

RADIO SPACE AND INDUSTRIAL TIME: THE CASE OF MUSIC FORMATS¹

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RADIO AS A 'SECONDARY MEDIUM'

In the broadcasting industry, radio is commonly referred to as a 'secondary medium'. The phrase conveys the pragmatic view that no one cares whether you listen to radio so long as you do not turn it off. Since it was displaced by television, radio has been expected to accommodate itself technologically and discursively to every situation. Are you brushing your teeth, turning a corner, buying or selling jeans or entering inventory into the computer? So much the better. Your broadcaster respects the fact that these important activities must come first. Radio is humble and friendly, it follows you everywhere. In any event, television makes more money.

This denigration of radio's potential in the guise of demographic pragmatism arouses my suspicions and my sympathy. Canadian history has long been shaped by a perceived affinity between the politics of radio and the possibilities of culture. They are bound up together by debates about the media and the nation-state, which originated with radio in the 1920s, and continue, unabated, to the present; by influential critical analysis of the role of technologically and spatially mediated communication in the building of empires; and by continuous political and legislative crises, mainly focused on the broadcast media, concerning the possibility of lasting cultural difference in North American culture. In addition, and perhaps in response to all this, there is a popular myth that Canadian radio is the best in the world. I subscribe to it myself on most days.

But as the airwaves fall victim to the politics of privatisation, radio is becoming progressively more 'popular'. Programming is defined by more and more sophisticated processes of audience research; it is increasingly framed by cross-media corporate strategies designed to cut costs, and across ever-expanding space; and it is increasingly built around music formats. This 'popular' radio hopes that more people will listen, but not really. Format radio

depends on distraction for its existence. Its primary goal is to accompany us through breakfast, travel and work without stimulating either too much attention or any thought of turning it off. In this respect it is mutually interdependent on the daily life of which it provides the soundtrack; more specifically, it is designed to harmonize all the contradictions of domestic and working life at radio could illuminate and transform.

The radio text is heard across all the institutional, social, solitary and mobile corners of urban and rural experience. It leaves no one untouched. During an average week, 94 percent of Canadians listen to radio at least once, and on average around 19 hours; 95 percent of this listening takes place as a secondary activity (Statistics Canada 1990: 1). This is fewer hours than we devote to television, but the more time we spend in cars (a salient issue, given recent cuts to rail service and public transport), the more time radio may be able to claim from us. (But will it? As new cars come equipped with increasing-sophisticated stereo cassette and portable CD players, and as teens opt for tapes over radio, is this radio making itself obsolete? This is more than a technological issue, as the following discussion suggests.) Almost 90 percent of radio listening time in Canada is now claimed by commercial radio. This cumulative success of commercial radio would have been inconceivable without music; music is indispensable for its schedule, its income and its listeners.

The assumption that more or less continuous music is the ideal program content for radio rests on the equally convenient assumption that radio listeners are mainly not listening very closely and that this is the 'natural' condition for radio communication. Thus the flow of music/commercials/talk offered by format radio has become inseparable from the mental image of wallpaper which shadows the concept of 'secondary medium'. This concept distinguishes radio from television on the basis of its mobility, ubiquitousness, and habitual presence in work and other social contexts. The phrase 'secondary medium' forces us to remember that radio programmers, industry analysts and government researchers know very well where we are and what we are doing while we are listening to which station. It usefully reminds us that radio's role as carrier of recorded music is not determined solely by radio's (nonvisual) technological capacities, but is equally a product of the radio apparatus as a social, institutional, and economic entity that depends on the music industry for its own reproduction. At the same time, it should remind us—appropriately, perhaps, since this role is now declining—that the critical emphasis on radio as a promotional vehicle for records has tended to simplify our understanding of its complex nature.

