of such things.⁶

New businesses sprang up that specialized in bringing music and marketers together. Gerry Dolezar, president of a company called Radio Kings, de-

scribed his role in 1987: "I'm basically a buffer between artists and agencies. I bring them together in combinations that are appropriate for each campaign." The trick, however, was to try to keep so abreast of trends that artists could be hired at affordable prices before they became popular and thus prohibitively expensive.⁷

This new segmentation of markets provided, and necessitated, ever more refined demographic data.⁸ People were analyzed with a new "science" called "psychographics," a kind of psychological profiling of demographic groups. Now, demographic data could be used to target youth and others in increasingly sophisticated ways, frequently through music. Perhaps the most influential scheme in this era was the "values and lifestyles" or VALS 1 typology, developed by a think tank called SRI International in the early 1980s.⁹ According to SRI, the VALS 1 typology comprises nine different types of consumers, divided into three groups: Need-Driven, Outer-Directed, and Inner-Directed. Need-Drivens are the "farthest removed from the cultural mainstream" of the nine lifestyles, and the "least flexible psychologically and least aware of the events of our times."¹⁰ Need-Drivens include "Survivors," who are old and poor; and "Sustainers," who are living on the edge of poverty. The Outer-Directed groups contain Middle America; generally, people in the Outer-Directed groups "respond intensely to signals, real or fancied, from others" and "conduct themselves in accord with what they think others will think."¹¹ The Inner-Directed groups (the term is derived from the noted Harvard sociologist David Riesman, we are told) are motivated by internal forces; they are sensitive to their feelings.¹² Outer-Directeds include "Belongers," who are conventional; "Emulators," who are youthful and ambitious; and "Achievers," who are middle-aged and prosperous. Inner-Directeds include the "I-Am-Me" lifestyle, which is people in a transitional state who are young and narcissistic; the "Experiential" lifestyle, youthful people who are in search of experience; and the "Societally Conscious" lifestyle, which is mission oriented and mature.¹³

Advertising agencies and marketers were well aware of the usages of music in the psychographics era. A president of a music marketing agency wrote in *Advertising Age* in 1985 that since psychographics helped advertisers become part of a person's lifestyle, and that, since "the consumer's values and fantasies are embodied in their favorite artists," the use of music could help advertisers transfer a consumer's loyalty from the musician to the sponsor or product.¹⁴ A 1985 trade press report noted how obsessed the advertising industry was

with market segmentation, quoting a composer who said, “The great thing about music is that it breaks things out demographically. You can really nail the prospects depending on the music played; it’s a great advertising and marketing tool.”¹⁵ A 1988 report in *Advertising Age* summarized the state of the business well:

The genius of music marketing stems from the knowledge that each performer—like each product—appeals to a particular niche audience. By properly identifying the characteristics of its target consumer, and then correlating that profile with the fans of potential music celebrity endorsers, savvy advertisers are able to tap into the relationship that exists between a group and its followers. The marketing-through-music concept is so effective at converting band loyalty into brand loyalty that it has been extended from traditional youth-oriented product categories—fast food, fashions and fragrances—to non-traditional segments such as cameras, cars and even cat food.

The article went on to note the fit between particular goods and services, target audiences, and music (Frank Sinatra singing for Holiday Inn, Pat and Shirley Boone for the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, and many more).¹⁶ And the article referenced the newfound success that old songs can have once they are introduced to new audiences through their use in commercials; Sam Cooke’s “Wonderful World,” for example, charted higher after its use in a Levi’s commercial than it did in its previous release some twenty-five years earlier. *Advertising Age* concluded with a useful summary, from marketers’ perspective, of the benefits of marketing through music and how music was being used to target specific social groups:

We’re seeing the ascendance of a new marketing tradition. It’s one that combines nostalgia, music and musical personalities—some of whom are finding a new generation of appreciative audiences—with products in a way that strikes a powerful, resonating chord in today’s marketplace.¹⁷

Race, Class, and Ethnicity

Ethnic groups began to be increasingly marketed to as well in this period, in part because of the rise of minority-owned advertising agencies. Bernie Drayton told me of how he was hired by Herman Edel in the 1960s but was deliber-

ately prevented from working commercials that might have employed African American music, for it would make him “the black guy that does all the black stuff.” But, “then the eighties came and the advent of African-American advertising agencies really bourgeoned. And by this time I was an established guy, I didn’t have anything to prove, and so I jumped right on that.”¹⁸

Hilary Lipsitz of BBDO, which produced many Pepsi-Cola commercials with music, recounted how his company never made a black-music commercial for black radio stations—it made youth-market commercials for youth-market stations: rock ‘n’ roll, top 40, black and white. He said that black players couldn’t play on commercials in that era (though it’s not clear why), so Lipsitz sought to change that with the commercials he produced for Pepsi. Quincy Jones recorded his second commercial ever for Pepsi’s “Come Alive” campaign, and BBDO filmed black groups in the mid-1960s such as the Four Tops.¹⁹

A late 1970s article in the trade press described how advertising agencies attempted to reach African American audiences through music. One agency had developed a melody to sell a soft drink, which was described thus: “We used very little rhythm and a lot of shimmering high-end tonality; bell tree, orchestra bells, car keys, triangle, electric keyboards and violins and a single female vocalist.” Evidently, it was thought that a different tack was needed for the African American audience:

For the black exposition of the same melody we studied the playlists of black radio stations in the major markets and let this information dictate our orchestration and arrangements. There should be no confusing this music with that of any other soft drink. And the care taken to provide customized music for different groups should reflect well on our client’s product.²⁰

The same author recounted how his company located Cuban and Puerto Rican musicians in New York City for a client who wanted to reach that market, but needed to travel to Los Angeles to record “Chicano versions” of the music. “We knew we were in the right place when the lead singer introduced himself as ‘Willie G. of the Southern California Dukes’ and asked if our music was going to be salsa or lowrider. It makes musical and advertising sense to have people in the subculture speak to the subculture.”²¹

Composer Chico O’Farrill spoke in a 1984 article of the growing influence of American popular musics on various Latin musics and vice versa, so that a

new generic sound was emerging, a sound that he employed to reach the Hispanic market, though he had been writing music for major Hispanic advertising agencies for a decade.²²

There were also periodic attempts to market to working-class and/or rural viewers and listeners; the trade press includes occasional articles throughout the 1950s and after on the rise of country music in advertising.²³ But such attempts never really caught on at the national level. Country music or musics associated with nonwhite ethnic groups are frequently used, but chosen for their efficacy in marketing a particular product in a particular way, not as part of a more general series of campaigns.

