

thebackgroundisafont - Ultrared

Advocates of das bang! find yesterday's manifestos grossly inadequate for the production of music in a day organized by fiber-optic markets and "symbolic capital." A new program needs to be written, one which breaks open the declarations of the past, beginning with an inquiry into the book of noise - of the peace disturbed - buch das banges!

In antiquity there was only silence. In the nineteenth century, with the invention of the machine, Noise was born.

Luigi Russolo, "The Art of Noises" (1913)¹

[Man] in the age of the omnipresent radio and juke box has forgotten the experience of music altogether.

Theodor W. Adorno, "Philosophy of Modern Music" (1948)²

We must bring about a music which is like furniture--a music, that is, which will be part of the noises of the environment, will take them into consideration.

John Cage, "Silence" (1961)³

[Mass music] has replaced natural background noise, invaded and even annulled the noise of machinery. [. . .] [P]ower has extended its function to all of society and music has become background noise for the masses. The music of channelization toward consumption. The music of worldwide repetition. Music for silencing.

Jacques Attali, "Noise" (1977)⁴

in an age of accumulation, the only space for music is background

People have no time to simply listen to music. So consumed with laboring for the money necessary to accumulate music, the 20th century listener hasn't time to hear music itself. 5 The one place left to actually experience music is every place; every place where a soundtrack backgrounds all of life's activities, from accounting to commuting, from shopping to sex.

Eventually, the modern listener accepts the fact that nothing can be accomplished without the accompaniment of music. Accompaniment becomes essential for existence--almost atmospheric. We need music to function; we function as consumers and we consume resources needed to accumulate music. Clearly, this cycle impacts the type of music produced, which in turn reflects back upon our lives creating a certain existence. Overloading the metaphor of "atmosphere," we elaborate further: background music is essential for human existence.

Thus, background music becomes--for the transmission of a certain economy--most indeed foreground.

Returning to our cyclical model, the sounds we hear every place support the way of life that puts music in the background. Music of the atmosphere grounds the very system of production and accumulation that necessitates its silencing in the first place. The music is atmospheric and existence is programmatic.

Just as music is composed through programming, so too is the consumer.

In what sense? Entertainment conglomerates offer this model: a market economy requires continual re-creation of the consumer. Conducted between contradictory poles of emptiness (of commodified lack) and fulfillment (of accumulation), the consumer incorporates those conditions necessary for the well-being of commodity exchange. Named the postmodern condition of an advanced capitalism, this is that political economy which benefits a great deal from the frequency of a decentered subject, highlighted, cited, sampled, quoted, cut and pasted within the next big thing.

We identify the current big thing as the musical commodity named "ambient."

Two forms of this currency, ambient house + ambient noise appear on the horizon of background music. While the inaudible pulse of ambient music accompanies us into the next day, something resembling resistance plays along with this currency. We audition within the ambient-commodity a disturbance of the use-value of background music. We hear traces of an ambient music stressing its function as background music.

The point of background music, its entire use-value as background, depends upon the invisibility of that use. While background music supports the life of the consumer, as such it must remain absolutely transparent. If the music demands attention it becomes noise. Pollution. The process of grounding existence (as consumers) then becomes stressed.

Speaking of stress, advocates of *das bang!* ask: can background music put forth another self? Might this self follow more along the lines of a strategy--a counterfeit identity, counterfeit to the self circulated in the market?

Entrenched in the technologies of the psychic state, ambient music typically programs the body through a process that either erases or obscures its own structure of reproduction. For ambient music, the program has been "pure ecstasy escapism." Behold the neo-conservative irony of the new age: by masking its subtle determination to leave the body behind, self-proclaimed background music at once reclaims the entire western metaphysical tradition of pure mind over (and out of) corporeality.

This sadly conventional (hyperventilated) ecstasy resists any inquiry into its place within the narrative of accumulation. Such an inquiry always appears as a challenge. The logic of ecstasy denies the materiality of place and the contiguity of relations, a denial forcibly challenged by questions of corporation.

In that sense, ambient music does not traditionally move the body but rather it appeals to moods and attitude presumed to be interior to and effects of the body. Of course, this is its deception. Most emphatically, ambient music does move the body by circulating the self's place in the market. Ambient music prophesies for the marketplace, naturalizing through repetition and circulation the self as consumer. That is the point, to naturalize the self's place in the market--the always already all-pervasive, essential, inescapable market. Ironic. Isn't it?

however, there are places where the background is a front

The chill-out sight + sound system redroom puts forth the body as "that site of power [in which] resistance can be mobilized in the struggle to liberate human desire."

In redroom the body continues to be the subject of that which operates in the background and yet by stressing the process of accumulation, we compose not only a new manifesto, but a new self. The body as a field of struggle moves to the fore.

Within redroom we experience the mood of the subject not as a programmed effect, but as itself dispositioning the body; a composition of forces which have positioned the body in a network of relationships. From this position, the body sounds its desire. An installation of redroom unleashes the strains of a music exposing its own synthetic, contiguous nature.

redroom is the body.

redroom is dedicated to Wendy Carlos.

"The Background is a Front" was written by Dont Rhine for the inter-disciplinary performance collective, Bang!manifesto. The article was intended as a declaration for the chill-out sight + sound system "redroom." The manifesto first appeared with the debut of "redroom" in November of 1992 at the Foundation for Artists' Resources, "FAR Bazaar", Federal Reserve Building, Los Angeles. Members of the collective included Becky Allen (California Consortium of Women Composers), DJ Etzen, Marco Larsen (Ultra-red), fashion designer Lun*na Menoh, Avid Paul, Dont Rhine, Knansie Sandercock and Theresa Saso (both of the LA post-rock combo Polar Goldie Cats).

1 Kirby and Kirby, Futurist Performance, p. 166.

2 Adorno, pp. 22-23.

3 John Cage, Silence (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 76. Cage is here miming the words of composer Erik Satie.

4 Attali, p. 111.

5 Ibid., p. 101.