The close identification of music and radio arose in the 1950s, when, in response to TV's dethroning of radio in the living room, records came to form the principal raw material of radio programming. Since TV took over not only radio's domestic space but also many of its entertainment conventions, the

industry had to devise new programming and commercial functions (as well as more mobile technologies) for radio. The record/DJ format arose partly because it was cheaper (no scriptwriters, union fees, sound effects, etc.) and partly because it attracted a new market of listeners—teens—who could be delivered to advertisers through radio rather than television. Music now provides well over 50 percent of all radio airtime. Even the partial usurpation of music marketing by videos has not challenged radio's reliance on recorded music, whatever the genre. In effect, radio has become a dependent medium, constrained by television on one side and the music industry on the other; its 'secondary' status is rooted historically and institutionally in that position.

The proportion of music in the radio schedule is much higher on FM, whose share of listeners has increased steadily since the mid-1970s. FM now claims over 40 percent of listening time in Canada, around 60 percent among young listeners (BBM 1986; Mietkiewicz 1986). FM carries more music because of its superior transmitting technology and because its music formats help to construct and define the groups most attractive to radio's advertisers: younger adults in urban areas. Recently FM stations led the market in a number of Canadian cities. FM's success has corresponded with an increase in the number of available frequencies, an increase in the proportion of listening time devoted to music, the growth of corporate integration in the radio industry, the re-emergence of program syndication, the introduction of satellite program distribution and a decline in the airtime quota of Canadian music, which is gradually being shifted to the domain of marginal campus/community stations and the increasingly impoverished Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The rise of FM is thus part of a larger change in which, as a result of technical, economic, and administrative development, music has become the primary instrument of commercial radio's de-localisation.

Yet radio continues to represent itself as the local medium, placing this theme at the centre of its commercial and regulative strategies, its daily schedule, and its programming rhetoric. Rather than taking this rhetoric at its word, the following explores the 'work' of the music/radio text as part of a productive apparatus reconstructing both space and time.

FORMAT

Radio is a medium which constructs and presents its own identity through its production. Radio has no reality, write Hennion and Meadel (1986), except to produce the reality that it records; it is nothing but intermediary, and its reconstruction of the music catalogue is its way of constructing its own identity, or discursive context, and its audience. If radio exists "only to make others present, an invisible machine for making the world visible to itself" (*ibid.*: 286),

the community which speaks and is spoken through that medium is also constituted by it, and is formed by its structures, selections and strategies. It is for this reason that radio comprises an ideal instrument for collective self-construction, for the enactment of a community's oral and musical history. Brecht (1990) argued that this role would be realized only when radio became a means of communication, rather than one of distribution. Contemporary radio functions as the latter, but it represents itself as the former. This rhetorical achievement is accomplished through music.

In North America, commercial radio is dominated by format stations in which the organization of music programming mediates and differentiates station and listener identities. Formats were introduced because they could deliver relatively cheap program/listener revenues to radio after the arrival of television. Their commercial consolidation was dependent on the development of transistor technologies, which allowed greater mobility and fragmentation among listeners, and of market research, which allowed broadcasters to be more specific about the listeners they were selling to advertisers. Today, the term 'format' has two related meanings; it describes "the type of programming done by a station, such as Top-40 or all-news. It also refers to the routine, or the list of specific ingredients, found in a program hour. This includes specific phrases to be spoken, program content, and the order and manner of placement" (Johnson and Jones 1978: 112). Formatting ensures that a station is clearly distinguishable from other stations (unlike TV, which distinguishes programs and times) through a clear musical identity constructed in harmony with the precise demographics and researched common tastes of the targeted audience. Formats have tended to become more specialized, largely because research methods have grown more sophisticated; listeners' loyalties are an effect, as much as cause, of this specialization process.

Format music programming styles thus appear to spring from, and to articulate, a neutral marriage of musics (country and western, Top 40, etc.) and demographics, and to correspond opportunistically to already established listener tastes, whose profiles are discovered through the neutral science of market research. For broadcasters and regulators, the division of a given broadcasting area according to demographic typologies reflects a division in the needs and listening expectations of "targeted" listeners, who have already been defined (and researched) as members of demographically discrete groups, who are conceived as firmly established in their musical tastes and listening habits, and who should therefore, according to this line of thought, be served by an appropriately diversified and rationalized radio spectrum.