The Influence of MTV

Market segmentation in the 1980s was greatly aided by the rise of cable television, which had been devised after World War II for Americans living in rural areas too remote from a broadcast signal, but which really took off in the 1980s for many Americans. One of the earliest and most successful of all the early cable channels was MTV, a cable television station that plays videos of popular songs. It debuted on 1 August 1981, but it wasn't until the mid-1980s that the advertising trade press was reporting on its influence on commercials—the Madison Avenue Choir sound was beginning to give way to MTV's world of spectacle and fantasy. And, not coincidentally, MTV helped make rock music more palatable to advertisers.

The influence of MTV can't be overstated since it ushered in a new, fast-paced visual language to accompany music. The music itself, commonly thought of as an accompaniment to visuals, was now driving the production of visuals, which had a tremendous impact on the production of commercials as music video directors shot commercials. Scott Elias described the effect of MTV as having taught listeners that music can be accompanied by visuals in meaningful ways: "I think that now visuals and music or sound or a sound track, always are associated with an image. And if you see an image, and it's a filmic or cinematic image, I think we always in our head dream up a sound track. That sort of socialization is now something that we sort of take for granted."²⁴ The visual language of MTV was so novel that it featured prominently in many scholars' theorizations of postmodern culture in this period.²⁵

Examples of the influence of MTV on advertising include a commercial from the 1980s for Edge shaving gel that shows a young man floating out of

bed into the bathroom, where he shaves with Edge when a beautiful woman appears in the doorway. By the next scene, they are gone, the camera showing only the water left running in the sink. According to the senior vice president=account director of the advertising agency that produced the commercial, “We wanted to create a fantasy experience the way MTV does. We want young men to think of our product as high-tech, high-performance in the same way that they think of cars and stereos.”²⁶

This article didn’t say so explicitly, but it seems to be the beginning of the shift away from older modes of advertising that made clear pitches, sometimes with jingles. One agency executive showed his colleagues some European commercials, all of which had “strong visuals, dramatic music and only a little copy.” The article also noted the trend toward making commercials that seem like little programs instead of commercials; according to one executive, “Everyone is so tired of commercials that it’s become incumbent upon advertisers to reach out and capture viewers by making them think they’re watching a program. Once you do that, you slip in a product message at the end.”²⁷

MTV also helped to contribute to an aestheticization of advertising. Many in the advertising industry felt that commercials could be creative expressions in and of themselves, just as an MTV video was a creative expression, even though, of course, it was in essence a commercial for a song, an album, a band, and a record label. Since many video directors worked in MTV and vice versa, it was inevitable that MTV video techniques found their way to the production of commercials. MTV-influenced commercials became known as “atmospheric advertising,” commercials featuring audio and visuals eschewing the hard sell.²⁸ A late 1980s assessment in *Advertising Age* of the influence of MTV on commercials said, “The videos’ quick cuts, pulsing beats and high energy would change the look and feel of TV programming, commercials and motion pictures forever,” to the extent that “it’s almost hard to tell one from the other,” according to MTV’s senior vice president=creative director. A commercial director thought this influence was negative, for “the techniques become the message.”²⁹

The substance of commercials changed as well. Honda aired some commercials in 1984 featuring popular musicians that were directly influenced by MTV in their use of bright colors and a new style of graphics. The commercials were for motor scooters and were deliberately targeted at young people, making no mention of anything technical about the scooters. A senior advertising specialist for Honda said, “It’s not a product commercial at all. It’s more

a portrayal of a sense of style and panache.” Not surprisingly, the commercials were aired on MTV.³⁰

A Levi’s 501 Blues campaign from the mid-1980s employed many famous musicians, such as Jerry Garcia. The ad agency’s executive producer said, “We let the artists be themselves. It’s not unlike the instruction we give the people appearing in the ads, which is ‘just be yourself and we’ll film.’ We tell the musicians to do what *they* do, not what they think we want them to do.”³¹ Artists were allowed to do whatever they wanted, though they had to mention Levi’s 501 jeans, and the phrases “shrink-to-fit” and “button-fly.” And, according to a press release, “no jingles.”³² A Levi’s executive said that the reason it hired famous musicians “is to pull from them the kind of music that they normally do. One interesting thing is that we do the music first. Before we even run the camera, we’ve got our musical tracks together. We basically shoot to the music,” showing the influence of MTV.³³ *Marketing through Music* reported that this campaign raised sales by 50 percent.³⁴

Pepsi Again

And MTV helped propel Michael Jackson to superstardom, which brought him to the attention of advertisers. Doubtless the most celebrated early examples of the convergence of popular music and advertising occurred when Pepsi paid Michael Jackson a reported five million dollars to appear in TV commercials in 1984. This was reputed to be the largest celebrity endorsement ever, which transformed the world of music and marketing. John Sculley, president of Pepsi, said in 1980, “We haven’t really changed our advertising—the Pepsi generation—in 18 years,” for “we think we articulate a life style that large groups of Americans can aspire to.”³⁵ Allen Rosenshine, worldwide CEO of BBDO, which produced the Jackson commercials, wrote that “The Pepsi Generation” had been very successful but Coke was making inroads.³⁶