Every format follows a complex set of rules for programming, including the style and range of music selections, size and origin of playlist, quotas for musical repetition, relative numbers of current and past hits and their usual sequence, conventional relationships between music and speech and so forth.

A major change in any one of these is inconceivable without a subsequent change in all of them and in the relationships amongst them. For instance, a switch from Middle of the Road (MOR) to contemporary hit radio (CHR) would demand (besides a new music director) a new on-air style, different news, a smaller playlist with higher weekly rotation and faster turnover of hits, and above all, a successful transition to new sources of advertising revenue for the less affluent but presumably larger market. Urban markets support an increasing number of pop-music format stations which compete for listeners and advertisers on the basis of finely researched distinctions notwithstanding some considerable crossover of music selections. An increased number of stations in a particular city does not at all guarantee a wider range of diversity of music selections.

In Canada, FM formats are closely regulated. Broadcasters seeking a licence or renewal must commit themselves to a general format and prove both the viability and need for the chosen format in that particular city. Their "Promise of Performance" must detail the type and range of popular music to be programmed, as well as the intended percentage of Canadian content, maximum repeat quotas for hits, proportions of hits to other musical selections (regulation prohibits more than 50 percent, though as with most restrictions there are exemptions for Canadian selections), total commercial time, amount of "foreground" programming and so on. This regulation is intended to maintain musical diversity in FM programming, given an increasingly competitive market and the well-documented tendency for broadcasters to duplicate successful formats as long as they can draw sufficient advertising revenue (Glasser 1984). Through format regulation, commercial radio is supposed to be balanced between viable market conditions on the one hand, and non-market cultural objectives like musical diversity and Canadian content on the other. Such scrupulous management of the market offers a bureaucratically dense trace of the government's ostensible defence of 'public interest', which used to be represented by the public system.

Given format radio's tendency towards duplication, and the pressures on programmers to prefer mainstream and crossover hits whatever the format, the rationale for FM regulation is more evident than its success. Actual musical diversity is doing less well than the radio market, which, while more or less stable in terms of total revenues, is heavily imbalanced (like the programming itself) between centre and margins, with major stations drawing huge revenues and many others continuing without reported profits for years at a time. New stations are still being licensed, though this does little to increase the range of music programming available; it merely intensifies the competition for advertising revenue and refines radio's production of audiences as more specialized commodities. In sum, the post-TV proliferation of stations and the refinement of research-based formats has contributed more to the expansion and rational-

ization of commercial revenues gained by the radio market as a whole than to the substantive diversity of tastes that is claimed to warrant such proliferation, and which, in any case, tends to be created as much (or as little) as indulged by radio practices.

The organization of audiences by music format does rationalize the radio market, but this is not the same as diversifying or enriching radio programming. This would entail diversifying musical production itself, and diversifying the exposure of musics to specific audiences, the opposite to what has actually occurred in the evolution of music formats. Diversifying the production of music is achieved by diversifying the site of its production; that is, by making music recording and broadcasting more widely accessible to a range of musical practices and styles. These objectives are not the intention or the effect of contemporary radio music formats, whether or not they are addressed to listening markets who buy records.

THE MARKET

In recent years radio production has been transformed by music television and other changes in the production and circulation of records; by more sophisticated methods of audience-testing and market research; by satellite and computer technology, and subsequent program services; by concentration of ownership structures; by the re-emergence of networks; and other factors. In other words, the process of mediation between station and listener is itself the subject of economic and technical modernisation, which has a direct influence on the radio 'text' itself. As this process is rationalized, so too is the text. What is important about the music, in that context, may be not so much what it says, but what it displaces; not so much whom it draws together, but how, and on what terms, and, of course, what it leaves out.

In 1989, the most successful formats were Adult Contemporary/Gold; MOR; and, well behind these, Country; Album-oriented rock, and Contemporary Hit Radio. The consolidation of Adult Contemporary, on AM, and of Album-oriented rock, on FM, as leading formats (following a gender distinction; women listen more to AM, men to FM), the slight decline of MOR on both AM and FM bands; and the relatively low standing of country and dance music formats on FM, in combination, confirm the relative strength of formats featuring current singles, though this tendency, mainly a response to the influence of videos, is less marked than in the mid 1980s because of the resurgence of 'Gold' formats.

The rise of video as a marketing tool reduced the supply of new recordings, while video's emphasis on singles tended to marginalize the rest of the album in terms of radio airplay. In conjunction with the relative aging of the

population (and the consequent relative decline of record consumption), this has changed the role of radio in the distribution of records, especially Canadian content records, which has further added to a decline in their supply (Hahn 1985: 17). After music television went on the air, the number of records in circulation declined; by 1985, releases by new artists were down 45 percent internationally from five years before (Bergeron *et al.* 1986: 42). In Canada, the multinationals release current recordings selectively, following their commercial success in Britain or the U.S.; this leads to further reduction of the number of records in circulation. While the number of records being released has decreased internationally, the proportion of national and international hits has risen in relation to local releases; this trend is exacerbated in Canada, where the music industry earns about 14 percent of its revenues from Canadian record and tape sales.

There are several issues worth considering in relation to these developments. First, the size of the radio market as a whole has remained stable; people are not tuning in to FM from television or magazines, but from AM stations, which have been subject to a strict 30 percent Canadian content quota since 1971. FM stations tend to be (depending on format) subject to lower Canadian-content quotas, and are frequently criticized for unloading Canadian content into off-peak listening hours. The relative decline of AM radio means less airtime for Canadian music, which spells trouble for the already marginal Canadian recording industry (Bergeron *et al.* 1986: 127). Competition from U.S. stations also contributes to lower Canadian content quotas, and probably reduced sales, in our border cities. Second, and in relation to this, formats that succeed in major markets affect listening patterns more widely. In addition to the dissemination of playlists from *Billboard*, or from major urban markets to smaller stations, and the rise of syndicated programs distributed by satellite, people tune into stations in large metropolitan centres even when they do not live there themselves (BBM 1986; *Report*: 24). The bigger the urban market, the more its stations function as magnets to listeners in surrounding areas, developing listening patterns from the centre outwards that are disproportionate in terms of the spatial distribution of the population. Because of this "spill" effect, residents of smaller towns tend not to listen to their own stations.

This is not because urban stations play more regional music, or even a wider range of music selections. Because a large city is more fragmented, or, to put it another way, because urban stations are competing for a larger revenue base and draw on more precise audience research, radio programming is more specialized. CHR, AC and AOR formats are more popular in big cities, where listeners (or perhaps their employers and shop-owners) seem to prefer more contemporary formats with a higher turnover and a smaller range, i.e., tighter and faster playlists (CRTC 1987: sec. 8.3.3). Urban format specialization is also tied to a greater emphasis on nationally distributed records, which

have international promotion in television, magazines, and other contexts.

Stations in smaller towns are more open to, and more reliant on, locally or regionally produced recordings (Hahn 1985: 23-4). But they are being culturally and economically marginalised by the urban specialization process and its attraction to small-town listeners. The growth of FM may be encouraging this process, because the revenue for FM stations increases commensurately with the expansion of audience reach, unlike AM stations, which experience a declining rate of increase as audience size increases (Babe 1985: 95-100). The marginalization of local music production (and other program sources) is also being intensified by the erosion of the public broadcasting system, which, ironically, is invariably accompanied by rhetorical flourishes about the greater local sensitivity of commercial broadcasting. As everyone knows, private broadcasters produce far less local programming. The only tangible proof of commercial radio's local allegiance lies in the high proportion of advertising revenue drawn from local businesses, the direct reversal of television revenue, which is three-quarters nationally based (*Report* 1986: 396). The proportion of radio revenue derived from local advertisers has risen substantially, from 60 percent in 1969 to over 73 percent in 1984 (Babe 1985: 27).