In the midst of devising this campaign, Rosenshine said in an interview that he didn’t think there was a real “Pepsi style” out in the world, “there never is.” “There are attitudes and styles which we wish to make signals of, or synonymous with, the brand. Advertising and brands don’t really create style. They take styles that exist, hopefully at the forefront . . . and try to make [them] the property, proprietarily owned by a brand.”³⁷ He wanted to make the drink a badge that said, “If I drink this, I have a certain style.”³⁸

Rosenshine also said that “Choice of a New Generation” marked a turning

point in 1984 because BBDO changed the advertising and the advertising's way of reaching the consumer in terms of both tools and strategies. Michael Jackson possessed "all-age, all-family appeal." The commercials' strategy was devised before Jackson was engaged, and he was hired because he fit that strategy. The target audience, he said, was twelve to twenty-four. "What characterizes those people that we can own, lifestyle-istically?" "We want to offer them the sign of 'we're a step ahead, we're a little snappier, we're a little wittier, we're a little cleverer, we're a little out front.'" "If you want to be that," he said, "you can't not be in music." Continuing, he said:

You can't ignore the world of music if you wish to be the badge of the leading edge of youth, because youth is into music. And that is part of their leading edge, they express themselves through music, they live through music; MTV is not an isolated phenomenon. So if we're going to be leading edge, we have to be in music.

Pepsi thought that Jackson wouldn't alienate older viewers, that, in fact, older viewers liked Jackson because he made them feel a little like kids, and that's what Rosenshine desired: he wanted older people to think of themselves as being part of the new generation when they drink a Pepsi or think of Pepsi.³⁹

Jackson's association with Pepsi began when Roger Enrico, head of Pepsi, was approached by Jay Coleman, founder and president of RockBill (a company that specialized in bringing musicians and corporations together, which was begun in the mid-1970s and which published a magazine of the same name, as discussed in the previous chapter). Jackson's representatives had approached Coleman seeking tour sponsorship. Coleman said, "The obvious place to take Michael is to a soft drink company. Cars, liquor—for a dreamy, clean-living kid like Michael, these make no sense. He needs a product that's soft, cuddly, harmless, and fun. And that's soda."⁴⁰

Pepsi and advertising agency executives weren't sure what they were getting, despite the massive success of Jackson's *Thriller*, released in 1982. Enrico wrote that Jackson's music videos that Coleman used in his pitch were the first ones he had ever seen, but he found Jackson's dancing so captivating that he thought the videos would be compelling with the sound off. "He's magic. We've got to sign him," wrote Enrico.⁴¹ Enrico balked at the five-million-dollar price tag, but Don King, Jackson's manager, held out successfully. Enrico's boss, head of PepsiCo's Worldwide Beverage Group, was not happy. "Look, do

you have a record or *something* this guy has done? I'd like to listen to it over the weekend and see what we're buying for five million dollars," recounted Enrico, emphasizing yet again the frequent disjuncture between popular culture and the rarefied world of advertising.⁴² But the deal was signed.

"Billie Jean" (example 7.1) features Jackson look-alikes, including a young boy, who bumps into the real Jackson in the course of the real commercial. The original lyrics were altered to contain Pepsi content, revisiting the generation theme with lines such as "You're a whole new generation."

Enrico claimed that after the release of these commercials, 97 percent of the American public saw them at least a dozen times in the space of a year, pushing sales to new levels.⁴³ As a result, Phil Dusenberry, chairman of BBDO, said, "Awareness of Pepsi's advertising went up 24% . . . [and] recall scores doubled the category norm. Nielsen shares increased a whopping two points in twelve months; that's \$250 million a point."⁴⁴

Pepsi engaged Jackson again in 1987 for more commercials for a reported fee of fifteen million dollars (though Enrico said that the contract prohibited him from mentioning a figure but claimed it was considerably less).⁴⁵ *Marketing through Music* called this arrangement "the most far-reaching and lucrative music marketing deal ever between a corporation and a performing artist."⁴⁶ Pepsi was put on the defensive about Jackson's popularity, which some thought had waned since the first commercials in 1984; Enrico himself wondered if Jackson could possibly be as hot in 1987 as he was in 1984.⁴⁷ But an anonymous Pepsi insider said, "We expect him to be a trendsetter again. A lot of people say he's through; we are convinced that he's still hot."⁴⁸

Enrico told *Advertising Age* that the second deal wasn't just a celebrity endorsement, but it was rather a "relationship," and that the cost of the deal was "the most money paid for any relationship of this kind." Jackson was slated to act as a "creative consultant" to Pepsi and perhaps direct a commercial; his first song written for Pepsi would be included on his next album. The contract did not require Jackson to hold, drink, or come into contact with Pepsi, something that Jackson had received criticism for in the first campaign.⁴⁹ Enrico insisted that such deals nonetheless paid dividends; the company said that sales rose 8 percent within thirty days after the last campaign. Enrico claimed that the Pepsi commercials would be zap-proof, referring to users' ability to mute commercials with remote control technologies that were becoming increasingly common in this era.⁵⁰

The new deal included Jackson's writing original music for two new com-

mercials. The broadcast of the new commercials was delayed to coincide with the release of Jackson's new album post-*Thriller*, *Bad*.⁵¹ Pepsi's marketing was closely tied to Jackson's album. The series of commercials consisted of four spots, the premiere of which was delayed, however, because the release of *Bad* was behind schedule. A trade press report said that the campaign marked a number of precedents in the industry: The campaign featured the song that was expected to be the album's biggest, and it was "unusual to buy the rights for a TV commercial before the song ha[d] proved itself on the charts"; the song was purchased as part of the overall deal with Jackson. Additionally, the two commercials cost two million dollars to produce, twice as much as Pepsi had spent on the earlier Jackson commercials.⁵²

Two commercials were released late in October of 1987, first airing on MTV, both continuing the "new generation" theme. The first, called "Concert," was a ninety-second spot that showed Jackson live in concert. The other, "Backstage," depicted Jackson in his dressing room meeting a young fan; both commercials use the song "Bad" (example 7.2). *Advertising Age's* reviewer's report was less than enthusiastic, and made fun of Jackson's album title, *Bad*: "They're bad, they're bad. But it don't make no never mind. Ooh." Describing the long-awaited commercials as "surprisingly ordinary" and highly reminiscent of the previous round of commercials from 1984, the reviewer averred that the long delays in the release of the album were simply an attempt to build up anticipation for it.⁵³ The second phase of the campaign was first aired during the 1988 Grammy Awards broadcast in March.