The effect of all this is that urban stations are attracting a higher proportion of listeners, while programming a decreasing number of music selections. This means that more and more listeners are listening to fewer and fewer songs. This reflects, and helps to legitimate, the general trend towards spatial and economic centralization characterizing radio in Canada and music production internationally.

SPACE AND TIME

If the hit parade had emerged by the time Harold Innis wrote *Empire and Communications* (1950), perhaps he would have offered some specific hypotheses about its spatial-temporal impact. In his work, media-produced relations between time and space have direct consequence for the growth of geopolitical formations and monopolies. Time-binding communications ensure continuity across time, and preserve memory, identity and hierarchy; space-binding media, such as telegraphs, roads and electronic media, permit more rapid dissemination of information across space, but erode local memory and the self-determination of peripheral groups. Commercial radio seems to follow this latter pattern through its hyperactive re-structuring of the spatial soundscape, its impact on changing patterns of consumer communities, and its role in the creation of international distribution systems, in much the same way that, in his prognosis, the rise of print created the material-political foundations for the present era.

In fact format radio, and the current changes in music radio, occupy an interesting but paradoxical position in this picture. Radio was developed to transmit across space, to overcome physical borders, and to make transitory messages broadly available; in this respect, it is a space-binding medium, ensuring the rapid, broad distribution of changing texts without restriction to an ordinary space or a cultural elite. On the other hand, it is aural, vernacular, immediate, transitory; its composite stream of music and speech, including local (if usually one-way) communication, has the capacity to nourish local identity and oral history, and to render these dynamic through contact with other spaces and cultures. This capacity for mediating the local with the new defines its styles of talk and construction of station identity. But format radio is thoroughly industrialized both in its temporal language, and in its relations of production, which are increasingly technologically rationalized, and less and less local in origin or scale. This paradox allows format-based music radio to be omnisciently 'local' without arising from or contributing to local cultures.

Radio, like other media, is constituted (and constitutes us) spatially as much as by genre, signification or mode of address. This thought is already half accomplished by the common emphasis on radio's resilient portability since the invention of transistors. Doesn't the birth of the hit parade form a homologous whole with cars, highways and scenic pull-offs, drive-in movies, blue jeans and Coke? But the point can be taken further. In the radiophonic production of sound texts and local, if not locally autonomous audiences, it is possible to identify more precisely how "spatial form and spatial strategy can be an active element of accumulation," as Doreen Massey (1984) argues in more general terms.

A number of elements in the production process spring to mind. Most broadly, radio provides an international distribution system for records. Music recording has become a globally integrated process within centralized economic structure which shapes the conditions and locations of manufacture and distribution. The demand for currency in sound values produces an incentive for technological innovation that ensures, among other things, a process of continuous rationalization in studio production facilities and strategies. Recording, touring, the music press, can all be mapped out in relation to a construct of centres and peripheries; you could argue that this map is materialized semiotically every time a musician displays her commercial success by moving to more sophisticated recording facilities, which almost invariably follows the move to a major label.

But here we are concerned with radio, which on the surface, at least, is a more dynamically local medium. Shifts in recording and listening technology and music marketing have reinforced commercial radio's dependency on the organizational rationalization of music programming, even where record promotion is not part of the station's demographic mandate. Responding to a

competitive, media-saturated and increasingly de-regulated environment, radio programmers are more inclined to turn to computer programs for music selection to cut programming costs, than to flex the boundaries of musical taste. Across Canada, over 100 stations now relay rock or country music programs by satellite from St. Catharines, Ontario (south of Toronto), produced by Canadian Radio Networks. CRN claims four minutes an hour for national advertising sales, and formats six and a half minutes into each program hour for local spots (Careless 1990). Otherwise the programs are live, DJ-hosted programming, delivered cheaply, all night long, from what is often the other side of the country. "In essence," writes a radio columnist for *Broadcaster*, "it's a local station gone national. This illusion exists because CRN jocks steadfastly refuse to identify their location. As well, the service offers toll-free 1-800 request lines, so listeners can call in and talk to a jock, wherever they may be" (*ibid.*). The only drawback, for this columnist? Unemployment for hundreds of DJs. Two more CRN networks—CHR and oldies—are in the works.