Not everyone in the advertising world liked the show business-ization of the advertising industry (one longtime composer I interviewed referred to it derisively as "starfucking"). Some believe that the infatuation with music and musicians threatened to overwhelm the sales pitch. *Advertising Age's* review of a Diet Coca-Cola commercial featuring George Michael said in early 1989, "You can certainly see how the millions of dollars behind this ad will accrue to the benefit of George Michael. Product as hero? This is product as extra."⁵⁴ The reviewer later attacked the commercial-celebrity system, likening it to the old payola system, in which record labels paid radio DJs to play their recordings:

Used to be, a singer cut a record and some sleazoid promoter paid bribes to get the thing airplay. And if payer and payee got caught—well, Faustian bargains can have infernally unpleasant consequences.

But now the whole system is turned topsy-turvy. These days, boffo recording artists get *paid* lotto-jackpot sums to plug their own songs on TV—with the sole proviso they be photographed in proximity to a major soft drink. . . .

Payola is old hat. This is the PayCola age.⁵⁵

But the attachment to the youth market and infatuation with hip and cool ideology that had begun to be established in the 1960s had become too entrenched to jettison; the use of popular music continued, even rose. A late 1980s report in *Advertising Age* noted the increased role played by popular music in commercials: “The ad industry, as a whole, has fallen in love with rock ’n’ roll, and for good reason. Its fans—primarily 15-to-44-year-olds—are the country’s largest population segment, wielding more purchasing power than any other age group. Marketers from every product category are eager to cash in on the avid consumerism of the demographic group.”⁵⁶

By the late 1980s, even hip-hop began to be used in commercials as major brands such as McDonald’s, Denny’s, and Coca-Cola attempted to reach urban youth. Part of the appeal seems to have been that a good deal of information could be imparted by rapping the lyrics.⁵⁷ A survey of teenagers in this period revealed that nearly 80 percent of them believed hip-hop to be in vogue, which was a higher score than for any other kind of music. Demonstrations of the music’s appeal to white teenagers were the deciding factor for many advertisers, though most were reluctant to employ hip-hop musicians who hadn’t “thrown off some of the ‘street,’” according to the president of the African-American Marketing and Media Association in 1993. Russell Simmons, one of the founders of Def Jam record label, said that the use of hip-hop in advertising wasn’t selling out (as it would have been perceived from a white, middle-class rock viewpoint), because

black kids want to be sold out, as in “there ain’t no more records left, no more tickets for your concert.” Black people like to see people large. The more cars and houses and places rappers go, the badder they are. Being a starving artist is not that cool in the ghetto.⁵⁸

Simmons articulated what many African American musicians had long felt: that permitting their music to be used in commercials was a sign of mainstream acceptance and thus was to be welcomed.

Corporatization

Within the advertising industry itself, the business-friendly environment nurtured by Ronald Reagan changed the industry substantially; advertising agencies became, as described by Bill Backer in our interview, “pawns in a Wall Street game of mergers and acquisitions.”⁵⁹ A couple of people I interviewed said that while they liked to work for independent music houses, after the mergers of the 1980s, many of the creative people that they had worked with were being let go in favor of younger people who were thought to be more in touch with youth culture.⁶⁰

The effect of the mergers and acquisitions of this period meant that the bottom line became increasingly important to the multinational corporations that owned advertising agencies. Budgets diminished considerably. While it was common to hire many live musicians in the heyday of the jingle in the 1960s and 1970s—many people I interviewed recalled working with twenty-to forty-piece orchestras—the rise of digital technologies that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s changed that. Compounding this change was a late 1980s SAG/AFTRA strike that had the effect of teaching advertising agencies and advertisers that music could be produced much more cheaply in “right to work” states and abroad. Once the strike was over, Nick DiMinno told me, things were never the same.⁶¹

And music was increasingly tested, increasingly brought into a rationalized business framework. Anne Phillips, a singer/composer, told me how demoralizing all of this testing was, not just testing about the efficacy of jingles but testing of every jingle, every commercial. This was part of the reason she decided to leave the business.⁶² She wrote an unpublished article in 1981 about this experience, describing how commercials were once beautifully crafted with skill and care, but

then something began to happen. More and more campaigns began to mysteriously die somewhere between creation and broadcast. . . . [The rise of testing meant that] soon it seemed that the people who once got excited about new campaigns had gotten knocked down so many times by the numbers that they just couldn't believe in or fight for an idea anymore. . . . Today if I write 30 commercials and one finally makes it through the maze of client presentations, marketing analysis, legal, testing, etc., I consider it a miracle. . . .

It's as though the rug of basic pride in our work and faith in our experience, talent and professionalism was slowly pulled out from under us. The basis for decision, if you call what is in truth non-decision, "decision," is no longer one's wisdom and ability to make sound judgments. It is numbers.⁶³

The advertising and music industries were becoming more like businesses in this era, more exclusively concerned with profits, and advertising agencies realized that they could potentially increase profits by hiring stars or licensing known songs. The kind of money that the increasingly corporatized world of advertising was spending on stars such as Jackson provides examples of just how important marketing through music had become in the 1980s. One of the biggest campaigns of this type occurred in the late 1980s when Burger King mounted a massive radio campaign costing between twenty-two million and thirty million dollars that featured musicians in sixty-second radio commercials, ranging from John Lee Hooker, the Fabulous Thunderbirds, the Neville Brothers, Take Six, Was (Not Was), Mel Tormé, Tone-Lōc, and Paul Shaffer and the World's Most Dangerous Band. According to the senior vice president-creative director at the advertising agency that produced the commercials, who got to play with the musicians, "We got to work with people we liked. We weren't looking for Michael Jackson. We're not looking for the Who; we're not looking for the Rolling Stones. We're looking for bands that have something to say, that have an identifiable musical style who also are known for breaking the rules a little bit." The senior VP-sales and marketing at the Radio Advertising Bureau praised the campaign because "everyone wants to get into specific targeting," at which radio was unparalleled.⁶⁴ The campaign, called "Sometimes You've Gotta Break the Rules," began airing on 1 October 1989, three days before the launching of the TV campaign. *Advertising Age* reported that the commercials were "a long way from hard sell, barely mentioning the name Burger King and never mentioning Whoppers, French fries or milk shakes." The ads were intended to "capture an attitude," according to the senior vice president-account director.

Sounding more like a music producer than an advertising music producer, Susan Hamilton, president of the music production company HB&B, said:

One of the reasons we were even able to touch a lot of the artists that we had was that we told them we were not interested in having them sing our jingle

and sound like us. We were interested in having their artistry, their talent, their words, their music, their sound, their personality be the driving force behind the performance.

If we had told them to stand up and sing our song, a number of them would have told us to take a flying leap.⁶⁵

Rather strangely, the television commercials in this campaign did not use this, or any, music. “We did not want to do a traditional jingle campaign. No matter how good the music is, and it is, the minute you start putting pictures against it, it’s something you’ve seen before,” said the senior VP–creative director at the advertising agency.⁶⁶

In 1989, the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company began what its marketing company described as “the largest fully-integrated music-marketing program in history.” This effort included advertising, promotional events in nightclubs, a direct-mail record and tape club, and a bimonthly music magazine. Reynolds was attempting to recapture some of its younger consumers for its Salem brand, and it clearly understood the importance of music to younger Americans. “Since we are the leading menthol in the country, there’s great potential with young adult smokers because music is a major element in their lifestyles,” according to a Reynolds spokesman. This promotional effort was based in part on the use of what the magazine called a “purchase behavior database” of menthol cigarette smokers that was built on the responses to offers of free merchandise.⁶⁷

Clearly, the music and marketing industries were becoming increasingly interdependent in the 1980s, and both industries became increasingly corporatized. In 1989, *Marketing through Music* included a rare column, by Mitchell Berk, president of Entertainment Marketing Inc., who wrote of the trend since the beginning of the 1980s of what in his business is called “marketing through entertainment.” At first, he said, companies simply derived goodwill from this practice. But soon corporate marketers wanted more—they wanted to be able to make the marketing efforts “help them accomplish specific marketing goals and objectives.” His case study was of country music star Kenny Rogers and Dole Food Company, which had recently signed a deal with the singer. It paid him a sizable fee (“which still amounts to only a small percentage of the company’s yearly marketing budget”), and would sponsor Rogers’s tour for at least three years. Rogers would also appear in television and radio commercials and “at a select number of Dole VIP functions.” Additionally,

every Kenny Rogers concert city becomes a target market for Dole and its field marketing team. For several weeks before a performance, local retail markets are turned into Dole promotional headquarters, with an ongoing appearance by a six foot Kenny Rogers standee, which appears in stores throughout the market.

There were also many different contests and promotions intended to “tactfully, yet permanently associate Dole products with Kenny Rogers”; and one radio station in each market was to air a one-hour music and interview special with Rogers. And still more.⁶⁸

Corporate sponsorship of musicians was one of the signs of the growing convergence of popular music and advertising, and corporate sponsorship of rock music tours reached new heights by the end of the 1980s, when many top musicians were expected to negotiate lucrative deals for sponsorship of their tours. Such deals often included the musician making commercials; Pepsi sponsored Michael Jackson’s overseas tours.⁶⁹ Paul McCartney received a seven-figure fee to appear in a commercial for Visa, which also sponsored his 1990 tour; McCartney had never appeared in advertising before. The president of Entertainment Marketing and Communications / RockBill said, “In the mid-’70s, when music sponsorships really began, the corporate side was very fearful of the countercultural image of rock ‘n’ roll, and most of Madison Avenue shared the sentiment. Today, most of the senior and middle-level managers in the agency and client world are products of the baby-boom era. They grew up with rock ‘n’ roll.”⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, marketers were acquiring tour sponsorships with greater alacrity than in the past and thus demanding more from musicians. A vice president at a promotion group said, “In the early 1980s, an advertiser would pay a relatively small amount to have its name printed on tickets and posters. Now advertisers want the umbilical cord to be shortened. They want artists to do things that will have the greatest possible impact on their target demographics, such as TV commercials, special concerts and merchandising programs.”⁷¹ At the same time, however, in this era, when many fans worried about whether or not their favorite musicians were sellouts, marketers had to be careful not to be too intrusive. This same vice president said, “If an advertiser over-commercializes the sponsorship, it compromises the value of the star in the eyes of his fans and reduces the value of the sponsorship. People relate to an artist because he’s different, he’s cool, he’s special. [Marketers] have to be careful not to kill the goose that laid the golden egg.”⁷²

In June 1989, *Marketing through Music* reported on a deal struck between Fuji Photo Film USA and Enigma Entertainment Corporation that the newsletter calls unprecedented. Fuji was to sponsor several Enigma acts on tour, include Enigma cassette samples in Fuji promotions at retail sites, provide the record label with tape for duplication, and sponsor some music specials on cable television. The agreement was based on Fuji's realization of the importance of the youth market.⁷³

And musicians increasingly wrote songs for brands. In the summer of 1987, Adidas launched a Run-D.M.C. Sportswear line, after the hip-hop artists wrote a song called "My Adidas" (example 7.3), which reached number 5 on *Billboard's* black singles chart.