Such mechanisms rationalize radio production across vast distances, in effect restricting local communication to advertisers. They also facilitate the economic security and spatial diffusion of monopolies, in this case in the recording and electronic industries, which are more interested in opening up markets for new cultural hardware and its accompanying software than in the recording and marketing of a wide range of musics, or the potential contribution of such musics to patterns of urban communication. If ensuing radio practices assure listeners of their right to a certain powerful habitual pleasure, they also suppress equally fundamental rights: Lefebvre (1976: 35) speaks of *the right to the town* (how often do you hear DJs, aural icons of local culture, encouraging debates or actions on urban development, racism, pollution, day-care, land rights, public transport?) and *the right to be different* ("the right not to be classified forcibly into categories which have been determined by the necessarily homogenizing powers") which, he argues, are endangered by the economic and political management of urban space.

As we have seen, radio produces difference through format competition, but only that which is demographically and administratively profitable. More clearly evident is radio's management of urban space, perhaps its chief accomplishment, in its promotion of local business, its management of traffic, time, and temperament in relation to rhythms of the working week.

RADIO SPACE AND TEMPORAL NARRATIVES

Like the radio schedule itself, with its strict markers of the hour, its subtly clocked rotation of current and past hits, its advance promotion of a new release, the music playlist functions as a kind of metalanguage of time.

The playlist offers a grammar of temporality which draws in the listener and produces her (economically, as a commodity; experientially, as a listener) as a member of a stylistic community defined, more and more, in inexorably temporal terms, rather than in relation to geographic or more explicitly substantive identification; that is, in terms of the preferred speed and rate of musical consumption (*cf.*, Straw 1988). The music playlist continuously (but variously) demarcates the present from the immediate or distant past. With its new hits, its repetitions and recyclings, its rising and falling stars, the playlist reinforces the space-bias of commercial radio by making diverse communities as listeners more and more the same, by spreading processes, values and decisions outwards from a technical and administrative centre, and by defining value in terms of rapid temporal change, competency in terms of knowledge of that change. The playlist is a central functional element within the radiophonic narrative, which, paradoxically, constantly posits the local as its subject.

Radio's textual interaction of music and speech can be analyzed as a type of narrative, one which simultaneously addresses and represents the specific targeted community. This makes the DJ or host a kind of narrator, and suggests that the combined elements of old and new songs, advertisements, news and weather on the hour, and so on, can be analyzed as structural functions within the narrative, which is constructed through their specific combination. Where traditional tales are analyzed as a structural combination of narrative elements condensed across time, we might consider contemporary radio narratives as the condensation of structural relations in and across space, in an interdependent relation of reverse proportionality to time. Space is collapsed because access to it is (at least imaginatively) expanded; time is speeded up and broken into contemporaneous moments within the still tangible discipline of the working week. The construction of radio audiences is not, then, simply an abstract (if quantifiable) assemblage of listeners with similar tastes, but also a ritualised transformation of people's relationships to (and in) space and time. Radio creates a new sense of time, not directly parallel to previous kinds, an overt disciplining of the hours of the day which also permits a non-spatial movement in and out of its compulsions with the simultaneous suspension/intensification of marked time through music, and the return/casual proliferation of social time through talk.

Radio is often described as surrogate or "portable friend" (Dominick 1979: 99). Early psychological and market research established the truism that radio's functions are "to 'involve' the listener in the great and small events of the day; the provision of commonly shared experiences that can facilitate interpersonal experiences and also that can cement the solidarity of various subcultures...within a mass audience" (Mendelsohn 1979: 96). This companionable set of functions is attributed to radio's technical mobility, its mix of music and talk and the ways this 'represents' the collective choices and desires

of its listeners, and its mode of address, which establishes a simulated intimacy that is specific to the medium. Radio announcers are instructed to address their audience in the singular, never as a mass, and to establish a mood of friendly companionship for their listeners, often assumed to be women.