My Adidas
walk through concert doors
and roam all over coliseum floors
I stepped on stage, at Live Aid
All the people gave an applause that paid
And out of speakers I did speak
I wore my sneakers but I'm not a sneak
My Adidas cuts the sand of a foreign land
with mic in hand I cold took command
my Adidas and me both askin P
we make a good team my Adidas and me
we get around together, rhyme forever
and we won't be mad when worn in bad weather
My Adidas . . .
My Adidas . . .
My Adidas

This was the culmination of a long relationship with Adidas, which had been supplying the musicians with promotional items for three or four years previously. The person responsible for promoting the relationship between the band and Adidas said, "The beauty about the whole thing is that when they began they bought Adidas because they simply loved the shoes. Now, I think Run-D.M.C. is almost synonymous with Adidas."⁷⁴

And in the fall of 1987, Pontiac launched a new campaign aimed at a younger audience. General Motors sponsored a twenty-seven-city tour in

1988 organized by MTV. Seven and a half million fans were expected to see Pontiac's 2.5-minute commercial. The first television commercial in the campaign featured a "feverish new theme song" dubbed "Ride Pontiac," which, in the somewhat overheated prose of *Advertising Age*, "accompanies quick visual intercuts of a band performing the music in concert, hard-charging cars and sultry scenes such as a woman who shrugs off an oversize shirt to reveal her swimsuit as she runs past her LeMans on the beach."⁷⁵

Given the continuing obeisance to the youth market and the ideology of the hip and the cool, finding out what youth were listening to was ever more important. And the new trend toward the use of existing popular music in advertising meant that some companies began to study popular music assiduously. A report in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1985 said that Coca-Cola studied the lyrics of the top 20 songs each week in an attempt to ascertain which music young people like. The senior vice president for marketing said, "Because there are fewer teenagers than in the 1970s, competition for their attention is fiercer, and targeting them demands greater precision than ever before."⁷⁶

A *Marketing through Music* article from April 1989 said that a study in which over two thousand twelve- to nineteen-year-olds were polled showed that teens looked to music and musicians when making their purchasing decisions.⁷⁷ Such studies were part of an increasing desire to follow trends in the popular culture of youth. "Commercial music has to follow the trends," according to David Horowitz, president of David Horowitz Music. "They check out the trends and fads before they plug into anything. Millions of dollars are being spent to buy time so they have to be sure that the way the message is cloaked will be acceptable by the pop music culture. After all, we're not selling art, we're selling a product."⁷⁸

Licensing

Big corporate money wasn't being spent just on musicians recording commercials but also to license preexisting music as recordings, not just covers (or parodies as they were known).⁷⁹ This practice had existed sporadically before that decade, however, as we have seen, and, in fact, by the late 1970s, articles began to appear on the use of existing songs in commercials.⁸⁰ In 1978, an industry insider said that licensing was "at an all-time high. There was a slight surge at the end of the '60s, but it's nothing like what it's been in the last three or four years." One advantage of using known music, according to another

insider, was that “it has a built-in safety factor. The song doesn’t need testing; you need only test the campaign and the identification of the song with the product. There’s no guesswork that you would have with a new tune. Will the public catch on to something it’s never heard before? Who knows?”⁸¹ Licensing of original songs was still on the rise in 1980; the agency that issued licenses and oversaw the collection of fees from record companies on behalf of music publishers saw licensing income from TV/radio commercials double from 1978 to 1979.⁸²

In May 1984, Sprint aired a TV commercial using Stevie Wonder’s “I Just Called to Say I Love You.” Calls to Sprint were up 25 percent in three days, which had a greater impact than anything the advertising agency had ever done for Sprint, according to an executive at the advertising agency that produced the commercial. The senior vice president of sales and marketing at the company said, “Music puts us firmly on the leading edge of contemporary lifestyles.”⁸³ The success of this commercial was such that in late 1984, CBS, several music publishers, and United Artists and Unart banded together to market songs and images to potential licensors in a twenty-two-minute video presentation entitled “Songs that Make Commercials Sing,” which was perhaps the first time that sound and film had been used to seek licensors.⁸⁴

Other advertisers tampered with lyrics of original songs, however, when they made covers, or remakes, of them. A 1985 article from *Madison Avenue* described “parody fever”—the use of preexisting popular songs to sell—which was sweeping the industry; some in the industry referred to the 1980s as the Re-Decade. Popular songs were tested for their memorability and then employed in commercials; using existing songs makes research and testing easier since the songs are already known.⁸⁵ Examples include the Platters’ “Only You,” which became “Only Wendy’s”; the Diamonds’ “Little Darlin’” became Kentucky Fried Chicken’s “Chicken Little”; Buddy Holly’s “Oh Boy” became “Oh Buick!”; Jerry Lee Lewis’s “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On” became Burger King’s “Whole Lotta Breakfast Goin’ On”; Danny and the Juniors’ “At the Hop” became “Let’s Go Take a [Granola] Dip”; “Mack the Knife” became “It’s Mac Tonight”; and “Look What They’ve Done to My Song, Ma” became “Look What They’ve Done to My Oatmeal.”⁸⁶

A 1985 article in *Forbes* noted the new trend of using preexisting music in commercials, articulating a widespread belief in the industry in this period: “It is an attempt to sway the viewer toward a product by enlisting the good feelings he or she already has for a popular song.”⁸⁷ The head of a music produc-

tion company in New York that specialized in turning 1960s hits into jingles noted that, while existing popular music had been used for commercial purposes in the past, it was a much bigger business in the mid-1980s, and that one of the main differences from earlier usages of popular music was the decrease in lag time between the release of a popular song and its appearance in a commercial. When an oldie is used as a jingle, he said:

You're buying all the associations people have for that song. Those songs define the listeners' life style, so advertisers can really target their audience that way. The risk is if the advertiser misunderstands, misrepresents or doesn't follow through on those associations. They can alienate the very people they want to impress.⁸⁸

Inevitably, new services arose to feed the new demand. *Marketing through Music* wrote in March 1988 that SBK Entertainment (a music publisher and entertainment services company) was to begin offering free catalogs of its extensive library to music professionals.⁸⁹ This may be the first time that potential licensors were courted.

The licensing craze did not seem to harm the music production business at first; *Marketing through Music* reported in June 1988 of the licensing boom: "Commercial music has been dramatically affected by the rising popularity of music marketing. The jingle business, once dominated by a handful of New York-based music houses, has become big business with 500 or so commercial music production facilities doing business in major cities across the country." The magazine interviewed several workers at Smythe and Company, a six-month-old jingle house in New York City.⁹⁰

Revolution? Or Devolution?

Perhaps the most celebrated—and condemned—of the early licensing of songs occurred in the spring of 1987, when Nike bought the rights to the Beatles' "Revolution" for a reported \$250,000 to EMI and another \$250,000 to SBK Entertainment World for the copyrights (example 7.4). This was to be the first time, according to Nike, that the Beatles' recorded music would be used in a commercial.⁹¹ Nike's use of the song was part of a \$7- to \$10-million campaign (depending on which trade press report one accepts).⁹² Nike purchased the rights from SBK, owned by Michael Jackson, to use the original song. The

director of public relations and communications for EMI Music, North America (EMI/Capitol owns the recordings) said, "Nike approached Yoko Ono because 'Revolution' is a John Lennon song. It was referred to us through Yoko's office with the understanding that Yoko was in favor of allowing the use of the song in the ad campaign. The deal was structured in such a way that it was used tastefully."⁹³ *Adweek* said that the commercial was "quietly redefining" TV advertising, in part because of its look, but also because there was no announcer, no real sales pitch, and the logo barely appeared.⁹⁴ The video showed clips of athletes young and old, famous and amateur, and Nike products, all in a quick cutting style.

Former music video producers Peter Kagan and Paul Greif, who had been making commercials for only a year, oversaw the production of the ad. They shot it in black and white with a handheld Super 8 camera and employed the music video technique of numerous quick cuts, which made it resemble a home movie. A partner in the advertising agency said, "Clients tend to want very predictable things. To turn everything over to 8mm was very radical. But when the idea of using 'Revolution' came up, we thought it would be terrific to use Kagan & Greif and get that honesty and reality they bring to film." The filmmakers claimed, "This is the right time for progressive advertising."⁹⁵ Their response to the prospect of filming a commercial with the iconic 1960s song was, "We were both pleased and nervous dealing with this piece of John Lennon music in advertising. There it is—the anthem—and we all know it had nothing to do with sneakers when it was written." Kagan said, "To voice over John Lennon would not only have been busy, but sacrilegious, impolite and insulting to him. We knew we were trying to do justice to the music."⁹⁶

Nonetheless, there was an outcry over the commercial, which was seen by many as desecrating not just the Beatles and the song but the 1960s revolutionary spirit the song articulated. An *Advertising Age* editorial acknowledged the outrage, but, the author said, the owner of the Beatles songs, Michael Jackson, is not running a charity, and "we lost our innocence about such deals well before 1967 when TWA began using the Fifth Dimension's 'Up, Up and Away,' so we expect many an advertiser to tell Michael Jackson, 'Count me in.'"⁹⁷

A letter to the editor described Jackson's "exploitation" of the Beatles' music as "obnoxious," and suggested that Beatles fans found a charity organization to purchase the music themselves, thus "saving the finest pop songs ever written from becoming fodder for mindless Madison Avenue 'jinglemonsters.'"⁹⁸ Historian Jon Wiener wrote an article in the *New Republic* in May of 1987⁹⁹

that was excerpted in *Advertising Age* on 29 June 1987, which generated a letter to the editor by a staff artist from a corporate advertising department, noting that Wiener and others had neglected to ask the main question: “Do such ads work?”¹⁰⁰

By any standard, I would be considered a prime target for such advertising, yet I have been largely unimpressed. The assumption seems to be that my heart will melt when I hear one of those “Good Old Songs” and I will become kindly disposed toward the product. However, when the time comes for me to part with my hard-earned income, I couldn’t care less about the background music. I would much rather be intelligently informed about what the seller has to offer.¹⁰¹

This position reflects the age-old tension between “reason why” and other forms of advertising.

In July 1987, the Beatles’ music company, Apple Records Inc., sued, claiming that Nike “wrongfully traded on the good will and popularity of the Beatles” by using the song. The lawsuit sought up to fifteen million dollars in damages.¹⁰² The lawsuit was based not on copyright infringement, since the Beatles no longer owned the song, but that the Beatles’ “persona and goodwill” had been damaged. The attorney for Apple told *Marketing through Music*:

The Beatles want this lawsuit to be a warning to advertisers that if you think you are going to use Beatles recordings to peddle, promote and endorse your commercial products, we are going to sue you. For 25 years, no Beatles original recording has been used to promote or endorse any product. Nike and EMI are well aware of the fact that this is the first time it has ever been done. Our position is that EMI can sell recordings, but can’t license our recordings to push other people’s commercial products.