Popular radio offers a sense of accessibility to and interaction within its own community, distinguishing itself from television through highly conventional and elaborated strategies of representation. Such conventions work to establish and draw attention to the radio station as a live and local content. They include signposting ("Later we'll be talking to...Coming up: the new release from...you can hear it right here on..."), styles of interviewing, spontaneous patter, informal commentary on music selections and music-related gossip, station identifications (Montreal's CHOM-FM, member of the nationwide CHUM chain which also owns MuchMusic Television, calls itself "the spirit of Montreal"), and so forth, all of which contribute to a sense of localness, immediacy, and accessibility.

Radio's localness is emphasized in all textbooks and industry commentaries on on-air practice. Successful DJs account for their popularity by claiming special contact with the local scene. "Radio is very much a local medium," advise Johnson and Jones (1978: 118), authors of a leading American textbook on modern radio station practices. In the same paragraph, they note that "in fact, no local station really originates all of its programming material. Phonograph records are nationally distributed, as is the news from wire services. Most ideas are borrowed, not originated." Stephen Barnard (1989: 92) observes that "radio stations throughout the world use records as a major source of program material for reasons of tradition, convenience, and economics," and notes the current trend among record companies to downplay local talents and to encourage trends at the local level. Thus broadcasters become what Babe (1985: 24) calls "localizers" of international content.

If radio is local, then, most of what we hear—other than the weather forecast—is not. Nor is the sum of technological relations upon which contemporary radio depends. Some stations produce their own commercials, but the soundtrack is as often as not imported (in the case of CHOM, from California in a boxed CD set). We think of radio as a low-tech medium, but it is not an autonomous one. Its dependencies follow the same patterns of more advanced technologies wherein the cycle of technical innovation/democratization does not democratize access to production, but only to (some) information, which thereby can be more centrally disseminated. To put it with complete cynicism (meaning only partial truth), radio's atmosphere of local involvement is designed to attract the highest possible proportion of listening hours for sale to local advertisers, and thus to maintain and promote the particular local 'feel' that can attract both listeners and advertisers. Local relevance becomes the shorthand for radio's competition with television, its dependency on advertis-

ing revenue from local sources, and its promotion of music sales at the local level.

In this context the DJ serves to personalize and thus to locate the station as more than an abstract mediation of records, advertisers and listeners. DJ's are increasingly disempowered in terms of programming, and make fewer and fewer decisions about music and other content. But it falls to the DJ's voice to provide an index of radio as a live and local medium, to provide immediate evidence of the efficacy of its listeners' desires. It is through that voice that the community hears itself constituted, through that voice that radio assumes authorship of the community, woven into itself through its jokes, its advertisements, its gossip, all represented, recurringly and powerfully, as the map of local life.

CONCLUSION

In Canada, as elsewhere, privatisation, networking, and intensified competition in the broadcasting sphere contribute to what Carey (1975: 33) calls "pervasive centralization": a general shift of the location of authority to "more distant, diffuse and abstract centres," thus eroding the "effective capacity of proximate relations." Commercial radio is constrained by an increasingly monopolized (and televisualised) distribution system for recorded music, and its programming is shaped by increasingly centralized hierarchical technical processes which it helps to valorize and reproduce. It posits listeners' desire as the engine of that set of social and technical relations. Through its mediation, it makes that posited account true.

Radio has unique capacities to map our symbolic and social environment. These capacities are considerably constrained by the national and international nature of music distribution and by radio's impetus towards technological rationalization. Radio mediates between local listeners and musical selections, but its forms of mediation, defined by the music format, can be heard as a naturalizing of technological change and the ongoing, sometimes violent displacement of its listeners. Its narrative depends on (though it also helps to diffuse) people's feelings about community, about territory, work and weekends, roads and traffic, memory and play, and what might be happening across town. Its special resource is the psychic investment of listeners in local space, whether they are isolated within it or driving across it; the displacement of this space in the radio airwaves has direct semiotic and structural implications in the shifting strategies of empire.

ENDNOTE

1. An earlier version of this paper was published in *Popular Music* 9(2), 1990.

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