EMI countered that the commercial had been made with Yoko Ono’s permission, but Apple’s lawyer said that Apple requires all four of its “directors”—that is, Ono and the remaining Beatles—to sign off on such usages.¹⁰³ Apple’s lawyer also claimed, “The Beatles didn’t write and record their music to sell commercial products. Any advertiser that tries to use a Beatles record to sell a product does so at [its] own peril and will be sued.” Apple not only wanted money but also demanded that Nike discontinue its advertising campaign,

and that Capitol and EMI return the Beatles' master recordings.¹⁰⁴ Nike, meanwhile, claimed not to have broken any laws. On 6 August 1987, Nike published a newspaper advertisement in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Portland, Oregon, and in *USA Today* labeling Apple's lawsuit a publicity stunt.¹⁰⁵ It continued to produce new commercials with the song.¹⁰⁶

In April 1988, *Marketing through Music* reported that Nike pulled the Beatles' "Revolution"; the fourth and last television usage of the song ceased on March 22 of that year.¹⁰⁷ Nike didn't exercise its option to renew the song for a second year, saying that it was simply a business decision.¹⁰⁸ This, however, did not staunch the animus. Paul McCartney told *Rolling Stone* that he wasn't pleased with Nike's campaign, "because the Beatles never did any of that. We were offered Disney, Coca-Cola and the hugest deals in Christendom and beyond. And we never took them, because we thought, 'Nah, kind of cheapens it.' It cheapens you to go on a commercial, I think," even though he did a few years later.¹⁰⁹ The lawsuit was settled out of court in 1989, terms undisclosed.

A later editorial in *Advertising Age* acknowledged that many fans don't like the licensing of popular songs to sell goods.

As these grumblers vow never to buy the products thus advertised, we might point out that in most instances the use of the music in commercials puts a few more bucks into the pocket of those who wrote the tunes. And since most songs that make it to the charts are written to make money, it seems unfair to insist the songwriters not benefit from their talent once the record sales fade away. They might even be thus inspired to pen more songs that bring pleasure to pop music fans.¹¹⁰

Despite fans' complaints, the use of familiar songs in commercials continued to rise.¹¹¹ Memorability, positive associations with the original song, and affection for the music were the driving forces behind the licensing trend, especially in attempts to reach baby boomers. In its July 1988 issue, *Marketing through Music* presented on its first page a graph that showed the success of commercials with music: Eric Clapton for Michelob, Linda Ronstadt for Coke, Michael Jackson for Pepsi, Bon Jovi for Coors, and U2 for Kodak. Its data showed that these commercials with music garnered more positive reactions than negative.¹¹² Data were presented a few months later in the same year, and this time, more was made of the data instead of simply displaying a graph:

In a national survey of more than 1,400 music consumers conducted during January 1988, Soundata asked consumers to name the best commercials they'd seen in the past 3 months. Music-based campaigns—California Raisins, Levi's 501 Blues and Michael Jackson spots—came out on top.¹¹³

Yet complaints continued. Many, even some in the advertising industry, decried the practice of licensing. A Chicago-based advertising copywriter wrote in a 1986 article in *Advertising Age*, "I'm being manipulated and I don't think I like it." She professed to be a "real" baby boomer, not one of the "new boomers," the twenty-five- to thirty-five-year-olds, and, since she could remember the original versions of songs that were being covered, wasn't happy about it.¹¹⁴

In the spring of 1989, *Advertising Age* interviewed many advertising and commercial music personnel about their favorite, and most disliked, uses of music in television commercials. Predictably, opinions varied on specific songs, as well as on more general questions. One interviewee said, "I don't think there is any music too sacred for appropriate use in a commercial. It depends on the product and the usage. It is very easy to be crass and blasphemous." The perennial question about the efficacy of using preexisting music in commercials was also raised. One composer said, "To use existing music in a commercial detracts from that music's original meaning. I understand the value that a well-known piece of music can add to a commercial, but at what price? The music loses value, creativity is stifled and often the consumer is insulted and boycotts the product that ruined his favorite song." Another observed, "The use of hit songs in advertising is here to stay. Rather than belittle that fact, we jingle composers should try harder to be the ones who write tomorrow's hit songs."¹¹⁵

One advertising agency music director, justifying the use of 1960s music in commercials, said, "You get some kind of immediate awareness when a voice comes on that you or I might know. You turn around and run back to your TV and say, 'Wow! What the hell is that?'"¹¹⁶ The president of a group that measures psychological response to advertising said of the use of 1960s music:

When you get into the music of the 1960s, it triggers a time in the listener when defenses were much lower than they are now. It was a time of lessened discipline, when people were concerned with protest and getting high. When

you use the voices of that time in a commercial, it induces a state of increased receptivity to stimuli.¹¹⁷

Baby boomers and others with memories of these songs were thus efficiently targeted with music, as were youths with their music.

In the mid-1990s, Mercedes attempted to reach a clientele younger than its fifty-one-year-old male median by lowering its prices and licensing Janis Joplin's "Oh, Lord, Won't You Buy Me a Mercedes Benz." A thirty-eight-year-old San Francisco banking executive who had bought his first Mercedes in 1994 said of the ad that "it's a riot; my wife sang right along with the ad" the first time they heard it.¹¹⁸ Licensing continues to the present, with the music industry happily complicit, charging fee after fee; I will discuss this practice in greater detail in the following chapter.¹¹⁹

Let's recall, by way of conclusion, how the practice of licensing not only represents the growing closeness of the music and marketing industries, motivated by increased attention to the bottom line in the decade of the 1980s. The revitalized emphasis on consumption in the 1980s also meant a greater attention to profits. Market segmentation, facilitated by the rise of cable television, was a strategy to increase profits. The fascination for the hip and the cool was so powerful that it reshaped not only advertisements and the corporate culture that produced them, but capitalism itself, as discussed in the previous chapter. Today, as one music production company worker told me, most such companies barely break even, and that is the norm. Money is still being made, of course, but only at the very top. Virtually everyone else, including musicians, is struggling.